



Period 4: London—Capital of Empire, 1871–1914

INTRODUCTION

This introduction develops the theme of London’s rapid expansion and transformation into a modern city, with improved transportation by Underground Railway, electric trams and the omnibus, and unimaginably fast communication via the telegraph and (later) the telephone. It considers the dissemination of literature through the development of periodical publication and the ‘railway novel’, and the rise of free public libraries established through the Public Libraries Act of 1850. The introduction also contemplates London’s morally ambivalent role as the capital of an empire covering a quarter of the globe (as highlighted by the Diamond Jubilee of 1897), and social developments such as the ‘scandalous’ rise of the ‘New Woman’ and the struggle for female suffrage.

Britain in the middle of the nineteenth century had witnessed several significant reforms. Among these were the Election Reform Bills of 1832 and 1867, which had lessened the power of the landed gentry and widened the electorate to include middle-class and upper-working-class men. Almost as important was the Secret Ballot Act of 1872 which in effect ensured that electors could no longer be swayed by bribes. In support of these reforms came another which had marked consequences for literature as well as politics: this was the Elementary Education Act of 1870, which made elementary education compulsory for all children between the ages of 5 and 12. Secondary education also expanded, local day-schools usually charging only modest fees or offering scholarships, and these began to take a respectable place beside the longer-established elite private (‘Public’) schools. London after 1836 had its own university, and during the latter half of the century several other tertiary institutions were founded. London had always been the hub of the

nation's commerce. Now, with Gresham College [2.12 n.67], the ancient Inns of Court for lawyers, and the teaching hospitals for physicians and surgeons, London was also now a centre of learning and research.

These reforms were for the benefit of London's ever-increasing population: between 1871 and 1918 it grew rapidly and in 1901 was roughly double what it had been in 1851. London continued to absorb the towns and villages on its borders, and in 1889 this was formalised by the establishment of the County of London, corresponding to what is now termed Inner London. Such a conurbation required improved amenities for its citizens, and some of these, such as Parks and Theatres, are noted in this section of the anthology.¹

The population also needed better transportation, and in the second half of the century this was developed or expanded. There were now twelve main-line railways that terminated in London (see [3.20]). As Donald J. Olsen writes: "The railway made possible the existence of a larger London, greater even than Greater London, by facilitating not only residence, but employment, business and play at distant parts of the kingdom" (1979, 313). In addition, the Underground opened in 1863, the first subterranean railway in the world, and soon had lines to all parts of the capital. Buses proliferated, with privately-owned licensed and 'pirate' enterprises flourishing until stronger regulation came with public ownership under the London Transport Board, set up in 1933. By the end of the century there were also electric trams.

Communications had been enhanced after the introduction of pre-paid postage in 1840, allowing for three deliveries of mail every working day in central London. The electric telegraph was increasingly employed, especially after it had shown its utility in 1852 with the completion of a cable between London and Paris. The wonders of the telegraph, however, paled beside those of the telephone, the first London exchange being established in 1879.

These changes had their effect on the conditions of authorship. Railways, for example, led to the emergence of the 'railway novel,' a cheap, slim, six-penny paper-backed volume that could be slipped into a traveller's overcoat pocket. Privately-owned lending libraries helped feed the demand for fiction, and made possible the continued popularity of the three-volume novel. There was a plethora of magazines and these encouraged a demand for short stories as well as serialized novels. London Clubs in Pall Mall (see [4.6]) subscribed to the fiction-carrying journals and reviews such as the *Edinburgh*, the *Quarterly*, *Belgravia*, *Frazer's*, *Blackwood's* and the *Cornhill*. Most of the novelists featured in Period IV fashioned their works to fit these out-lets. George Gissing's *New Grub Street* [4.13] is especially illuminating on these matters.

Sir Herbert Maxwell, in *Sixty Years a Queen*, was rather uneasy about the tastes of the enlarged readership:

¹For London parks see [4.8], [4.13] and [4.16]; for theatres see [4.14] and [4.25].

As to the impulse given to the demand for literature by the extension of education, there need be no doubt whatever; the enormous supply continually pouring from the press of the country is sufficient proof of that. In respect of books, the returns from the numerous public libraries in the country show that works of fiction are in request far beyond all the other branches of literature put together. Some sinister conclusions have been drawn from that fact, but it is not always remembered that most of those who frequent free libraries are hard-working people, who turn to books for recreation rather than instruction. On the whole, English fiction remains wholesome, a result which, notwithstanding the democratic nature of our Constitution, is owing, undoubtedly, in large measure to the tone maintained in her Court by our present Monarch. (182)

However, what Maxwell would regard as unwholesome literature certainly flourished in the late Victorian Age, even if it had to be hunted down furtively, as in the opening pages of Conrad's *The Secret Agent* [4.28]. But Maxwell was essentially correct to assert that “on the whole, English fiction remains wholesome” (182): this was because middle-class readers usually subscribed to lending libraries, especially Mudie's, whose owner, Charles Mudie (1818–1890) acted as a censor and banned unseemly books from his shelves. For example, he refused to circulate three novels of George Moore (see [4.4 HN] and [4.12 HN]); these were also banned by W. H. Smith,² whose company managed railway book-stalls.

The influence of the lending libraries was indeed great, and they had been largely instrumental in keeping up the demand for the three-decker novel, using which they could satisfy three borrowers with one novel—if the three borrowers were prepared to wait in line. But in the mid-1890s these libraries changed their policy. Bernard Bergonzi comments in his edition of George Gissing's *New Grub Street*: “the circulating libraries, which for so long had buttressed the three-decker, turned abruptly against it, and informed publishers that they would no longer be ordering it” (15). The consequences were clear: “in 1894, 184 three-volume novels appeared, in 1897 only four [...] novels became shorter and cheaper” (Bergonzi 1968, 16). Furthermore, an author's work would now be rewarded by a royalty system rather than by outright purchase. These would become the arrangements that would generally obtain in the twentieth century.

Whether Maxwell would have thought the novels of Gissing “wholesome” is doubtful. Though they are quoted generously in this anthology, they were not usually very popular, being written in too unromantic a vein—for Gissing has no rival amongst English novelists as a Realist. As the fiction writer and journalist W. Pett Ridge commented: “Gissing's books could not, I imagine, have had a wide circulation, but the circulation was fit, and no man who wrote so gloomily about gloomy people could expect to have a very large number of readers” (1923, 23).

²W. H. Smith (1825–1891) became an MP in 1869 and First Lord of the Admiralty in 1874; he was satirised as Sir Joseph Porter in Gilbert and Sullivan's *H M S Pinafore*.

Pett Ridge's own novels, by contrast, were extremely popular in their day, though they are unread now, and he had happy memories of the period 1871 to 1914:

It would be difficult to make a comparison in value of all the changes London has seen in forty years, and it will be discreet not to make the attempt. The electric light made its bluish, ghost-like appearance outside the old Gaiety Theatre³ in '78; a chairman of a gas company said, "When the Paris Exhibition" – then being held – "closes, the electric light will close with it!"

Motor-drawn vehicles I first saw in the 'nineties with a man ahead carrying a cautionary red flag, and under the four miles an hour limit. Exemption from these rules came in '96, and there was a drive London to Brighton; few of the starters lasted the distance. The motor bicycle came in, lumberingly at first, with the new century; it did not achieve popularity until '06. The telephone service was adopted by the Postmaster-General in '05. London saw the X-rays⁴ in '96, and radium⁵ was talked about in '03. (1923, 225)

Here Pett Ridge, writing in 1926, is recalling London as it was before the First World War, and he speaks as if London had then been on the verge of entering a new Golden Age. In 1897, the year of Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee, there were many to claim that the Golden Age had already arrived. Queen Victoria had been proclaimed Empress of India in 1874, and London could well regard itself as the greatest city in the world, at the centre of the greatest empire that had ever existed, embracing a quarter of the globe and a quarter of its people. It celebrated accordingly:

On the evening of June 22, and for two or three days following, London was ablaze with illuminations. In the city especially these were on a scale of unparalleled magnificence. The Bank of England was fringed and festooned with myriads of many-coloured lamps, while from the parapet of the corner which looks towards Cheapside there glowed and scintillated a dazzling fan-shaped device of huge size. Over the chief entrance appeared the following inscription in letters of living fire: "She Wrought Her People Lasting Good." The pillars of the Mansion House⁶ and the Royal Exchange were entwined with bands of light, and every detail of their architecture was accentuated by rows of tiny lamps. In this, the very heart of London, it was as light as day. It may be mentioned that 35,000 gas jets were used in decorating the Mansion House alone. (Maxwell 1897, 219)

But these lavish and expensive illuminations did not prove that Britain's world dominance was merited. Great power should be accompanied by

³**Gaiety Theatre:** established as the Strand Musick Theatre in 1864.

⁴**X-rays:** discovered in 1895 by William Conrad Roentgen.

⁵**radium:** the first radioactive element to be discovered (by Marie Curie in 1898).

⁶**Mansion House:** official residence of the Lord Mayor of London.

dutiful responsibility, as Rudyard Kipling wrote in “Recessional”, where he warned against imperial boasting, subtitled his poem “1897.” He reminded his readers that great empires such as Nineveh and great trading cities such as Tyre were now forgotten or of no account:

Far-called, our navies melt away –
On dune and headland sinks the fire –
Lo, all our pomp of yesterday
Is one with Nineveh and Tyre!
Judge of the Nations, spare us yet.
Lest we forget – lest we forget! [13–18]

Likewise it is against the Jubilee’s presentation of London as a fount of light that we should place the opening of Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* [4.20], first published in 1899. True, in one sense the title refers to central Africa, but it also suggests that London has had, and still has, its own dark phases. Furthermore, Conrad’s *The Secret Agent* [4.28] reflects some of the discontents that were flourishing away from the lights of London and that were seeking to bring down London and the Empire.

Conrad is rather contemptuous of his would-be revolutionaries, depicting them as careless of the human pain their actions might cause. There were, however, activists, often Socialists, who hoped to bring about political change by peaceful means. They were cruelly disappointed when the two largest demonstrations of the 1880s in London ended in violence. These were the Black Monday Riot of 8 February 1886 (in which William Morris [3.42 HN] was involved) and the Bloody Sunday Riot of 13 November 1887, the year of Queen Victoria’s Golden Jubilee.⁷ Both were brutally quashed by the police and military, but the reform movement survived: the Independent Labour Party was formed in 1893 and in 1906 was affiliated with the Labour Party, which in due course would become one of the two major political parties in Britain.

A political issue that demanded public attention throughout this period concerned the rights of women. The Married Women’s Property Act of 1870 had given married women limited rights to own property, and these rights were extended by the Act of 1882 which allowed women to keep any money that they earned and any property that they inherited, and to bequeath it as they wished. However, there was continuing agitation for women to be given the vote, to be treated under the law as the equals of men, and to receive full respect as thinking and feeling creatures. Some writers—Margaret Oliphant [4.22], Mary Ward [4.24] and Lady St Helier [4.25]—depicted women exercising considerable influence on male politicians though they themselves had no voting rights. There were, of course, individual approaches to this

⁷The Golden Jubilee is the setting for Gissing’s novel of domestic disenchantment *In the Year of Jubilee* (1894).

issue—George Eliot [4.21 HN] did not favour it and Mary Ward strenuously opposed it. But these and others—Gissing [4.23], Zangwill [4.29] and Levy [4.31]—were alike keen for women’s voices to be heard, louder and clearer. Their aspirations would not be fully satisfied: in particular a woman’s right to vote would not be recognised until 1918.⁸ But by 1914 many more women enjoyed economic independence than had been the case in 1871.

Sir Herbert Maxwell gives no consideration to the rights of women in *Sixty Years a Queen*. He also overlooks or ignores in his account of the Jubilee celebrations the Irish Question—whether Ireland should recover the power of self-government which it had lost in 1801 when its Parliament was abolished. This problem would come to a bloody climax at the end of our Period 4. For the moment the Irish writers Wilde [4.7] and Moore [4.4], exercising clever mockery, were content to show Londoners to themselves, without directly advocating social reforms, let alone Irish independence.

In any case, it was questionable whether those in power had any deep desire for social change. In Henry James’s *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881) there is an elderly American, Mr Touchett, who has resided in England for thirty years; he declares—and this may well be James’s own opinion—that such a peer of the realm as the character Lord Warburton merely flirts with the idea of reform:

Their radical views are a kind of amusement; they’ve got to have some amusement, and they might have coarser tastes than that. You see they’re very luxurious, and these progressive ideas are about their biggest luxury. They make them feel moral and yet don’t damage their position. They think a great deal of their position; don’t let one of them ever persuade you he doesn’t, for if you were to proceed on that basis you’d be pulled up very short. (Vol. 1, ch. 8)

The protagonist of another James novel, *The Princess Casamassima* (1886: [4.2] and [4.19]), involves himself in revolutionary politics, but approaches the workaday and tawdry aspects of London rather as an aesthete or a dilettante might. There is a strong suspicion that he loves London as it is, not as it might be.

Indeed, our writers do not often rhapsodise about the perfections of London. On the other hand, unlike what we have frequently seen in Period III, in Period IV we rarely find trenchant criticism of the capital. Rather, there is sometimes gentle and even loving satire, as in W. S. Gilbert [4.14] or C. W. Murphy [4.18]. There is also a curious and recurring fascination with London’s murkiness, its mists, grime and inconvenience, as in Emily Cook [4.5], Henry James [4.6] and Anthony Trollope [4.15]. Occasionally there are even glimpses of London as a waste land, as in George Moore [4.4]:

⁸To vote, a woman had to be aged 30 or more and to satisfy certain property conditions; full adult suffrage for women did not come until 1928.

“They passed bits of common with cows and a stray horse, also a little rural cemetery; but London suddenly began again – parish after parish, the same blue roofs, the same tenement houses.”

In any case, writers who saw the need for reform were not confident that it would come. H. G. Wells, for example, presents two Londoners as rather comical, even inane, dreamers: “He likened the Serpentine to Life, and found Meaning in the dark banks of Kensington Gardens and the remote bright lights. ‘The long struggle,’ he said, ‘and the lights at the end,’ – though he really did not know what he meant by the lights at the end” [4.8].

D. H. Lawrence [4.30] goes further and shows the distress of London’s outcasts as virtually insurmountable.

William Morris [3.42], intensely aware of London’s social problems, favoured in later life a kind of Socialism that would replace the factory system and mechanised manufacturing generally with small work-shops, where goods would be produced by workers who would approach their tasks with the values of craftsmen, as he imagined had been the case in Chaucer’s time.

Ruskin in his old age viewed London rather as Morris did. Though he used trains and trams he thought earlier modes of transport had more romance and poetry in them: “How much happier the privilege of entering a mediaeval city [...] than the free ingress of being jammed between a dray and a tram-car at a railroad station!”⁹

Virginia Woolf at the opening of *The Voyage Out* [4.33], through her central character Mrs Ambrose, depicts Thames-side London very much as some of our previous writers do, the murky river flanked by famous monuments, against a background of regimented traffic and a city that has seen better times. But the viewer is now an isolated figure, experiencing depression and alienation.

Only one of our writers, however, goes so far as to wish London away. This is Richard Jefferies, who in *After London* [4.35] takes imaginative delight in picturing a London, full of unnatural, inhuman and ghastly filth, and with no compensating beauties, lying at the bottom of a lake. Jefferies belongs to an English tradition that prefers the country to the town. But most of our other writers, even William Cobbett who describes London as the Great Wen [3.4], have faith in London’s ability to renew, refresh and redeem itself.

Beatrix Potter, our final writer [4.35], is perhaps the most balanced of them all. As she says, “One place suits one person, another place suits another person. For my part I prefer to live in the country, like Timmy Willie.” But her titular hero, Johnny Town-mouse, would rather agree with Dr Johnson [2.18]: “there is in London all that life can afford.”

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⁹ *Praeterita*, Vol. 1, ch. 6, Section 132. See also [3.11 HN].

AN OPENING MISCELLANY

4.1 THOMAS HARDY, "SNOW IN THE SUBURBS"

For a note on Thomas Hardy see [3.47 HN]. When Hardy gave up writing novels and concentrated on poetry, he published many poems that were written a generation before. "Snow in the Suburbs," for example, was first published in 1925 but had been written 45 or so years earlier, when he and his wife lived in Upper Tooting. The poem exhibits Hardy's ability to create a poetic form nicely fitting the subject matter, as in lines six and seven, where the gentle behaviour of the snowflakes is delicately supported by the metre. Hardy's acute observation of, and sympathy for, natural phenomena are very clear – for example, the sparrow, the cat, and even the twigs on the branches of the trees.

From Human Shows (1925) (written 1878–1881)

Every branch big with it,
Bent every twig with it;
Every fork like a white web-foot;
Every street and pavement mute:
Some flakes have lost their way, and grope back upward, when
Meeting those meandering down they turn and descend again.
The palings are glued together like a wall,
And there is no waft of wind with the fleecy fall.

A sparrow enters the tree,
Whereon immediately
A snow-lump thrice his own slight size
Descends on him and showers his head and eyes,
And overturns him,
And near inurns him,
And lights on a nether twig, when its brush
Starts off a volley of other lodging lumps with a rush.

The steps are a blanched slope,
Up which, with feeble hope,
A black cat comes, wide-eyed and thin;
And we take him in.

4.2 HENRY JAMES, A SATURDAY EVENING STROLL

Henry James (1843–1916) was born in New York but migrated to Europe in 1875 and spent 20 years in London. He wrote over 100 short stories and articles and over 25 novels and novellas. The protagonist in The Princess Casamassima, Hyacinth Robinson, grew up in London as an impoverished 'urchin.' As an adult he becomes involved in revolutionary politics, encouraged by his friend Paul Muniment (see [4.19]). As he walks from his lodgings in

north London he is absorbed in the sights afforded on a Saturday evening in the 'vulgar' districts of the humble tradesmen and other workers, with whom he feels an affinity.

From The Princess Casamassima (1886), Bk I, ch. 5

[... Hyacinth ...] liked the streets at all times, but especially at nightfall in the autumn, of a Saturday, when in the vulgar districts the smaller shops and open-air industries were doubly active, and big clumsy torches flared and smoked over handcarts and costermongers'¹⁰ barrows drawn up in the gutters. Hyacinth had roamed through the great city since he was an urchin, but his imagination had never ceased to be stirred by the preparations for Sunday that went on in the evening among the toilers and spinners, his brothers and sisters, and he lost himself in all the quickened crowding and pushing and staring at lighted windows and chaffering at the stalls of fishmongers and hucksters. He liked the people who looked as if they had got their week's wage and were prepared to lay it out discreetly; and even those whose use of it would plainly be extravagant and intemperate; and best of all, those who evidently hadn't received it at all and who wandered about, disinterestedly, vaguely, with their hands in empty pockets, watching others make their bargains and fill their satchels, or staring at the striated sides of bacon, at the golden cubes and triangles of cheese, at the graceful festoons of sausage, in the most brilliant of the windows. He liked the reflection of the lamps on the wet pavements, the feeling and smell of the carboniferous London damp; the way the winter fog¹¹ blurred and suffused the whole place, made it seem bigger and more crowded, produced halos and dim radiations, trickles, and evaporations on the plates of glass.

4.3 LIONEL JOHNSON: "BY THE STATUE OF KING CHARLES AT CHARING CROSS"

The equestrian statue of Charles I was cast in bronze by Hubert Le Sueur in 1633. It was hidden during the Commonwealth (1649–60) but later purchased by Charles II. It was erected at Charing Cross in 1675 where it still remains. It is sited so that it faces the royal palace of Whitehall, adjacent to the Banqueting House outside which Charles had been executed in 1649, becoming, in the eyes of royalists, a martyr and saint (see [1.27]).

Lionel Pigot Johnson (1867–1902) was educated at Winchester and Oxford and lived mainly in London. He was a member of the "The Rhymers' Club" in Fleet Street, an informal group of poets, among them W B Yeats, who much admired Johnson's work as poet and critic. He became a Catholic convert in 1891. According to the Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, "[h]is own homosexuality, always strictly repressed, may well have added to his sense of isolation and consciousness of 'the Dark Angel' [of melancholia]." His early death at 35 was hastened by alcoholism.

¹⁰ **costermongers**: costermongers sold fruit and vegetables in the street.

¹¹ For London **fog**, see **General Introduction**, n.21.

From Poems (1895)

*To William Watson*¹²

Sombre and rich, the skies;
Great glooms, and starry plains.
Gently the night wind sighs;
Else a vast silence reigns.

The splendid silence clings
Around me: and around
The saddest of all kings
Crowned, and again discrowned.

Comely and calm, he rides
Hard by his own Whitehall:
Only the night wind glides:
No crowds, nor rebels, brawl.

Gone, too, his Court: and yet,
The stars his courtiers are:
Stars in their stations set;
And every wandering star.

Alone he rides, alone,
The fair and fatal king:
Dark night is all his own,
That strange and solemn thing.

Which are more full of fate:
The stars; or those sad eyes?
Which are more still and great:
Those brows; or the dark skies?

Although his whole heart yearn
In passionate tragedy:
Never was face so stern
With sweet austerity.¹³

Vanquished in life, his death
By beauty made amends:
The passing of his breath
Won his defeated ends.

¹²*To William Watson*: William Watson (1858–1935), a popular poet of the 1890s; twice passed over as Poet Laureate, in favour of Alfred Austin (now all but forgotten) in 1886 and Robert Bridges in 1913.

¹³Marvell also paid tribute to the dignified demeanour of Charles on the scaffold; see [1.27].

Brief life, and hapless? Nay:
 Through death, life grew sublime.
*Speak after sentence?*¹⁴ Yea:
 And to the end of time.

Armoured he rides, his head
 Bare to the stars of doom:
 He triumphs now, the dead,
 Beholding London's gloom.

Our wearier spirit faints,
 Vexed in the world's employ:
 His soul was of the saints;
 And art to him was joy.¹⁵

King, tried in fires of woe!
 Men hunger for thy grace:
 And through the night I go,
 Loving thy mournful face.

Yet, when the city sleeps;
 When all the cries are still:
 The stars and heavenly deeps
 Work out a perfect will.

4.4 GEORGE MOORE: A TRAIN JOURNEY

George Moore (1852–1933) was a novelist, poet, and dramatist. He studied art in London and Paris with little success, before turning to literature of the realist style. His novels caused much controversy: they contained what was regarded as salacious, immoral, and radically unconventional. After a decade in Ireland, where he was born, he lived mainly in London. In his Esther Waters the heroine is an uneducated servant and has a child by William Latch, a footman in the household in which she works. The two eventually marry, but he is an inveterate gambler, which accounts for them taking the train from London to Epsom to watch (and bet on) the Derby. The novel is set in the 1870s. For a note on the building of railways see [3.20].

From Esther Waters (1894), ch. 31

They rolled out of the grey station into the raw sunlight. The plate-glass drew the rays together till they burnt the face and hands. They sped alongside of

¹⁴ *Speak after sentence?*: After sentence had been passed on Charles at his trial in Westminster Hall the President, John Bradshaw, forbade him to speak.

¹⁵ *art to him was joy*: Charles built up a huge art collection at Whitehall, which was largely dispersed in the Commonwealth. He also commissioned the magnificent ceiling by Rubens in the Banqueting House.

the upper windows nearly on a level with the red and yellow chimney pots; they passed open spaces filled with cranes, old iron, and stacks of railway sleepers, pictorial advertisements, sky signs, great gasometers rising round and black in their iron cages over-topping or nearly the slender spires, and behind them the great London plain of the roofs dim with morning mist, broken here and there with a fringe of foliage, the trees of some distant park. A train steamed along a hundred-arched viaduct; and along a black embankment other trains rushed by in a whirl of wheels, bringing thousands of clerks up from the suburbs to their city toil.

The excursion jogged on, stopping for long intervals before strips of sordid garden where shirts and pink petticoats were blowing. Little streets ascended the hillsides; no more trams; 'buses, too, had disappeared, and afoot the folk hurried among the lonely pavements of their suburbs. At Clapham Junction betting men had crowded the platform; they all wore grey overcoats with race-glasses slung over their shoulders. And the train still rolled through the brick wilderness which old John said was all country forty years ago [...]

They passed bits of common with cows and a stray horse, also a little rural cemetery; but London suddenly began again—parish after parish, the same blue roofs, the same tenement houses. But this last parish was the last. The train had passed the first cedar and the first tennis lawn. And knowing it to be a Derby excursion the players paused in their play and looked up. Again the line was blocked; the train stopped again and again. But it had left London behind, and the last stoppage was in front of a beautiful June landscape. A thick meadow with a square weather-beaten church showing between the spreading trees; miles of green corn, with birds flying in the bright air, and lazy clouds going out, making way for the endless blue of a long summer's day.

DELIGHTS AND BEAUTIES

4.5 EMILY CONSTANCE COOK: THE RESPECTABLE GRIME OF AGES

*The long-standing tradition of celebratory descriptions of London's impressive architecture, its imposing topographical features, and the renowned grandeur of its buildings, gave rise to a sub-genre of less serious, sometimes highly romanticized, accounts of the city. These became enormously popular at the turn of the century (roughly 1890–1910). Their authors felt free to offer personal, even eccentric opinions. They were often less interested in commonplace facts than in curiosities—out-of-the-way taverns, street games, pavement artists, and customs that had survived from a bygone London. Charles W. Heckethorn's *London Souvenirs* (1899) was notable as one of these, and another (slightly more serious) was E V Lucas's *A Wanderer in London* (1905). In the extract below, **Emily Constance Cook** (1857–1903) surprises the reader with her whimsical appreciation of the dirt of London's buildings.*

From Highways and Byways of London (1902), ch. 2

[...] This same blue-grey mist of London, especially near the river, is rarely ever entirely absent. Chemists may tell you that it is merely carbon, a product of the soot, but what does that matter? In its own place and way it is beautiful. The heresy has before now been ventured, that London would not be half so picturesque if it were cleaner; and from the river this fact is driven home more than ever to the lover of the beautiful. Blackened wharves, that through the dimmed light take on all the air of “magic casements”¹⁶—great bridges, invisible till close at hand, that loom down suddenly on the passing steamer with the roar of many feet, a rattle of many wheels, a rumble of many trains; vast Charing Cross vaguely seen overhead—immense, grandiose, darkening all the stream; the Venetian white tower of St Magnus,¹⁷ gleaming all at once before blackened St Paul’s; and, most popular of all London views, the tall Clock Tower of the Houses of Parliament [2.31, n.144], with its long terraced wall, reflecting its shining lines in the broad waters. As ivy and creepers adorn a building, so does the respectable grime of ages clothe London stones as with a garment of beauty.¹⁸

4.6 HENRY JAMES: THE APPEAL OF THE GREAT CITY

For a note on Henry James see [4.2 HN]. One of the major preoccupations of James was the differences he observed between the European and American ways of life – the old world and the new. Here, while acknowledging the ugliness and sordidness of certain parts of London, he evokes the singular attractions that the city holds for him.

From “London” 6, in The Century Illustrated Monthly Magazine 57 (November–April 1888–1889)

And yet I should not go so far as to say that it is a condition of such geniality to close one’s eyes upon the immense misery; on the contrary, I think it is partly because we are irremediably conscious of that dark gulf that the most general appeal of the great city remains exactly what it is, the largest chapter of human accidents. I have no idea of what the future evolution of the strangely mingled monster may be; whether the poor will improve away the rich, or the rich will expropriate the poor, or they will continue to dwell together on their present imperfect terms of intercourse. Certain it is, at any rate, that the impression of suffering is a part of the general response; it is

¹⁶“magic casements”: Quoted from Keats’s “Ode to a Nightingale,” St. 7. A **casement** is a window (in Keats’ case, “opening on the foam / Of perilous seas, in faery lands forlorn.”)

¹⁷**St Magnus**: St Magnus the Martyr, in Lower Thames St. Medieval in origin, it was rebuilt by Wren after the Great Fire, as an “Inexplicable splendour of Ionian white and gold” (T. S. Eliot, *The Waste Land*, 1922).

¹⁸**garment of beauty**: Possibly alluding to Wordsworth, “Composed upon Westminster Bridge,” line 4 [3.12].

one of the things that mingle with all the others to make the sound that is supremely dear to the consistent London-lover—the rumble of the tremendous human mill. This is the note which, in all its modulations, haunts and fascinates and inspires him. And whether or no he may succeed in keeping the misery out of the picture, he will freely confess that the latter is not spoiled for him by some of its duskiest shades. We do not like London well enough till we like its defects: the dense darkness of much of its winter, the soot in the chimney-pots,—and everywhere else,—the early lamplight, the brown blur of the houses, the splashing of hansoms in Oxford Street or the Strand on December afternoons.

There is still something to me that recalls the enchantments of children – the anticipation of Christmas, the delight of a holiday walk—in the way the shop-fronts shine into the fog. It makes each of them seem a little world of light and warmth, and I can still waste time in looking at them, with dirty Bloomsbury on one side and dirtier Soho on the other. There are winter effects, not intrinsically sweet, it would appear, which somehow touch the chords of memory, and even the fount of tears, in absence: as, for instance, the front of the British Museum on a black afternoon, or the portico, when the weather is vile, of one of the big square clubs in Pall Mall. I can give no adequate account of the subtle poetry of such reminiscences; it depends upon associations of which we have often lost the thread. The wide colonnade of the Museum, its symmetrical wings, the high iron fence, in its granite setting, the sense of the misty halls within, where all the treasures lie—these things loom through a thickness of atmosphere which doesn't make them dreary, but on the contrary imparts to them something of a cheer of red lights in a storm. I think the romance of a winter afternoon in London arises partly from the fact that, when it is not altogether smothered, the general lamplight takes this hue of hospitality. Such is the colour of the interior glow of the clubs in Pall Mall, which I positively like best when the fog loiters upon their monumental staircases.

4.7 OSCAR WILDE, “IMPRESSION DU MATIN”

This was an early poem by Oscar Wilde (1854–1900). Wilde was born in Dublin and was a brilliant classical scholar at Trinity College, Dublin and Magdalen College, Oxford, where he was heavily influenced by the aesthetic theories of John Ruskin (1819–1900) [3.11 HN] and Walter Pater (1839–1894) (see [4.10 HN]). He settled in London and became well known for his witty conversation, outrageous iconoclasm, and flamboyance in dress and manners. He wrote one highly successful novel (The Picture of Dorian Gray, 1891), many articles, and (in the last decade of his life) several equally successful plays, including The Importance of being Earnest (1895). In 1895 the homosexuality that he had refused to conceal led to his imprisonment for “committing acts of gross indecency with certain male persons.” At the end of his two-year gaol sentence he moved to France, where he died in poverty (as ‘Sebastian Melmoth’) some three years later.

His “Impression du Matin,” written in the In Memoriam stanza (see [3.6]) and influenced by that poem (“suddenly arose the clang / Of waking life” recalls Tennyson’s “The noise of life begins again”), also owes much to the paintings (“Nocturnes”) of London at night by James McNeill Whistler (1834–1903), whom he knew. The subtly changing shades and occasional splashes of colour are certainly reminiscent of some of Whistler’s “Nocturnes.” The last stanza comes as a surprise: the sudden appearance of the sex-worker (see also [3.45])—who is a creature of both departing night and coming day—is a reminder of the sordid reality that co-exists with the slightly romanticized view of the Thames and London.

From Poems (1881)

The Thames nocturne of blue and gold
 Changed to a harmony in grey;
 A barge with ochre-coloured hay
 Dropped [*left*] from the wharf: and chill and cold

The yellow fog¹⁹ came creeping down
 The bridges, till the houses’ walls
 Seemed changed to shadows, and St Paul’s
 Loomed like a bubble o’er the town.

Then suddenly arose the clang
 Of waking life; the streets were stirred
 With country wagons; and a bird
 Flew to the glistening roofs and sang.

But one pale woman all alone,
 The daylight kissing her wan hair,
 Loitered beneath the gas lamps’ flare,
 With lips of flame and heart of stone.

4.8 H. G. WELLS: AN EVENING IN HYDE PARK

H. G. Wells (1866–1946) was a prolific writer of novels and short stories on a great variety of subjects, particularly science fiction and romance, history, politics and social disadvantage. Early in his career he became a socialist and many of his works of fiction and history reflect his political outlook. His realistic accounts of lower-middle-class life often have a comic element: Love and Mr Lewisham is one of these. In this extract Lewisham and his wife Ethel on their honeymoon, full of love’s rapture, are inspired by the quiet scenery of Hyde Park.

¹⁹For London fog, see **General Introduction**, n.21.

From Love and Mr Lewisham (1900), ch. 22

On Sunday evening they went for a long rambling walk through the quiet streets, coming out at last into Hyde Park. The early spring night was mild and clear and the kindly moonlight was about them. They went to the bridge and looked down the Serpentine, with the lights of Paddington yellow and remote. They stood there, dim little figures and very close together. They whispered and became silent.

Presently it seemed that something passed, and Lewisham began talking in his magnificent vein. He likened the Serpentine to Life, and found Meaning in the dark banks of Kensington Gardens and the remote bright lights. “The long struggle,” he said, “and the lights at the end,”—though he really did not know what he meant by the lights at the end. Neither did Ethel, though the emotion was indisputable. “We are Fighting the World,” he said, finding great satisfaction in the thought, “All the world is against us – and we are fighting it all.”

“We will not be beaten,” said Ethel.

“How could we be beaten – together”? said Lewisham. “For you I would fight a dozen worlds.”

It seemed a very sweet and noble thing to them under the sympathetic moonlight, almost indeed too easy for their courage, to be merely fighting the world.

4.9 ROBERT BRIDGES, “LONDON SNOW”

This poem is the most anthologized of all those by Robert Bridges (1844–1930), although his long Testament of Beauty (1929) is his finest work – the culmination of his poetic career. Bridges began his working life as a physician but, even before his early retirement through ill health in 1881, he wrote poetry and plays, becoming Poet Laureate in 1913. He was interested in phonetics, grammar, and prosody and was co-founder of the Society for Pure English. “London Snow,” in the avant-garde form of ‘opened’ iambic pentameter (see Groves 2011), is a vivid evocation of the beauty of the city under a night’s snow and the responses to it of the Londoners, who wake to appreciate a new and marvellous world.

From Poems. Third Series (1880)

When men were all asleep the snow came flying,
 In large white flakes falling on the city brown,
 Stealthily and perpetually settling and loosely lying,
 Hushing the latest traffic of the drowsy town;
 Deadening, muffling, stifling its murmurs failing;
 Lazily and incessantly floating down and down:
 Silently sifting and veiling road, roof, and railing;
 Hiding difference, making unevenness even,
 Into angles and crevices softly drifting and sailing.

All night it fell, and when full inches seven
 It lay in the depth of its uncompacted lightness,
 The clouds blew off from a high and frosty heaven;
 And all woke earlier for the unaccustomed brightness
 Of the winter dawning, the strange unheavenly glare;
 The eye marvelled – marvelled at the dazzling whiteness;
 The ear hearkened to the stillness of the solemn air;
 No sound of wheel rumbling nor of foot falling,
 And the busy morning cries came thin and spare.
 Then boys I heard, as they went to school, calling,
 They gathered up the crystal manna to freeze
 Their tongues with tasting, their hands with snowballing;
 Or rioted in a drift, plunging up to the knees;
 Or peering up from under the white-mossed wonder,
 “O look at the trees!” they cried, “O look at the trees!”

With lessened load a few carts creak and blunder,
 Following along the white deserted way,
 A country company long dispersed asunder:
 When now already the sun, in pale display
 Standing by Paul’s high dome, spread forth below
 His sparkling beams, and awoke the stir of the day.
 For now doors open, and war is waged with the snow;
 And trains of sombre men, past tale of number,
 Tread long brown paths, as toward their toil they go:
 But even for them awhile no cares encumber
 Their minds diverted; the daily word is unspoken,
 The daily thoughts of labour and sorrow slumber
 At the sight of the beauty that greets them, for the charm they have broken.

THE AESTHETIC MOVEMENT

4.10 OSCAR WILDE: “LONDON MODELS”

The Aesthetic Movement was a mid-nineteenth century artistic reaction to the materialistic and conservative Victorian traditions. In England it flourished in the 1880s. It was indebted to the Pre-Raphaelite Movement and the artistic theories of John Ruskin (1819–1900) and Walter Pater (1839–94). Writers such as Oscar Wilde (1854–1900) and Algernon Charles Swinburne (1837–1909) emphasized the superiority of aesthetic values rather than political, social, or moral subject matter. The commonly used phrase ‘art for art’s sake’ encapsulated the theory that appreciation of literature (or any of the arts) lay in recognizing the beauty of the art form alone when it was divorced from any deeper meaning. Taste and discrimination were encouraged by the Movement’s exponents at the expense of didacticism and practicality. Freedom of creative expression led to extravagant and eccentric behaviour among the aesthetes who were frequently ridiculed—in Punch and in Gilbert and Sullivan’s comic opera, Patience (1881).

Wilde's article, "London Models" is a witty reflection on the difference between how female and male models appear in paintings as opposed to their actual life, behaviour, and indeed intellectual capacity. It is a comic exposé of the art of posing—at which Wilde himself of course excelled. See also [4.7 HN].

From The English Illustrated Magazine 6 (January 1889)

[...] As a rule the model, nowadays, is a pretty girl, from about twelve to twenty-five years of age, who knows nothing about art, cares less, and is merely anxious to earn seven or eight shillings a day without much trouble. English models rarely look at a picture, and never venture on any aesthetic theories. In fact they realize very completely Mr Whistler's idea of the function of an art critic, for they pass no criticisms at all.²⁰ They accept all schools of art with the grand catholicity²¹ of the auctioneer, and sit to a fantastic young impressionist as readily as to a learned and laborious academician. They are neither for the Whistlerites, nor against them; the quarrel between the school of facts and the school of effects²² touches them not; idealistic and naturalistic are words that convey no meaning to their ears; they merely desire that the studio shall be warm, and the lunch hot, for all charming artists give their models lunch.

As to what they are asked to do they are equally indifferent. On Monday they will don the rags of a beggar-girl for Mr Pumper, whose pathetic pictures of modern life draw such tears from the public, and on Tuesday they will pose in a peplum²³ for Mr Phoebus, who thinks that all really artistic subjects are necessarily B.C. They career gaily through all centuries and through all costumes, and like actors, are only interesting when they are not themselves. They are extremely good-natured, and very accommodating. "What do you sit for?" said a young artist to a model who had sent him in her card (all models by the way have cards and a small black bag). "Oh, for anything you like, sir," said the girl; "landscape if necessary!"

Intellectually, it must be acknowledged, they are Philistines, but physically they are perfect—at least some are. Though none of them can talk Greek, many can look Greek, which to a nineteenth-century painter is naturally of great importance. If they are allowed, they chatter a great deal, but they never say anything. Their observations are the only *banalités* heard in Bohemia. However, though they cannot appreciate the artist as an artist, they are quite ready to appreciate the artist as a man. They are very sensitive to kindness, respect, and generosity [...]

²⁰**Mr Whistler's idea ... at all:** James McNeill Whistler (1834–1903) was a friend of Wilde and an advocate of the Aesthetic Movement until the mid-1880s, when he became hostile to both—hence Wilde's sarcasm.

²¹**catholicity:** inclusiveness, indifference to distinctions.

²²**school of facts ... effects:** Alluding to the opposing theories of whether the subject or the depiction of it is the more important.

²³**peplum:** embroidered robe worn by women in ancient Greece.

When they are tired a wise artist gives them a rest. Then they sit in a chair and read penny-dreadfuls, till they are roused from the tragedy of literature to take their place again in the tragedy of art. A few of them smoke cigarettes. This, however, is regarded by the other models as showing a want of seriousness, and is not generally approved of. They are engaged by the day and by the half-day. The tariff is a shilling an hour, to which great artists usually add an omnibus²⁴ fare. The two best things about them are their extraordinary prettiness, and their extreme respectability. As a class they are very well behaved, particularly those who sit for the figure, a fact which is curious or natural according to the view one takes of human nature. They usually marry well, and sometimes they marry the artist. In neither case do they ever sit again. For an artist to marry his model is as fatal as for a *gourmet* to marry his cook, the one gets no sittings, and the other gets no dinners [...]

[...] Then there is the true Academy model. He is usually a man of thirty, rarely good-looking, but a perfect miracle of muscles. In fact he is the apotheosis of anatomy, and is so conscious of his own splendour that he tells you of his tibia and his thorax, as if no one else had anything of the kind. Then come the Oriental models. The supply of these is limited, but there are always about a dozen in London. They are very much sought after as they can remain immobile for hours, and generally possess lovely costumes. However, they have a poor opinion of English art, which they regard as something between a vulgar personality and a commonplace photograph. Next we have the Italian youth who has either come over specially to be a model, or takes to it when his organ is out of repair.²⁵ He is often quite charming with his large melancholy eyes, his crisp hair, and his slim brown figure. It is true he eats garlic, but then he can stand like a faun and couch like a leopard, so he is forgiven. He is always full of pretty compliments, and has been known to have kind words of encouragement for even our greatest artists. As for the English lad of the same age, he never sits at all. Apparently he does not regard the career of a model as a serious profession. In any case he is rarely if ever to be got hold of. English boys too are difficult to find. Sometimes an ex-model who has a son will curl his hair, and wash his face, and bring him the round of the studios, all soap and shininess. The young school don't like him, but the older school do, and when he appears on the walls of the Royal Academy he is called *The Infant Samuel*.²⁶ Occasionally also an artist catches a couple of *gamins* [*street-urchins*] in the gutter and asks them to come to his studio. The first time they always appear, but after that they don't keep their appointments. They dislike sitting still, and have a strong and perhaps natural

²⁴ omnibus: see [3.21], n.82.

²⁵ when his organ is out of repair: Wilde implies that an Italian youth is likely to be a busking organ-grinder by trade (see [4.29], n.79); he may also intend a sly allusion to the youth's penis, implying an alternative source of income.

²⁶ *The Infant Samuel*: See 1 Samuel 3.

objection to looking pathetic. Besides they are always under the impression that the artist is laughing at them. It is a sad fact, but there is no doubt that the poor are completely unconscious of their own picturesqueness. Those of them who can be induced to sit do so with the idea that the artist is merely a benevolent philanthropist who has chosen an eccentric method of distributing alms to the undeserving. Perhaps the School Board will teach the London *gamin* his own artistic value, and then they will be better models than they are now. One remarkable privilege belongs to the Academic model, that of extorting a sovereign from any newly elected Associate or R.A. They wait at Burlington House²⁷ till the announcement is made, and then race to the hapless artist's house. The one who arrives first receives the money. They have of late been much troubled at the long distances they have had to run, and they look with strong disfavour on the election of artists who live at Hampstead or at Bedford Park, for it is considered a point of honour not to employ the underground railway, omnibuses, or any artificial means of locomotion. The race is to the swift.²⁸

Besides the professional posers of the studio there are the posers of the Row, the posers at afternoon teas, the posers in politics, and the circus-posers [...]

4.11 VERNON LEE: THE MAZES OF AESTHETIC LONDON

Vernon Lee was the pseudonym of *Violet Paget* (1856–1935), novelist, playwright, travel-writer and scholar of aesthetics and cultural history, who was born in France and spent much of her life in Europe, acquiring a fluent command of four languages. She was a feminist, socialist and pacifist who disdained stereotypical female roles and Victorian heteronormativity. As a writer she was prolific and various: her early work includes academic works such as *Studies of the Eighteenth Century in Italy* (1880) and *Euphorion, Being Studies of the Antique and the Mediaeval in the Renaissance* (1884), a biography (*The Countess of Albany*, 1884) and a novel (*Miss Brown*, 1884), which is a satire on the aesthetic movement. The beautiful *Anne Brown* is adopted by the poet *Hamlin* as his protégée: he gives her financial support and introductions to his fellow aesthetes in London in the hope that she will become an aesthete herself and marry him. The practical and serious *Anne*, however, remains sceptical and indeed wonders whether *Hamlin* “cares for her only as a sort of live picture.” While she ultimately marries him it is not for his aesthetic ideals.

From Miss Brown (1884), Vol. 1, Bk 4, ch. 4

[... S]he found herself being led about, passively, half unconsciously, through the mazes of aesthetic London. It was all very hazy: *Anne* was informed that this and that person was coming to dinner or lunch at Hammersmith; that

²⁷Burlington House: see [4.22], n.52 **Bookmark not defined.**

²⁸The race is to the swift: An allusion to Ecclesiastes 9:11: “the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong.”

this or that person hoped she would come and dine or take tea somewhere or other; that such or such a lady was going to take her to see someone or other's studio, or to introduce her at some other person's house. She knew that they were all either distinguished poets, or critics, or painters, or musicians, or distinguished relations and friends of the above; that they all received her as if they had heard of her from their earliest infancy; that they pressed her to have tea, and strawberries, and claret-cup,²⁹ and cakes, and asked her what she thought of this picture or that poem; that they lived in grim, smut-engrained houses in Bloomsbury, or rose-grown cottages at Hampstead, with just the same sort of weird furniture, partly Japanese, partly Queen Anne, partly medieval; with blue-and-white china and embroidered chasubles³⁰ stuck upon the walls if they were rich, and twopenny screens and ninepenny pots if they were poor, but with no further differences; and finally, that they were all intimately acquainted, and spoke of each other as being, or just having missed being, the most brilliant or promising specimens of whatever they happened to be.

At first Anne felt very shy and puzzled; but after a few days the very vagueness which she felt about all these men and women, these artists, critics, poets, and relatives, who were perpetually reappearing as on a merry-go-round,—nay, the very cloudiness as to the identity of these familiar faces—the very confusion as to whether they were one, two, or three different individuals,—produced in Miss Brown an indifference, an ease, almost a familiarity, like that which we may experience towards the vague, unindividual company met on a steamer or at a hotel.

And little by little, out of this crowd of people who seemed to look, and to dress, and to talk very much alike,—venerable bearded men, who were the heads of great schools of painting, or poetry, or criticism, or were the papas of great offspring; elderly, quaintly dressed ladies, who were somebody's wife, or mother, or sister; youngish men, with manners at once exotically courteous, and curiously free and easy, in velveteen³¹ coats and mustard-coloured shooting-jackets, or elegiac-looking dress-coats, all rising in poetry, or art, or criticism; young ladies, varying from sixteen to six-and-thirty, with hair cut like medieval pages, or tousled like *mœnads*,³² or tucked away under caps like eighteenth-century housekeepers, habited in limp and stayless³³ garments,

²⁹**claret-cup**: “a mixture of iced claret with lemonade and various flavouring ingredients” (*OED*).

³⁰**chasuble**: “an ecclesiastical vestment, a kind of sleeveless mantle covering the body and shoulders” (*OED*).

³¹**velveteen**: “a fabric having the appearance or surface of velvet, but made from cotton in place of silk” (*OED*).

³²**mœnads**: (more usually *maenads*) Bacchantes, frenzied priestesses of Dionysus, the Greek god of wine, theatre and religious ecstasy.

³³**stayless**: without ‘stays,’ or stiffened corsets, to give shape to the garments.

picturesque and economical, with Japanese chintzes for brocade, and flannel instead of stamped velvets—most of which young ladies appeared at one period, past, present, or future, to own a connection with the Slade School,³⁴ and all of whom, when not poets or painters themselves, were the belongings of some such, or madly in love with the great sonneteer such a one, or the great colourist such another;—out of all this confusion there began gradually to detach themselves and assume consistency in Anne’s mind one or two personalities, some of whom attracted, and some of whom repelled her [...]

4.12 GEORGE MOORE: BOHEMIAN LIFE IN MAYFAIR

For a note on George Moore (1852–1933) see [4.4 HN]. He lived in various parts of London after he returned from Paris, where he had studied art. Here he describes his Bohemian days in Curzon Street, Mayfair.

From Confessions of a Young Man (1886), ch. 16

Fortunately for my life and my sanity, my interests were, about this time, attracted into other ways—ways that led into London life, and were suitable for me to tread. In a restaurant where low-necked dresses and evening clothes crushed with loud exclamations, where there was ever an odour of cigarette and brandy-and-soda, I was introduced to a Jew³⁵ of whom I had heard much, a man who had newspapers and racehorses. The bright witty glances of his brown eyes at once prejudiced me in his favour, and it was not long before I knew that I had found another friend. His house was what was wanted, for it was so trenchant in character, so different from all I knew of, that I was forced to accept it, without likening it to any French memory and thereby weakening the impression. It was a house of champagne, late hours, and evening clothes, of literature and art, of passionate discussions. So this house was not so alien to me as all else I had seen in London; and perhaps the cosmopolitanism of this charming Jew, his Hellenism, in fact, was a sort of plank whereon I might pass and enter again into English life. I found in Curzon Street another ‘Nouvelle Athènes,’ a Bohemianism of titles that went back to the Conquest, a Bohemianism of the ten sovereigns always jingling in the trousers pocket, of scrupulous cleanliness, of hansom cabs, of ladies’ pet names; of triumphant champagne, of debts, gaslight, supper-parties, morning light, coaching; a fabulous Bohemianism; a Bohemianism of eternal hard-upishness and eternal squandering of money,—money that rose at no discoverable well-head and flowed into a sea of boudoirs and restaurants, a sort of whirlpool of sovereigns in which we were caught, and sent eddying

³⁴**Slade School:** The Slade School of Fine Art was founded as part of University College, London, in 1871 and soon became famous world-wide.

³⁵**Jew:** “Owen Hall” (pen-name of Jimmy Davis), a musical comedy scriptwriter, born in Ireland.

through music halls [4.25 HN], bright shoulders, tresses of hair, and slang; and I joined in the adorable game of Bohemianism that was played round and about Piccadilly Circus, with Curzon Street for a magnificent rallying point.

After dinner a general ‘clear’ was made in the direction of halls and theatres, a few friends would drop in about twelve, and continue their drinking till three or four; but Saturday night was gala night—at half-past eleven the lords drove up in their hansoms, then a genius or two would arrive, and supper and singing went merrily until the chimney sweeps began to go by. Then we took chairs and bottles into the street and entered into discussion with the policeman. Twelve hours later we struggled out of our beds, and to the sound of church bells we commenced writing. The paper appeared on Tuesday. Our host sat in a small room off the dining-room from which he occasionally emerged to stimulate our lagging pens.

4.13 GEORGE GISSING: A STRUGGLING WRITER

George Gissing (1857–1903) was born in England but spent some time, poverty-stricken, in America before settling in London. He observed working class life at first hand and his (nearly 20) novels describe with pessimistic resignation the impoverished and uneducated populace: see also [4.16 HN] and [4.23 HN]. In New Grub Street Gissing examines the life of Edward Reardon, who aspires to produce works that satisfy his aesthetic criteria in a world where success usually comes only to those who put commercial considerations first. His wife Amy does not give him moral support and after his death will marry Jasper Milvain, a writer who knows how to satisfy popular taste. This extract is from the description of Reardon at work in a house near Regent’s Park.

From New Grub Street (1891), Part 1, ch. 4

Eight flights of stairs, consisting alternately of eight and nine steps. Amy had made the calculation, and wondered what was the cause of this arrangement. The ascent was trying, but then no one could contest the respectability of the abode. In the flat immediately beneath resided a successful musician, whose carriage and pair came at a regular hour each afternoon to take him and his wife for a most respectable drive. In this special building no one else seemed at present to keep a carriage, but all the tenants were gentlefolk.

And as to living up at the very top, why, there were distinct advantages—as so many people of moderate income are nowadays hastening to discover. The noise from the street was diminished at this height; no possible trammers could establish themselves above your head; the air was bound to be purer than that of inferior strata; finally, one had the flat roof whereon to sit or expatiate in sunny weather. True that a gentle rain of soot was wont to interfere with one’s comfort out there in the open, but such minutiae are easily forgotten in the fervour of domestic description. It was undeniable that on a fine day one enjoyed extensive views. The green ridge from Hampstead

to Highgate, with Primrose Hill and the foliage of Regent's Park³⁶ in the foreground; the suburban spaces of St John's Wood, Maida Vale, Kilburn; Westminster Abbey and the Houses of Parliament,³⁷ lying low by the side of the hidden river, and a glassy gleam on far-off hills which meant the Crystal Palace; then the clouded majesty of eastern London, crowned by St Paul's dome. These things one's friends were expected to admire. Sunset often afforded rich effects, but they were for solitary musing.

A sitting-room, a bedroom, a kitchen. But the kitchen was called dining-room, or even parlour at need; for the cooking-range lent itself to concealment behind an ornamental screen, the walls displayed pictures and bookcases, and a tiny scullery³⁸ which lay apart sufficed for the coarser domestic operations. This was Amy's territory during the hours when her husband was working, or endeavouring to work. Of necessity, Edwin Reardon used the front room as his study. His writing-table stood against the window; each wall had its shelves of serried literature; vases, busts, engravings (all of the inexpensive kind) served for ornaments.

A maid-servant, recently emancipated from the Board school,³⁹ came at half-past seven each morning, and remained until two o'clock, by which time the Reardons had dined; on special occasions, her services were enlisted for later hours. But it was Reardon's habit to begin the serious work of the day at about three o'clock, and to continue with brief interruptions until ten or eleven; in many respects an awkward arrangement, but enforced by the man's temperament and his poverty.

One evening he sat at his desk with a slip of manuscript paper before him. It was the hour of sunset. His outlook was upon the backs of certain large houses skirting Regent's Park, and lights had begun to show here and there in the windows: in one room a man was discoverable dressing for dinner—he had not thought it worth while to lower the blind; in another, some people were playing billiards. The higher windows reflected a rich glow from the western sky.

For two or three hours Reardon had been seated in much the same attitude. Occasionally he dipped his pen into the ink and seemed about to write: but each time the effort was abortive. At the head of the paper was inscribed "Chapter 3," but that was all.

And now the sky was dusking over; darkness would soon fall.

He looked something older than his years, which were two-and-thirty; on his face was the pallor of mental suffering. Often he fell into a fit of absence, and gazed at vacancy with wide, miserable eyes. Returning to consciousness, he fidgeted nervously on his chair, dipped his pen for the hundredth time,

³⁶ **Regent's Park:** A Royal Park, situated in north-western London.

³⁷ **Houses of Parliament:** see [2.31], n.144.

³⁸ **scullery:** a small back-kitchen for washing dishes.

³⁹ **Board school:** a school set up under the Elementary Education Act of 1870 and regulated by the School Board of London to provide education for children aged between 5 and 12.

bent forward in feverish determination to work. Useless; he scarcely knew what he wished to put into words, and his brain refused to construct the simplest sentence.

The colours faded from the sky, and night came quickly. Reardon threw his arms upon the desk, let his head fall forward, and remained so, as if asleep.

*

He stood and regarded her. His expression was one of pained perplexity.

“You mustn’t forget, Amy, that it needs a particular kind of faculty to write stories of this sort. The invention of a plot is just the thing I find most difficult.”

“But the plot may be as silly as you like, providing it holds the attention of vulgar readers. Think of *The Hollow Statue*, what could be more idiotic? Yet it sells by thousands.”

“I don’t think I can bring myself to that,” Reardon said, in a low voice.

“Very well, then will you tell me what you propose to do”?

“I might perhaps manage a novel in two volumes, instead of three.”

He seated himself at the writing-table, and stared at the blank sheets of paper in an anguish of hopelessness.

“It will take you till Christmas,” said Amy, “and then you will get perhaps fifty pounds for it.”

“I must do my best. I’ll go out and try to get some ideas. I – ”

He broke off and looked steadily at his wife.

“What is it”?

“Suppose I were to propose to you to leave this flat and take cheaper rooms”?

He uttered it in a shamefaced way, his eyes falling. Amy kept silence.

“We might sublet it,” he continued, in the same tone, “for the last year of the lease.”

“And where do you propose to live”?

Amy inquired, coldly. “There’s no need to be in such a dear neighbourhood. We could go to one of the outer districts. One might find three unfurnished rooms for about eight-and-sixpence a week – less than half our rent here.”

“You must do as seems good to you.”

“For Heaven’s sake, Amy, don’t speak to me in that way! I can’t stand that! Surely you can see that I am driven to think of every possible resource. To speak like that is to abandon me. Say you can’t or won’t do it, but don’t treat me as if you had no share in my miseries!”

She was touched for the moment.

“I didn’t mean to speak unkindly, dear. But think what it means, to give up our home and position. That is open confession of failure. It would be horrible.”

“I won’t think of it. I have three months before Christmas, and I will finish a book!”

“I really can’t see why you shouldn’t. Just do a certain number of pages every day. Good or bad, never mind; let the pages be finished. Now you have got two chapters –”

“No; that won’t do. I must think of a better subject.”

Amy made a gesture of impatience.

“There you are! What does the subject matter? Get this book finished and sold, and then do something better next time.”

“Give me to-night, just to think. Perhaps one of the old stories I have thrown aside will come back in a clearer light. I’ll go out for an hour; you don’t mind being left alone?”

“You mustn’t think of such trifles as that.”

“But nothing that concerns you in the slightest way is a trifle to me – nothing! I can’t bear that you should forget that. Have patience with me, darling, a little longer.”

He knelt by her, and looked up into her face.

“Say only one or two kind words – like you used to!”

She passed her hand lightly over his hair, and murmured something with a faint smile.

Then Reardon took his hat and stick and descended the eight flights of stone steps, and walked in the darkness round the outer circle of Regent’s Park, racking his fagged brain in a hopeless search for characters, situations, motives.

INSTITUTIONS

4.14 WILLIAM S. GILBERT: THE HOUSE OF PEERS

William S. Gilbert (1836–1911) wrote a great many plays and poems, both serious and comic, but is best known for the 13 comic operas (the Savoy Operas) which he produced in collaboration with Arthur Sullivan between 1875 and 1896. Gilbert’s comedy often had a satirical edge and in various operas he made fun of figures of authority and established institutions, including the navy, the law, the police, and the Houses of Parliament. In Iolanthe (first performed in 1882) the House of Peers is subjected to his satirical wit.

“*When Britain really ruled the waves,*” in *Songs of a Savoyard (1890)*

When Britain really ruled the waves –
 (In good Queen Bess’s time)
 The House of Peers made no pretence
 To intellectual eminence,
 Or scholarship sublime;
 Yet Britain won her proudest bays
 In good Queen Bess’s glorious days!

When Wellington thrashed Bonaparte,
 As every child can tell,
 The House of Peers, throughout the war,
 Did nothing in particular,
 And did it very well:
 Yet Britain set the world a-blaze
 In good King George's glorious days!

And while the House of Peers withholds
 Its legislative hand,
 And noble statesmen do not itch
 To interfere with matters which
 They do not understand,
 As bright will shine Great Britain's rays
 As in King George's glorious days!

4.15 ANTHONY TROLLOPE: THE HOUSE OF COMMONS

The Way We Live Now is a long novel by **Anthony Trollope** (1815–1882), a writer both prolific and immensely popular (see [3.25]). The novel condemns dishonesty and corruption, particularly in the world of finance and personal relations. *Augustus Melmotte* is a wealthy financier with a shady past who moves to London and makes a great impression on society by entertaining lavishly, meanwhile planning a large-scale swindle in America. He is, however, humbled by the niceties of acceptable behaviour in the House of Commons, of which he is a new member. Trollope's treatment of the ruling class here may be compared with Disraeli's in [3.24] and Dickens's in [3.31].

From The Way We Live Now (1875), ch. 69

In the meantime a scene of a different kind was going on in the House of Commons. Melmotte had been seated on one of the back Conservative benches, and there he remained for a considerable time unnoticed and forgotten. The little emotion that had attended his entrance had passed away, and Melmotte was now no more than anyone else. At first he had taken his hat off, but as soon as he observed that the majority of members were covered, he put it on again. Then he sat motionless for an hour, looking round him and wondering. He had never hitherto been even in the gallery of the House. The place was very much smaller than he had thought, and much less tremendous. The Speaker did not strike him with the awe which he had expected, and it seemed to him that they who spoke were talking much like other people in other places. For the first hour he hardly caught the meaning of a sentence that was said, nor did he try to do so. One man got up very quickly after another, some of them barely rising on their legs to say the few words that they uttered. It seemed to him to be a very commonplace affair [...]

[*Melmotte determines to make a speech in response to an error made by a Mr Brown, whom he dislikes, and is immediately overawed by the ceremoniousness and strict decorum expected of members.*]

But the courage of the man was too high to allow him to be altogether quelled at once. The hum was prolonged; and though he was red in the face, perspiring, and utterly confused, he was determined to make a dash at the matter with the first words which would occur to him. "Mr Brown is all wrong," he said. He had not even taken off his hat as he rose. Mr Brown turned slowly round and looked up at him. Someone, whom he could not exactly hear, touching him behind, suggested that he should take off his hat. There was a cry of order, which of course he did not understand. "Yes, you are," said Melmotte, nodding his head, and frowning angrily at poor Mr Brown.

"The honourable member," said the Speaker, with the most good-natured voice which he could assume, "is not perhaps as yet aware that he should not call another member by his name. He should speak of the gentleman to whom he alluded as the honourable member for Whitechapel. And in speaking he should address, not another honourable member, but the chair."

"You should take your hat off," said the good-natured gentleman behind.

In such a position how should any man understand so many and such complicated instructions at once, and at the same time remember the gist of the argument to be produced? He did take off his hat, and was of course made hotter and more confused by doing so. "What he said was all wrong," continued Melmotte; "and I should have thought a man out of the City, like Mr Brown, ought to have known better." Then there were repeated calls of order, and a violent ebullition of laughter from both sides of the House. The man stood for a while glaring around him, summoning his own pluck for a renewal of his attack on Mr Brown, determined that he would be appalled and put down neither by the ridicule of those around him, nor by his want of familiarity with the place; but still utterly unable to find words with which to carry on the combat. "I ought to know something about it," said Melmotte sitting down and hiding his indignation and his shame under his hat.

"We are sure that the honourable member for Westminster does understand the subject," said the leader of the House, "and we shall be very glad to hear his remarks. The House I am sure will pardon ignorance of its rules in so young a member."

But Mr Melmotte would not rise again. He had made a great effort, and had at any rate exhibited his courage. Though they might all say that he had not displayed much eloquence, they would be driven to admit that he had not been ashamed to show himself. He kept his seat till the regular stampede was made for dinner, and then walked out with as stately a demeanour as he could assume.

4.16 GEORGE GISSING: THE CRYSTAL PALACE PARK

In The Nether World the newly married Bob Hewett and Pennyloaf Candy, together with their friends, enjoy an outing to the Crystal Palace. After the Great Exhibition of 1851 (see [3.21]) the Crystal Palace was moved across the river to Sydenham and became part of an amusement park with fairground entertainment, tea rooms, concerts, and fireworks. For further notes on Gissing see also [4.13 HN] and [4.23 HN].

From The Nether World (1889), ch. 12

Thus early in the day the grounds were of course preferred to the interior of the glass House. Bob and Pennyloaf bent their steps to the fair. Here already was gathered much goodly company; above their heads hung a thick white wavering cloud of dust. Swing-boats and merry-go-rounds are from of old the chief features of these rural festivities; they soared and dipped and circled to the joyous music of organs which played the same tune automatically for any number of hours, whilst raucous voices invited all and sundry to take their turn. Should this delight pall, behold on every hand such sports as are dearest to the Briton, those which call for strength of sinew and exactitude of aim. The philosophic mind would have noted with interest how ingeniously these games were made to appeal to the patriotism of the throng. Did you choose to ‘shy’ sticks in the contest for coconuts, behold your object was a wooden model of the treacherous Afghan or the base African. If you took up the mallet to smite upon a spring and make proof of how far you could send a ball flying upwards, your blow descended upon the head of some other recent foeman. Try your fist at the indicator of muscularity, and with zeal you smote full in the stomach of a guy [*dummy*] made to represent a Russian.⁴⁰ If you essayed the pop-gun, the mark set you was on the flank of a wooden donkey, so contrived that it would kick when hit in the true spot. What a joy to observe the tendency of all these diversions! How characteristic of a high-spirited people that nowhere could be found any amusement appealing to the mere mind, or calculated to effeminate by encouraging a love of beauty [...]

As the dusk descends there is a general setting of the throng towards the open air; all the pathways swarm with groups which have a tendency to disintegrate into couples; universal is the protecting arm. Relief from the sweltering atmosphere of the hours of sunshine causes a revival of hilarity; those who have hitherto only bemused themselves with liquor now pass into the stage of jovial recklessness, and others, determined to prolong a flagging merriment, begin to depend upon their companions for guidance. On the terraces dancing

⁴⁰Tension rose sharply between Britain and Russia over the Russo-Turkish War (1877–1878), giving rise to the catch-cry “The Russians shall not have Constantinople”.

has commenced; the players of violins, concertinas, and penny-whistles do a brisk trade among the groups for a rough-and-tumble valse; so do the pick-pockets. Vigorous and varied is the jollity that occupies the external galleries, filling now in expectation of the fireworks; indescribable the mingled tumult that roars heavenwards. Girls linked by the half-dozen arm-in-arm leap along with shrieks like grotesque mænads [4.11, n.32]; a rougher horseplay finds favour among the youths, occasionally leading to fisticuffs. Thick voices bellow in in fragmentary chorus; from every side comes the yell, the catcall, the ear-rending whistle; and as the bass, the never-ceasing accompaniment, sounds myriad-footed tramp, tramp along the wooden flooring. A fight, a scene of bestial drunkenness, a tender whispering between two lovers, proceed concurrently in a space of five square yards.—Above them glimmers the dawn of starlight.

4.17 ARNOLD BENNETT: A LONDON BANK

Arnold Bennett (1867–1931) was born in Staffordshire but settled in London where he lived as a journalist. Thereafter he wrote many short stories and novels, the best known of which are set in the Potteries (the ‘Five Towns’), where he was born. He spent most of his life in London except for 10 years in France. In Teresa of Watling Street Richard Redgrave, an amateur detective who has recently made friends with Lord Dolmer, a director of the British and Scottish Banking Company, is invited by him to investigate some mysteries regarding the Bank’s employees. In the opening scene the Bank has every appearance of the opulence and solidity of an old traditional establishment.

From Teresa of Watling Street (1904), ch. 1

Since money is the fount of all modern romantic adventure, the City of London, which holds more money to the square yard than any other place in the world, is the most romantic of cities. This is a profound truth, but people will not recognize it. There is no more prosaic person than your bank clerk, who ladles out romance from nine to four with a copper trowel without knowing it. There is no more prosaic building than your stone-faced banking office, which hums with romance all day, and never guesses what a palace of wonders it is. The truth, however, remains; and sometime in the future it will be universally admitted. And if the City, as a whole, is romantic, its banks are doubly and trebly romantic. Nothing is more marvellous than the rapid growth of our banking system, which is twice as great now as it was twenty years ago—and it was great enough then [...]

Mr Richard Redgrave stepped that way, and presently found himself in front of a mahogany door, on which was painted the legend, “Directors’ Parlour”—not “Board Room,” but “Directors’ Parlour.” The British and Scottish was not an ancient corporation with a century or two of traditions; it was merely a joint-stock company some thirty years of age. But it had prospered exceedingly, and the directors, especially Mr Simon Lock, liked to seem quaint and old-fashioned in trifles. Such harmless affectations helped

to impress customers and to increase business. The official [*who was ushering in Redgrave*] knocked, and entered the parlour with as much solemnity as though he had been entering a mosque or the tomb of Napoleon. Fifty millions of deposits were manoeuvred from day to day in that parlour, and the careers of eight hundred clerks depended on words spoken therein. Then Mr Richard Redgrave was invited to enter. His foot sank into the deep pile of a Persian carpet. The official closed the door. The specialist [Redgrave] was alone with three of the directors of the British and Scottish Bank.

“Please take a seat, Redgrave,” said Lord Dolmer, the only one of the trio with whom Richard was personally acquainted, and to whom he owed this introduction. “We shall not keep you waiting more than a minute or two.”

The other directors did not look up. All three were rapidly signing papers.

Richard occupied a chair upholstered in red leather, next the door, and surveyed the room. It was a large and lofty apartment, simply but massively furnished in mahogany. A table of superb solidity and vast acreage filled the middle space—such a table as only a bank director could comfortably sit at. As Richard gazed at that article of furniture and listened to the busy scratching of pens, he saw, with the prophetic vision characteristic of all men who are born to success, that a crisis in his life was at hand. He had steadily risen throughout his brief life, but he had never before risen so high as a bank parlour, and the parlour of such a bank!

4.18 C. W. MURPHY: “I LIVE IN TRAFALGAR SQUARE”

The nineteenth-century music hall evolved from popular singing in taverns and public houses in earlier times; however, only from the 1850s might music halls be regarded as an institution. Purpose-built halls were then being established to entertain audiences with popular songs and a variety of (usually comic) acts. This form of entertainment became immensely popular, particularly among the working classes, and provided opportunities for talented writers and singers, such as Gus Elen, Harry Champion, George Robey, and Marie Lloyd. “I Live in Trafalgar Square” was written by C. W. Murphy (1875–1913) and sung by Morny Cash (1875–1938), the Lancashire comedian. It appealed to the civic pride of the Londoner, who would also have been alive to the comic absurdity of inverted snobbery—the outcast who is defiantly proud of his social status. See Howard (1970) for more information.

From “I live in Trafalgar Square” (1902)

Today I’ve been busy removing,
And I’m all of a fidgety-fidge;
My last digs were on the Embankment,
The third seat from Waterloo Bridge.

But the cooking, and oh! the attendance [*service*]
Didn’t happen to suit me so well,
So I ordered my man to pack up, and
Look out for another hotel.

He did, and the new place is ‘extra,’ I vow,
Just wait till I tell you where I’m staying now.

Chorus. *I live in Trafalgar Square
With four lions to guard me;
Fountains and statues all over the place,
And the ‘Metropole’⁴¹ staring me right in the face.
I’ll own it’s a trifle draughty,
But I look at it this way, you see:
If it’s good enough for Nelson
It’s quite good enough for me.*

The beds ain’t so soft as they might be,
Still, the temperature’s never too high,
And it’s nice to see swells who are passing
Look on you with envious eye;

And then when you wake in the morning,
Just fancy how nice it would be
To have a good walk for your breakfast,
And the same for your dinner and tea;

There’s many a swell up in Park Lane tonight
Who’d be glad if he only had my appetite.

THE THAMES

4.19 HENRY JAMES: A STEAMER DOWN THE THAMES

In The Princess Casamassima by Henry James (1843–1916) the hero Hyacinth Robinson, a young orphan boy in London, is strangely attracted to scenes of working class life with which he feels an affinity (see [4.2]). He and his friend Paul Muniment take a steamer down the Thames to Greenwich. The boat passes the ugliness of wharves and warehouses, the grimy signs of maritime industries, the busyness and dirt of small boats and barges, all described in naturalistic detail, but these are not enough to qualify the “deep beguilement” that the Thames holds for Hyacinth.

From The Princess Casamassima (1886), Bk 4, ch. 35

[...] The boat was densely crowded, and they leaned, rather squeezed together, in the fore part of it, against the rail of the deck, and watched the big black fringe of the yellow stream. The river was always fascinating to Hyacinth. The mystified entertainment, which, as a child, he had found in

⁴¹ ‘*Metropole*’: a luxury hotel between Trafalgar Square and the Thames Embankment, which opened in 1885 (now called the Corinthia Hotel).

all the aspects of London came back to him from the murky scenery of its banks and the sordid agitation of its bosom: the great arches and pillars of the bridges, where the water rushed, and the funnels tipped, and sounds made an echo, and there seemed an overhanging of interminable processions; the miles of ugly wharves and warehouses; the lean protrusions of chimney, mast, and crane; the painted signs of grimy industries, staring from shore to shore; the strange, flat, obstructive barges, straining and bumping on some business as to which everything was vague but that it was remarkably dirty; the clumsy coasters and colliers, which thickened as one went down; the small, loafing boats, whose occupants, somehow, looking up from their oars at the steamer, as they rocked in the oily undulations of its wake, appeared profane and sarcastic; in short, all the grinding, puffing, smoking, splashing activity of the turbid flood.

4.20 JOSEPH CONRAD: SUNSET ON THE THAMES

Joseph Conrad (Teodor Josef Konrad Korzeniowski) (1857–1924) was born in Poland and went to sea at the age of 17. In 1878 he joined his first English ship and became a naturalized British subject in 1886. He settled in London in 1896, and then turned to writing. In 1890 he had taken a steamboat up the Congo River and his experiences there formed the basis for Heart of Darkness, which was first published in serial form in 1899. This novella exposed the brutal and squalid operations of the Belgian Empire in the Congo, but Conrad was careful to show that London, in 1899 the greatest city on earth, at the heart of the greatest empire on earth, was once itself at the “heart of darkness,” and that later some of its most intrepid voyagers might be epitomised as hunters and adventurers. This passage hints that all empires have their days in the brilliant light of the sun, but that their glory may go out suddenly, “stricken to death by the touch of that gloom brooding over a crowd of men.”

From Heart of Darkness (1902), ch. 1

The *Nellie*, a cruising yawl, swung to her anchor without a flutter of the sails, and was at rest. The flood had made,⁴² the wind was nearly calm, and being bound down the river, the only thing for it was to come to⁴³ and wait for the turn of the tide.

The sea-reach of the Thames stretched before us like the beginning of an interminable waterway. In the offing the sea and the sky were welded together without a joint and in the luminous space the tanned sails of the barges drifting up with the tide seemed to stand still in red clusters of canvas, sharply peaked with gleams of varnished sprits. A haze rested on the low shores that ran out to sea in vanishing flatness. The air was dark above

⁴²the flood had made: the flood tide had begun to rise.

⁴³come to: come to a standstill.

Gravesend,⁴⁴ and farther back still seemed condensed into a mournful gloom brooding motionless over the biggest, and the greatest, town on earth [...]

[...] The day was ending in a serenity of still and exquisite brilliance. The water shone pacifically, the sky without a speck was a benign immensity of unstained light, the very mist on the Essex marsh was like a gauzy and radiant fabric hung from the wooded rises inland and draping the low shores in diaphanous folds. Only the gloom to the west brooding over the upper reaches became more sombre every minute as if angered by the approach of the sun.

And at last in its curved and imperceptible fall the sun sank low, and from glowing white changed to a dull red without rays and without heat, as if about to go out suddenly, stricken to death by the touch of that gloom brooding over a crowd of men.

Forthwith a change came over the waters, and the serenity became less brilliant but more profound. The old river in its broad reach rested unruffled at the decline of day after ages of good service done to the race that peopled its banks, spread out in the tranquil dignity of a waterway leading to the uttermost ends of the earth. We looked at the venerable stream not in the vivid flush of a short day that comes and departs for ever but in the august light of abiding memories. And indeed nothing is easier for a man who has, as the phrase goes, “followed the sea” with reverence and affection, than to evoke the great spirit of the past upon the lower reaches of the Thames. The tidal current runs to and fro in its unceasing service, crowded with memories of men and ships it has borne to the rest of home or to the battles of the sea. It had known and served all the men of whom the nation is proud, from Sir Francis Drake⁴⁵ to Sir John Franklin,⁴⁶ knights all, titled and untitled—the great knights-errant of the sea. It had borne all the ships whose names are like jewels flashing in the night of time, from the *Golden Hind* returning with her round flanks full of treasure, to be visited by the Queen’s Highness and thus pass out of the gigantic tale, to the *Erebus* and *Terror*, bound on other conquests—and that never returned. It had known the ships and the men. They had sailed from Deptford, from Greenwich, from Erith—the adventurers and settlers; kings’ ships and the ships of men on ‘Change [*maritime business*]; Captains, Admirals, the dark ‘interlopers’ of the Eastern trade,⁴⁷ and

⁴⁴Gravesend: a town 26 miles downstream from London.

⁴⁵Sir Francis Drake (?1545–1596) circumnavigated the world in his ship *The Golden Hind* and brought home immense treasure plundered from Spanish ships; he was knighted by Elizabeth.

⁴⁶Sir John Franklin (1786–1847) in the *Erebus* and *Terror* searched for a route to the Pacific through the Arctic Ocean (the fabled ‘Northwest Passage’), but at some time in 1846–1848 his ships became icebound and were lost with all hands. In 2014, the *Erebus* was found west of O’Reilly Island, and the *Terror* south of King William Island in 2016.

⁴⁷‘interlopers’ ... trade: ships that poached the authorized trading of the East India Company.

the commissioned ‘generals’⁴⁸ of East India fleets. Hunters for gold or pursuers of fame they all had gone out on that stream, bearing the sword, and often the torch, messengers of the might within the land, bearers of a spark from the sacred fire. What greatness had not floated on the ebb of that river into the mystery of an unknown earth? [...] The dreams of men, the seed of commonwealths, the germs of empires.

The sun set; the dusk fell on the stream and lights began to appear along the shore. The Chapman lighthouse, a three-legged thing erect on a mudflat, shone strongly. Lights of ships moved in the fairway—a great stir of lights going up and going down. And farther west on the upper reaches the place of the monstrous town was still marked ominously on the sky, a brooding gloom in sunshine, a lurid glare under the stars.

“And this also,” said Marlow suddenly, “has been one of the dark places of the earth.”

MIDDLE CLASS LIFE

4.21 GEORGE ELIOT: A HOUSE BY THE THAMES

Daniel Deronda *was the last novel by George Eliot—the nom de plume of Mary Ann (or Marian) Evans (1819–1880). She was a prolific journalist before writing her major novels in the 1850s and thereafter. Many of the major characters of Daniel Deronda suffer various agonizing problems—unhappy marriage, concerns about parentage and religious heritage, and the loss of relatives. In contrast the Meyricks do not live such complex lives. They are secure in their identity as a loving family, living happily and without pretension. After this passage Deronda, who has saved a young woman, Mirah Lapidoth, from committing suicide, asks his friends the Meyricks to take her into their household, where she is welcomed.*

From Daniel Deronda (1876), ch. 18

Mrs Meyrick’s house was not noisy: the front parlour looked on the river, and the back on gardens, so that though she was reading aloud to her daughters, the window could be left open to freshen the air of the small double room where a lamp and two candles were burning. The candles were on a table apart for Kate, who was drawing illustrations for a publisher; the lamp was not only for the reader but for Amy and Mab, who were embroidering satin cushions for “the great world.”

Outside, the house looked very narrow and shabby, the bright light through the holland blind⁴⁹ showing the heavy old-fashioned window frame; but it is pleasant to know that many such grim-walled slices of space in our foggy London have been, and still are the homes of a culture the more spotlessly free from vulgarity, because poverty has rendered

⁴⁸ **commissioned ‘generals’**: authorized trading ships carrying general merchandise.

⁴⁹ **holland blind**: a kind of slatted window-covering with small spaces between the slats.

everything like display an impersonal question, and all the grand shows of the world simply a spectacle which rouses no petty rivalry or vain effort after possession.

The Meyricks' was a home of that kind; and they all clung to this particular house in a row because its interior was filled with objects always in the same places, which for the mother held memories of her marriage time, and for the young ones seemed as necessary and uncriticised a part of their world as the stars of the Great Bear seen from the back windows. Mrs Meyrick had borne much stint of other matters that she might be able to keep some engravings specially cherished by her husband; and the narrow spaces of wall held a world-history in scenes and heads which the children had early learned by heart. The chairs and tables were also old friends preferred to new. But in these two little parlours with no furniture that a broker would have cared to cheapen except the prints and piano, there was space and apparatus for a wide-glancing, nicely-select life, open to the highest things in music, painting, and poetry. I am not sure that in the times of greatest scarcity, before Kate could get paid work, these ladies had always had a servant to light their fires and sweep their rooms; yet they were fastidious in some points, and could not believe that the manners of ladies in the fashionable world were so full of coarse selfishness, petty quarrelling, and slang as they are represented to be in what are called literary photographs. The Meyricks had their little oddities, streaks of eccentricity from the mother's blood as well as the father's, their minds being like medieval houses with unexpected recesses and opening from this into that, flights of steps and sudden outlooks.

But mother and daughters were all united by a triple bond—family love; admiration for the finest work, the best action; and habitual industry.

4.22 MARGARET OLIPHANT: THE PAINTER AND THE PHILISTINE

Margaret Oliphant (1828–1897), born in Scotland, published her first novel there in 1849. After her marriage in 1852 to her cousin Francis Oliphant, an artist who worked chiefly in stained glass, she moved to London. Early widowed, throughout her career she had to support her family, especially her ineffectual sons, by means of her writing, producing more than a hundred articles for Blackwood's Magazine, several short stories and many novels. Of the latter the best known are the six in the series The Chronicles of Carlingford; this includes Miss Marjoribanks, a highly accomplished work that some have compared with Jane Austen's Emma (1816) and George Eliot's Middlemarch (1872) for its presentation of an anti-heroine. Of her non-fiction A Literary History of England from 1760 to 1825 (1885) and William Blackwood and his Sons (1897) are still worth consulting. Oliphant was as industrious a novelist as any in the nineteenth century, but because of her gender she was undervalued, at least in monetary terms: Anthony Trollope, with whom Margaret Oliphant is often compared, would typically receive for a novel four times the amount paid to Oliphant.

From one of Oliphant's London novels we have selected a passage in At His Gates,⁵⁰ which studies the marriage of the artist Robert Drummond and his "semi-Philistine" wife.

From At His Gates (1872), ch. 1

Mr and Mrs Robert Drummond lived in a pretty house in the Kensington district; a house, the very external aspect of which informed the passer-by who they were, or at least what the husband was. The house was embowered in its little garden; and in spring, with its lilacs and laburnums, looked like a great bouquet of bloom—as such houses often do. But built out from the house, and occupying a large slice of the garden at the side, was a long room, lighted with sky windows, and not by any means charming to look at outside, though the creepers, which had not long been planted, were beginning to climb upon the walls. It was connected with the house by a passage which acted as a conservatory, and was full of flowers; and everything had been done that could be done to render the new studio as beautiful in aspect as it was in meaning. But it was new, and had scarcely yet begun, as its proprietor said, to “compose” with its surroundings. Robert Drummond, accordingly, was a painter, a painter producing, in the mean time, pictures of the class called ‘genre’⁵¹; but intending to be historical, and to take to the highest school of art as soon as life and fame would permit. He was a very good painter; his subjects were truly ‘felt’ and exquisitely manipulated; but there was no energy of emotion, no originality of genius about them. A great many people admired them very much; other painters lingered over them lovingly, with that true professional admiration of ‘good work’ which counteracts the jealousy of trade in every honest mind. They were very saleable articles, indeed, and had procured a considerable amount of prosperity for the young painter. It was almost certain that he would be made an Associate at the next vacancy, and an Academician⁵² in time. But with all this, he was well aware that he was no genius, and so was his wife.

*

Her great characteristic was what the French call ‘distinction’; a quality to which in point of truth she had no claim—for Helen, it must be remembered, was no long-descended lady. She was the produce of three generations

⁵⁰ *At His Gates*: serialised in *Good Words* January–December 1872; published in book form by Tinsley Bros; its title is taken from the parable of Dives and Lazarus, Luke 16: 19–31.

⁵¹ **genre**: genre painting, hugely popular and **very saleable** in the Victorian period, depicted scenes from everyday life, modern or historical, often with a hint of a more-or-less sentimental narrative, like William F. Yeames’ famous “And When Did You Last See Your Father?” (1878), showing the young son of a Royalist officer being questioned by Roundheads during the Civil War.

⁵² **Associate ... Academician**: The Royal Academy of Arts was founded by George III in 1766, to raise the professional status of artists and promote contemporary art, with a membership limited to 34 **Academicians**, selected from the ranks of **Associate** Members of the Academy. Its headquarters are in Burlington House on Piccadilly.

of money, and a race which could be called nothing but Philistine⁵³ and from whence came her highbred look, her fanciful pride, her unrealisable ambition, it would be difficult to say.

She went over the house with a little sigh after Robert was gone, profess- edly in the ordinary way of a housewife's duty, but really with reference to his last words. Yes, the house might be made a great deal better. The draw- ing-room was a very pretty one—quite enough for all their wants—but the dining-room was occupied by Drummond as his studio, according to an arrangement very common among painters. This, it will be perceived, was before the day of the new studio. The dining-room was thus occupied, and a smaller room, such as in most suburban houses is appropriated gen- erally to the often scanty books of the family, was the eating-room of the Drummonds. It was one of those things which made Helen's pride wince—a very petty subject for pride, you will say—but, then, pride is not above petty things; and it wounded her to be obliged to say apologetically to her cous- in—"The real dining-room of the house is Mr Drummond's studio. We con- tent ourselves with this in the mean time." "Oh, yes; I see; of course he must want space and light," Reginald Burton had replied with patronising com- placency, and a recollection of his own banqueting-hall at Dura. How Helen hated him at that moment, and how much aggravated she felt with poor Robert smiling opposite to her, and feeling quite comfortable on the sub- ject! "We painters are troublesome things," he even said, as if it was a thing to smile at. Helen went and looked in at the studio on this particular morn- ing, and made a rapid calculation how it could be "made better." It would have to be improved off the face of the earth, in the first place, as a studio; and then carpeted, and tabled, and mirrored, and ornamented to suit its new destination. It would take a good deal of money to do it, but that was not the first consideration. The thing was, where was Robert to go? She, for her part, would have been reconciled to it easily, could he have made up his mind to have a studio apart from the house, and come home when his work was done. That would be an advantage in every way. It would secure that in the evening, at least, his profession should be banished. He would have to spend the evening as gentlemen usually do, yawning his head off if he pleased, but not professional for ever. It would no longer be possible for him to put on an old coat, and steal away into that atmosphere of paint, and moon over his effects, as he loved to do now. He liked Helen to go with him, and she did so often, and was tried almost beyond her strength by his affectionate lingerings over the canvas, which, in her soul, she felt would never be any better, and his appeals to her to suggest and to approve. Nothing would teach him not to appeal to her. Though he divined what she felt, though it had eaten into his very life, yet still he would try again. Perhaps this time she might like it better—perhaps [...]

⁵³ **Philistine**: indifferent or hostile to the arts.

“If he would only have his studio out of doors,” Helen reflected. She was too sure of him to be checked by the thought that his heart might perhaps learn to live out of doors too as well as his pictures, did she succeed in driving them out. No such doubt ever crossed her mind. He loved her, and nobody else, she knew. His mind had never admitted another idea but hers. She was a woman who would have scorned to be jealous in any circumstances—but she had no temptation to be jealous. He was only a moderate painter. He would never be as splendid as Titian, with a prince to pick up his pencil⁵⁴—which is what Helen’s semi-Philistine pride would have prized. But he loved her so as no man had ever surpassed. She knew that, and was vaguely pleased by it; yet not as she might have been had there ever been any doubt about the matter. She was utterly sure of him, and it did not excite her one way or another. But his words had put a little gentle agitation in her mind. She put down her calculation on paper when she went back to the drawing-room after her morning occupations were over, and called Norah to her music. Sideboard so much, old carved oak, to please him, though for herself she thought it gloomy; curtains, for these luxuries he had not admitted to spoil his light; a much larger carpet—she made her list with some pleasure while Norah played her scales. And that was the day on which the painter’s commercial career began.

4.23 GEORGE GISSING: THE WOMEN’S MOVEMENT

George Gissing (1857–1903) in his earlier works concentrated on the underbelly of society; later, he portrayed social issues centring on the English middle classes. In The Odd Women he studies the gathering momentum of the Women’s Movement. The women of the title are odd because they are as yet a small minority, odd because not mart of a pair in marriage, and odd because widely considered abnormal. Here, Mary Barfoot, who teaches secretarial skills to unmarried women in London, talks earnestly to thirteen of them under her tutelage, arguing for women’s emancipation and independence in their choice of career. For further notes on Gissing see [4.13 HN] and [4.16 HN].

From The Odd Women (1893), ch. 13

“Follow me carefully. A governess, a nurse, may be the most admirable of women. I will dissuade no one from following those careers who is distinctly fitted for them. But these are only a few out of the vast number of girls who must, if they are not to be despicable persons, somehow find serious work. Because I myself have had an education in clerkship, and have most capacity for such employment, I look about for girls of like mind, and do my best to prepare them for work in offices. And (here I must become emphatic once

⁵⁴**Titian:** (ca. 1488–1576), one of the greatest painters of the Venetian school. While he was painting for the Emperor Charles V he dropped his pencil; the emperor picked it up, saying “To wait on Titian is service for an emperor” (see Anon. 1859, 269).

more) I am *glad* to have entered on this course. I am *glad* that I can show girls the way to a career which my opponents call unwomanly.

“Now see why. ‘Womanly’ and ‘womanish’ are two very different words; but the latter, as the world uses it, has become practically synonymous with the former. A womanly occupation means, practically, an occupation that a man disdains. And here is the root of the matter. I repeat that I am not first of all anxious to keep you supplied with daily bread. I am a troublesome, aggressive, revolutionary person. I want to do away with that common confusion of the words ‘womanly’ and ‘womanish’, and I see very clearly that this can only be effected by an armed movement, an invasion by women of the spheres which men have always forbidden us to enter [...]

“An excellent governess, a perfect hospital nurse, do work which is invaluable; but for our cause of emancipation they are no good—nay, they are harmful. Men point to them, and say, ‘Imitate these, keep to your proper world.’ Our proper world is the world of intelligence, of honest effort, of moral strength. The old types of womanly perfection are no longer helpful to us. Like the Church service, which to all but one person in a thousand has become meaningless gabble by dint of repetition, these types have lost their effect. They are no longer educational. We have to ask ourselves, ‘What course of training will wake women up, make them conscious of their souls, startle them into healthy activity?’

“It must be something new, something free from the reproach of womanliness. I don’t care whether we crowd out the men or not. I don’t care *what* results, if only women are made strong and self-reliant and nobly independent! The world must look to its concerns. Most likely we shall have a revolution in the social order greater than any that yet seems possible. Let it come, and let us help its coming. When I think of the contemptible wretchedness of women enslaved by custom, by their weakness, by their desires, I am ready to cry, Let the world perish in tumult rather than things go in this way!”

4.24 MARY AUGUSTA WARD: A POLITICIAN AND HIS WIFE

Mary August Ward (1851–1920)—Mrs Humphry Ward—was the grand-daughter of Dr Thomas Arnold and a niece of Matthew Arnold (see [3.13 HN]). Born in Tasmania, where her father was an Inspector of Schools, she came to England when she was six but did not live with her immediate family until she was twelve. In 1872 she married Thomas Humphry Ward, an Oxford don. In 1888 she published her most famous work, Robert Elsmere, a novel of faith and doubt set mainly in Oxford, loosely based on her father’s spiritual conversions, first to Catholicism, then back to Anglicanism and finally again to Catholicism. She is now remembered unfavourably for campaigning against women’s suffrage, but she worked tirelessly to improve educational opportunities for women and working people generally; London’s Passmore Edwards Settlement is a monument to her. In addition to Robert Elsmere, Marcella (1894), Helbeck of Bannisdale (1898) and The Marriage of William Ashe (1905) deserve special attention. The latter deals with the strains encountered in a marriage, against a background of political intrigue and ambition. According to Mary Ward it was based loosely on “William Lamb, his

flighty madcap wife, her flirtation with Byron, the publication of Glenarvon, and his early death" (5). Kitty, the wife of William Ashe, was suggested by the "flighty madcap wife," Lady Caroline Lamb.⁵⁵ The allusion to Madame de Longueville foreshadows the influence of aristocratic ladies on politics in Mary Ward's time.

From *The Marriage of William Ashe* (1905), *ch.* 7

The Ashes had been settled since their marriage in a house in Hill Street⁵⁶—a house to which Kitty had lost her heart at first sight. It was old and distinguished, covered here and there with eighteenth-century decoration, once, no doubt, a little florid and coarse beside the finer work of the period, but now agreeably blunted and mellowed by time. Kitty had had her impetuous and decided way with the furnishing of it; and, though Lady Tranmore professed to admire it, the result was, in truth, too French and too pagan for her taste. Her own room reflected the rising worship of Morris and Burne-Jones,⁵⁷ of which, indeed, she had been an adept from the beginning. Her walls were covered by the well-known pomegranate or jasmine or sunflower patterns; her hangings were of a mystic greenish-blue; her pictures were drawn either from the Italian primitives⁵⁸ or their modern followers. Celtic romance, Christian symbolism, all that was touching, other-worldly, and obscure—our late English form, in fact, of the great Romantic reaction—it was amid influences of this kind that Lady Tranmore lived and fed her own imagination. The dim, suggestive, and pathetic; twilight rather than dawn, autumn rather than spring; yearning rather than fulfilment; "the gleam" rather than noon-day: it was in this half-lit, richly coloured sphere that she and most of her friends saw the tent of Beauty pitched.

But Kitty would have none of it. She quoted French sceptical remarks about the legs and joints of the Burne-Jones knights; she declared that so much pattern made her dizzy; and that the French were the only nation in the world who understood a *salon*, whether as upholstery or conversation. Accordingly, in days when these things were rare, the girl of eighteen made her new husband provide her with white-panelled walls, lightly gilt, and with a Persian carpet of which the mass was of a plain, blackish grey, and only the border was allowed to flower. A few Louis-Quinze⁵⁹ girandoles⁶⁰ on the walls, a Vernis-Martin⁶¹ screen, an old French clock, two or three inlaid

⁵⁵**Lady Caroline Lamb**: (1783–1828), best known for her affair with Lord Byron in 1812; her novel *Glenarvon*, based on this, depicted Byron as Lord Ruthven. Her husband, William Lamb, later became Lord Melbourne, Prime Minister in 1834 and 1835–1841.

⁵⁶**Hill Street**: In Mayfair, developed in the nineteenth-century with expensive mansions.

⁵⁷**Morris and Burne-Jones**: William Morris (1834–1896; see [3.42 HN]) and Edward Burne-Jones (1833–1898), a painter associated with the Pre-Raphaelites, who worked closely with Morris.

⁵⁸**Italian primitives**: painters such as Giotto and Fra Angelico who flourished 'pre-Raphael.'

⁵⁹**Louis-Quinze**: style of architecture and decorative art characteristic of early to mid eighteenth-century France.

⁶⁰**girandoles**: ornamental branched candle-sticks.

⁶¹**Vernis-Martin**: a type of japanning or imitation lacquer.

cabinets, and a collection of lightly built chairs and settees in the French mode—this was all she would allow; and while Lady Tranmore’s room was always crowded, Kitty’s, which was much smaller, had always an air of space. French books were scattered here and there; and only one picture was admitted. That was a Watteau sketch of a group from *L’Embarquement pour Cythère*.⁶² Kitty adored it; Lady Tranmore thought it absurd and disagreeable.

As she entered the room now, on this May afternoon, she looked round it with her usual distaste. On several of the chairs large illustrated books were lying. They contained pictures of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century costume—one of them displayed a coloured engraving of a brilliant Madame de Pompadour,⁶³ by Boucher.⁶⁴

The maid who followed her into the room began to remove the books.

“Her ladyship has been choosing her costume, my lady,” she explained, as she closed some of the volumes.

“Is it settled?” said Lady Tranmore.

The maid replied that she believed so, and, bringing a volume which had been laid aside with a mark in it, she opened on a fantastic plate of Madame de Longueville, as Diana, in a gorgeous hunting-dress.⁶⁵

Lady Tranmore looked at it in silence; she thought it unseemly, with its bare ankles and sandalled feet, and likely to be extremely expensive. For this Diana of the Fronde sparkled with jewels from top to toe, and Lady Tranmore felt certain that Kitty had already made William promise her the counterpart of the magnificent diamond crescent that shone in the coiffure of the goddess.

4.25 LADY ST HELIER: POLITICS AND THE MUSIC-HALL

Lady St Helier (Mary Jeune, 1845–1931), a London County Councillor for many years, was a philanthropist and essayist who advocated greater political freedom for women. She wrote more than fifty articles on social issues, some of which were collected in The Revolt of Daughters in 1894. An energetic London hostess, she continued the tradition of London peeresses influencing the direction of party politics, as depicted in Disraeli’s Sybil (see [3.21]). She also encouraged artists and writers and was a close friend of the novelist Edith Wharton. Her Memories of Fifty Years was published in London (Arnold) in 1909 and is a valuable record of upper-middle-class life in London. She was created a Dame of the Order of the British Empire in 1925.

⁶²*L’Embarquement pour Cythère*: painted by Watteau in 1717, depicting a *fête galante*.

⁶³**Madame de Pompadour**: 1721–1764, chief mistress of Louis XV of France from 1745–1751.

⁶⁴**Boucher**: François Boucher, 1703–1770, French painter of the Rococo period.

⁶⁵**Madame de Longueville**: Anne Geneviève de Bourbon (1619–1679), daughter of Henri de Bourbon; married Henri II d’Orléans in 1642; mistress of the Duke of La Rochefoucauld and then of the Duke of Nemours; famed for her beauty, she posed as Diana and other goddesses. She exercised great political influence during the Fronde and later protected the Jansenists.

From Memories of Fifty Years (1909), ch. 13

Theatres and music-halls [4.18 HN] in later years have entered keenly into the political and public questions of the day. The controversies which accompany political life have generally supplied themes on which the leading artists, certainly of the music-hall stage, have quickly seized; although, except on celebrated occasions, the effect produced has been ephemeral. Formerly topical songs and political allusions were little heard, but during the period of Mr Gladstone's Government (1868–1873), when Lord Sherbrooke (Mr Lowe) was Chancellor of the Exchequer, and Mr Ayrton the First Commissioner of Works, the power of the stage made itself first. Mr Lowe had incurred great unpopularity by reason of his match-tax. Mr Ayrton, who had a singularly unattractive appearance and a rough manner, had contrived to irritate a very large section of the community, especially the middle classes of London; and the Court Theatre, at which a piece called "The Happy Land" was then being performed, seized the occasion to make a great demonstration against the Government. All sorts of jokes and caricatures were made, encouraged by the evident approval of the large audience which came nightly to see the performance. A dance was introduced into the last act of the play, in which Mr Gladstone, Mr Lowe, and Mr Ayrton performed in character a *pas de trois*⁶⁶ to the words of a song which dealt with the faults and peculiarities of the three Ministers, Mr Lowe being particularly blamed for the match-tax, and Mr Ayrton for his rudeness and incivility. The refrain of Mr Ayrton's song, which consisted of a repetition of all the insolence of which he was thought guilty, generally brought the house down. The play lasted for two or three months, but the caricatures of the three Ministers were withdrawn, by order of the Lord Chamberlain. The theatre was crowded, the songs were repeated in the streets, and the feeling of anger against the Government grew daily instead of diminishing. Lady Waldegrave, who was no bad judge of the power of public opinion, always declared that Mr Gladstone's downfall was due to the burlesque of "The Happy Land".

4.26 GEORGE AND WEEDON GROSSMITH: NOBODY IS INVITED TO A BALL

George Grossmith (1847–1912) and his brother Weedon (1852–1919) were both involved in London theatre life and collaborated to produce The Diary of a Nobody, with illustrations by Weedon. The novel is in the form of a diary written over a period of 15 months by Mr Charles Pooter, a self-important and undistinguished clerk, who meticulously records the events of his mundane lower-middle-class life. He lives in Brickfield Terrace, Holloway, a particularly drab London suburb. Much of the book's comedy is derived from Pooter's naïve simplicity, his physical and social awkwardness, and his jealously guarded respectability in

⁶⁶ *pas de trois*: a dance for three people.

the face of many humiliating circumstances. There is social satire on his and his wife Carrie's scorn of those whom they consider "vulgar," while they themselves lack sophistication and aspire to be accepted by higher, "fashionable" society.

From The Diary of a Nobody (1892), ch. 4

April 30.—Perfectly astounded at receiving an invitation for Carrie and myself⁶⁷ from the Lord and Lady Mayoress to the Mansion House,⁶⁸ to “meet the Representatives of Trades and Commerce.” My heart beat like that of a schoolboy. Carrie and I read the invitation over two or three times. I could scarcely eat my breakfast. I said—and I felt it from the bottom of my heart—“Carrie darling, I was a proud man when I led you down the aisle of the church on our wedding day; that pride will be equalled, if not surpassed, when I lead my dear, pretty wife up to the Lord and Lady Mayoress at the Mansion House.” I saw the tears in Carrie’s eyes, and she said: “Charlie dear, it is *I* who have to be proud of you. And I am very, very proud of you. You have called me pretty; and as long as I am pretty in your eyes, I am happy. You, dear old Charlie, are *not* handsome, but you are *good*, which is far more noble.” I gave her a kiss, and she said: “I wonder if there will be any dancing? I have not danced with you for years.”

I cannot tell what induced me to do it, but I seized her round the waist, and we were silly enough to be executing a wild kind of polka⁶⁹ when Sarah entered, grinning, and said: “There is a man, mum, at the door who wants to know if you want any good coals.” Most annoyed at this. Spent the evening in answering, and tearing up again, the reply to the Mansion House, having left word with Sarah if Gowing and Cummings called we were not at home. Must consult Mr Perkupp⁷⁰ how to answer the Lord Mayor’s invitation.

May 1.—Carrie said: “I should like to send mother the invitation to look at.” I consented, as soon as I had answered it. I told Mr Perkupp, at the office, with a feeling of pride, that we had received an invitation to the Mansion House; and he said, to my astonishment, that he himself gave in my name to the Lord Mayor’s secretary. I felt this rather discounted the value of the invitation, but I thanked him; and in reply to me, he described how I was to answer it. I felt the reply was too simple; but of course Mr Perkupp knows best.

May 2.—Sent my dress-coat and trousers to the little tailor’s round the corner, to have the creases taken out. Told Gowing not to call next Monday, as we were going to the Mansion House. Sent similar note to Cummings.

⁶⁷**myself:** this ungrammatical use of *myself* to avoid saying *me*, now (it seems) almost normalised, may then have suggested a certain social pretentiousness.

⁶⁸**the Mansion House:** the official residence of the Lord Mayor of London, a grand Palladian mansion used for official City functions.

⁶⁹**polka:** a lively Czech folk-dance in 2/4 time, popular throughout Europe from the 1840s; the Pooters are a little behind the fashion.

⁷⁰**Mr Perkupp:** The principal of the firm in which Pooter is a clerk.

May 3.—Carrie went to Mrs James,⁷¹ at Sutton, to consult about her dress for next Monday. While speaking incidentally to Spotch, one of our head clerks, about the Mansion House, he said: “Oh, I’m asked, but don’t think I shall go.” When a vulgar man like Spotch is asked I feel my invitation is considerably discounted. In the evening, while I was out, the little tailor brought round my coat and trousers, and because Sarah had not a shilling to pay for the pressing, he took them away again.

May 4.—Carrie’s mother returned the Lord Mayor’s invitation, which was sent to her to look at, with apologies for having upset a glass of port over it. I was too angry to say anything.

May 5.—Bought a pair of lavender kid-gloves for next Monday, and two white ties, in case one got spoiled in the tying.

May 6, Sunday.—A very dull sermon, during which, I regret to say, I twice thought of the Mansion House reception tomorrow.

WORKING-CLASS LIFE

4.27 GEORGE GISSING: SUPREME UGLINESS IN THE CALEDONIAN ROAD

*For brief biographical notes on **George Gissing** see [4.13 HN], [4.16 HN] and [4.23 HN]. Exemplifying the development of Realism in England, Gissing’s work is free of sentiment and pathos, and its rare moments of humour are sardonic and ironic. His settings are chiefly among the working- and lower-middle classes, and his central characters tend to be ordinary and undistinguished, and are placed in plots that counter their aspirations towards joy and thwart their hopes for self-fulfilment. In *Thyrza* Gissing pictures Caledonian Road as the perfect ambience for constricted lives.*

*From *Thyrza* (1887), ch. 27*

Caledonian Road is a great channel of traffic running directly north from King’s Cross to Holloway. It is doubtful whether London can show any thoroughfare of importance more offensive to eye and ear and nostril. You stand at the entrance to it, and gaze into a region of supreme ugliness; every house front is marked with meanness and inveterate grime; every shop seems breaking forth with mould or dry-rot; the people who walk here appear one and all to be employed in labour that soils body and spirit. Journey on the top of a tram-car from King’s Cross to Holloway, and civilization has taught you its ultimate achievement in ignoble hideousness. You look off into narrow side-channels where unconscious degradation has made its inexpugnable⁷² home, and sits veiled with refuse. You pass above lines of railway,

⁷¹**Mrs James** is regarded by the Pooters as a fashionable woman of taste.

⁷²**inexpugnable**: impossible to evict.

which cleave the region with black-breathing fissure. You see the pavements half occupied with the paltriest and most sordid wares; the sign of the pawn-broker is on every hand; the public-houses look and reek more intolerably than in other places. The population is dense, the poverty is undisguised. All this northward-bearing tract, between Camden Town on the one hand and Islington on the other, is the valley of the shadow of vilest servitude. Its public monument is a cyclopean prison⁷³: save for the desert around the Great Northern Goods Depot, its only open ground is a malodorous cattle market. In comparison, Lambeth is picturesque and venerable, St Giles is romantic, Hoxton is clean and suggestive of domesticity, Whitechapel is full of poetry, Limehouse is sweet with sea-breathings.⁷⁴

4.28 JOSEPH CONRAD: BOMBS AND PORNOGRAPHY

For a brief biographical note on Joseph Conrad (1857–1924) see [4.20 HN]. Conrad's father had plotted to try to bring about the overthrow of Russian rule in Poland, so Joseph understood well the appeal of patriotism and nationalism. At the same time he abhorred the selfishness of conspirators who undermined social cohesion. In The Secret Agent he is particularly severe on Mr Verloc who works for revolutionary causes without any apparent risk to his own domestic comforts. Verloc's shop in Soho is squalid and sordid, and a fitting cover for his character, which is thoroughly self-centred, indolent, and parasitic. The anarchists and "visionaries" who gather at his shop after hours are hardly more admirable than Verloc himself, or indeed than the timid day-time customers who leaf through his range of scrofulous risqué publications. The true motives of night-time and day-time patrons alike are swathed in secrecy, as are the inner lives of Mr Verloc and his wife Winnie.

From The Secret Agent: A Simple Tale (1907), ch. 1

Mr Verloc, going out in the morning, left his shop nominally in charge of his brother-in-law. It could be done, because there was very little business at any time, and practically none at all before the evening. Mr Verloc cared but little about his ostensible business. And, moreover, his wife was in charge of his brother-in-law.

The shop was small, and so was the house. It was one of those grimy brick houses which existed in large quantities before the era of reconstruction⁷⁵ dawned upon London. The shop was a square box of a place, with the

⁷³**cyclopean prison**: Pentonville model prison, called **cyclopean** because it comprised a sort of panopticon, with corridors radiating from a central point so that one guard could theoretically oversee the whole (the classical Cyclops had only one eye).

⁷⁴**Lambeth ... Limehouse**: All these suburbs (or parts of them) had become impoverished and disreputable by the 1880s; **Limehouse**, once a busy shipbuilding centre, became overpopulated and known for its gambling and opium dens.

⁷⁵**era of reconstruction**: "The City of London has always been in a state of more or less continuous rebuilding. There have, however, been three periods when the rebuilding was

front glazed in small panes. In the daytime the door remained closed; in the evening it stood discreetly but suspiciously ajar.

The window contained photographs of more or less undressed dancing girls; nondescript packages in wrappers like patent medicines; closed yellow paper envelopes, very flimsy, and marked two-and-six in heavy black figures; a few numbers of ancient French comic publications hung across a string as if to dry; a dingy blue china bowl, a casket of black wood, bottles of marking ink, and rubber stamps; a few books with titles hinting at impropriety; a few apparently old copies of obscure newspapers, badly printed, with titles like *The Torch*, *The Gong*—rousing titles. And the two gas jets inside the panes were always turned low, either for economy's sake or for the sake of the customers.

These customers were either very young men, who hung about the window for a time before slipping in suddenly; or men of a more mature age, but looking generally as if they were not in funds. Some of that last kind had the collars of their overcoats turned right up to their moustaches, and traces of mud on the bottom of their nether garments, which had the appearance of being much worn and not very valuable. And the legs inside them did not, as a general rule, seem of much account either. With their hands plunged deep in the side pockets of their coats, they dodged in sideways, one shoulder first, as if afraid to start the bell going.

The bell, hung on the door by means of a curved ribbon of steel, was difficult to circumvent. It was hopelessly cracked; but of an evening, at the slightest provocation, it clattered behind the customer with impudent virulence.

It clattered; and at that signal, through the dusty glass door behind the painted deal counter, Mr Verloc would issue hastily from the parlour at the back. His eyes were naturally heavy; he had an air of having wallowed, fully dressed, all day on an unmade bed. Another man would have felt such an appearance a distinct disadvantage. In a commercial transaction of the retail order much depends on the seller's engaging and amiable aspect. But Mr Verloc knew his business, and remained undisturbed by any sort of aesthetic doubt about his appearance. With a firm, steady-eyed impudence, which seemed to hold back the threat of some abominable menace, he would proceed to sell over the counter some object looking obviously and scandalously not worth the money which passed in the transaction: a small cardboard box with apparently nothing inside, for instance, or one of those carefully closed yellow flimsy envelopes, or a soiled volume in paper covers with a promising title. Now and then it happened that one of the faded, yellow dancing girls would get sold to an amateur, as though she had been alive and young.

especially rapid, intensive and visually transforming. The first was in the years after the Great Fire of 1666 [2.11]. The second was two hundred years later, when the City ceased to be the living place of a community and became an area almost exclusively of daytime business" (Summerson 1977, 163).

Sometimes it was Mrs Verloc who would appear at the call of the cracked bell. Winnie Verloc was a young woman with a full bust, in a tight bodice, and with broad hips. Her hair was very tidy. Steady-eyed like her husband, she preserved an air of unfathomable indifference behind the rampart of the counter. Then the customer of comparatively tender years would get suddenly disconcerted at having to deal with a woman, and with rage in his heart would proffer a request for a bottle of marking ink, retail value sixpence (price in Verloc's shop one-and-sixpence), which, once outside, he would drop stealthily into the gutter.

4.29 ISRAEL ZANGWILL: A CHILD OF THE GHETTO

Israel Zangwill (1864–1926) was born in London to Jewish immigrants from the Tsarist empire, who (like many such migrants) had settled in the working-class East End of London. He began as a teacher, but pursued a career in literature, writing novels and plays (as well as journalism) against antisemitism and other forms of racism, and in favour of assimilation and multiculturalism. His play The Melting Pot made a deep impression on Theodore Roosevelt. He was a leading British Zionist for a time, a pacifist, and an advocate of women's suffrage. This description of a child on her way to a soup kitchen with her pitcher is a vivid vignette of ghetto life but is not without its comic touches, reminiscent of Dickens.

From Children of the Ghetto: A Study of a Peculiar People (1892), Bk 1, ch. 1

A dead and gone wag called the street 'Fashion Street,' and most of the people who live in it do not even see the joke. If it could exchange names with 'Rotten Row,'⁷⁶ both places would be more appropriately designated. It is a dull, squalid, narrow thoroughfare in the East End of London, connecting Spitalfields with Whitechapel, and branching off in blind alleys. In the days when little Esther Ansell trudged its unclean pavements, its extremities were within earshot of the blasphemies from some of the vilest quarters and filthiest rookeries⁷⁷ in the capital of the civilized world. Some of these clotted spiders' webs have since been swept away by the besom of the social reformer, and the spiders have scurried off into darker crannies.

There were the conventional touches about the London street-picture as Esther Ansell sped through the freezing mist of the December evening, with a pitcher in her hand, looking in her oriental colouring like a miniature of Rebecca going to the well.⁷⁸ A female street-singer, with a trail of infants of dubious maternity, troubled the air with a piercing melody; a pair of slatterns with arms akimbo reviled each other's relatives; a drunkard lurched

⁷⁶**Rotten Row:** see [3.43, n.169].

⁷⁷**rookeries:** slums; refuges for petty criminals.

⁷⁸**Rebecca ... well:** see Genesis 24:15–16, 45.

along, babbling amiably; an organ-grinder,⁷⁹ blue-nosed as his monkey, set some ragged children jiggling under the watery rays of a street lamp. Esther drew her little plaid shawl tightly around her, and ran on without heeding these familiar details, her chilled feet absorbing the damp of the murky pavement through the worn soles of her cumbrous boots. They were masculine boots, kicked off by some intoxicated tramp, and picked up by Esther's father. Moses Ansell had a habit of lighting on windfalls, due, perhaps, to his meek manner of walking with bent head, as though literally bowed beneath the yoke of the Captivity.⁸⁰ Providence rewarded him for his humility by occasional treasure trove. Esther had received a pair of new boots from her school a week before, and the substitution of the tramp's footgear for her own resulted in a net profit of half a crown, and kept Esther's little brothers and sisters in bread for a week. At school, under her teacher's eye, Esther was very unobtrusive about the feet for the next fortnight, but as the fear of being found out died away, even her rather morbid conscience condoned the deception in view of the stomachic gain.

4.30 D. H. LAWRENCE: OUTCASTS OF WATERLOO BRIDGE

D. H. Lawrence (1885–1930) was born in Eastwood, Nottinghamshire and most of his works are set in the Midlands, but he knew London well—he lived in or visited the city almost every year from 1908 to 1926. In his first novel, The White Peacock, the narrator Cyril Beardsall (an approximate self-portrait) and his friend George Saxton delight in viewing the “bewildering pageant of modern life” that London affords, until a socialist speaking at Marble Arch Corner reminds Cyril of the miseries of the poor in his Nottinghamshire home. Later that night they encounter the homeless sleeping under Waterloo Bridge.

From The White Peacock (1911), Part 3, ch. 5

At night, after the theatre, we saw the outcasts sleep in a rank under the Waterloo Bridge, their heads to the wall, their feet lying out on the pavement: a long, black, ruffled heap at the foot of the wall. All the faces were covered but two, that of a peaked, pale little man, and that of a brutal woman. Over these two faces, floating like uneasy pale dreams on their obscurity, swept now and again the trailing light of the tram cars. We picked our way past the line of abandoned feet, shrinking from the sight of the thin bare ankles of a young man, from the draggled edge of the skirts of a bunched-up woman, from the pitiable sight of the men who had wrapped their legs in newspaper for a little warmth, and lay like worthless parcels. It was raining. Some men

⁷⁹organ-grinder: an itinerant street musician playing a barrel organ or hurdy-gurdy, frequently accompanied by a monkey.

⁸⁰yoke ... Captivity: alluding to the Babylonian Captivity, when Nebuchadnezzar forced the Israelites into exile in Babylon in the 6th BCE.

stood at the edge of the causeway fixed in dreary misery, finding no room to sleep. Outside, on a seat in the blackness and the rain, a woman sat sleeping, while the water trickled and hung heavily at the ends of her loosened strands of hair. Her hands were pushed in the bosom of her jacket. She lurched forward in her sleep, started, and one of her hands fell out of her bosom. She sank again to sleep. George gripped my arm.

“Give her something,” he whispered in panic. I was afraid. Then suddenly getting a florin from my pocket, I stiffened my nerves and slid it into her palm. Her hand was soft, and warm, and curled in sleep. She started violently, looking up at me, then down at her hand. I turned my face aside, terrified lest she should look in my eyes, and full of shame and grief I ran down the embankment to him. We hurried along under the plane trees in silence. The shining cars were drawing tall in the distance over Westminster Bridge, a fainter, yellow light running with them on the water below. The wet streets were spilled with golden liquor of light, and on the deep blackness of the river were the restless yellow slashes of the lamps.

4.31 AMY LEVY: “BALLADE OF AN OMNIBUS”

Amy Levy (1861–1889) was born in Clapham, London, into an Anglo-Jewish family that was active in intellectual and artistic life. “A precocious feminist” (DNB), she was one of the first women (and only the second Jewish woman) to be admitted to Cambridge University, where she matriculated at Newnham College. While still an undergraduate she published stories, articles and poems. In due course she published novels, notably The Romance of a Shop (1888) and Reuben Sachs (1888), and her work was admired by many contemporary writers, including Yeats and Wilde. Unlike most middle-class single women of that era, she travelled through London and abroad without a chaperon. Her most intense relationships were same-sex ones, and she formed a close friendship with Vernon Lee (see [4.11 HN]) and other writing women. She hints at these passionate involvements in some of her poems, such as London in July. Her collections of verse are Xantippe and Other Verse (1881), A Minor Poet and Other Verse (1884) and A London Plane-Tree and Other Verse (1889). Critical of the materialism, philistinism and complacency of contemporary society, she particularly objected to what she considered racist stereotyping of ‘Jews’ by writers such as Charles Dickens and George Eliot. She suffered from serious bouts of depression and ended her own life aged 27.

From A London Plane-Tree and Other Verse (1889)

“To see my love suffices me”⁸¹ (Ballades in Blue China)

Some men to carriages aspire;
On some the costly hansoms wait;
Some seek a fly,⁸² on job or hire;

⁸¹ “To see my love suffices me”: refrain from *Ballades in Blue China* by Andrew Lang.

⁸² fly: “any one-horse covered carriage, as a cab or hansom, let out on hire” (OED).

Some mount the trotting steed, elate.
 I envy not the rich and great,
 A wandering minstrel, poor and free,
 I am contented with my fate –
 An omnibus⁸³ suffices me.

In winter days of rain and mire
 I find within a corner straight⁸⁴;
 The 'busmen know me and my lyre
 From Brompton⁸⁵ to the Bull-and-Gate.⁸⁶
 When summer comes, I mount in state
 The topmost summit, whence I see
 Croesus⁸⁷ look up, compassionate –
 An omnibus suffices me.

I mark, untroubled by desire,
 Lucullus⁸⁸ phaeton and its freight.
 The scene whereof I cannot tire,
 The human tale of love and hate,
 The city pageant, early and late
 Unfolds itself, rolls by, to be
 A pleasure deep and delicate.
 An omnibus suffices me.

Princess, your splendour you require,
 I, my simplicity; agree
 Neither to rate lower nor higher.
 An omnibus suffices me.

*

London in July

What ails my senses thus to cheat?
 What is it ails the place,
 That all the people in the street
 Should wear one woman's face?

⁸³ **omnibus**: see [3.21], n.82.

⁸⁴ **I ... straight**: i.e. 'I immediately find a corner inside'.

⁸⁵ **Brompton**: At that time regarded as the artists' quarter.

⁸⁶ **Bull-and-Gate**: Public house in Kentish Town, rebuilt in 1871; formerly, in Tudor times, the 'Boulogne Gate.'

⁸⁷ **Croesus**: a rich man (from the semi-mythical King of Lydia, ca. 550 BCE).

⁸⁸ **Lucullus**: Wealthy Roman soldier and politician, 118–56 BC; generous patron of the arts.

The London trees are dusty-brown
 Beneath the summer sky;
 My love, she dwells in London town,
 Nor leaves it in July.

O various and intricate⁸⁹ maze,
 Wide waste of square and street;
 Where, missing through unnumbered days,
 We twain at last may meet!

And who cries out on crowd and mart?
 Who prates of stream and sea?
 The summer in the city's heart –
 That is enough for me.

4.32 ARTHUR MORRISON: A SLUM

Arthur Morrison (1863–1945) was born in the East End of London. He became a journalist in 1890, and wrote short stories and detective fiction as a side-line. He enjoyed literary success with Tales of Mean Street (1894), A Child of the Jago (1896) and an historical novel The Hole in the Wall (1902). He published further collections of stories thereafter until 1933. He is best remembered now for his realist depiction of life in the East End.

From A Child of the Jago (1896), ch. 1

It was past the mid of a summer night in the Old Jago.⁹⁰ The narrow street was all the blacker for the lurid sky; for there was a fire in a further part of Shoreditch, and the welkin was an infernal coppery glare. Below, the hot heavy air lay, a rank oppression, on the contorted forms of those who made for sleep on the pavement: and in it, and through it all, there rose from foul earth and grimed walls a close, mingled stink—the odour of the Jago.

From where, off Shoreditch High Street, a narrow passage, set across with posts, gave menacing entrance on one end of Old Jago Street, to where the other end lost itself in the black beyond Jago Row; from where Jago Row began south at Meakin Street, to where it ended north at Honey Lane; there the Jago, for one hundred years the blackest pit in London, lay and festered; and half way along Old Jago Street a narrow archway gave upon Jago Court, the blackest hole in all that pit.

A square of two hundred and fifty yards or less—that was all there was of the Jago. But in that square the human population swarmed in thousands.

⁸⁹ **intricate**: pronounced *inTRicate*.

⁹⁰ **Old Jago**: a fictional name for the Old Nichol, a slum area between Shoreditch High Street and Bethnal Green Road.

Old Jago Street, New Jago Street, Half Jago street lay parallel, east and west; Jago Row at one end and Edge Lane at the other lay parallel also, stretching north and south: foul ways all. What was too vile for Kate Street,⁹¹ Seven Dials,⁹² and Ratcliff Highway⁹³ in its worst day, what was too useless, incapable and corrupt—all that teemed in the Old Jago.

Old Jago Street lay black and close under the quivering red sky; and slinking forms, as of great rats, followed one another quickly between the posts in the gut by the High Street, and scattered over the Jago. For the crowd about the fire was now small, the police was there in force, and every safe pocket had been tried. Soon the incursion ceased, and the sky, flickering and brightening no longer, settled to a sullen flush. On the pavement some writhed wearily, longing for sleep; others, despairing of it, sat and lolled, and a few talked. They were not there for lack of shelter, but because in this weather repose was less unlikely in the street than within doors; and the lodgings of the few who nevertheless abode at home were marked, here and there, by the lights visible from the windows. For in this place none ever slept without a light, because of three sorts of vermin that light in some sort keeps at bay: vermin which added to existence here a terror not to be guessed by the unafflicted, who object to being told of it. For on them that lay writhen and gasping on the pavement; on them that sat among them; on them that rolled and blasphemed in the lighted rooms; on every moving creature in this, the Old Jago, day and night, sleeping and waking, the third plague of Egypt,⁹⁴ and more, lay unceasing.

4.33 BARONESS EMMUSKA ORCZY: DEATH ON THE TUBE

Baroness Emmuska Orczy (1865–1947) was born in Hungary, the daughter of Baron Felix Orczy. In 1880, the 14-year-old Emma and her family moved to London, where they lodged at 162 Great Portland Street. After attending the West London School of Art and then Heatherley's School of Fine Art, she began a career as an artist and exhibited at the Royal Academy. At art school she met a young illustrator named Montague MacLean Barstow, the son of an English clergyman; they married in 1894. Soon after the birth of their son Emma Orczy started writing fiction, and enjoyed moderate success with a series of detective stories in the Royal Magazine. Eventually her crime mysteries would make her a rival to Arthur Conan Doyle. When she turned to writing novels she was most successful with the romantic historical The Scarlet Pimpernel (1905), its sequels, and other works in the same genre. The Pimpernel stories were adapted for stage and screen and made Baroness Orczy rich and famous.

⁹¹**Kate Street:** in Victorian times a slum area in Balham; now demolished.

⁹²**Seven Dials:** slum area in Covent Garden, notorious for filth and crime. See [2.18 HN].

⁹³**Ratcliffe Highway:** runs east from the City of London to Limehouse; notorious for poverty and violent crime.

⁹⁴**third plague of Egypt:** an infestation of lice or gnats; see Exodus 10: 12–29.

'The Mysterious Death on the Underground Railway' is one of Orczy's best-known short stories and we have chosen extracts from sections. 1 and 2: these set up the mystery but we leave its solution to be discovered by readers elsewhere. The story is narrated to 'Polly' by 'the man in the corner'.

From 'The Mysterious Death on the Underground Railway' (1901)

"In these days of tubes and motor traction of all kinds, the old-fashioned 'best, cheapest, and quickest route to City and West End' is often deserted, and the good old Metropolitan Railway⁹⁵ carriages cannot at any time be said to be overcrowded. Anyway, when that particular train steamed into Aldgate at about 4 p.m. on March 18th last, the first-class carriages were all but empty.

"The guard marched up and down the platform looking into all the carriages to see if anyone had left a halfpenny evening paper behind for him, and opening the door of one of the first-class compartments, he noticed a lady sitting in the further corner, with her head turned away towards the window, evidently oblivious of the fact that on this line Aldgate is the terminal station.

"Where are you for, lady?" he said.

"The lady did not move, and the guard stepped into the carriage, thinking that perhaps the lady was asleep. He touched her arm lightly and looked into her face. In his own poetic language, he was 'struck all of a'cap.' In the glassy eyes, the ashen colour of the cheeks, the rigidity of the head, there was the unmistakable look of death.

"Hastily the guard, having carefully locked the carriage door, summoned a couple of porters, and sent one of them off to the police-station, and the other in search of the station-master.

"Fortunately at this time of day the up platform is not very crowded, all the traffic tending westward in the afternoon. It was only when an inspector and two police constables, accompanied by a detective in plain clothes and a medical officer, appeared upon the scene, and stood round a first-class railway compartment, that a few idlers realized that something unusual had occurred, and crowded round, eager and curious.

"Thus it was that the later editions of the evening papers, under the sensational heading, 'Mysterious Suicide on the Underground Railway,' had already an account of the extraordinary event. The medical officer had very soon come to the decision that the guard had not been mistaken, and that life was indeed extinct.

"The lady was young, and must have been very pretty before the look of fright and horror had so terribly distorted her features. She was very elegantly dressed, and the more frivolous papers were able to give their feminine readers a detailed account of the unfortunate woman's gown, her shoes, hat, and gloves.

⁹⁵**Metropolitan Railway:** opened 1863 as an underground line, later with a branch from Baker Street.

“It appears that one of the latter, the one on the right hand, was partly off, leaving the thumb and wrist bare. That hand held a small satchel, which the police opened, with a view to the possible identification of the deceased, but which was found to contain only a little loose silver, some smelling-salts, and a small empty bottle, which was handed over to the medical officer for purposes of analysis.

“It was the presence of that small bottle which had caused the report to circulate freely that the mysterious case on the Underground Railway was one of suicide. Certain it was that neither about the lady’s person, nor in the appearance of the railway carriage, was there the slightest sign of struggle or even of resistance. Only the look in the poor woman’s eyes spoke of sudden terror, of the rapid vision of an unexpected and violent death, which probably only lasted an infinitesimal fraction of a second, but which had left its indelible mark upon the face, otherwise so placid and so still.”

“The body of the deceased was conveyed to the mortuary. So far, of course, not a soul had been able to identify her, or to throw the slightest light upon the mystery which hung around her death.

“Against that, quite a crowd of idlers—genuinely interested or not—obtained admission to view the body, on the pretext of having lost or mislaid a relative or a friend. At about 8.30 p.m. a young man, very well dressed, drove up to the station in a hansom, and sent in his card to the superintendent. It was Mr Hazeldene, shipping agent, of 11, Crown Lane, E.C., and No. 19, Addison Row, Kensington.

“The young man looked in a pitiable state of mental distress; his hand clutched nervously a copy of the *St. James’s Gazette*, which contained the fatal news. He said very little to the superintendent except that a person who was very dear to him had not returned home that evening.

“He had not felt really anxious until half an hour ago, when suddenly he thought of looking at his paper. The description of the deceased lady, though vague, had terribly alarmed him. He had jumped into a hansom, and now begged permission to view the body, in order that his worst fears might be allayed.

“You know what followed, of course,” continued the man in the corner, “the grief of the young man was truly pitiable. In the woman lying there in a public mortuary before him, Mr Hazeldene had recognized his wife.

“I am waxing melodramatic,” said the man in the corner, who looked up at Polly with a mild and gentle smile, while his nervous fingers vainly endeavoured to add another knot on the scrappy bit of string with which he was continually playing, “and I fear that the whole story savours of the penny novelette, but you must admit, and no doubt you remember, that it was an intensely pathetic and truly dramatic moment.

“The unfortunate young husband of the deceased lady was not much worried with questions that night. As a matter of fact, he was not in a fit condition to make any coherent statement. It was at the coroner’s inquest on

the following day that certain facts came to light, which for the time being seemed to clear up the mystery surrounding Mrs. Hazeldene's death, only to plunge that same mystery, later on, into denser gloom than before.

"The first witness at the inquest was, of course, Mr Hazeldene himself. I think every one's sympathy went out to the young man as he stood before the coroner and tried to throw what light he could upon the mystery. He was well dressed, as he had been the day before, but he looked terribly ill and worried, and no doubt the fact that he had not shaved gave his face a care-worn and neglected air.

"It appears that he and the deceased had been married some six years or so, and that they had always been happy in their married life. They had no children. Mrs Hazeldene seemed to enjoy the best of health till lately, when she had had a slight attack of influenza, in which Dr Arthur Jones had attended her. The doctor was present at this moment, and would no doubt explain to the coroner and the jury whether he thought that Mrs Hazeldene had the slightest tendency to heart disease, which might have had a sudden and fatal ending.

"The coroner was, of course, very considerate to the bereaved husband. He tried by circumlocution to get at the point he wanted, namely, Mrs Hazeldene's mental condition lately. Mr Hazeldene seemed loath to talk about this. No doubt he had been warned as to the existence of the small bottle found in his wife's satchel.

"It certainly did seem to me at times,' he at last reluctantly admitted, 'that my wife did not seem quite herself. She used to be very gay and bright, and lately I often saw her in the evening sitting, as if brooding over some matters, which evidently she did not care to communicate to me.'

"Still the coroner insisted, and suggested the small bottle.

"I know, I know,' replied the young man, with a short, heavy sigh. 'You mean – the question of suicide – I cannot understand it at all – it seems so sudden and so terrible – she certainly had seemed listless and troubled lately – but only at times – and yesterday morning, when I went to business, she appeared quite herself again, and I suggested that we should go to the opera in the evening. She was delighted, I know, and told me she would do some shopping, and pay a few calls in the afternoon.'

"Do you know at all where she intended to go when she got into the Underground Railway?"

"Well, not with certainty. You see, she may have meant to get out at Baker Street, and go down to Bond Street to do her shopping. Then, again, she sometimes goes to a shop in St. Paul's Churchyard, in which case she would take a ticket to Aldersgate Street; but I cannot say.'

"Now, Mr Hazeldene,' said the coroner at last very kindly, 'will you try to tell me if there was anything in Mrs. Hazeldene's life which you know of, and which might in some measure explain the cause of the distressed state of

mind, which you yourself had noticed? Did there exist any financial difficulty which might have preyed upon Mrs. Hazeldene's mind; was there any friend – to whose intercourse with Mrs. Hazeldene – you – er – at any time took exception? In fact,' added the coroner, as if thankful that he had got over an unpleasant moment, 'can you give me the slightest indication which would tend to confirm the suspicion that the unfortunate lady, in a moment of mental anxiety or derangement, may have wished to take her own life?'

"There was silence in the court for a few moments. Mr Hazeldene seemed to every one there present to be labouring under some terrible moral doubt. He looked very pale and wretched, and twice attempted to speak before he at last said in scarcely audible tones:

"No; there were no financial difficulties of any sort. My wife had an independent fortune of her own – she had no extravagant tastes –'

"Nor any friend you at any time objected to?' insisted the coroner.

"Nor any friend, I – at any time objected to,' stammered the unfortunate young man, evidently speaking with an effort.

"I was present at the inquest," resumed the man in the corner, after he had drunk a glass of milk and ordered another, "and I can assure you that the most obtuse person there plainly realized that Mr Hazeldene was telling a lie. It was pretty plain to the meanest intelligence that the unfortunate lady had not fallen into a state of morbid dejection for nothing, and that perhaps there existed a third person who could throw more light on her strange and sudden death than the unhappy, bereaved young widower.

*

"I said there were three persons who understood the gravity of the two doctors' statements—the other two were, firstly, the detective who had originally examined the railway carriage, a young man of energy and plenty of misguided intelligence, the other was Mr Hazeldene.

"At this point the interesting element of the whole story was first introduced into the proceedings, and this was done through the humble channel of Emma Funnel, Mrs Hazeldene's maid, who, as far as was known then, was the last person who had seen the unfortunate lady alive and had spoken to her.

"Mrs. Hazeldene lunched at home,' explained Emma, who was shy, and spoke almost in a whisper; 'she seemed well and cheerful. She went out at about half-past three, and told me she was going to Spence's, in St. Paul's Churchyard, to try on her new tailor-made gown. Mrs. Hazeldene had meant to go there in the morning, but was prevented as Mr. Errington called.'

"Mr. Errington?' asked the coroner casually. 'Who is Mr. Errington?'

"But this Emma found difficult to explain. Mr Errington was—Mr Errington, that's all.

"Mr. Errington was a friend of the family. He lived in a flat in the Albert Mansions. He very often came to Addison Row, and generally stayed late.'

“Pressed still further with questions, Emma at last stated that latterly Mrs Hazeldene had been to the theatre several times with Mr Errington, and that on those nights the master looked very gloomy, and was very cross.

“Recalled, the young widower was strangely reticent. He gave forth his answers very grudgingly, and the coroner was evidently absolutely satisfied with himself at the marvellous way in which, after a quarter of an hour of firm yet very kind questionings, he had elicited from the witness what information he wanted.

“Mr Errington was a friend of his wife. He was a gentleman of means, and seemed to have a great deal of time at his command. He himself did not particularly care about Mr Errington, but he certainly had never made any observations to his wife on the subject.

“But who is Mr. Errington?” repeated the coroner once more. ‘What does he do? What is his business or profession?’

“He has no business or profession.

“What is his occupation, then?

“He has no special occupation. He has ample private means. But he has a great and very absorbing hobby.’

“What is that?”

“He spends all his time in chemical experiments, and is, I believe, as an amateur, a very distinguished toxicologist.”

4.34 VIRGINIA WOOLF: LEAVING LONDON

Virginia Woolf (1882–1914) was born in South Kensington and educated at home, where she benefitted from a rich cultural heritage. Her mother Julia (1846–1895) had sat as a model of beauty to her aunt, the distinguished photographer Julia Cameron, and also to Pre-Raphaelite painters. Virginia’s father was Sir Leslie Stephen (1832–1904), mainly remembered now as the first editor of the Dictionary of National Biography; in 1865 he had married as his first wife Harriet Marian Thackeray (1840–1875), daughter of W. M. Thackeray (see [3.9] and [3.33]); he married Julia Duckworth, his second wife, in 1878. Virginia Woolf loosely depicts her parents as Mr and Mrs Ramsay in *To the Lighthouse* (1928). In 1912 she married Leonard Woolf (1880–1969), an essayist and novelist; together they founded the Hogarth Press in 1917. They formed the nucleus of the Bloomsbury Group, a gathering of writers, painters and critics that included John Maynard Keynes, E M Forster, Lytton Strachey and Roger Fry. On the fringe of that group was Vita Sackville-West,⁹⁶ the poet and novelist, with whom Virginia Woolf had a long-lasting same-sex love affair; she based the protagonist of *Orlando: a Biography* (1928) on her. Woolf was also an influential essayist, especially through *A Room of One’s Own* (1929), where she sets out a plea for women writers to be given literal and figurative space in a male-dominated tradition. After suffering many periods of depression Woolf committed suicide in 1941.

⁹⁶Vita Sackville-West: lived 1892–1962; prolific poet and novelist, remembered especially for her long poem “The Land” (1926) and her novel *The Edwardians* (1930).

Woolf's first novel, The Voyage Out, begun in 1912, was published, much revised, in 1915. Although not so experimental as works such as Mrs Dalloway⁹⁷ (1925) and The Waves (1931), it is recognizably modernist in the representation of the sensibility of its central character: Thames-side London is here registered through Mrs Ambrose's consciousness.

From The Voyage Out (1915), ch. 1

Yes, she knew she must go back to all that, but at present she must weep. Screening her face she sobbed more steadily than she had yet done, her shoulders rising and falling with great regularity. It was this figure that her husband saw when, having reached the polished Sphinx,⁹⁸ having entangled himself with a man selling picture postcards, he turned; the stanza instantly stopped. He came up to her, laid his hand on her shoulder, and said, "Dearest." His voice was supplicating. But she shut her face away from him, as much as to say, "You can't possibly understand."

As he did not leave her, however, she had to wipe her eyes, and to raise them to the level of the factory chimneys on the other bank. She saw also the arches of Waterloo Bridge⁹⁹ and the carts moving across them, like the line of animals in a shooting gallery. They were seen blankly, but to see anything was of course to end her weeping and begin to walk.

"I would rather walk," she said, her husband having hailed a cab already occupied by two city men.

The fixity of her mood was broken by the action of walking. The shooting motor cars, more like spiders in the moon than terrestrial objects, the thundering drays, the jingling hansoms, and little black broughams, made her think of the world she lived in. Somewhere up there above the pinnacles where the smoke rose in a pointed hill, her children were now asking for her, and getting a soothing reply. As for the mass of streets, squares, and public buildings which parted them, she only felt at this moment how little London had done to make her love it, although thirty of her forty years had been spent in a street. She knew how to read the people who were passing her; there were the rich who were running to and from each others' houses at this hour; there were the bigoted workers driving in a straight line to their offices; there were the poor who were unhappy and rightly malignant. Already, though there was sunlight in the haze, tattered old men and women were nodding off to sleep upon the seats. When one gave up seeing the beauty that clothed things, this was the skeleton beneath.

A fine rain now made her still more dismal; vans with the odd names of those engaged in odd industries—Sprules, Manufacturer of Saw-dust; Grabb, to whom no piece of waste paper comes amiss—fell flat as a bad joke; bold

⁹⁷**Mrs Dalloway:** Clarissa Dalloway appears in *A Voyage Out*.

⁹⁸**Sphinx:** one of two placed in 1882 to flank Cleopatra's Needle, erected in 1878 on the Thames Embankment.

⁹⁹**Waterloo Bridge:** designed by John Rennie; opened in 1817.

lovers, sheltered behind one cloak, seemed to her sordid, past their passion; the flower women, a contented company, whose talk is always worth hearing, were sodden hags; the red, yellow, and blue flowers, whose heads were pressed together, would not blaze. Moreover, her husband walking with a quick rhythmic stride, jerking his free hand occasionally, was either a Viking or a stricken Nelson; the sea-gulls had changed his note.

“Ridley, shall we drive? Shall we drive, Ridley?”

Mrs Ambrose had to speak sharply; by this time he was far away.

The cab, by trotting steadily along the same road, soon withdrew them from the West End, and plunged them into London. It appeared that this was a great manufacturing place, where the people were engaged in making things, as though the West End, with its electric lamps, its vast plate-glass windows all shining yellow, its carefully-finished houses, and tiny live figures trotting on the pavement, or bowled along on wheels in the road, was the finished work. It appeared to her a very small bit of work for such an enormous factory to have made. For some reason it appeared to her as a small golden tassel on the edge of a vast black cloak.

Observing that they passed no other hansom cab, but only vans and waggons, and that not one of the thousand men and women she saw was either a gentleman or a lady, Mrs Ambrose understood that after all it is the ordinary thing to be poor, and that London is the city of innumerable poor people. Startled by this discovery and seeing herself pacing a circle all the days of her life round Piccadilly Circus¹⁰⁰ she was greatly relieved to pass a building put up by the London County Council for Night Schools.¹⁰¹

“Lord, how gloomy it is!” her husband groaned. “Poor creatures!”

What with the misery for her children, the poor, and the rain, her mind was like a wound exposed to dry in the air.

At this point the cab stopped, for it was in danger of being crushed like an egg-shell. The wide Embankment which had had room for cannonballs and squadrons, had now shrunk to a cobbled lane steaming with smells of malt and oil and blocked by waggons. While her husband read the placards pasted on the brick announcing the hours at which certain ships would sail for Scotland, Mrs Ambrose did her best to find information. From a world exclusively occupied in feeding waggons with sacks, half obliterated too in a fine yellow fog,¹⁰² they got neither help nor attention. It seemed a miracle when an old man approached, guessed their condition, and proposed to row them out to their ship in the little boat which he kept moored at the bottom of a flight of steps. With some hesitation they trusted themselves to him, took

¹⁰⁰**Piccadilly Circus**: junction built in 1819 to connect Regent Street with Piccadilly.

¹⁰¹**London County Council ... Night Schools**: the LCC was established in 1889; its responsibilities included the management of adult education.

¹⁰²For London fog, see **General Introduction**, n.21.

their places, and were soon waving up and down upon the water, London having shrunk to two lines of buildings on either side of them, square buildings and oblong buildings placed in rows like a child's avenue of bricks.

The river, which had a certain amount of troubled yellow light in it, ran with great force; bulky barges floated down swiftly escorted by tugs; police boats shot past everything; the wind went with the current. The open rowing-boat in which they sat bobbed and curtseyed across the line of traffic. In mid-stream the old man stayed his hands upon the oars, and as the water rushed past them, remarked that once he had taken many passengers across, where now he took scarcely any. He seemed to recall an age when his boat, moored among rushes, carried delicate feet across to lawns at Rotherhithe.¹⁰³

"They want bridges now," he said, indicating the monstrous outline of the Tower Bridge.¹⁰⁴ Mournfully Helen regarded him, who was putting water between her and her children. Mournfully she gazed at the ship they were approaching; anchored in the middle of the stream they could dimly read her name—"Euphrosyne".¹⁰⁵

AFTER LONDON

4.35 RICHARD JEFFERIES: DROWNED LONDON

Richard Jefferies (1848–1887), a writer and naturalist born on a Wiltshire farm, wrote several works expressing his knowledge and love of the natural world. He is celebrated for *Bevis (1882), an evocation of his country boyhood, The Story of My Heart (1883), which expressed his quasi-mystical beliefs, and After London (1885), a vision of a future when London has disappeared below a poisonous lake, the ultimate apocalyptic fantasy prefigured by Gray's* *Babylon (p. 7) and Cobbett's* *Great Wen [3.4].*

From After London, or Wild England (1885), Pt. 1, ch. 5

At the eastern extremity the Lake narrows, and finally is lost in the vast marshes which cover the site of the ancient London. Through these, no doubt, in the days of the old world there flowed the river Thames. By changes of the sea level and the sand that was brought up there must have grown great banks, which obstructed the stream. I have formerly mentioned the vast quantities of timber, the wreckage of towns and bridges which was carried down by the various rivers, and by none more so than by the Thames. These added to the accumulation, which increased the faster because the foundations of the ancient bridges held it like piles driven in for the purpose.

¹⁰³**Rotherhithe:** by Elizabethan times already a port serving Southwark, when ship's passengers would be rowed to and from London in ferry boats.

¹⁰⁴**Tower Bridge:** built between 1886 and 1894.

¹⁰⁵**Euphrosyne:** Greek goddess of joy and mirth.

And before this the river had become partially choked from the cloacæ [*sewers*] of the ancient city which poured into it through enormous subterranean aqueducts and drains.

After a time all these shallows and banks became well matted together by the growth of weeds, of willows, and flags, while the tide, ebbing lower at each drawing back, left still more mud and sand. Now it is believed that when this had gone on for a time, the waters of the river, unable to find a channel, began to overflow up into the deserted streets, and especially to fill the underground passages and drains, of which the number and extent was beyond all the power of words to describe. These, by the force of the water, were burst up, and the houses fell in.

For this marvellous city, of which such legends are related, was after all only of brick, and when the ivy grew over and trees and shrubs sprang up, and, lastly, the waters underneath burst in, this huge metropolis was soon overthrown. At this day all those parts which were built upon low ground are marshes and swamps. Those houses that were upon high ground were, of course, like the other towns, ransacked of all they contained by the remnant that was left; the iron, too, was extracted. Trees growing up by them in time cracked the walls, and they fell in. Trees and bushes covered them; ivy and nettles concealed the crumbling masses of brick.

*

Thus the low-lying parts of the mighty city of London became swamps, and the higher grounds were clad with bushes. The very largest of the buildings fell in, and there was nothing visible but trees and hawthorns on the upper lands, and willows, flags, reeds, and rushes on the lower. These crumbling ruins still more choked the stream, and almost, if not quite, turned it back. If any water ooze past, it is not perceptible, and there is no channel through to the salt ocean. It is a vast stagnant swamp, which no man dare enter, since death would be his inevitable fate.

There exhales from this oozy mass so fatal a vapour that no animal can endure it. The black water bears a greenish-brown floating scum, which for ever bubbles up from the putrid mud of the bottom. When the wind collects the miasma, and, as it were, presses it together, it becomes visible as a low cloud which hangs over the place. The cloud does not advance beyond the limit of the marsh, seeming to stay there by some constant attraction; and well it is for us that it does not, since at such times when the vapour is thickest, the very wildfowl leave the reeds, and fly from the poison. There are no fishes, neither can eels exist in the mud, nor even newts. It is dead.

The flags and reeds are coated with slime and noisome to the touch; there is one place where even these do not grow, and where there is nothing but an oily liquid, green and rank. It is plain there are no fishes in the water, for herons do not go thither, nor the kingfishers, not one of which approaches the spot. They say the sun is sometimes hidden by the vapour when it is thickest, but I do not see how any can tell this, since they could not enter the cloud, as to breathe

it when collected by the wind is immediately fatal. For all the rottenness of a thousand years and of many hundred millions of human beings is there festering under the stagnant water, which has sunk down into and penetrated the earth, and floated up to the surface the contents of the buried cloacæ.

*

The extent of these foul swamps is not known with certainty, but it is generally believed that they are, at the widest, twenty miles across, and that they reach in a winding line for nearly forty.¹⁰⁶ But the outside parts are much less fatal; it is only the interior which is avoided.

*

[The common people] say when they are stricken with ague or fever, that they must have unwittingly slept on the site of an ancient habitation. Nor can the ground be cultivated near the ancient towns, because it causes fever; and thus it is that, as I have already stated, the present places of the same name are often miles distant from the former locality. No sooner does the plough or the spade turn up an ancient site than those who work there are attacked with illness. And thus the cities of the old world, and their houses and habitations, are deserted and lost in the forest. If the hunters, about to pitch their camp for the night, should stumble on so much as a crumbling brick or a fragment of hewn stone, they at once remove at least a bowshot away.

EPILOGUE: TOWN *VERSUS* COUNTRY

4.36 BEATRIX POTTER: TOWN MOUSE AND COUNTRY MOUSE

Beatrix Potter (1866–1943) was born in Kensington, London, and began her career as a writer with The Tale of Peter Rabbit, published in 1902. Like all her subsequent books it was adorned with her own exquisitely painted illustrations. In 1913 she married William Heelis, and they lived on a farm in the Lake District, where she pursued her interest in land maintenance and in preserving a local breed of sheep which was in danger of extinction. Her charming story of Johnny Town-mouse and the field mouse Timmy Willie was planned in 1916 but not published until 1918; it gives an even-handed treatment of the traditional tension between Town and Country.

From The Tale of Johnny Town-mouse (1918)

At last the cart stopped at a house, where the hamper was taken out, carried in, and set down. The cook gave the carrier sixpence; the back door banged, and the cart rumbled away. But there was no quiet; there seemed to be hundreds of carts passing. Dogs barked; boys whistled in the street; the cook laughed, the parlour maid ran up and down-stairs; and a canary sang like a steam engine.

¹⁰⁶twenty miles across ... nearly forty: in Jeffries's day, roughly the extent of London.

Timmy Willie, who had lived all his life in a garden, was almost frightened to death. Presently the cook opened the hamper and began to unpack the vegetables. Out sprang the terrified Timmy Willie. Up jumped the cook on a chair, exclaiming "A mouse! a mouse! Call the cat! Fetch me the poker, Sarah!" Timmy Willie did not wait for Sarah with the poker; he rushed along the skirting board till he came to a little hole, and in he popped.

He dropped half a foot, and crashed into the middle of a mouse dinner party, breaking three glasses.—"Who in the world is this?" inquired Johnny Town-mouse. But after the first exclamation of surprise he instantly recovered his manners. With the utmost politeness he introduced Timmy Willie to nine other mice, all with long tails and white neckties. Timmy Willie's own tail was insignificant. Johnny Town-mouse and his friends noticed it; but they were too well bred to make personal remarks; only one of them asked Timmy Willie if he had ever been in a trap?

The dinner was of eight courses; not much of anything, but truly elegant. All the dishes were unknown to Timmy Willie, who would have been a little afraid of tasting them; only he was very hungry, and very anxious to behave with company manners. The continual noise upstairs made him so nervous, that he dropped a plate. "Never mind, they don't belong to us," said Johnny.

"Why don't those youngsters come back with the dessert?" It should be explained that two young mice, who were waiting on the others, went skirmishing upstairs to the kitchen between courses. Several times they had come tumbling in, squeaking and laughing; Timmy Willie learnt with horror that they were being chased by the cat. His appetite failed, he felt faint. "Try some jelly?" said Johnny Town-mouse. "No? Would you rather go to bed? I will show you a most comfortable sofa pillow."

The sofa pillow had a hole in it. Johnny Town-mouse quite honestly recommended it as the best bed, kept exclusively for visitors. But the sofa smelt of cat. Timmy Willie preferred to spend a miserable night under the fender.

It was just the same next day. An excellent breakfast was provided—for mice accustomed to eat bacon¹⁰⁷; but Timmy Willie had been reared on roots and salad. Johnny Town-mouse and his friends racketted about under the floors, and came boldly out all over the house in the evening. One particularly loud crash had been caused by Sarah tumbling downstairs with the tea-tray; there were crumbs and sugar and smears of jam to be collected, in spite of the cat.

Timmy Willie longed to be at home in his peaceful nest in a sunny bank. The food disagreed with him; the noise prevented him from sleeping. In a few days he grew so thin that Johnny Town-mouse noticed it, and questioned

¹⁰⁷According to a German proverb, *Mit Speck fängt man Mäuse* ("with bacon you [can] catch mice").

him. He listened to Timmy Willie's story and inquired about the garden. "It sounds rather a dull place. What do you do when it rains?"

"When it rains, I sit in my little sandy burrow and shell corn and seeds from my Autumn store. I peep out at the throstles and blackbirds on the lawn, and my friend Cock Robin. And when the sun comes out again, you should see my garden and the flowers – roses and pinks and pansies – no noise except the birds and bees, and the lambs in the meadows."

"There goes that cat again!" exclaimed Johnny Town-mouse. When they had taken refuge in the coal-cellar he resumed the conversation; "I confess I am a little disappointed; we have endeavoured to entertain you, Timothy William."

"Oh yes, yes, you have been most kind; but I do feel so ill," said Timmy Willie.

*

So Timmy Willie said good-bye to his new friends, and hid in the hamper with a crumb of cake and a withered cabbage leaf; and after much jolting, he was set down safely in his own garden.

Sometimes on Saturdays he went to look at the hamper lying by the gate, but he knew better than to get in again. And nobody got out, though Johnny Town-mouse had half promised a visit. The winter passed; the sun came out again; Timmy Willie sat by his burrow warming his little fur coat and sniffing the smell of violets and spring grass. He had nearly forgotten his visit to town. When up the sandy path all spick and span with a brown leather bag came Johnny Town-mouse!

Timmy Willie received him with open arms. "You have come at the best of all the year, we will have herb pudding and sit in the sun."

"H'm'm! it is a little damp," said Johnny Town-mouse, who was carrying his tail under his arm, out of the mud. "What is that fearful noise?" he started violently.

"That?" said Timmy Willie, "that is only a cow; I will beg a little milk, they are quite harmless, unless they happen to lie down upon you. How are all our friends?"

Johnny's account was rather middling. He explained why he was paying his visit so early in the season; the family had gone to the sea-side for Easter; the cook was doing spring cleaning, on board wages, with particular instructions to clear out the mice. There were four kittens, and the cat had killed the canary.

"They say we did it; but I know better," said Johnny Town-mouse. "Whatever is that fearful racket?"

"That is only the lawn-mower; I will fetch some of the grass clippings presently to make your bed. I am sure you had better settle in the country, Johnny."

"H'mm – we shall see by Tuesday week; the hamper is stopped while they are at the sea-side."

“I am sure you will never want to live in town again,” said Timmy Willie.

But he did. He went back in the very next hamper of vegetables; he said it was too quiet!!

One place suits one person, another place suits another person. For my part I prefer to live in the country, like Timmy Willie.

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