

# WHO SHOULD WRITE MEMOIRS<sup>1</sup>

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THREE quarters of a century ago, when Lord Campbell published his *Lives of the Chancellors*, Sir Charles Wetherall remarked that such a book was enough to add a new terror to death. Since then the alarm seems to have grown, for a recent contributor to *The Quarterly Review* has said that our popular Memoirs and Reminiscences have now added a new terror to life. Dead or alive, our conspicuous people are allowed no seclusion. While in the flesh they must dodge the interviewer, the camera fiend, the motion-picture man, and they may do this with intermittent success. But the writer of Memoirs can pursue them beyond the grave; where they have no remedy at all. Burke and Hare could snatch no more than their vile bodies. But he who pretends to remember their wayward freaks of temperament, their covert intrigues and their intimate confidences, can make posthumous havoc of their good name.

One conjecture<sup>2</sup> is that the Satan of the *Book of Job* has of late taken up the rôle of biographer, not—like the old biographers—that he may praise famous men and our fathers who begat us, but rather with the thought that famous men—even our fathers—have been praised too much already. There has been a reaction from the old disease of panegyric, the so-called *lues Boswelliana*. The new biographer is penetrating, suspicious, far more like a Scotland Yard detective than like the poet laureate of a funeral ode. And he is armed with the very latest scientific apparatus for dealing death to reputations. Not only the conscious, but the subconscious fields are now brought under review,—those parts of the hero's soul which were dark to the hero himself, but which by a sort of biographic X-ray may be searched and uncovered.

That the men and women prominent in public life are now walking under the strain of a new fear, is perhaps further suggested by one striking example. In the lately published Will of a great biographer all men are forbidden to write the testator's biography. What was the ground of that fierce prohibition? Why this warning, solemn like a voice from the tomb, in which Lord Morley debarred

1 A "Popular Lecture" delivered at the Quebec meeting of the Royal Society of Canada, May, 1924

2 This is the interesting suggestion of Dr. S. M. Crothers in *The Atlantic Monthly*.

any man from preserving his own name and fame, as he had preserved the name and fame of others? It was not just a too retiring spirit of self-effacement, for none ever doubted that Lord Morley had his share in "the last infirmity of noble minds." It was not, surely, because "Honest John" can have had anything to conceal, for about few indeed of those soiled with the dust of politics has there been wider confidence that "whatever record springs to light, he never can be shamed." Nor was it because, in general, he had set a low value upon the biographic art and purpose, for there was no department of literature in which his interest had been more continuous or for which his enthusiasm had been more intense.

Was it, perhaps, just an old-age judgment,—the judgment of one at the long last disillusioned about the republic of letters, as Lord Bryce seems to have become disillusioned about republics as a whole? An interesting monograph might be written upon such old-age recantations. That was a sombre note in which the venerable apostle of popular rule spoke his last word about the vanity of plebiscites. Had he ceased to believe in democratic governments because he had travelled so far, and—as Coleridge said about his own disbelief in ghosts—because he had "seen too many?" At all events the earlier faith had been purged and the earlier fire had been trimmed when Lord Bryce gave us that final *Odyssey*, in a spirit like that of the "much-enduring" *Odysseus* himself:

the man who drew  
His changeful course through wanderings not a few,  
And saw the cities and the counsel knew  
Of many men.

Had Lord Morley likewise had his *Odyssey* of culture? Did that old biographer refuse to be "biographed," as the wise golf caddie refused Lord Northcliffe's offer of a box of chocolates, with the disquieting excuse "I works where they makes 'em?" A remark of his last days seems to suggest that this may be the explanation.

It is a remark about the deceptiveness of history. His friend, Prof. J. H. Morgan, has thought it no breach of the prohibitory injunction to give us some personal reminiscences, and among the rest he quotes this. Lord Morley had drawn up a statement regarding his own attitude to the Great War, and his resignation from the Cabinet in August, 1914. It must have been a memorandum of high historical value, and those to whom it was shown were anxious that it should be published. But Lord Morley refused. "No," he said: "the truth can never be known."

It will never overtake the legend. I have read many books of late, dealing with events in which I took some part, and all of them are wrong. "History" always misleads. Far more depended on the conversations of half an hour, and was transacted by them, than ever appeared in letters and despatches.

This, surely, is a counsel of despair, such as Lord Morley would never have entertained—much less promulgated—in his own greatest period. Surely it is just by the candid report of those conversations of half an hour that the legend might be combatted. But it is the same friend who has told us this, and has added the resentful comment about Memoirs as a new terror.

Is the terror wholly new? No doubt many men and women of to-day search—under nervous excitement—for their own names in the index to Mrs. Asquith's *Autobiography* or Colonel Repington's *Diaries*. Many a politician and many a divine, psycho-analyzed by the "Gentleman with a Duster," must tremble at the revelation of a personality they never knew, and feel almost ashamed of the hidden motive laid bare in their own best deeds. Many a descendant of national heroes, alarmed for his ancestral prestige, has to wonder where the next arrow from Mr. Lytton Strachey's quiver will find its shining mark. But for such people all this is in the life's work. They or their ancestors chose to live in the fierce glare of a world's scrutiny, and they must pay the price. Moreover, they may look across the years to companions in misfortune of a time long past. He who judges that literature has degenerated of late into specially gross personalities must be quite unfamiliar with the letters of the seventeenth century, the pamphlets of the eighteenth, and the journals of the nineteenth. The victims of to-day are in no worse case than those who had to contemplate their likeness—at times distorted, but at times all too faithful—in the *Memoirs* of Saint Simon, the *Correspondence* of Horace Walpole, or even the *Reminiscences* of Carlyle.

But this alleged terror, though not new, has become more frequent in its action and wider in its range. Memoirs and Reminiscences have blossomed of late with extraordinary luxuriance. Under this title I shall include all such records of the past as are based, not upon documentary sources, but upon the living memory of the narrator. Work of this sort, executed in picturesque detail and with complete absence of restraint, is tremendously appealing. It has the appeal which belongs to him who tells what his eyes have seen rather than what his ears have heard,—the appeal of Pepys's *Diary*, of Boswell's *Johnson*, of Goethe's *Aus Meinem Leben*, of Renan's *Souvenirs de ma jeunesse*. Even the dullest narrative by

an eyewitness is charged with a force which the later historian can never equal and at best can only counterfeit. It seems to surpass the most scrupulous and painstaking record by an outsider, as a natural growth surpasses the most cunning creation of art. And if the story is made piquant by the element of surprise, if long established reputations are adroitly lowered and traditional estimates are put to confusion, if the staid and sober historical account is supplemented by a kind of *chronique scandaleuse*, public interest is rivetted all the more. For the epicurean palate the refinements of cookery must bring the stimulus of a sting, and for the intellectual appetite which familiar truth has left somewhat jaded no book will be attractive which is not in a measure disturbing. Thus our so-called "reading public," just as it pays the tribute of a conventional salaam to scientific histories which it refuses to read, will devour volume after volume of Memoirs by which it ironically pretends to be shocked.

Is there value in work of this kind? That it is not history, that it is even among the more dubious sources for history, will be conceded by all. And yet it is in works which do not profess to be historical, works whose subject is trifling, whose method is capricious, and whose motive may be spiteful, that the past is often most suggestively reflected. Just one hundred years ago Macaulay<sup>3</sup> pointed out that we learn far less about Athenian life from Thucydides than from Aristophanes or Plato, that the little treatise by Xenophon on Domestic Economy contains more historical information than all the seven books of his Hellenics, and that a like debt might be acknowledged to the Satires of Horace, the Letters of Cicero, the novels of Le Sage, or the Memoirs of Marmontel.

Despite Lord Morley's old-age cynicism, I want to make out a case tonight for the special value of the frank and veracious Memoir. I cannot indeed agree with one enthusiast<sup>4</sup> who has said that just as every sensible man ought to make his will, so everyone owes to his family an autobiographic record of his inward experiences. Not until a man's children come to value his spiritual story as much as his material effects can we look for a rule like this. But at least in the case of public men, among those who know what Lord Morley called "the truth" and are prepared to struggle for it against what he called "the legend," there appear to be three classes who should thus bequeath their memoirs to posterity.

First, there are those whose title is that of a long life, coupled

<sup>3</sup> In his *Essay on Mitford's History of Greece*.

<sup>4</sup> Sir Leslie Stephen.

with keen powers of observation and a tenacious memory. They have lived through different periods, have felt the impact of many changes, can recall a multitude of details that will never enter into conventional history and yet may enrich such history with vividness and colour. Who, for example, would willingly miss such books as the *Autobiographic Memoirs* of the late Frederic Harrison, or the *Memories* of Dean Hole, or the *Recollections* of Sir Algernon West? Last month Mr. Chauncey Depew passed his ninetieth birthday, and his friends remembered with a thrill that there was one still among them who in the prime of manhood had exchanged stories with Abraham Lincoln. Sir Algernon West, who died only two years ago, could tell us of a past incredibly remote, of a lady—for example—he had personally known who had refused an offer of marriage from Horace Walpole. Dean Hole could talk to an ecclesiastical age excited about Modernism and Birth Control as one who had attended the services of a rural English church before Newman's first Tract appeared, and who thus *felt* many a difference which the men of to-day can only imagine. Frederic Harrison could enter into the military history of the Great War as one who had met an officer that crossed in the Bellerophon with Napoleon, into the budget controversies of Mr. Lloyd George as one who remembered the repeal of the Corn Laws, and into the debate on reparations as one who had argued on the hearthrug with Gambetta. Say what we will about the risks of trusting such a raconteur, we all love to meet him; and if he speaks the truth as he knows it, he can light up the story as no one else can light it up. Just now, I suppose, all others must yield pride of place to that sanguine old lady, Mrs. Haldane, mother of the Lord Chancellor, who at least *believes* she can remember the passage of the first Reform Act.

Again, what of the men who have *made* that history which others can only *record*? What of Lord Morley's own *Recollections*? What of the *Life and Letters* of the late Walter Hines Page? Those who took part in guiding some great hidden sequence of public events, those who shared the inner counsels by which some high decision was reached, must often stare in amazement—as Lord Morley stared—at the popular legend of the daily press. For a time, perhaps, they are forbid to tell the secrets of their diplomatic prisonhouse. But they could a tale unfold, a tale that later generations at least, and quieter times, have much need to know. Should the inhibition last for ever? They may feel—as Lord Morley felt—that the legend has got too long a start, and that the truth can never overtake it. But do they not owe to truth and to the cause of public enlightenment at least a gallant effort? If

some unwonted impulse of veracity should come upon some German war-lord in the evening of his days, so that he should break the seal that has so long lain upon his lips, what a chance to clarify the German mind—and the whole European mind—about the ways of Potsdam in the summer of 1914! There indeed would be a revelation that can never be elicited from books white, blue or yellow. There is our chance for the filling in of *lacunae* in State papers that will keep a multitude of historians guessing for ever. And who can be sure that the effort would not succeed? A plain, unvarnished tale, into which the well-known but hitherto incoherent facts would all fit, so that light would rise upon many an old mystery like the light of a scientific generalization grouping together the isolated facts of experience,—are we sure that any college of propaganda however active and any tradition however encrusted could prevail against it?

Apart from such personal disclosures, it will be long indeed before "the lie can rot." With a satiric smile those who have sat in a Cabinet must hear public praise or blame glibly ascribed to men whom they know to have counted for almost nothing, or even to have played a rôle the precise opposite of what a docile press suggests: they must hear decisions patriotically explained by motives which would have been creditable if they had only existed; and they must listen in vain for a word about malignant forces which they know to have turned the scale at the crucial moment, or those sheer accidents and coincidences which they know to have determined so much.

Yet a third class of writers seem to owe their reminiscences to those who come after. It is a daring venture to write *autobiography*, and there are autobiographers whose impelling motive is just presumption. But there are others who are only discharging a debt. Here and there in every age we have a man whose life story epitomises the time, a man of whom we may say that the march of spiritual events is best exhibited in the stages of his developing mind. About that story and that development he has means of knowing that are at the disposal of no one else. Like Richter, in Carlyle's quaint description, he may well in old age become "professor of his own life." Goethe's *Aus Meinem Leben*, Newman's *Apologia*, even—though at a long distance in the rear—Herbert Spencer's *Autobiography*—who shall say that these are pieces of presumptuous egotism? How invaluable are they as sources for our knowledge of the springs of German literature in the early nineteenth century, of the Oxford Movement and the Catholic Revival, of the philosophic upshot of English evolutionary thought?



Before a man risks the assumption that he is in this significant class, he has need of persistent self-scrutiny, and perhaps had better rely upon the opinion of others rather than upon his own. But we have some work of this kind that none would willingly let die.

Here then are three conditions which justify the sort of literary effort that I have indicated. If such is its value, what are its risks?

The narrator who seems justified by a long life and a tenacious memory may have grave corresponding disabilities. Of these the most common is just that of forgetting his subject, forgetting—for example—whether he has set out to compose *Memoirs* or to compose an *Autobiography*. It is often said that any honest man can be a good autobiographer, and Leslie Stephen in a rapturous mood declared that no autobiography can be dull, for its very dullness would be interesting. At all events, such a writer has both special knowledge of his subject and special interest in it. Harriet Martineau's book about herself, for example, has achieved its exact aim, for it has made us acquainted with Harriet Martineau as we could never have known her without that astonishing medley of sound sense and trivial gossip, of public spirit and monstrous egotism which she has packed into her two irritating but most revealing volumes. Something very similar may be said of the recent self-revelation of Mrs. Asquith. Whether that lady is a quite desirable addition to the spiritual circle of her readers may be open to doubt. But she has introduced herself with marked effect. She set out to disclose her personality, and she has disclosed it. We have the picture of a vivacious companion, quick-witted, widely informed, a warm friend to those she likes, a good hater of those who have offended her, radiantly affectionate towards those who worship at her own or her husband's shrine, able to say pleasant things with sweetness and unpleasant things with bitterness and everything with a pungent wit, a little too absorbed in reflecting about her own remarkable qualities, intellectually vain, spoiled with admiration and contemptuous of disparagement. Is not this "a very woman"? Mrs. Asquith does not fulfill all the requirements I have suggested as the title to write autobiography. She has not had a notably long life, and the development of her mind is not the history of the time. But she has had a hand in great events, and has unusual knowledge of them. She is not of the company of the saints, and her books are no part of the literature of devotion. But they are exactly of the autobiographic sort.

An important thing to observe is that such books are not *Memoirs*, and that the merit of *Memoirs* is very different from that

of Autobiography. In the Memoir great events have to be recorded for their own sake, not for the human interest of the writer's feeling about them. The effect is spoiled by that recurring parenthesis *quorum pars magna fui* which, whether it be explicitly stated or dexterously suggested, makes autobiography gain so much in vividness even where it loses in charm. Those who write as witnesses to the future of the things they have seen and the changes through which they have passed must keep in the record just enough of themselves to give it a personal authority, but as little as will secure it against personal bias, and the "line" as usual is hard to draw. What part of the vast stores in an acute observer's memory is important enough to be transferred to paper, what part of it was of interest to one's self at the time and will have no significance for those who come later, how the perspective shall be arranged and the proportions fixed,—these are the problems of this sort of writing if it is to be of permanent worth. One of those who in recent years attempted it has felt driven to say that memory itself would defeat such a project, for memory is like a canvas upon which pictures are painted by an artist who takes in and leaves out according to his taste, making many a big thing small and many a small thing big. Hence, argues Sir Rabindranath Tagore, we must abandon all thought of an historical sketch in reminiscences, and give—for whatever it may be worth—the features of a single life.

The risk, of course, is enormously increased when we pass to those writers of Memoirs who undertake an explanation of great events in which they bore—or think that they bore—a decisive personal part. The Great War has produced a flood of such controversial pamphlets by men who were in the thick of it. It is not in human nature for the writers to be strictly veracious even if they try. Meteorological observation of the heavens cannot be made by a man swimming for his life in a stormy sea, even though he may be said to know the storm at first hand better than anyone who observes it from a distant point on the shore. When he collected his data, his mind was a little *distrail*, and when he thought he was observing he was often inferring, seeing what he expected to see, what he hoped to see, what he feared to see. When a war statesman looks back upon his past, can he prevent himself from finding in the facts what would have justified his own policy if it had only been there? As Mr. Asquith replies to Lord French or General Ludendorff to Admiral von Tirpitz, as Clemenceau now tells us why it was needless for France to cede Alsace-Lorraine when he himself declaimed against that step in 1870, as Mr. Winston Churchill makes it perfectly clear that the Antwerp project and the



Dardanelles project were well judged and would have succeeded but for someone else's fault,—can we accept these stories as history? Pamphleteer and counter-pamphleteer are just like the rival minstrels in Vergil, *et cantare pares et respondere parati*.

But, it is argued, autobiography can at least be precise as an account of the processes in the autobiographer's own mind. Can it? The limits here too are narrow. The autobiographer, unless he is insufferably vain, writes in old age; and if he is worth much, he has changed far more than he thinks. Yet it is natural that he should try to show a symmetry in his life. So he may be quite reasonably sincere when he disbelieves in many a change of himself which others—not concerned to prove him consistent—can see perfectly well. He is a little less sincere, but very human, when he takes care not to acknowledge in print even the personal changes that he may suspect. The late Wilfrid Ward said about Father Tyrrell's autobiography that it did less than justice to the writer's character. He had never been such a hypocrite as he represented himself to have been; for in the period of his apparently whole-hearted devotion to the Church his convictions were quite real while they lasted. It was only the later mood—joined to a passion for supposed consistency—which made him read into his subconscious youth the doubts or misgivings of a subsequent date. Men change, not just nominally, but really. A later state of mind need not be just the earlier at another stage, nor need the earlier be the later in disguise. What a reflective old man sees in his own youth has been fitly described as just the shadow of his subsequent self cast upon the coloured and distorting mists of memory. As in a palimpsest, so in a protracted life—there are many writings superimposed upon the first, and the accurate autobiography is a grim enterprise in deciphering.

So much for the Memoirs that are honest and careful. What about those that are reckless and hasty and sensational? We have those too, transmitted to the printing office by professional writers who have taken up this craft just as they might have chosen any other for the prospect of celebrity and reward. A good deal of the Memoir-writing of our time has been spurious. It has been done, by persons not justified by any span of years, any unusual opportunities of observation, or any special significance which belongs to their own personality.

In short, the place of the biographer has been usurped by him who produces at disgraceful speed a mere impressionist sketch, written to entertain readers no less hurried than the writer. Books professing to delineate a dozen eminent persons, within the compass

of a few pages for each, are now advertised as Silhouettes, Profiles, Masques. Most of them might be summarily dismissed as Caricatures. The writers have adopted that style of which Mr. Birrell has so well said that he who uses it can tell the truth about nothing. Adequate treatment is everywhere sacrificed to smartness and epigram. Each separate paragraph is intended to glow like a diamond. Convinced that he has so far been a mute inglorious Bernard Shaw, the correspondent of the London *Times* decides to challenge glory by ceasing to be mute, and collects into what he calls a book those ephemeral articles which were perhaps good enough for his weekly column in the newspaper press. Thus we get, instead of serious biography, an exciting volume with abnormally large type, wide margins, numerous photographs, and incessant paradoxes, supposed to resemble Chesterton or Shaw, and indeed recalling these writers as a schoolboy's copy of Latin verse has a dim but exasperating resemblance to the *Georgics* of Vergil or the *Odes* of Horace. The writer of such a book illumines no subject, but rather "commits indecent exposure of his own mind." His work is commonly marked by the affectation of the short sentence, the sort of style about which Coleridge conjectured that it was meant for persons troubled with asthma to read, and for those to comprehend who labour under the more pitiful asthma of a short-witted intellect. Mr. E. T. Raymond is among the cleverest of such performers, and has well summed up the performance: "A mere essay in instantaneous photography, with its mad foreshortenings and irrelevant emphasis."

Such writers have indeed a notable model, and I am far from denying that there is a place for instantaneous photography even in literature. Mr. Lytton Strachey can do it. With true photographic instinct he catches his characters in a striking pose, and the illusion created by one of his books is just the illusion of the cinema. The snapshots, so cunningly taken, are thrown successively upon the screen by an instrument that never fails. Pictures—each by itself quite static—fade into one another at once so gradually and so rapidly that we think we are watching the very movements of life. Look, for example, at the portrayals of Melbourne, Palmerston, Disraeli in his *Queen Victoria*.

Now this consummate art is just the art of the best Memoir writer, raised to the highest degree. I do not refer to him who merely ransacks his memory for miscellaneous anecdotes and puts them together with the zeal of a laborious but pedestrian Muse. The higher type of Memoir is not annalistic: it is pictorial. We get someone's authentic features as mirrored in the remembrance

of a writer who knew them, and the writer must be selective. So is Mr. Strachey. He did not know, he never saw in the flesh Lord Melbourne, Lord Palmerston, Lord Beaconsfield. Yet, counterfeiting the vividness of one who remembers, he makes us know them, makes us feel as if we had seen them,—Melbourne with his devoutness and his oaths, his decorum when decorum was required, and his ribaldry over his cups, his adventures in the Divorce Court and his marginal comments on the Book of Revelation: Palmerston with his jaunty air, his dyed whiskers, his dictatorial notes from the Foreign Office, his constant skating on the thinnest ice of diplomacy, and his unflinching recoveries of prestige by some well-calculated blazing indiscretion: Disraeli—the “strange old comedian,” reading in women’s hearts as in an open book, laying on flattery upon royalties—as he himself boasted—“with a trowel.” If Mr. Strachey had been writing of men he knew, what Memoirs we should have got! Not complete records, carefully documented, with copious footnotes. He would have drawn pictures, and the footnote or the qualifying explanation would spoil the film. Just a few rapid strokes of the brush or pencil, re-drawing the traditional lineaments, making perhaps no change except in the grouping. But a turn would have been given to the kaleidoscope, and the old pattern would have rearranged itself. So too with the composer of Memoirs. He takes out, puts in, and—most of all—fixes the pose according to his caprice.

You cannot escape the charm of such work when it is well done, though it has its defects and its dangers. A reviewer said that Mr. Strachey’s *Queen Victoria* was as interesting as a novel, no doubt intending to compliment him. But the compliment was ambiguous. The subtle might see in it something like what Victor Hugo meant when he said of Lamartine: “He has raised history to the level of fiction.” There lies the vast and perilous opportunity of the method when used by a master hand. To-day it is being widely misused, and its charm is being mistaken for its worth.

*Mirrors of Downing Street* was a brilliant book of this type, followed by *Mirrors of Washington* that was not so brilliant, and by others in descending scale with no lower limit. Before long we may expect that Mr. Strachey’s earlier book, *Eminent Victorians*, will call forth some American counterpart in which the shining figures of the American imagination will be dimmed with caustic irony. There is a place for such work, but it should not be called biographic. These are just pieces of critical appreciation, to be judged as more or less adequate hypotheses for explaining known

facts, with constant reference to sources—the few cited, and still more the multitude not cited.

When a narrator speaks of what he has himself seen and his readers have not seen, if he chooses to lie he can lie with enormous advantage. Hence the appeal from commonplace history to the sparkling Memoir is not an appeal to a higher court, nor can we rely—as is so often suggested—upon learning the truth about this or that puzzle when So-and-So's Memoirs are given to the world. Clarendon had one story to tell and Baillie the Covenanter had a story far different about the same occurrences. Each, as he told his tale, had to suggest the interpretation. It is safe to say that the divergence between them would have become not less but greater in proportion as they had postponed their narratives till advancing years had made recollection less clear and prejudice more obstinate, till the area of solid data had receded, and the waters of theory had mounted higher and higher upon the dry land of fact. For even the most tenacious memory holds no more than a fragment of the past, and the fragment it will hold is determined by a multitude of causes, psychological, personal, or merely casual. The incapacity or bias of the historian who works from documents may be bad enough, but not worse than the subtle inversions of proportion in that glass of individual memory which, even if it gave back all it received, is still like one of those excruciating mirrors whose convexity or concavity makes many a big feature small and many a small feature big. For the writer of Memoirs, however sincere, the past must group itself around the focus of his own person, including that past self for which—as someone has said—every man has considerable respect, and upon whose earlier views he is unwilling that his later comment should cast discrediting reflections.

We must, indeed, in historic phrase, “subtract the due subtrahend,” and no one can be sure what subtrahend is due. There is one point, however, on which we need make no mistake. The writer may be uncandid or undiscerning about his own past, but he can at least keep no secrets about his present. If he writes an autobiography, it may be full of fiction about what he once was, but it reveals his inmost soul at the moment of writing. He gives us that picture of himself which he desires the reader to entertain, and there is no surer clue than this to his genuine nature. “If,” said W. R. Greg, “he is not telling the truth, he is betraying it unawares.” To this extent all autobiographies are real confessions, designed or undesigned, and as such confessional literature they have an interest that abides.

For, after all, we care little about externals in comparison

with the disclosure of personality. And it makes no great difference to the interest whether the personality be high or low. Let a character be noble, and we are curious to learn how it felt its own nobleness; let it be mean, and—says one keen critic—we are curious to see how its meanness was justified to itself. Whether it be Wesley's *Journal* or the *Diaries* of Colonel Repington, Bunyan's *Grace Abounding* or the *Memoirs* of the German Crown Prince, à Kempis's *Imitatio Christi* or Lord Beaverbrook's book on Success,—all are human documents, all have their human picture to help us in completing our gallery of mankind.

It is a high distinction of the writers of France to be greatest of all in the field of the Memoir. The limpid clearness of French prose and the introspective subtlety of the French mind no doubt explain such pre-eminence. A relative dearth of such writings in English has been variously attributed to the reticence that betokens modesty and the aloofness that betokens contempt. Whether its source is thus in what an Englishman thinks one of his chief virtues or in what foreign critics place among his chief vices, I shall not attempt to judge. But of late years this wall of separation between an Englishman and his public has been more and more perforated, if not broken down. And though the limits to our pleasure at the increasing tide of English Reminiscences must be somewhat strictly set, we may well rejoice that our greatest writers and our greatest men of affairs are to-day more ready than they once were to make frank avowal of their most intimate experience of life.