

sorely interrupted and impeded, can gather itself together and go on again.

This is all quite too bad. For youth's inexperience is its serious handicap; and maturity's wisdom might stand it in good stead, if it were not taken in such over-doses that it becomes a poison. If people and nations could only conserve their madness through the whole course of their experimenting lives, learning the rules of the game while still devoting their passionate attention to the goal, they might end by making some really great and brilliant achievements.

Perhaps, then, sanitariums would be better than asylums for our sane. Instead of waiting till they become hopeless and then committing them permanently, it might be well to note the first symptoms and take them in hand. For the groundwork of human nature is so vital and healthy that, if it is encouraged, it can almost always throw off incipient sanity. The methods of such sanitariums would be interesting to devise. Patients not too far advanced in their malady would have a good time. They would be constrained to devote themselves recklessly to whatever they held most dear (provided the causes were approved worthy); they would be made to take risks, commit imprudences. By some ingenious arrangement of the daily curriculum, they would be constantly given the choice between that which is spontaneous, vital, and that which is reasonable; and, when they chose the latter, they would be hissed. A fine place, such a sanitarium! Stimulating, inspiring, invigorating. We should all of us want to go there, for very love of the standard, for very joy in the great contagion of enthusiasm. Sane and insane alike, we should look upon the experience as a sort of religious 'retreat.'

Ah! it is a desperate business, this life, to which we are so obscurely, so

inexplicably committed. Our only chance with it is to take it desperately. It is infinitely greater than we are, it knows what it is about, its cosmic intentions endure. We are wise when we let ourselves go with it; we are very silly when we weigh and reserve our allegiance. So, then, the sane are the only insane? That is possible.

#### IN A TRAIN WITH LAMB

I WAS riding in a train with Charles Lamb — who never rode in one in all his shadowed life. I doubt whether he would have cared for it. When he went to Coleridge's or to Mackery End by coach there was a slowness of transit that did not forebode the putting of great distances between himself and his beloved London. But a train! — whizz and clang! and many miles away from Fleet Street in an incredibly short space of time! He would have fancied the impossibility of ever going back over such a distance. Of course, in reality, the going back would have been as swift; but Charles Lamb no more dwelt amid realities than did I reflect reality when I wrote of riding with him in a train. What I truly meant was that I had his essays with me; and as I was buried in "Schoolmasters New and Old" the subconscious contrast was in my mind between the coach of which he told — the leisurely and I hope comfortable coach — and my clanking train which was making a blur of all the beauty near at hand and leaving for the eye's delight only the more distant landscape.

It was in raising my eyes from the book for a second to look at the distant hills — misty, as I love hills best — that I brought about a longer interruption of my reading than I had intended. My own fault, of course, for deserting the page; one who wants to find the crock of gold should never allow his

eyes to leave the guiding fairy. But Lamb so vividly described the bore with whom he was riding in the coach that I forewent for a moment the delight of his page to reflect with sardonic and not sufficiently guilty pleasure on the boredom of visiting relatives whom I had escaped by a far from truthful story that I must make a journey into the country. Yet, 'a feller has to fish' — and as I laid my hand affectionately on the rod which stood beside me I reflected that the imperative in the line quoted afforded at least some salve for conscience. And it was with this feeling of stifled scruples that I was turning back to the volume when the man who sat between me and the window spoke.

I had no further noted him in taking my seat than to observe that he was bulky and left me none too much room. Now, as he spoke and I perforce looked at him, I saw that his face was mate to his body in its bulkiness, and that there was little in it to indicate companionship for me.

He pointed to a building of galvanized iron which was going up at the farther edge of a marsh over which we were traveling.

'Do you happen to know what that is intended for?' he inquired.

With politeness that denoted a total lack of interest I replied that I did not.

'I heard that big woolen mills are to be put up in this neighborhood,' he said, 'and I wondered if that could be the building.'

I did not know, I was sure. I lack the temperament which enables one to turn abruptly away from a bore — and although perhaps not encouraged, he was at least not sufficiently discouraged by my reticence to be prevented from saying, —

'There would be a fine opening for a big woolen mill here.'

I tried to think of something pat to the occasion — I could not; I saw something opposite in the form of a flock of grazing sheep, but was afraid that mention of them would make him further discursive, and depended upon nods and half-muttered negatives and assents to silence him. But this was not easy. He was interested in woolen mills and craved conversation about them. Then the recollection that a chewing-gum factory was to be erected in the neighborhood furnished a cud for his audible reflections to several minutes' extent. The wonder to me was that he could be so interested in these things, yet talk so stupidly of them. I am not one of the bookish sort who look upon books as the only worth-while topic of conversation; but one who cannot talk well upon the only things he knows, as was the case with this man, should talk only to himself.

I was becoming desperate when the delightful reflection came upon me that I was going through an episode such as had befallen Lamb on the stage-coach — that I had deserted an account of his distressing experience only to plunge into something similar. So absorbed did I become in dwelling upon the comparison that I ceased listening to what the man was saying till he leaned toward me and asked, —

'May I inquire what you are reading?'

I wanted to shout with laughter. It was with real effort that I suppressed at least a chuckle. What an opportunity! He should see the book — his attention should be called to the passage wherein Lamb drew the schoolmaster who must have been one of my neighbor's ancestors. With my finger ready to point to the passage as one especially worth reading, I extended the book to him.

'Lamb,' I said.

I had regarded him as a man who,

should a waiter say, 'Lamb, sir?' would look epicureanly reflective. What other application of the word could appeal to him?

But at my reply his heavy face grew all a-sparkle.

'Lamb!' he cried. 'I hope for your sake that you love him as I do. To know him is enough to make one happy for life.'

By this time he had the volume in his hand, and my changed heart was beating in sympathy with his.

He flipped the pages rapidly, slowly, glancing here and there, reading here and there, sometimes to himself with great inner rumblings, sometimes to me — until I impatiently but politely took the book from him and had my share of glance and comment. He liked some passages better than I did — I liked others better than he did. For some our admiration was equally shared.

'What a fellow!' he said. 'Remember his friend George! — what was his other name? Well, it does n't matter. But you remember, don't you, how he was leaving Lamb's house one night, and fell into the river; and Lamb and others fished him out, all but drowned; and how the sappy eccentric stood there and said, happy over his own perception, "Huh, I knew all the time that I was in the river"?''

What joy to meet a man who knows and loves your favorite story of all stories!

With equal gusto I reviewed Lamb's letter in which he wrote of his journey home from the doctor's party astride a friend's back — it having been a party of the sort that makes walking difficult for a true devotee of gin. So overjoyed was my new acquaintance at the re-awakened memory of this letter that he thumped me heartily on the back to emphasize his delight. Now, I am sensitive about being thumped on the back, but on this occasion it seemed to be

quite in keeping with the boisterousness of the doctor's party.

It was with real regret that I prepared to leave him at my journey's end — real regret until he said, 'Sorry you're going; we have n't had time to go through my favorite essay, "Schoolmasters New and Old."' Then I was rather glad that we had to part.

#### FLAT PROSE

SOME time ago a writer in the *Atlantic* protested against the taboo on 'beautiful prose.' He asserted that the usual organs of publication, especially in America, reject with deadly certainty all contributions whose style suggests that melodious rhythm which De Quincey and Ruskin made fashionable for their generations, and Stevenson revived in the nineties. He complained that the writer is no longer allowed to write as well as he can; that he must abstract all unnecessary color of phrase, all warmth of connotation and grace of rhythm from his style, lest he should seem to be striving for 'atmosphere,' instead of going about his proper business, which is to fill the greedy stomach of the public with facts.

Unfortunately, this timely fighter in a good cause was too enamored of the art whose suppression he was bewailing. He so far forgot himself as to make his own style 'beautiful' in the old-time fashion, and thus must have roused the prejudice of the multitude, who had to study such style in college, and knew from sad experience that it takes longer to read than the other kind.

But there are other and safer ways of combating the taste for flat prose. One might be to print parallel columns of 'newspaper English' (which they threaten now to teach in the schools) until the eye sickened of its deadly monotony. This is a bad way. The average reader would not see the point.