Hail and Farewell! Vale — Chapter 6

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It is to Mr. Lane's extraordinary enthusiasm, energy, and love of Art that we owe the pleasure of this beautiful collection of pictures, and, that it may not be but a passing pleasure, it is his proposal to collect funds for the purchase of these pictures, and to found a Gallery of Modern Art in Dublin. A few days before the Exhibition opened he came to ask for an article about these pictures, but it seemed to me that all I had to say about pictures in the form of articles I had already said; and I did not dare to accept his proposal to deliver a lecture on French Art until it occurred to me that being probably the only person in Dublin who had known the painters whose works hang on the wall, I might, without being thought too presumptuous, come here and — I will not say discuss French Art — ! prefer to say talk about Manet, Degas, Renoir, Pissaro, Monet, and Sisley, and in doing so to discuss French Art indirectly.

Yes, it was my good fortune to know these men when their talent was beginning, before they were known to the rest of the world. When my mother offered me my choice of Oxford or Cambridge, I told her that I had decided to go to Paris. 'My dear boy, your education — you learned nothing at school.' 'That is why, my dear mother, I intend to devote myself entirely to my own education, and I think it can be better conducted in a café than in a university.' So I went to Paris with a valet. It is necessary that I should mention him, for a valet means conformity to certain conventions; and the young man who sets out on artistic adventure must try to separate himself from all conventions, whether of politics, society, or creed.

My valet did not remain with me for more than six or eight months, 'his continual sighing after beef, beer, and a wife, his incapacity for learning a single word of a foreign language — the beds he couldn't sleep on, and the wines he couldn't drink' — I forget how the sentence runs on; it is Byron's description of his valet (I forget which one), should I say my memory of Byron's description of his valet? Be that as it may, the passage, I may remark, occurs in one of his letters, and no doubt the sentence closes, 'obliged me to send him back to England.' That is what happened in my case, and my valet's dismissal was led up to by circumstances precisely similar to those described by Byron. But behind these material reasons for getting rid of him, there was a deeper reason — his presence stood between me and myself; I wished above all things to be myself, and to be myself I felt I should have to live the physical as well as the intellectual life of the Quarter.

Myself was the goal I was making for, instinctively if you will, but still making for it; I felt that I must think out life for myself, and from end to end, and to do this I felt — I must not be afraid to repeat the verb, for at times I was guided more by feeling than by reason — well, I felt that my

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first business was the discovery of a café where I could pass the evening — nothing seemed to me more essential than that. In the mornings I worked at L'Ecole des Beaux Arts, but one's evenings are more important than one's mornings, the soul evolves in the gaslight; and as soon as my valet left me I started on the quest of the café of my instinctive predilection round the Odéon and the Luxembourg Gardens.

In the Middle Ages young men went in search of the Grail; to-day the café is the quest of a young man in search of artistic education. But the cafés about the Odéon and the Luxembourg Gardens did not correspond to my need, I wearied of noisy students, the Latin Quarter seemed to me a little out of fashion; eventually I immigrated to Montmartre, and continued my search along the Boulevard Extérieur. One evening I discovered the ideal café on the Place Pigalle. I cannot say now if it were instinct that guided me there, or if, perchance, I met someone who told me that Manet spent his evenings in the café of the Nouvelle Athènes. The name sounds as if it were invented on purpose, 'The New Athens.' You wouldn't have thought it was 'a new Athens' if you had seen it, but it was one for all that…. I can see it now, the white nose of a block of buildings, stretching up the hillside into the Place Pigalle opposite the fountain. Men of letters went there, too — Duranty, one of the original Realists, a contemporary of Flaubert, use to stay with us for an hour or so every night; a quiet, elderly man who knew that he had failed, and whom failure had saddened. The Nouvelle Athènes was a café of *ratés*, literary and pictorial. The literary *ratés* were Alexis, Céard, and Hennique. At the time I am speaking of Zola had ceased to go to the café, he spent his evenings with his wife; but his disciples — all except Maupassant and Huysmans, I do not remember ever having seen them there — collected about the marble tables, lured to the Nouvelle Athènes by their love of Art. One generation of *littérateurs* associates itself with painting, the next clings to music. The aim and triumph of the Realist were to force the pen to compete with the painter's brush and the engraver's needle in the description, let us say, of a mean street, just as the desire of a symbolistic writer was to describe the vague but intense sensations of music so accurately that the reader would guess the piece he had selected for description, though it were not named in the text. We all entertained doubts regarding the validity of the Art we practised, and envied the Art of the painter, deeming it superior to literature; and it is hardly an exaggeration to say that we used to weary a little of conversation amongst ourselves, just as dogs weary of their own society, and I think there was a feeling of relief among us all when the painters came in. We raised ourselves up to welcome them — Manet, Degas, Renoir, Pissaro, Monet, and Sisley; they were our masters. A partition rising a few feet or more over the hats of the men sitting at the usual marble tables separated the glass front from the main body of the café; two tables in the right-hand corner were reserved for Manet and Degas and for their circle of admirers. It is pleasant to remember my longing to be received into that circle, and my longing to speak to Manet, whom I had begun to recognize as the great new force in painting. Evening after evening went by and I did not dare to speak to him, nor did he speak to me, until one evening — thrice happy evening! — as I sat thinking of him, pretending to be busy correcting proofs, he asked me if the conversation of the café did not distract my attention, and I answered: 'Not at all; I was thinking of your painting.' It seems to me that we became friends at once; he invited me to his studio in the rue d'Amsterdam, where his greatest works were painted — all the works that are Manet and nothing but Manet, the real Manet, the Parisian Manet. But before speaking of his painting

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some description of his personality is essential to an understanding of Manet. It is often said that the personality of the artist concerns us not, and in the case of bad Art it is certainly true, for bad Art reveals no personality, bad Art is bad because it is anonymous. The work of the great artist is himself, and, being one of the greatest painters that ever lived, Manet's Art was all Manet; one cannot think of Manet's painting without thinking of the man himself. The last time I saw Monet was at dinner in the Café Royal, and, after talking of many things, suddenly, without any transition, Monet said, speaking out of a dream: 'How like Manet was to his painting,' and I answered delighted, for it is always exciting to talk about Manet: 'Yes, how like. That blonde, amusing face, the clear eyes that saw simply, truly, and quickly;' and having said so much, my thoughts went back to the time when the glass door of the café grated upon the sanded floor, and Manet entered. Though by birth and by education essentially Parisian, there was something in his appearance and manner of speaking that often suggested an Englishman. Perhaps it was his dress — his clean-cut clothes and figure. That figure! Those square shoulders that swaggered as he went across the room, and the thin waist; the face, the beard, and the nose, satyr-like shall I say? No, for I would evoke an idea of beauty of line united to that of intellectual expression — frank works, frank passion in his convictions, loyal and simple phrases, clear as well-water, sometimes a little hard, sometimes as they flowed away bitter, but at the fountain-head sweet and full of light.

I should emphasize Manet's courage, for without courage there cannot be Art. We have all heard the phrase, 'I should not like to think like that'; and whosoever feels that he would not like to think out to its end every thought that may happen to come into his mind, I would dissuade from Art if I could. Manet's Art is the most courageous ever seen. One looks in vain for those subterfuges that we find in every other painter. What he saw he stated candidly, almost innocently, and what he did not see he passed over. Never in his life did he stop to worry over a piece of drawing that did not interest him because it was possible that somebody might notice the omission. It was part of his genius to omit what did not interest him. I remember a young man whom Manet thought well of — a frequent visitor to the studio — and one day he brought his sister with him — not an ill-looking girl, no better and no worse than another, a little commonplace, that was all. Manet was affable and charming; he showed his pictures, he talked volubly, but next day when the young man arrived and asked Manet what he thought of his sister, Manet said, extending his arm (the gesture was habitual to him): 'The last girl in the world I should have thought was your sister.' The young man protested, saying Manet had seen his sister dressed to her disadvantage — she was wearing a thick woollen dress, for there was snow on the ground. Manet shook his head. 'I haven't to look twice; I'm in the habit of judging things.'

These were his words, or very nearly, and I think this anecdote throws a light upon Manet's painting. He saw quickly and clearly, and he stated what he saw candidly, I repeat almost innocently. It was not well-mannered perhaps to speak to a brother of his sister in those terms, but we have not come here to discuss good manners — what are manners but the conventions that obtain at a certain moment, and among a certain class? Well-mannered people do not think sincerely, their minds are full of evasions and subterfuges. Well-mannered people constantly feel that they would not like to think like this or that they would not like to think like that, and, as I

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have said, whoever feels that he would not like to think out to the end every thought that may come into his mind should tum away from Art. All conventions of politics, society, and creed, yes, and of Art, too, must be cast into the melting-pot; he who would be an artist must melt down all things; he must discover new formulas, new moulds, all the old values must be swept aside, and he must arrive at a new estimate. The artist should keep himself free from all creed, from all dogma, from all opinion. As he accepts the opinions of others he loses his talent, all his feelings and his ideas must be his own, for Art is a personal re-thinking of life from end to end, and for this reason the artist is always eccentric. He is almost unaware of your moral codes, he laughs at them when he thinks of them, which is rarely, and he is unashamed as a little child. The word 'unashamed' perhaps explains Manet's Art better than any other. It is essentially unashamed, and in speaking of him one must never be afraid to repeat the word 'unashamed.' Manet was born in what is known as refined society; he was a rich man; in dress and appearance he was an aristocrat; but to be aristocratic in Art one must avoid polite society. Manet was obliged for the sake of his genius to separate himself from his class; he was obliged to spend his evenings in the café of the Nouvelle Athènes, and his friends were artists; however poor and miserable, if they were artists, they were welcome in Manet's studio. We have often heard artists laughed at for wearing long hair, for not speaking as ambassadors speak; but how superficial is this criticism when the essence of Art is to separate, to repudiate all conventions, to be ashamed of nothing but to be ashamed! The price one pays for shamelessness, for truth, sincerity, personality, is public neglect. During the years that I knew Manet he never sold a picture. Some years earlier Durand-Ruel bought two thousand pounds' worth of his pictures, but as these remained on his hands he bought no more. You will wonder why, in a city like Paris, he did not find support. Support means money, and monied men do not appreciate shamelessness in art. In many ways Paris is more like the rest of the world than we think, and the monied man in Paris, like the monied man in London, admires pictures in proportion as they resemble other pictures; those who like pictures in proportion as they differ from others are rare.

After Manet's death his friends made some little stir; there was a sale, and then the prices sank again, sank almost to nothing, and it seemed as if the world would never appreciate Manet. There was a time, fifteen or sixteen years ago, when Manet's pictures could have been bought for twenty, thirty, forty, or fifty pounds apiece. I remember saying to Albert Wolff, some years after Manet's death — it was at Tortoni's; the celebrated café is now gone:

'How is it,' I said, 'that Degas and Whistler and Monet have come into their inheritance, but there is no sign of recognition of Manet's Art?'

Wolff was the Art critic of the *Figaro*, and understood painting as well as another. He answered: 'Put that hope aside; the time will never come when people will care for Manet's painting.'

I can recall the feeling of depression that this pronouncement caused me, and how I went away asking myself if the most beautiful painting the world had ever seen was destined to remain the most unpopular. That was fifteen years ago. We are impatient for the triumph of the things we love, and it took fifteen years for the light of Manet's genius to reach Ireland.

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I have been asked which of the two pictures hanging in this room it would be better to buy for the Gallery of Modern Art, the *Itinerant Musician* or the portrait of Mademoiselle Gonzales. Mr. Lane himself put this question to me, and I answered: 'I am afraid whichever you choose you will regret you had not chosen the other.' The picture of the *Itinerant Musician* is a Spanish Manet, it was painted after Manet had seen Goya, but it is as obviously a Manet as the portrait of Mademoiselle Gonzales. To anyone who knows Manet's work it possesses all the qualities which we associate with Manet; the eye that sees clearly and quickly is as apparent in one picture as in the other. Manet saw Nature rapidly, and in full contour, and before he began to paint all those people were seated and standing in his mind's eye as they are on the canvas. The painting is as unashamed as Whitman; Manet is a sort of Whitman in paint. Look at that girl's foot — it is stated without either fear of offending or desire of pleasing anybody! And was not that Whitman's attitude of mind? Mademoiselle Gonzales' rounded white arm is even more courageously stated, for it is entirely without sexual appeal, and I am afraid the picture will, to many people, seem vulgar for that very reason. In the Spanish picture Manet is disguised a little, so little that one hesitates to admit it; but one should never hesitate about saying anything — the larger picture is Manet and Goya, whereas the portrait is Manet and nothing but Manet. That portrait is an article of faith. It says: 'Be not ashamed of anything but to be ashamed.' Never did Manet paint more unashamedly. There are Manets that I like more, but the portrait of Mademoiselle Gonzales is what Dublin needs. In Dublin everyone is afraid to confess himself. Is it not clear that whosoever paints like that confesses himself unashamed? He who admires that picture is already half free — the shackles are broken, and will fall presently. Therefore I hope it will be Mademoiselle Gonzales that will be purchased, for it will perhaps help to bring about the crisis we are longing for — that spiritual crisis when men shall begin once more to think out life for themselves, when men shall return to Nature naked and unashamed.

Some day this question will have to be discussed — whether the buying of odds and ends, chairs, fire-irons and decanters, and building at a great cost places in which to store them, along with stuffed birds and Esquimeaux boats and all the paraphernalia of the South Sea Islanders, is not a waste of public money? Every age has its folly, and the folly of the twentieth century is probably the desire to educate. I do not say the desire of education, of that desire there is very little — it is not uncommon to meet men who will admit that they are not educated, and we may meet men who admit that they are incapable of education, but we never meet anyone who will admit that he cannot educate somebody else. Hence the great vogue of museums. But man is full of subterfuge and evasions. He would fain educate somebody, but he shrinks from doing anything that would disturb the present; that is the great fear of the ordinary man, to disturb the present ever so slightly; so he would fill museums with dead things that can never awaken desire or impulse or idea, and gain credit for contributing to the education of a nation without contributing anything at all. Or maybe I am unjust to the ordinary rich man. Perhaps the reason why his gifts to museums consist principally of old dead things, out of which the spirit of life has departed — ancient coins, ancient parchments, and ancient pictures — is because he does not know how to acquire valuable modern pictures. I admit that the difficulty is a serious one, and the attempts that have been made to acquire collections of modern pictures have not been successful. I am alluding now to the Tate Gallery and the Chantry Bequest. But of the value of the present collection of modern pictures there can be no question, and what is wanted is a

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standard, a criterion. London wants this, and so does every town in England; but no town wants it so much as Dublin. Though there be no unimpeachable collection of modem pictures in London, yet there are modem pictures to be seen in different galleries, but in Dublin there is no criterion. The only beautiful pictures in the National Gallery are ancient pictures, and for the purpose of instruction in the art of modem painting ancient pictures are useless. The student will never look into Ruysdael's brown woods and grey skies for instruction in the art of painting; nor will he seek Ruysdael's mournful moods amid the woods of Malahide and Blessington, for Ruysdael's mind exists in his painting, and is dependent upon it. And as the whole method of painting has changed within the last hundred years — and changed radically — we moderns no longer feel and see like the ancient masters. And this will be apparent to anyone who goes to the Louvre with a view to examining how the ancient masters painted; he will find that all pictures painted before the nineteenth century were painted first in black and white, and were then glazed. To explain a word that will be very well understood in the studios, I will say that 'glazing' means the use of transparent colours without any admixture of white. However much the artists of Italy, Spain, Holland, and France differed, they all painted alike in this respect; their pictures were painted in black and white, and then the natural colours were applied. The roses painted in Holland in the seventeenth century were painted black first and then glazed with crimson lake.

Boucher's unfinished pictures are all in *terre verte* and white; Greuze was perhaps the last painter who glazed always. We find the two methods in David; he is sometimes an eighteenth-century, sometimes a nineteenth-century, painter, and as a great many of his nineteenth-century pictures are no more than *du carton peint*, it has been rumoured, and is still being rumoured, in the studios, that to bring about a revival of painting it is necessary that we should begin by reviving the handicraft of our forefathers. But the craft of glazing was merely an outward sign, as much as Chaucer's syntax was the outward sign of his mind. There is no returning, in literature any more than in painting; we must write and paint in the idiom of our time; however bad it may be, we shall do better in it than in any other idiom. Our minds are the outcome of our artistic method. At last I have said it, and if anybody doubts it, let him paint a landscape in black and white and then glaze it, as the ancients did, and he will find that he has painted, if not an archaic picture, at least a picture wearing a slightly archaic air. The ancient painters, perhaps owing to their method, saw Nature in large aspects; we are interested in detail, and we are eager to note every passing effect of rain or shine; we desire light above all things, and chiaroscuro bores us; we do not omit a stone in the foreground, though its value is the same as the value of a bit of wall in the middle distance. To explain myself in a way that will make my meaning clear to everyone, I will say, 'Our pictures are no longer vignetted.' The first thing we note in Claude Monet is his escape from the vignette of Turner and Constable — so a vainer suggestion was never put forward than that the Impressionists derived their art from England. There is no escaping from the conclusion that the modern mind is dependent upon the modem method; some may prefer to think that it was the modern mind that invented the modern method — well, it will be always difficult to decide whether the egg preceded the chicken or the chicken preceded the egg. But this at least is certain, that the event of solid painting was bound to lead to Impressionism.

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At this time a new faith was abroad, a new manner of thinking, and I find I have already written this description of the naturalistic movement in which I found myself caught: 'The idea of a new art based upon science in opposition to the art of the old world that was based upon imagination, an art that should explain all things and embrace life in its entirety, in its endless ramifications, be, as it were, a new creed in a new civilization, filled me with wonder, and I stood dumb before the vastness of the conception and the height of the ambition. In my fevered fancy I saw a new race of writers that would arise, and, with the aid of the novel, continue to a more glorious and legitimate conclusion the work that the Hebrew prophets had begun.' A few pages later I find the admission that I was deceived, as was all my generation, by a certain externality, an outer skin, a nearness, *un approchement*; in a word, by the substitution of Paris for the distant and exotic backgrounds so beloved of the romantic school.

The glass door of the café grates upon the sand again. It is Degas, a round-shouldered man in a suit of pepper and salt. There is nothing very trenchantly French about him either, except the large necktie. His eyes are small, his words sharp, ironical, cynical. Manet and Degas are the leaders of the Impressionistic school, but their friendship has been jarred by inevitable rivalry. 'Degas was painting *Semiramis* when I was painting *Modern Paris*,' says Manet. 'Manet is in despair because he cannot paint vulgar pictures like Duran, and be fêted and decorated; he is an artist not by inclination but by force; he is a galley-slave chained to the oar,' says Degas. Degas is more inclined to look back than Manet; even his portraits are composed from drawings and notes, and looking at a picture by Degas we think, 'Yes, that was how we thought in the seventies and in the eighties.'

Manet desired modernity as earnestly as Degas, but his genius saved him from the ideas that were of his time. Manet was a pure painter, and it mattered nothing to him whether he painted a religious subject — angels watching by the side of the Dead Christ — or yachting at Argenteuil. Manet was an instinct, Degas is an intellectuality, and believes with Edgar Poe that one becomes original by saying, 'I will not do a certain thing because it has been done before.'

So the day came when Degas put *Semiramis* aside for a ballet girl. *Semiramis* had been painted again and again; but the ballet girl in pink tights, clumsy shoes, and bunched skirts, looking unnatural as a cockatoo, had not. And it was Degas who introduced the acrobat into art, and the *repasseuse*. His portrait of Manet on the sofa listening to Madame Manet playing the piano is one of the most intellectual pieces of painting ever done in the world; its intellectuality reminds one of Leonardo da Vinci, for, like Degas, Leonardo painted by intellect rather than by instinct. It was in the Louvre a few months ago that it occurred to me to compare Leonardo with Degas. I had gone there on a special errand, and when wearied with examination and debate, I turned into the Salle Carrée for relaxation, and there wandered about, waiting to be attracted. Long ago the *Mona Lisa* was my adventure, but this year Rembrandt's portrait of his wife held me at gaze. It did not delight me as Manet delights; the emotion was deeper, vaguer and more intense, and I seemed to myself like a magnetic patient in the coil of some powerful enchantment. The emotion that this picture awakens is almost physical. It gets at you like music, like a sudden breath of perfume. When one approaches, the eyes fade into brown shadow, and when one withdraws, they begin to tell their story, and the story they tell is of a woman's soul. She seems

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conscious of her weakness, of her sex, and the burden of her own special lot — she is Rembrandt's wife, a servant, a satellite, a watcher. The mouth is no more than a little shadow, but what wistful tenderness there is in it! and the colour of the face is white, faintly tinted with bitumen, and in the cheeks some rose madder comes through the yellow. She wears a fur jacket, but the fur was no trouble to Rembrandt; he did not strive for realism. It is fur, that is sufficient. Grey pearls hang in her ears; there is a brooch upon her breast, and a hand at the bottom of the picture passing out of the frame, and that hand reminds one as the chin does, of the old story that God took a little clay and made man out of it. That chin and that hand and arm are moulded without display of knowledge as Nature moulds. The picture seems as if it had been breathed upon the canvas. Did not a great poet once say that God breathed into Adam? The other pictures seem dry and insignificant, the *Mona Lisa*, celebrated in literature, hanging a few feet away, seems factitious when compared with this portrait; that smile, so often described as mysterious, that hesitating smile which held my youth in a little tether, has come to seem to me but a grimace, and the pale mountains no more mysterious than a globe or map seems at a distance.

The *Mona Lisa* is a sort of riddle, an acrostic, a poetical decoction, a ballade, a rondel, a villanelle, or ballade with double burden, a sestina — that is what it is like, a sestina or chant royal. The *Mona Lisa*, being literature in intention rather than painting, has drawn round her many poets. We must forgive her many mediocre verses for the sake of one incomparable prose passage. She has now passed out of that mysterious misuse of oil paint, that arid glazing of *terre verte*, and has come into her possession of eternal life, into the immortality of Pater's prose. The *Mona Lisa* and Degas's *Leçon de Danse*, are intellectual pictures; they were painted with the brains rather than with the temperaments; and what is any intellect compared to a gift like Manet's? The intellectual pleasure that we receive from a mind so curiously critical, inquisitive, and mordant as Degas's withers, but the joy we get from the gift of painting like Manet's is a joy that lasts for ever. Of what value are Degas's descriptions of washerwomen and dancers and race-horses compared with that fallen flower, that Aubusson carpet, above all, the footstool? The pleasure of an early Degas, the *Semiramis*, is more lasting than that which we get from the dancers plunging forward in the blaze ot the 'limes.' By the *Semiramis* hangs a tale — Degas painted Semiramis at the head of a group of women admiring the walls of Babylon; there were hanging gardens in the background. But one day he scratched half the picture away, and his explanation was that Semiramis would not surround herself with women; she would walk surrounded by men. His best pictures were painted before he began to think, when he was merely interested in Nature, and if any one of Degas's pictures is bought for this gallery, I hope it will be one of these early pictures, the red headed girl, for instance, an unfinished sketch, exhibited some time ago at Knightsbridge, the property, I believe, of Durand Ruel.

In the days of the Nouvelle Athènes we used to repeat Degas's witticisms, how he once said to Whistler, 'Whistler, if you were not a genius you would be the most ridiculous man in Paris.' Leonardo made roads, Degas makes witticisms. I remember his answer when I confided to him one day that I did not care for Daumier — the beautiful *Don Quixote and Sancho Panza* that hangs on the wall I had not then seen; that is my excuse — an insufficient one, I admit. Degas answered, 'If you were to show Raphael a Daumier he would admire it, he would take off his

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hat; but if you were to show him a Cabanel he would say with a sigh, "That is my fault.'" It is not possible to be wittier than this or more appreciative, but, I ask again, what does such intellect amount to when compared to that fallen flower or the beautiful painting of Mademoiselle Gonzales' white arm, or the dress so liquid, so beautiful, more beautiful than silk or ivory, every accent in its place? To omit any one of them would be a loss, to add another would be a redundancy. Manet said to me once, 'I tried to write, but I couldn't write,' and I thought he spoke apologetically, whereas his words were a boast. 'He who paints as I paint could never think of doing anything else,' was what was in his mind, and if Manet had lived till he was a hundred, he would have painted to the last. But Degas, being merely a man of intellect, wearied of painting; he turned to modelling for relaxation, and he has collected pictures. His collection is the most interesting in Paris, for it represents the taste of one man. His chief admirations are Delacroix and Ingres and Manet, especially Ingres. There was a time when he knew everyone who owned an Ingres, and it is said that the concierges used to keep him informed as to the health of the owners of certain pictures, and hearing of an appendicitis that might prove fatal, or a bad attack of influenza, Degas at once flapped his wings and went away like a vulture. One day I met him in the Rue Maubeuge. 'I've got it,' he said, and he was surprised when I asked him what he had got: great egotists always take it for granted that everyone is thinking of what they are doing. 'Why, the *Jupiter*, of course the *Jupiter*,' and he took me to see the picture — not a very good Ingres, I thought — good, of course, but somewhat tedious — a Jupiter with beetling brows, and a thunderbolt in his hand. But next to it was a pear, and I knew that pear, just a speckled pear painted on six inches of canvas; it used to hang in Manet's studio, six inches of canvas nailed to the wall, and I said to Degas, 'I think, after all, I like the pear better than *Jupiter*;' and Degas said, 'I put it there, for a pear painted like that would overthrow any god.' There is a picture by Mr. Sargent in this room — one of his fashionable women. She is dressed to receive visitors, and is about to spring from her chair; the usual words, 'How do you do, Mary?' are upon her crimson lips, and the usual hysterical lights are in her eyes, and her arms are like bananas as usual. There is in this portrait the same factitious surface life that informs all his pictures, and, recognizing fashionable gowns and drawing-room vivacities as the fundamental Sargent, Degas described him as *Le chef de rayon de la peinture. Le chef de rayon* is the young man behind the counter who says, 'I think, madam, that this piece of mauve silk would suit your daughter admirably, ten yards at least will be required. If your daughter will step upstairs, I will take her measure. *Vous pouvez me confier votre fille; soyez sûr que je ne voudrais rien faire qui pût nuire à mon commerce*.'

'Anyone,' Degas said once to me, 'can have talent when he is five-and-twenty; the thing is to have talent when you are fifty.' I remember the Salon in which Bastien Lepage exhibited his *Potato Harvest*, and we all admired it till Degas said, 'A Bouguereau of the modern movement.' Then everyone understood that Bastien Lepage's talent was not an original but a derivative talent. When Roll, another painter of the same time, exhibited his enormous picture entitled *Work*, containing fifty figures, Degas said, 'One doesn't make a crowd with fifty figures, one makes a crowd with five.' But what is all this intellect compared with that flower fallen on the carpet, or that plump white arm moulded without a shadow?

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Monet being a landscape painter only appeared in the Nouvelle Athènes after long absences; he would return suddenly from the country, bringing with him twenty or thirty canvases, all equally perfect. He seemed to be doing always what he set out to do, whether a row of poplars seen in perspective against a grey sky, or a view of the Seine with a bridge cutting the picture in equal halves, or a cottage shrouded in snow with some low hills over yonder and some poplar-trees, and one mutters, 'The touch is as beautiful as Sisley's.' One of the few things this exhibition lacks is a picture by Sisley, and it is my hope that the Sisley that will come into this collection in due time may be the one that I saw many years ago in the galleries of George Pettit: the bare wall of a cottage, a frozen pond, and on the other side of the pond some poplar-trees — these trees and their shadows are the picture. The delicacy of the vision that saw these trees against the winter sky, and their mauve and transparent shadows floating over the frozen ground to the pond's edge, enchants us as music does, and we are unable to put back the thought that a picture like this makes Constable's vision seem coarse and his craft very clumsy. Monet or Sisley — which is the greater? Monet is more external, more decorative than Sisley — that is all one can say. But those who like to trace all individual qualities back to race influence may, if they will, trace back the exquisite reverie which distinguishes Sisley's pictures from Monet to Sisley's northern blood.

Of the originality of these two painters, and of the originality of the Impressionist school, one cannot think too often or too long; there arose suddenly an art in France unlike any other art that had ever been seen in the world before, and no country, not even France, is prepared for such surprising innovations as Monet's and Sisley's pictures. Monet especially paid dearly for the gift of his genius, he very nearly starved; there were times when he could not get more than one hundred francs apiece for his pictures, very often no price could be obtained, and Monet went without his dinner. He began by imitating Manet, and Manet ended by imitating Monet. They were great friends. Manet painted Monet and Madame Monet in their garden, and Monet painted Manet and Madame Manet in the same garden; they exchanged pictures, but after a quarrel each returned the other his picture. Monet's picture of Manet and his wife I never saw, but Manet's picture of Monet and Madame Monet belongs to a very wealthy merchant, a Monsieur Pellerin, who has the finest collection of Manet's and Cézanne's in the world. I do not remember ever to have seen Cézanne at the Nouvelle Athènes; he was too rough, too savage a creature, and appeared in Paris only rarely. We used to hear about him — he used to be met on the outskirts of Paris wandering about the hillsides in jack-boots. As no one took the least interest in his pictures he left them in the fields; when his pictures began to be asked for, his son and daughter used to inquire them out in the cottages, and they used to keep watch in the hedges and collect the sketches he had left behind him. It would be untrue to say that he had no talent, but whereas the intention of Manet and of Monet and of Degas was always to paint, the intention of Cézanne was, I am afraid, never very clear to himself. His work may be described as anarchical. It is impossible to deny to this strange being a certain uncouth individuality; uncouth though it be, there is life in his pictures, otherwise no one would remember them. I pause to ask myself which I would prefer — one of Millet's conventional, simpering peasants or one of Cézanne's crazy cornfields peopled with violet reapers. But why do I linger talking of Cézanne when the greatest of all this group of painters has only been mentioned by name — Renoir. Nor is this the first time I have delayed to speak of him, and so betrayed a lack of

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appreciation. Among the Impressionist painters there was an English, I should say an American, Mary Casat. She did not come to the Nouvelle Athènes it is true, but she lived on the Boulevard Extérieur; her studio was within a minute's walk of the Place Pigalle, and we used to see her every day. Her art was derived from Degas as Berthe Morisot's art was derived from Manet. Berthe Morisot was Manet's sister-in-law, and I remember him saying to me once, ‘My sister-in-law would not have existed without me; she did nothing but carry my art across her fan.' Berthe Morisot is dead, and her pictures are very expensive — picture-dealers do not make presents; but Mary Casat is alive, and she is a rich woman, and I take this opportunity of suggesting that she should be asked to give a picture. But to the anecdote. After an absence of many years I met her in Durand Ruel's, and at breakfast next day we talked of all the people we had known, and at the end of breakfast she said, ‘There is one we haven't spoken about, perhaps the greatest of all.’ I said, ‘You mean Renoir?' And she accused me of having been always a little indifferent to Renoir's art. I don't think that this is true, or if it is true, it is only true in a way. I know of nothing that I would sooner possess — and by our desire of possession we may measure our admiration — than one of Renoir's nudes. He has modelled whole bodies of women in the light, and the light is not only on the surface, apparently; it is under the surface. Some of his portraits of children are the most beautiful I know — they are white and flower-like, and therefore very unlike the stunted, leering little monkeys which Sir Joshua Reynolds persuaded us to accept as representative of tall and beautiful English children. Renoir's life supplies me with an instructive anecdote; but for you to approve of the anecdote you must know something of his early days. So I will tell you that he began life as a porcelain painter — I have seen flowered vases painted by him and pictures of flowers painted exactly as a porcelain painter would paint them. It was not till the sixties that he began to paint portraits. I think that it was at the end of the sixties that he painted the celebrated picture of the woman looking into the canary cage — a wonderful picture, but very unlike the Renoir of the nudes that I hunger to possess. Is it not strange that an art so strangely personal as Renoir's should have been developed by degrees? Manet was Manet as soon as he left Couture's studio — even before he went there. Degas always was Degas, but there was no sign of the late Renoir even in the portrait of the lady looking into the canary cage. The beautiful nudes would never have been painted if he had not come to the café of the Nouvelle Athènes. But do I admire the nudes as much as I say I do ? Renoir as a whole — is he the equal of Manet? Good heavens, no! And, indeed, at the bottom of my heart I always suspect Renoir's art of a certain vulgarity. If this be true, all the more strange that he, who was influenced by everybody, should have ended by influencing all the others. Manet's last pictures were certainly influenced by Renoir; Manet's last years were spent in thinking of Renoir. Renoir was always in the café of the Nouvelle Athènes, and I remember well the hatred with which he used to denounce the nineteenth century — the century in which he used to say there was no one who could make a piece of furniture or a clock that was beautiful and that was not a copy of an old one. It was about that time that Durand Ruel began to buy his pictures, and one day, finding himself in easier circumstances, he thought he would take what the newspapers call a well deserved — or is it a well-earned? — holiday. For some time he was not sure whether he should lay in a stock of wine or cigars and give dinner-parties, or should furnish a flat and fall in love. These are the outlets that life offers to the successful painter, and it would have been well for Renoir if he had not been so virtuous: for he went instead to Venice to study Tintoretto, and when he returned to Paris he entered a studio

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with a view to perfecting his drawing, and in two years he had destroyed for ever the beautiful art which had taken twenty years to elaborate. The last time I saw him was on the Butte Montmartre, a decaying quarter, full of crumbling façades, pillars, and abandoned gardens. He was living in a small house at the end of one of these gardens, interested far more in his rheumatism than in painting. I was talking to him of Aungtin, who believes that the whole century has gone astray, that we must return to the painting of our ancestors, to glazes; but Renoir showed little interest — he only said *chacun a sa marotte*, which means that everyone has a bee in his bonnet. But why should this old man take an interest in Aungtin's new aestheticism? Renoir has said what he had to say, and when a man has done that, the rest had better be silence.

The evenings that Pissaro did not come to take his coffee in the Nouvelle Athènes were very rare indeed. He was there more frequently than Manet or Degas, and when they were there he sat listening, approving of their ideas, joining in the conversation quietly. A wise and appreciative Jew, who looked like Abraham; his beard was white and his hair was white and he was bald, though at the time he could not have been much more than fifty. He was the oldest of that group, and died two years ago at an advanced age, I think seventy-five. The last time I saw him was at Rouen, about six years ago, and he did not look older then than he had looked twenty years before, nor was he older in mind. He was enthusiastic and interested in everything; he was painting the Cathedral, I suppose because Monet had been there the year before and had painted the Cathedral. Pissaro always followed in somebody's footsteps; he was a sort of will-o'-the-wisp of painting, and his course was zig-zag. But though his wanderings were many and sudden, he never quite lost his individuality, not even when he painted yachts after the manner of Signac, in dots. The picture in the present exhibition, which I hope Dublin will be able to acquire, is a very good example of Pissaro's work: it represents Pissaro in his first period, when he followed Corot. In the *Confessions of a Young Man* I find an appreciation of Pissaro, and, as I think to-day as I thought then, I may quote it. Speaking of a group of girls gathering apples in a garden, I wrote: ‘Sad greys and violets, beautifully harmonized. The figures seem to move as in a dream; we are on the thither side of life, in a world of quiet colour and happy aspiration. Those apples will never fall from the branches, those baskets that the stooping girls are filling will never be filled, that garden is the garden that life has not for giving, but which the painter has set in an eternal dream of violet and grey.’ Pissaro has painted many such pictures — pictures of hillsides, where the peasants hoe the little mildew that has collected on the earth's surface. No one has understood the pathos of the peasant's lot better than Pissaro; he has understood it far better than Millet, who has never seemed to me much more than an eighteenth century painter. Millet's subjects differ from Romney or Greuze, but the painting is much the same, and the mind is the same — given over to tedious sentimentalities.

When Pissaro died, the question was asked: Who had invented Impressionism? and attempts were made to trace Monet back to Turner. Monet, it was said, had been to England, and in England he must have seen Turner, and it was impossible to see Turner without being influenced by Turner. Yes! Monet was in England many times, and he painted in England, and one day we went together to an Exhibition of Old Masters in Burlington House; we saw there a picture for which many thousands of pounds had just been paid, and Monet said, 'Is that brown

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thing your great Turner?' It is true, the picture we were looking at was not much more interesting than brown paper, and I told him that Turner had painted other pictures that he would like better, 'The Frosty Morning,' and he said he had seen it, and that Turner had painted that morning with his eyes open. Whistler liked 'Calais Pier' much better than 'The Frosty Morning,' for it was more like his own painting. We cannot be sincere in our own work and admire the very opposite to ourselves, and no very special discernment is required to understand that Turner and Constable could not have influenced painters whose desire was to dispense altogether with shadow. Whether, by doing so, they failed sometimes to differentiate between a picture and a strip of wall paper is a question that does not come within the scope of the present inquiry. Mr. Lane is asking us to consider if a collection of Impressionist pictures would be of advantage to Dublin, and it seems to me that the pictures he offers us could not fail to inspire freedom of thought. All are a departure from precedent, and Manet, even more than Monet and Sisley, urges revolt against the old. Adam standing in Eden looking at the sunset was not more naked and unashamed than Manet. I believe that a Gallery of Impressionist pictures would be more likely than any other pictures to send men to France, and in some café in some Nouvelle Athènes, named though it be not in any Baedeker, nor marked on any traveller's chart, their souls will be exalted to praise life. Art is but praise of life, and it is only through the arts that we can praise life. Life is a rose that withers in the iron fist of dogma, and it was France that forced open the deadly fingers of the Ecclesiastic and allowed the rose to bloom again. He started out to crush life about two thousand years ago, and in three centuries humility, resignation, and obedience were accepted as virtues; the shrines of the Gods were abandoned; the beautiful limbs of the lover and the athlete were forbidden to the sculptor, and the meagre thighs of dying saints were offered him instead. Literature died, for literature can but praise life. Music died, for music can but praise life, and the lugubrious Dies Irae was heard in the fanes. What use had a world for art when the creed current among men was that life is a mean and miserable thing? So amid lugubrious chant and solemn procession the dusk thickened, until the moment of deepest night was reached in the ninth and the tenth and the eleventh centuries. In the fifteenth century the dawn began in Italy, and sculptors and painters turned their eyes towards Greece. Donatello and Michael Angelo replaced Praxiteles and Phidias. Day follows night as surely as night follows day, and the light that began in Italy in the fifteenth century has been widening ever since, veil after veil has been scattered, and now there is broad daylight in the land of France. News of the white town far away, news of its gardens, its statues and monumented swards reach us; and we go there like humble rag-pickers with baskets on our backs and hooked sticks in our hands, and we come back rich men…. The light is spreading northward; light is on the mountaintops, while the valleys are still in darkness. The light will rise higher and higher, Northern Europe will again bask in sunlight, the beams will reach this lonely Western valley — not in our time; a hundred years hence the sun will be again overhead, and life shall be praised again, praise of the incomparable gift shall be sung in joyous procession about the temples of 'the young compassionate gods.'

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