

GEORGE EDWARD BATEMAN SAINTSBURY

1845-1933

GEORGE EDWARD BATEMAN SAINTSBURY was born on 23 October 1845 in Southampton, where his father George Saintsbury was secretary and general superintendent of the docks; his mother's maiden name was Elizabeth Wright. 'I was born', he says, 'in a port, and have as a small boy lunched under the star of cutlasses in the gunroom (or whatever it was) of the *Victory*.' He records too his pleasing memories of King's College School in the Strand. It was then and for long afterwards the junior department of King's College; the classes were there held in the basements. Amongst *alumni* of the school, later to be notable, had been Henry Fawcett and Ingram Bywater; also Frederic Harrison, who in old age was to be Saintsbury's neighbour in Bath. The head master, Dr. Major, was a good classical scholar, full of 'humanism of the older kind'; and he taught the Upper Sixth, in which Saintsbury stayed during his last three years of pupilage. 'The whole of the teaching of Greek and Latin was soaked in the literary spirit.' There were no definite hours of 'English' teaching, but essays were written, and there was a good 'library of English poems and novels and *belles-lettres* generally'. For Saintsbury there could be no better pasturage. On one prize-day he recited a poem on Sicily, which ended with a 'magnificent denunciation of the Garibaldian revolution and the part played therein by England'. The dispenser of the prizes was Mr. Gladstone, who, with his 'mixture of kindness and indignation—hand-clasp and eye-flash—', praised the verses, but was 'afraid he couldn't at all agree with the sentiments'. The versifier, indeed, was a Tory born, and was to excel in Toryism of an extreme and picturesque type. Already he devoured books, and was sensitive above all things to form and expression. While a schoolboy he conceived a lifelong

passion for Lucretius, 'with his marvellous combination of sweetness and strength'. Indeed all Saintsbury's deeper convictions, like his temper and creed as a critic, were graven early. In October 1863, being then just under eighteen, he went up to Merton with a Postmastership, with a good classical groundwork and an uncommon store of irregular reading.

In his *Second Scrap-Book* (1923) Saintsbury devotes a hundred pages to a retrospect of 'Oxford Sixty Years Since'. He never wrote anything better; they are in his most personal, whimsical, and confidential style; the scenes, the portraits, come out in sharp outline and in motley tints. We read of pranks and 'wines'; of Warden Marsham, of Edward Caird the philosopher, of William Sidgwick the tutor, and of strange old cloistered 'characters'; of Saintsbury's brushes (evidently triumphant) with Jowett and with Mark Pattison; of his friendships, and his intimacy with Mandell Creighton; and of the first class in Moderations, won despite all his disclaimers of 'technical scholarship'. A second class, or 'smash', in 'Greats', caused him a chagrin not soon to be forgotten; that 'second' which, as he says, always '*hurts* so abominably'. The check affected his career; he sat without success for five fellowships, and quitted Oxford in 1868. But this was also the year of his happy marriage to Miss Emily Fenn King, daughter of Mr. H. W. King. With this companionship, which was to last for fifty-six years, he could face a life not without vicissitudes. Saintsbury now went out into the open world; he was to take and give many knocks; to be in turn school-master, journalist, critic and politician, professor, Emeritus veteran, and all the while an insatiable author. Not so soft or uniform a life as that of some who dwell in colleges, but one likely to form a personality 'for shape and use'. Saintsbury ever cherished a more than ordinary devotion to Oxford, deplored every change in her institutions, and gave up most regretfully the hope of residence. He was much attached to Merton, and rejoiced when in 1909 he became

an Honorary Fellow. His portrait by Nicholson, presented by himself in 1923, hangs in the Common Room; and he bequeathed to the College a beautiful, and never yet reproduced, drawing by Rossetti, besides his own interleaved copy of Lucretius.

Saintsbury's already wide but somewhat vagrant reading had not helped him in the Schools; but it was the foundation of his capital as a man of letters. Oxford, meanwhile, only intensified his Toryism and his High Churchmanship. His deepest admiration was for Pusey; and ὁ μέγας, so termed by disciples, was now and for long afterwards the leader of those who 'remained behind'. Saintsbury, fixed in his allegiance, had no inclination towards Rome, and was equally unmoved by any kind of 'modernism'. Though so firm, not to say fierce, in his political and religious convictions, he was not the less fair and catholic as a critic of letters. It was his principle that no dislike of a writer's opinions or ideas must deflect by a hairsbreadth our judgement of his art. Such equity is not too common; and Saintsbury, but for an irrepressible spark or two, practised it with remarkable fidelity. This was perhaps the easier for him because he cared above all, as the sequel will show, for 'treatment' and execution, and tended to abstract them, almost to an extreme degree, from the intellectual substance or 'matter' of the artistic product.

Much as he was to write, he did not rush at all early into print. Failing to anchor in Oxford, he betook himself for eight years to schoolmastering, a calling that he never greatly liked. From January to July 1868 he taught English and history in the Upper and Lower Removes of the Manchester Grammar School; the High Master was the noted Frederick William Walker. Of this sojourn Saintsbury says little more than that it was 'very agreeable'; in the autumn he migrated to Elizabeth College, Guernsey, as classical master, there to remain till 1874. In the head master, the Rev. John Oates, he found a kindred spirit and fellow-humanist. About Oates, he writes, 'there was even

a touch of the old French *abbé*. A prospectus survives which shows Saintsbury discoursing in 1871 several times a week to a 'ladies' educational association' on logic, literature, and European history in the eighteenth century. Among his colleagues was Paul Stapfer, best known in England for books on 'Shakespeare and classical antiquity'. In Guernsey Saintsbury was happy and found many friends; he enjoyed the company and the scenery; and he saw, as he relates, his 'only ghost'. Also he 'read immense quantities of French and other literature'—encouraged, it is thought, by Stapfer. But his stream of production was still delayed. For two years he was head master of the Elgin Educational Institute, a provincial secondary day school which has long ago disappeared. Of this experience he tells us little, and it can hardly have been congenial; but he is said to have always spoken of it 'with a kindly recollection', and of his many tramps in Moray. In 1876 he went to London and 'flung himself', he says, on literature and on the press: a phase that was to last for nineteen years. From 1876 to 1887 the family lived in London, and then, till 1891, at Fulbourn in Cambridgeshire,—a period during which Saintsbury had rooms in town for his work, and lived there for part of the week. After this his home was in Reading, and he travelled to London daily. His chosen haunt was the Savile Club, where he had many friends and which he regarded and remembered with special affection; and 'for twenty years scarcely passed a single week-day without crossing its threshold'.

His first essay of mark, on Baudelaire, had already appeared in the *Fortnightly* of October 1875; and to the editor, John Morley, he tells us that he 'owed a great part of his establishment on the Press'. Like many a youth of letters he had started with signed notices in the old *Academy*; but the *Fortnightly* articles on 'Modern English Prose', on Saint-Evremond, and on Renan, he justly thought worthy of reprinting in 1923-4. There is no recounting here the magazines and journals to which Saintsbury contributed

during these two decades; but three may be specified. The shortlived *London* was edited by W. E. Henley, with Andrew Lang among the contributors. On Lang and Henley, as well as on Henry Duff Traill, Austin Dobson, and W. P. Ker, Saintsbury has left in his *Scrap-Books* beautifully conceived 'little necrologies'. R. L. Stevenson was also among his friends. During some months of 1877 he did 'inside' work (of course non-political) on the *Manchester Guardian*, and always held the great editor, C. P. Scott ('my second master in the Press'), in warm regard. He reviewed for the paper for many years afterwards. But by far his longest and closest ties were with the *Saturday Review*. Here he served, first under Philip Harwood (till 1883) and then under Walter Pollock; latterly he was assistant-editor; and he wrote regularly, inexhaustibly, and easily, on literature, on politics, and on things in general. He loved the trade; he compares the charm of journalism to that of Ninon de l'Enclos; and part of 'her' charm was 'her uncertainty'. In 1892 Saintsbury found himself 'on the pavement—planted there incomeless, disestablished, and disendowed'. The proprietors, the Beresford Hope family, had parted with the *Saturday*; and Saintsbury, with many of his colleagues, felt unable to serve under the new regime. For three years he was without regular employ, until his appointment by the Crown, in September 1895, as Professor of Rhetoric and English Literature in the University of Edinburgh, in succession to David Masson.

During these long years of presswork Saintsbury wrote prodigiously: myriads of words unsigned, and ephemeral; and over a score of prefaces to editions of, or selections from, writers French and English. A bibliography of his signed writings would be long and cannot here be sketched. One large section would be occupied with his work on French literature. This, on the historical side, could hardly be in the highest sense original, or tell the public of French scholars much that was new to them; and it may perhaps best be described as a light to lighten the Gentiles. Matthew

Arnold had impressed on the British Philistine the virtues of French urbanity and French form, and had been praised by Sainte-Beuve; but he was cold to the charm of French verse, and connected history was not his work. Edmund Gosse, later in the day, was to produce penetrating studies, beautifully turned, of recent French writers; few Englishmen, in the field of *belles-lettres*, have been such 'good Europeans'. But Saintsbury, with his skilled and prolonged labours, covered a far wider field of French literature than any English contemporary; and they have met a practical and urgent need. His most systematic work was *A Short History of French Literature* (1882). On this, five years later, Edmond Scherer, to whom Saintsbury had given a few lines in his survey, published a hostile article. In twenty bitter pages he disparages Saintsbury as a critic, and makes the utmost of certain mistakes in facts and dates. Many of them are small; and they are amended, all but silently, in later editions of the *Short History*. In 1889, by way of 'raising a little pile of coals of fire', Saintsbury published a volume of Scherer's essays on English literature, translated by himself. On Scherer, who had died in the same year, he prefixes a careful notice, in which the criticisms are restrained and the final tribute is handsome. The *Short History* has since gone through several editions. It houses a surprising amount of matter; and it is untrammelled by any reverence for traditional French opinion. Saintsbury, like all critics, is most illuminating when he likes and enjoys his author; and his range of liking is wide, although many will feel that he is curiously jealous of his praise when he comes to the masters of the *grand siècle*. He was sensitive to the music of French song, as his delightful garland of *French Lyrics* (1883) is enough to prove; but much less so to the alexandrine of Racine. He eschewed the theatre, and perhaps never listened to Sarah Bernhardt. Nor does he profess to sketch—he hardly touches on—the intellectual history of France, as portrayed in her literature. A manifest limitation; but we must recognize the element of truth as well as the weakness

in Saintsbury's belief that the history of form, on which he tends to concentrate, is the thread that gives unity to the chronicle of letters. To trace this, at any rate, was his chosen task. The thirty and more articles on French authors in the eleventh edition of the *Britannica* have the same qualities as the *Short History*; and the range of Saintsbury's medieval reading was to be seen in *The Flourishing of Romance and the Rise of Allegory* (1897), a volume in *Periods of European Literature*—a rapid review, but with much labour behind it. His preface (1892) to Florio's *Montaigne*, in the 'Tudor Translations', had shown an increasing freedom and warmth of style. But his biggest, liveliest, and most individual book in this field is the *History of the French Novel* down to 1900. Written later in life (1917-19), it is full of quip and heresy and acumen; the obscurest tales and romances are perused and gaily commented, without a trace of surfeit. Few, no doubt, will follow the explorer through the whole jungle, or return to 'the full and gracious moon of the *Astrée*', or decide for themselves whether '*Almahide* is, I think, more readable than *Ibrahim*'. The second volume (1800-1900) is no less copious and elaborate, and full as ever of vitality; it is Saintsbury's last considered finding on a theme familiar from youth. Adverse, by every instinct, to 'naturalism', he yet makes some unexpected concessions to the talent of Zola. But he is happiest with his first loves, the generations of Gautier, Mérimée, and Flaubert; and happier still when he reverts to the essay-form, or writes a preface. Here the conditions of publication lead him not only to be short, but to be more final and clear-cut in expression. His introduction to a translation of *Madame Bovary* is masterly. He was also staunch to Balzac; and the same praise is due to his general overture to a series of translations, made by other hands but directed by himself, of the *Comédie Humaine*. In sum, his service as a presenter of French literature to the English public may fairly be described as national. Nor is he only a breaker of the ground; he has left many a chapter and *causerie* in the good tradition of Sainte-Beuve.

During his years on the press, Saintsbury won a position still more distinctive as a critic and historian of English literature. Much good work was being done, as the 'English Men of Letters' series is enough to show; but it was chiefly in the form of short separate studies, or of miniature biographies. Literary history was in arrear. There were useful manuals, which have not survived. Taine's *Histoire de la littérature anglaise*, though incomparably stimulating, was a misleading work of genius, imperfectly informed. The first volume of the *Cambridge History of English Literature* was not to appear till 1907 (and to this great work Saintsbury was to contribute no less than twenty-one chapters). There was room, and much need, for a learned scholar with an historical sense and with an instinct for presenting, in due focus, the record of an entire period. Such was Saintsbury; and his preoccupation with questions of form and style, whatever limitation of view it might involve, was also an advantage. Criticism, in mid- and late Victorian times, was much engrossed with the bearing of poetry and *belles-lettres* upon 'conduct'; and Saintsbury, without ever falling into the affectations of the derided 'aesthetic' group, counterpoised, by precept and example, the tendency to sermonize. His training on the press no doubt made for too great facility; yet it served him well, for his work was alive, and he insisted on being readable. His skill is well seen in his *Elizabethan Literature* (1887), with its mixture of succinct biography, quotation, and remark; and in the similar *Nineteenth-Century Literature* (1896), finished before his arrival in Edinburgh.

All this, however, hardly gave scope to his peculiar talent; he was somewhat hampered by the educational purpose of the manual. Nor do his conscientious small volumes on *Marlborough* (1885), on *Manchester* (1887), and on *The Earl of Derby* (1892) show his usual vivacity. His sketch of the fourteenth earl, indeed, throws light on his own political tenets, so firmly riveted; and we know where he stands when he writes:

This little book is written from the point of view of a Tory; and

as I have heard several persons say that they do not exactly know what a Tory means, I may say that I define a Tory as a person who would, at the respective times and in the respective circumstances, have opposed Catholic Emancipation, Reform, the repeal of the Corn Laws, and the whole Irish legislation of Mr. Gladstone.

The book went into a second impression in 1906. It contains a close criticism of Lord Derby's translation of the *Iliad*; Saintsbury's style always takes gayer colours when he touches any question of technique. He also re-edited Scott's edition of Dryden; but his additions are not very considerable, and he overlooked some misreadings of the poet's text which former editors had retained. This venture was early work; the first volume was out in 1882, and the whole was quickly completed, although the appearance of the final volume was long delayed. But Saintsbury deserved well of Dryden, a many-faceted author and one after his own heart; and his study in the 'English Men of Letters' series is one of his best. But, once more, the essay is his real *cadre*. The *Essays in English Literature, 1780-1860*, were reissued in 1890 in a sheaf, and they read freshly to-day. Some of the happiest are on writers like Moore and Hogg, Sydney Smith and Lockhart, Jeffrey and Wilson, who were apt to receive perfunctory treatment in the histories, but each of whom has a definite 'savour', as Saintsbury likes to call it, of his own. These papers form a curious complement to Leslie Stephen's *Hours in a Library*, which date from the 'seventies. Stephen, the strong-headed moralist, is more deeply concerned with the character, doings, and general reasonableness of his author; Saintsbury, with the artistic performance, and with the 'special pleasure' (in Aristotle's phrase) that in each case is afforded; and, though not the more classic writer of the two, he is the more flexible and sympathetic critic. His short introduction (1896) to Sir Edmund Chambers's edition of Donne shows his deep temperamental appreciation of that poet, and rises to eloquence. Saintsbury is always sharply alive to the discords of feeling in the Renaissance: to its passion for experi-

ence at any cost, and again to its revulsions, which may take the form of cynicism, or of satiety, or of a no less passionate, and yet never-forgetting, repentance: all this being mirrored in the expression, with its mingled beauty and harshness, of a poet like Donne. In a similar spirit Saintsbury writes of the 'melancholy' of Du Bellay, or of the temper of the *Heptameron*. Another gathering, *Corrected Impressions* (1895), is perhaps his most weighty and durable volume of articles. The 'impressions' are those which in the course of years he had 'corrected', or rather confirmed, of thirteen of the greater Victorians; and the work, showing exactly how Carlyle, Tennyson, Swinburne, Dickens, Thackeray, and the rest, 'struck a contemporary', is a document for the future critic. To Thackeray Saintsbury often returned, and in 1908 edited his works; reprinting in 1931, as a confession of unaltered faith, the various prefaces under the title *A Consideration of Thackeray*. He exalts that writer with a fervour that is now becoming rare; and he has been heard to say to cavillers, 'Yes, you do not like him—because he hits too hard.' Indeed Saintsbury is in his glory when he is acting as the 'presenter' of our older novelists. The prefaces to his editions of Fielding, Smollett, Sterne, and Peacock, all produced during the years 1893–7, are to be reprinted, as they well deserve, in a collected form. They were mostly written during the difficult years between Saintsbury's departure from the *Saturday Review* and his migration to Scotland.

It was an adventure for him, in his fiftieth year, suddenly to instruct university classes in the north. His appointment made some stir. Lord Balfour of Burleigh was Secretary for Scotland; Andrew Lang and W. P. Ker did not come forward; Henley and Walter Raleigh were among the candidates; but Saintsbury had the strongest record. Yet it was not an academic record, or that of a lecturer; and the Chair of Rhetoric and English Literature, an old eighteenth-century foundation, had ever been held by a Scot. However, he was chosen, though the election was not made till mid-

September; and on 15 October 1895 he gave his inaugural address. His primary business, he said, was not to try to create men of letters, or producers; but rather

to expound and illustrate those common principles of literary art which are found alike in Aristophanes and in Swift, in Aeschylus and in Shakespeare. For the City of Literature is a true—and if not the only true yet the only uncontested—city in the world; and its municipal regulations bind Englishman and Frenchman, Greek of Athens and Scotsman of Edinburgh, with a yoke at once gratefully observed by the free man and irresistible by the rebel.

In another address, never printed, entitled *The Sure Foundation*, he speaks to young students of the rewards of literary study:

You will always have, with regret, to leave some things untasted; but as long as the Upper Powers permit, you can go on tasting; and if you have prepared yourself properly, your taste will refine and strengthen from year to year, and from day to day. The whole world of speech and thought is your province; the accumulations of centuries and millennia are at your disposal with no prejudice to others. There is in the region of Arts a point in which it differs remarkably, and most happily, from other regions: nothing is obsolete, nothing ancient, nothing modern. Everything is an expression of the undying human mind. What has been, has been, and therefore is.

For twenty years Saintsbury carried this programme through unweariedly; and after his death many an old pupil bore witness to his powers of inspiring as well as of instructing. He was a sound, enthusiastic, and successful teacher. The mere tests of the examination room (as the present writer, often his external colleague, can declare) showed a high average of general competence in his flock; and the higher, or 'honours', work, more congenial to Saintsbury than lecturing to the multitude, compared well with that of any British university. He trained many young scholars who have since proved their mettle. This academic statement may be worth making, because Saintsbury had for some little time to contend with the secular licence of the northern student, and with the consequent strain upon a

quick, though rapidly cooled, temper. In a notice in *The Scotsman* (30 January 1933) it is explained how

he overcame all obstacles in the way of his complete success, including an evil tradition of rowdiness, which was apt to break out with special virulence on the opening day of the session. Order was ultimately taken with the disturbers of the peace, and the upshot was that, long before the end of his time, no department of teaching in the University was better organized or controlled by its head than that for which Saintsbury was responsible.

We also hear of Saintsbury's good judgement in academic affairs (though he was not a man of committees), and of his friendly counsel and hospitality to pupils. His humorous and glancing habit of speech was not always understood by the serious-minded; he might at first seem strange, an unfamiliar type from London; but the taste for Saintsbury was quickly acquired upon acquaintance. We learn without surprise of the high regard and liking in which he was held, by his 'honours' students in particular, and by the rest in proportion as they knew him. He lived awhile at Murrayfield House, Murrayfield; but, for most of his sojourn, at 2 Eton Terrace. As the *Cellar-Book* and many memories testify, he was a noble entertainer. But he laboured all the time; lived by method, rising and retiring early and wasting little of the day in social calls. Long before his departure he had a host of Scottish friends and admirers, and had become a notable, almost an historic, personage, in his adopted city. When, at the age of seventy, still full of vigour, he resigned his chair amid many testimonies of goodwill, it was natural that he should go home to the south.

During these twenty years in Edinburgh Saintsbury wrote as steadily as ever; but he was now far better able to concentrate his activities. He continued indeed to write short histories, or surveys, of which the most important is the *Short History of English Literature* (1898). It is not so very short; it is a stout closely printed volume, written rapidly, but containing a wealth of information and of condensed judgements. It is still the most valuable book upon the

subject, on its particular scale, that has been written by one man. The style, for younger students and for the laity, is somewhat over-allusive and closely packed, but has all Saintsbury's peculiar liveliness. The book was harshly attacked by John Churton Collins for some errors of detail which were afterwards put right. Saintsbury also produced *The Earlier Renaissance* (1901) and *The Later Nineteenth Century* (1907), as well as *The Flourishing of Romance*, in the bold enterprise already mentioned, *Periods of European Literature*. Of this syndicate-work in twelve volumes he was the general editor. The range of knowledge required for 'something like a new "Hallam"', as he called it, was almost prohibitive; and every chapter was in danger of enforced compression. The results were not in all cases happy; but the experiment remains unique, and its value seems to be admitted. Saintsbury worked tirelessly both as contributor and as director. Those of his team of nine authors who survive have reason to remember thankfully many a pencilling in the proof-margins: a comment on a fact ('Surely no?'), or on a judgement ('*Ça porte malheur!*'), which made us think hard, once we had deciphered the cryptic handwriting. Saintsbury, during these years, cut down his miscellaneous reviewing. He was no longer partly dependent, as he had often been before, upon piecework. He produced a few more prefaces (to selected plays of Shadwell and Dryden, to translated tales from Marmontel). He also wrote short books on Scott, on the *English Novel* (1913); and one on Matthew Arnold, full of imperfect sympathy and of extreme anxiety to be fair. But he could now turn to bigger undertakings. One of these, which cost much work, was the edition in three volumes (1905, 1906, 1921) of *Minor Poets of the Caroline Period*, eighteen in number. The long romances of Chamberlayne, Chalkhill, and Kynaston, like the charming lyrics of Ayres and Stanley, had been hardly accessible except in large libraries. Saintsbury reads through good stuff and bad alike and revels in the duty of appraisal.

His appointment to a Chair was a turning-point in his

career as a scholar and a writer. Edinburgh gave him not only a special status, but his first real chance to produce any large monument of learning. Now appeared *A History of Criticism and Literary Taste in Europe from the Earliest Times to the Present Day* (1900-4); *A History of English Prosody from the Twelfth Century to the Present Day* (1908-10); and *A History of English Prose Rhythm* (1912). In 1911 he became a Fellow of the Academy.¹ Each of these books must be judged by its avowed purpose. Like every critic Saintsbury, as will appear, has an 'aesthetic' of his own; but Aesthetic, as a branch of philosophy, he considers to be foreign to his task. Such *a priori* questions are excluded. In approaching a critic, Saintsbury asks what are his working principles, or *media axiomata*, what light they throw on literature, and how literature itself confirms or refutes them. This deliberate limitation of view affects, no doubt, his handling of Plato and of Lessing, and (to some extent) of Aristotle; and comes out most clearly in the case of Hegel, with his symmetrical and majestic, though very strange, theory of tragedy. Saintsbury, after hearing a brilliant public lecture on the subject, and acknowledging its excellence, concludes nevertheless that

it might have been delivered just as well if we were in such an infinite state of misery as to have not a line of an actual tragedy of Shakespeare, but only abstracts and arguments, as with some of the ancients.

We must, then, go elsewhere for high philosophy. Still, in the 'history of criticism and taste' there is quite enough to record without digging into fundamentals. The immense chronicle, embracing hundreds of authors famous and obscure, classical, French, Italian, German, and English, with abundant 'abstracts and arguments' embedded, is leisurely indeed; but it moves on without flagging, with a clear historical clue, amply documented, and with personality on every page. It is flowing water, and not tank-water.

¹ On 30 October 1912 he read to the Academy his Warton Lecture on 'The Historical Character of English Lyric'.

No such task had been attempted before. Among the many contributions to learning might be singled out the chapters on the critics of the Italian and French Renaissance—a field in which the experts are few—and those on the ‘dissolvents’, in the eighteenth century, of ‘neo-classicism’. But a word should be said on Saintsbury’s own tenets as a critic; they are the natural expression of his temperament.

Among the ancients, his master is ‘Longinus’; among the moderns, Walter Pater—though there are very marked differences—is perhaps his nearest kinsman. Longinus, he says, ‘looks at the true and only test of literary greatness—the “transport”, the absorption of the reader’; and furnishes ‘an analysis of the direct appeals of literature to the primary emotions of the soul’. ‘Beautiful words are the very light of thought’: to that famed sentence, to the *frisson* and exaltation awakened by consummate expression, Saintsbury often returns. It is the counterpart, weaker but still authentic, of what the poets feel—and sometimes tell us that they feel—in the act of expression. Saintsbury had in a high degree this kind of sensibility; and it was *his* business, in turn, he felt, to find, in a given case, the words that will define it most sharply and communicate it to others. Hence he likes to start with the consummate, the magical, word, or phrase, or line, or passage, and to dwell upon that; caring much less, in comparison, even for the structure and ordering of the work. He is thus sometimes landed in a formula that does him less than justice. In a paper of 1926 on ‘Technique’ he declares that ‘for more than half a century he has done his little best to accentuate the importance of treatment over that of mere subject’. The word ‘mere’ is essential, for by treatment he means what he calls ‘*live form*’—the fusion of form and matter through the miracle of language.

In his estimate of Walter Pater there are many reserves; yet he concludes that

The Paterian method is coextensive in possibility of application with the entire range of criticism—from the long and slow

degustation and appreciation of a Dante or a Shakespeare to the rapidest adequate review of the most trivial and ephemeral of books. Feel; discover the sources of feeling (or no feeling, or disgust, as it will often be in the trivial cases); express the discovery so as to communicate the feeling. . . . (1904.)

He is careful to avert any misconstruction of this creed, which is that of the higher Hedonism. He will be no simple Cyrenaic:

The more your interests are, the better; the higher, the nobler, the purer the subjects of them are, of course, the better; but the main thing is to get *themselves* intensified, purified, ennobled; to make sure that they are *your* interests . . . to make the flame . . . 'gemlike', the essence quintessential, the gold free from alloy. That is the principal thing. . . . I can see no reason why his [Pater's] method should not be applied with an infinite gain of satisfaction to the soul as well as to the senses. (*Bookman*, August, 1906.)

Luckily, no man can keep at this elevation all the time; and we find Saintsbury constantly talking, and that most sagaciously, of structure, and character, and the mind of his author; of the doings and excuses of Tom Jones, of Pantagruel, of the pessimism of Lucretius—of all the things that a critic *must* talk about. He was himself a humorist, in the older and in all the senses of the word, and interpreted his gospel of 'enjoyment' generously. In the histories of English prosody and prose rhythm there is the same learning and method, the same connoisseurship, and the same refusal to go too far 'behind' the matter in hand. All inquiries into the physical, or physiological, basis of metre, and all attempts to measure them by machinery, are to Saintsbury '*metaprosodic*', outside the field; and all attempts to record it in musical terms are vain.¹ His theory of 'foot-

¹ In his address read to the Academy on 28 May 1919 Saintsbury discusses 'Some Recent Studies in English Prosody', and assails (1) quantitative experiments, (2) 'free verse', (3) the musical metrists, and (4) mechanical appliances for measurement of time, accent, &c. On this last issue, see the paper read to the Academy on 31 January 1923 by Dr. E. W. Scripture, 'The Study of English Speech by New Methods of Phonetic Investigation'.

scansion' is not always easy to make out, but this causes little hindrance. He uses the classical terms, and 'longs and shorts', without prejudice to their interpretation in respect of stress, duration, or pitch. When he speaks of 'iambic', 'catalectic', 'pacon', and the like, it is perfectly clear how he is scanning the verse. We can, if we like, translate throughout into terms of 'accent'. The essential thing is that the language of prosody, and that alone, can measure, up to a point, the impression left by the ineffable 'poetic moment'. Saintsbury goes through the whole record, beginning with the twelfth century, and the historical pattern comes out with surprising clearness. Decisive moments, such as the appearance of the 'rippling trisyllabic foot', or 'anapaest', are sharply marked. The field is reviewed again, on a different plan, in the *Historical Manual of English Prosody* (1910). Saintsbury showers examples everywhere, and dull is the reader who does not catch some of his sensibility, disciplined by an exact notation, to the glory of rhythm. Saintsbury can also desert all technical phrasing and word his sensations in lyrical but precise language. Gallantly, at the age of eighty-two, he repeats a daring remark which had led Leslie Stephen, many decades before, to reject one of his youthful articles; namely, that Edgar Allan Poe is 'of the first order of poets'. *Annabel Lee*, we now hear,

begins quite quietly but with a motion of gathering speed and a sort of flicker of light and glow of heat; and these things quicken and brighten and grow till they finish in the last stanza, that incomparable explosion of rapturous regret that towers to the stars and sinks to the sea. This however is no doubt terribly like fine writing, which is not my trade. . . . (*The Dial*, December, 1927.)

The *History of English Prosody* was a work long overdue; there had been nothing of the same compass since Edwin Guest's *History of English Rhythms*, which though still suggestive has long been out of date. A still more original achievement, though in its nature a piece of pioneering, is Saintsbury's *History of English Prose Rhythm*, which has recently inspired

other students. The story here begins with Old English; but the emphasis—though the plainer rhythms receive full justice—is on the development of the more elaborately musical, or ‘impassioned prose’, that culminates in the Authorized Version, in the seventeenth-century preachers and fantasists, and in De Quincey and Ruskin. The book does much to quicken our sense of ‘the other harmony, of prose’.

For a year after his retirement Saintsbury lived in his native Southampton; and then, for the rest of his days, at 1 Royal Crescent, Bath. For many years, prolonged by her husband’s devoted attendance, Mrs. Saintsbury had been invalided: in 1924 she died. Of their two sons, Lewis and Christopher, the elder, Lewis, had died two years previously; the younger was Saintsbury’s companion during his latter years, when he kept his house more and more. His physical infirmities, in the course of nature, increased; but his mental activity and alertness, during these last eighteen years, remained great and persistent.

The two ample volumes on the *History of the French Novel* have been already mentioned. In *The Peace of the Augustans* (1916), a review of our eighteenth-century literature as ‘a place of rest and refreshment’, Saintsbury’s later manner is well seen. He flings away his gown, and writes exactly as he likes, and exactly as he talked and corresponded. He is heedless of the canons, and of the censors who for years had thrown up their hands at his ‘style’. The general public now began to be aware of a veteran who was full, to use a word of his own, of ‘sempervirescence’. There was no need to be ‘literary’ to appreciate the *Notes on a Cellar-Book* (1920), that joyous learned memoir of many festive years and of many hospitalities bestowed. It was followed by a *Letter-Book* (1922), an anthology of letters of all ages with an admirable essay. But perhaps the quintessence of Saintsbury in all his aspects is to be found in the three *Scrap-Books* (1922–4). Here he ‘lets fly’; curses the Whig dogs of every variety, the ‘pussyfoots’, and most things new; and

defines once more, defiantly and joyously, his likes and dislikes in life and literature, and his creed as a critic. He was writing reviews for the *Dial* and new prefaces to Gautier and Flaubert as late as 1928. In 1923-4 he published four volumes of *Collected Essays and Papers, 1875-1920*; but many still remain (such as the preface to his *Seventeenth-Century Lyrics*) that call to be reissued. In 1922 he received with high delight an address¹ signed by more than three hundred admirers, including many men of letters and old pupils. Such tributes are not supposed to speak with the cold voice of posterity; but some happy phrases which hit the mark may be rescued here:

You have been a pioneer in many branches of your calling, not least notably in bringing the historical and the critical study of literature into closer relation than in the past. . . . You have shown how an unsurpassed catholicity of taste may be united to an ardent passion of appreciation. . . . Without moralizing you have been a moralist, whose every page has inculcated manliness, courage, and a relish of life. . . . You have given us all many hours and days of pure enjoyment, of laughter and delight. . . .

A sentence in Saintsbury's acknowledgement gives the key to his career and purpose:

At a very early time of my life it was, as the old phrase goes, borne in upon me that I was not destined to create great literature, but that I had perhaps some faculty of appreciating it, and might even to some extent assist that appreciation in others.

Indeed, Saintsbury was never forgotten in his old age. The announcement of the end, which came on 28 January 1933, brought testimonies from over the English-reading world. The larger public felt, more or less dimly, that there had departed not only a great pundit and literary personage, but a man and a brother and a good companion.

No doubt the work, so profuse and often so rapid, of such a 'polymath' is quickly sifted by time. But the future chronicler of English criticism must find an honoured place

¹ Amongst other honours may be mentioned: Hon. LL.D. Aberdeen, 1898; Hon. D.Litt., Durham, 1906; Presidency of English Association, 1909; Hon. D.Litt., Oxford, 1912; Hon. LL.D., Edinburgh, 1919.

for Saintsbury. His larger monuments of learning cannot soon be outworn, and a host of his studies and essays are of the best lineage. One of his few scraps of verse was written in 1899 in honour of F. J. Furnivall; and for motto it has the words which Martianus Capella puts into the mouth of Grammar. They apply well to Saintsbury himself: *Partes autem meae sunt quatuor: litterae litteratura litteratus litterate.*

NOTE.—George Saintsbury left in his will a direction to his legal representatives ‘that no assistance of any kind is to be given to any person proposing to write and publish a biography of me’. He has, however, given much information about himself in his *Scrap-Books* and other writings. Other sources for the present notice include the obituaries (30 January 1933) in *The Times* and the *Scotsman*: an article by Sir George Chrystal in the *London Mercury* for April 1933; and personal knowledge. The writer is indebted to Professor D. Nichol Smith, and also to Professor A. Blyth Webster, and to Professor F. Y. Eccles, for most valuable aid; and, for a number of details of interest, to Dr. W. R. Halliday, Principal of King’s College, London; to Mr. Douglas Miller, High Master of the Manchester Grammar School; to Mr. W. Rolleston, of St. Saviour’s, Guernsey; and to Mr. W. P. Crozier, editor of the *Manchester Guardian*.

OLIVER ELTON.