



THE GREEN BAG

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If there is anything pleasant in life, it is doing what we aren't meant to do. If there is anything pleasant in criticism, it is finding out what we aren't meant to find out. It is the method by which we treat as significant what the author did not mean to be significant, by which we single out as essential, what the author regarded as incidental. Thus, if one brings out a book on turnips, the modern scholar tries to discover from it whether the author was on good terms with his wife; if a poet writes on buttercups, every word he says may be used as evidence against him at an inquest of his views on a future existence. On this fascinating principle we delight to extort economic evidence from Aristophanes, because Aristophanes knew nothing of economics; we try to extract cryptograms from Shakespeare, because we are inwardly certain that Shakespeare never put them there; we sift and winnow the Gospel of S. Luke, in order to produce a Synoptic problem, because S. Luke, poor man, never knew the Synoptic problem to exist.

R.A. Knox

1 Blackfriars 154 (June 1920)

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