

**Fee-Alexandra Haase**

**An Anthology  
of the History of English Literature**

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Beers, Henry Augustin

*Brief History of English and American Literature*

**CHAPTER III.**

**THE AGE OF SHAKSPERE. 1564-1616.**

The great age of English poetry opened with the publication of Spenser's Shepheard's Calendar, in 1579, and closed with the printing of Milton's Samson Agonistes, in 1671. Within this period of little less than a century English thought passed through many changes, and there were several successive phases of style in our imaginative literature. Milton, who acknowledged Spenser as his master, and who was a boy of eight years at Shakspeare's death, lived long enough to witness the establishment of an entirely new school of poets, in the persons of Dryden and his contemporaries. But, roughly speaking, the dates above given mark the limits of one literary epoch, which may not improperly be called the Elisabethan. In strictness the Elisabethan age ended with the queen's death, in 1603. But the poets of the succeeding reigns inherited much of the glow and splendor which marked the diction of their forerunners; and "the spacious times of great Elisabeth" have been, by courtesy, prolonged to the year of the Restoration (1660). There is a certain likeness in the intellectual products of the whole period, a largeness of utterance, and a high imaginative cast of thought which stamp them all alike with the queen's seal. Nor is it by any undue stretch of the royal prerogative that the name of the monarch has attached itself to the literature of her reign and of the reigns succeeding hers. The expression "Victorian poetry" has a rather absurd sound when one considers how little Victoria counts for in the literature of her time. But in Elisabethan poetry the maiden queen is really the central figure. She is Cynthia, she is Thetis, great queen of shepherds and of the sea; she is Spenser's Gloriana, and even Shakspeare, the most impersonal of poets, paid tribute to her in Henry VIII., and, in a more delicate and indirect way, in the little allegory introduced into *Midsummer Night's Dream*.

"That very time I marked--but thou could'st not--  
 Flying between the cold moon and the earth,  
 Cupid all armed. A certain aim he took  
 At a fair vestal throned by the west,  
 And loosed his love-shaft smartly from his bow  
 As he would pierce a hundred thousand hearts.  
 But I might see young Cupid's fiery dart  
 Quenched in the chaste beams of the watery moon,  
 And the imperial votaress passed on  
 In maiden meditation, fancy free"--

an allusion to Leicester's unsuccessful suit for Elisabeth's hand.

The praises of the queen, which sound through all the poetry of her time, seem somewhat overdone to a modern reader. But they were not merely the insipid language of courtly compliment. England had never before had a female sovereign, except in the instance of the gloomy and bigoted Mary. When she was succeeded by her more brilliant sister, the gallantry of a gallant and fantastic age was poured at the latter's feet, the sentiment of chivalry mingling itself with loyalty to the crown. The poets idealized Elisabeth. She was to Spenser, to Sidney, and to Raleigh, not merely a woman and a virgin queen, but the champion of Protestantism, the lady of young England, the heroine of the conflict against popery and Spain. Moreover Elisabeth was a great woman. In spite of the vanity, caprice, and ingratitude which disfigured her character, and the vacillating, tortuous policy which often distinguished her government, she was at bottom a sovereign of large views, strong will, and dauntless courage. Like her father, she "loved a man," and she had the magnificent tastes of the Tudors. She was a patron of the arts, passionately fond of shows and

spectacles, and sensible to poetic flattery. In her royal progresses through the kingdom, the universities and the nobles and the cities vied with one another in receiving her with plays, revels, masques, and triumphs, in the mythological taste of the day. "When the queen paraded through a country town," says Warton, the historian of English poetry, "almost every pageant was a pantheon. When she paid a visit at the house of any of her nobility, at entering the hall she was saluted by the Penates. In the afternoon, when she condescended to walk in the garden, the lake was covered with tritons and nereids; the pages of the family were converted into wood-nymphs, who peeped from every bower; and the footmen gamboled over the lawns in the figure of satyrs. When her majesty hunted in the park she was met by Diana who, pronouncing our royal prude to be the brightest paragon of unspotted chastity, invited her to groves free from the intrusions of Acteon." The most elaborate of these entertainments of which we have any notice, were, perhaps, the games celebrated in her honor by the Earl of Leicester, when she visited him at Kenilworth, in 1575. An account of these was published by a contemporary poet, George Gascoigne, *The Princely Pleasures at the Court of Kenilworth*, and Walter Scott has made them familiar to modern readers in his novel of *Kenilworth*. Sidney was present on this occasion, and, perhaps, Shakspeare, then a boy of eleven, and living at Stratford, not far off, may have been taken to see the spectacle, may have seen Neptune, riding on the back of a huge dolphin in the castle lake, speak the copy of verses in which he offered his trident to the empress of the sea, and may have

"heard a mermaid on a dolphin's back,  
Utter such dulcet and harmonious breath,  
That the rude sea grew civil at the sound."

{80} But in considering the literature of Elisabeth's reign it will be convenient to speak first of the prose. While following up Spenser's career to its close (1599), we have, for the sake of unity of treatment, anticipated somewhat the literary history of the twenty years preceding. In 1579 appeared a book which had a remarkable influence on English prose. This was John Lyly's *Euphues, the Anatomy of Wit*. It was in form a romance, the history of a young Athenian who went to Naples to see the world and get an education; but it is in substance nothing but a series of dialogues on love, friendship, religion, etc., written in language which, from the title of the book, has received the name of Euphuism. This new English became very fashionable among the ladies, and "that beauty in court which could not parley Euphuism," says a writer of 1632, "was as little regarded as she which now there speaks not French." Walter Scott introduced a Euphuist into his novel *the Monastery*, but the peculiar jargon which Sir Piercie Shafton is made to talk is not at all like the real Euphuism. That consisted of antithesis, alliteration, and the profuse illustration of every thought by metaphors borrowed from a kind of fabulous natural history. "Descend into thine own conscience and consider with thyself the great difference between staring and stark-blind, wit and wisdom, love and lust; be merry, but with modesty; be sober, but not too sullen; {81} be valiant, but not too venturesome." "I see now that, as the fish *Scolopidus* in the flood *Araxes* at the waxing of the moon is as white as the driven snow, and at the waning as black as the burnt coal; so *Euphues*, which at the first increasing of our familiarity was very zealous, is now at the last cast become most faithless." Besides the fish *Scolopidus*, the favorite animals of Lyly's menagerie are such as the chameleon, which, "though he have most guts draweth least breath;" the bird *Piralis*, "which sitting upon white cloth is white, upon green, green;" and the serpent *Porphirius*, which, "though he be full of poison, yet having no teeth, hurteth none but himself." Lyly's style was pithy and sententious, and his sentences have the air of proverbs or epigrams. The vice of Euphuism was its monotony. On every page of the book there was something pungent, something quotable; but many pages of such writing became tiresome. Yet it did much to form the hitherto loose structure of English prose, by lending it point and polish. His carefully balanced periods were valuable lessons in rhetoric, and his book became a manual of polite conversation and introduced that fashion of witty repartee, which is evident enough in Shakspeare's comic dialogue. In 1580 appeared the second part, *Euphues and his England*, and six editions of the whole work were printed before 1598. Lyly had many imitators. In Stephen Gosson's *School of Abuse*, a tract directed against the stage and published about four months later than the first part of *Euphues*, the language is distinctly Euphuistic. The dramatist, Robert Greene, published, in 1587, his *Menaphon*; *Camilla's Alarum to Slumbering Euphues*, and his *Euphues's Censure to Philautus*. His brother dramatist, Thomas Lodge, published; in 1590, *Rosalynde: Euphues's Golden Legacy*, from which Shakspeare took the plot of *As You Like It*. Shakspeare and Ben Jonson both quote from *Euphues* in their plays, and Shakspeare was really writing Euphuism, when he wrote such a sentence as "Tis true, 'tis pity; pity 'tis 'tis true." That knightly gentleman, Philip Sidney, was a true

type of the lofty aspiration and manifold activity of Elizabethan England. He was scholar, poet, courtier, diplomatist, statesman, soldier, all in one. Educated at Oxford and then introduced at court by his uncle, the Earl of Leicester, he had been sent to France when a lad of eighteen, with the embassy which went to treat of the queen's proposed marriage to the Duke of Alencon, and was in Paris at the time of the Massacre of St. Bartholomew, in 1572. Afterward he had traveled through Germany, Italy, and the Netherlands, had gone as ambassador to the Emperor's Court, and every-where won golden opinions. In 1580, while visiting his sister Mary, Countess of Pembroke, at Wilton, he wrote, for her pleasure, the Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia, which remained in MS. till 1590. This was a pastoral romance, after the manner of the Italian Arcadia of Sanazzaro, and the Diana Enamorada of Montemayor, a Portuguese author. It was in prose, but intermixed with songs and sonnets, and Sidney finished only two books and a portion of a third. It describes the adventures of two cousins, Musidorus and Pyrocles, who are wrecked on the coast of Sparta. The plot is very involved and is full of the stock episodes of romance: disguises, surprises, love intrigues, battles, jousts and single combats. Although the insurrection of the Helots against the Spartans forms a part of the story, the Arcadia is not the real Arcadia of the Hellenic Peloponnesus, but the fanciful country of pastoral romance, an unreal clime, like the Faery Land of Spenser. Sidney was our first writer of poetic prose. The poet Drayton says that he

"did first reduce  
Our tongue from Lyly's writing, then in use,  
Talking of stones, stars, plants, of fishes, flies,  
Playing with words and idle similes."

Sidney was certainly no Euphuist, but his style was as "Italianated" as Lyly's, though in a different way. His English was too pretty for prose. His "Sidneian showers of sweet discourse" sowed every page of the Arcadia with those flowers of conceit, those sugared fancies which his contemporaries loved, but which the taste of a severer {84} age finds insipid. This splendid vice of the Elisabethan writers appears in Sidney, chiefly in the form of an excessive personification. If he describes a field full of roses, he makes "the roses add such a ruddy show unto it, as though the field were bashful at his own beauty." If he describes ladies bathing in a stream, he makes the water break into twenty bubbles, as "not content to have the picture of their face in large upon him, but he would in each of those bubbles set forth the miniature of them." And even a passage which should be tragic, such as the death of his heroine, Parthenia, he embroiders with conceits like these: "For her exceeding fair eyes having with continued weeping got a little redness about them, her round sweetly swelling lips a little trembling, as though they kissed their neighbor Death; in her cheeks the whiteness striving by little and little to get upon the rosiness of them; her neck, a neck indeed of alabaster, displaying the wound which with most dainty blood labored to drown his own beauties; so as here was a river of purest red, there an island of perfectest white," etc. The Arcadia, like Euphues, was a lady's book. It was the favorite court romance of its day, but it surfeits a modern reader with its sweetness, and confuses him with its tangle of adventures. The lady for whom it was written was the mother of that William Herbert, Earl of Pembroke, to whom Shakspeare's sonnets are thought to have been dedicated. And she was the subject of Ben Jonson's famous epitaph.

"Underneath this sable herse  
Lies the subject of all verse,  
Sidney's sister, Pembroke's mother;  
Death, ere thou hast slain another  
Learn'd and fair and good as she,  
Time shall throw a dart at thee."

Sidney's Defense of Poesy, composed in 1581, but not printed till 1595, was written in manlier English than the Arcadia, and is one of the very few books of criticism belonging to a creative and uncritical time. He was also the author of a series of love sonnets, Astrophel and Stella, in which he paid Platonic court to the Lady Penelope Rich (with whom he was not at all in love), according to the conventional usage of the amourists. Sidney died in 1586, from a wound received in a cavalry charge at Zutphen, where he was an officer in the English contingent, sent to help the Dutch against Spain. The story has often been told of his giving his cup of water to a wounded soldier with the words, "Thy necessity is yet greater than mine." Sidney was England's darling, and there was hardly a poet in the land from whom his death did not obtain

"the meed of some melodious tear." Spenser's Ruins of Time were among the number of these funeral songs; but the best of them all was by one Matthew Royden, concerning whom little is known. {86} Another typical Englishman of Elisabeth's reign was Walter Raleigh, who was even more versatile than Sidney, and more representative of the restless spirit of romantic adventure, mixed with cool, practical enterprise that marked the times. He fought against the Queen's enemies by land and sea in many quarters of the globe; in the Netherlands and in Ireland against Spain, with the Huguenot Army against the League in France. Raleigh was from Devonshire, the great nursery of English seamen. He was half-brother to the famous navigator, Sir Humphrey Gilbert, and cousin to another great captain, Sir Richard Grenville. He sailed with Gilbert on one of his voyages against the Spanish treasure fleet, and in 1591 he published a report of the fight, near the Azores, between Grenville's ship, the *Revenue*, and fifteen great ships of Spain, an action, said Francis Bacon, "memorable even beyond credit, and to the height of some heroical fable." Raleigh was active in raising a fleet against the Spanish Armada of 1588. He was present in 1596 at the brilliant action in which the Earl of Essex "singd the Spanish king's beard," in the harbor of Cadiz. The year before he had sailed to Guiana, in search of the fabled *El Dorado*, destroying on the way the Spanish town of San José, in the West Indies; and on his return he published his *Discovery of the Empire of Guiana*. In 1597 he captured the town of Fayal, in the Azores. He took a prominent part in colonizing Virginia, and he introduced tobacco and the potato plant into Europe. America was still a land of wonder and romance, full of rumors, nightmares, and enchantments. In 1580, when Francis Drake, "the Devonshire Skipper," had dropped anchor in Plymouth harbor, after his voyage around the world, the enthusiasm of England had been mightily stirred. These narratives of Raleigh, and the similar accounts of the exploits of the bold sailors, Davis, Hawkins, Frobisher, Gilbert, and Drake; but especially the great cyclopedia of nautical travel, published by Richard Hakluyt, in 1589, *The Principal Navigations, Voyages, and Discoveries made by the English Nation*, worked powerfully on the imaginations of the poets. We see the influence of this literature of travel in the *Tempest*, written undoubtedly after Shakspeare had been reading the narrative of Sir George Somers's shipwreck on the Bermudas or "Isles of Devils." Raleigh was not in favor with Elizabeth's successor, James I. He was sentenced to death on a trumped-up charge of high treason. The sentence hung over him until 1618, when it was revived against him and he was beheaded. Meanwhile, during his twelve years' imprisonment in the Tower, he had written his magnum opus, the *History of the World*. This is not a history, in the modern sense, but a series of learned dissertations on law, government, theology, magic, war, etc. A chapter with such a caption as the following {88} would hardly be found in a universal history nowadays: "Of their opinion which make Paradise as high as the moon; and of others which make it higher than the middle region of the air." The preface and conclusion are noble examples of Elisabethan prose, and the book ends with an oft-quoted apostrophe to Death. "O eloquent, just: and mighty Death! Whom none could advise, thou has persuaded; what none hath dared, thou hast done; and whom all the world hath flattered, thou only hast cast out of the world and despised; thou hast drawn together all the far-fetched greatness, all the pride, cruelty, and ambition of man, and covered it all over with these two narrow words, *hic jacet*." Although so busy a man, Raleigh found time to be a poet. Spenser calls him "the summer's nightingale," and George Puttenham, in his *Art of English Poesy* (1589), finds his "vein most lofty, insolent, and passionate." Puttenham used insolent in its old sense, uncommon; but this description is hardly less true, if we accept the word in its modern meaning. Raleigh's most notable verses, *The Lie*, are a challenge to the world, inspired by indignant pride and the weariness of life--the *saeva indignatio* of Swift. The same grave and caustic melancholy, the same disillusion marks his quaint poem, *The Pilgrimage*. It is remarkable how many of the verses among his few poetical remains are asserted in the MSS. or by tradition to have been "made by Sir Walter Raleigh the night before he was beheaded." Of one such poem the assertion is probably true, namely, the lines "found in his Bible in the gate-house at Westminster."

"Even such is Time, that takes in trust,  
 Our youth, our joys, our all we have,  
 And pays as but with earth and dust;  
 Who in the dark and silent grave,  
 When we have wandered all our ways,  
 Shuts up the story of our days;  
 But from this earth, this grave, this dust,  
 My God shall raise me up, I trust!"



The strictly literary prose of the Elizabethan period bore a small proportion to the verse. Many entire departments of prose literature were as yet undeveloped. Fiction was represented--outside of the *Arcadia* and *Euphues* already mentioned--chiefly by tales translated or imitated from Italian novelle. George Turberville's *Tragical Tales* (1566) was a collection of such stories, and William Paynter's *Palace of Pleasure* (1576-1577) a similar collection from Boccaccio's *Decameron* and the novels of Bandello. These translations are mainly of interest, as having furnished plots to the English dramatists. Lodge's *Rosalind* and Robert Greene's *Pandosto*, the sources respectively of Shakspeare's *As You Like It* and *Winter's Tale*, are short pastoral romances, not without prettiness in their artificial way. The satirical pamphlets of Thomas Nash and his fellows, against "Martin Marprelate," an anonymous writer, or {90} company of writers, who attacked the bishops, are not wanting in wit, but are so cumbered with fantastic whimsicalities, and so bound up with personal quarrels, that oblivion has covered them. The most noteworthy of them were Nash's *Piers Penniless's Supplication to the Devil*, Lyly's *Pap with a Hatchet*, and Greene's *Groat's Worth of Wit*. Of books which were not so much literature as the material of literature, mention may be made of the *Chronicle of England*, compiled by Ralph Holinshed in 1577. This was Shakspeare's English history, and its strong Lancastrian bias influenced Shakspeare in his representation of Richard III. and other characters in his historical plays. In his Roman tragedies Shakspeare followed closely Sir Thomas North's translation of Plutarch's *Lives*, made in 1579 from the French version of Jacques Amyot. Of books belonging to other departments than pure literature, the most important was Richard Hooker's *Ecclesiastical Polity*, the first four books of which appeared in 1594. This was a work on the philosophy of law and a defense, as against the Presbyterians, of the government of the English Church by bishops. No work of equal dignity and scope had yet been published in English prose. It was written in sonorous, stately and somewhat involved periods, in a Latin rather than an English idiom, and it influenced strongly the diction of later writers, such as Milton and Sir Thomas Browne. Had the *Ecclesiastical Polity* been written one hundred, or perhaps even fifty, {91} years earlier, it would doubtless have been written in Latin. The life of Francis Bacon, "the father of inductive philosophy," as he has been called--better, the founder of inductive logic--belongs to English history, and the bulk of his writings, in Latin and English, to the history of English philosophy. But his volume of *Essays* was a contribution to general literature. In their completed form they belong to the year 1625, but the first edition was printed in 1597 and contained only ten short essays, each of them rather a string of pregnant maxims--the text for an essay--than that developed treatment of a subject which we now understand by the word essay. They were, said their author, "as grains of salt that will rather give you an appetite than offend you with satiety." They were the first essays so-called in the language. "The word," said Bacon, "is late, but the thing is ancient." The word he took from the French *essais* of Montaigne, the first two books of which had been published in 1592. Bacon testified that his essays were the most popular of his writings because they "came home to men's business and bosoms." Their alternate title explains their character: *Counsels Civil and Moral*, that is, pieces of advice touching the conduct of life, "of a nature whereof men shall find much in experience, little in books." The essays contain the quintessence of Bacon's practical wisdom, his wide knowledge of the world of men. The truth and depth of his sayings, and the extent of ground which they cover, as well as the weighty compactness of his style, have given many of them the currency of proverbs. "Revenge is a kind of wild justice." "He that hath wife and children hath given hostages to fortune." "There is no excellent beauty that hath not some strangeness in the proportion." Bacon's reason was illuminated by a powerful imagination, and his noble English rises now and then, as in his essay *On Death*, into eloquence--the eloquence of pure thought, touched gravely and afar off by emotion. In general, the atmosphere of his intellect is that *lumen siccum* which he loved to commend, "not drenched or bloodied by the affections." Dr. Johnson said that the wine of Bacon's writings was a dry wine. A popular class of books in the 17th century were "characters" or "witty descriptions of the properties of sundry persons," such as the *Good Schoolmaster*, the *Clown*, the *Country Magistrate*; much as in some modern *Heads of the People* where Douglas Jerrold or Leigh Hunt sketches the *Medical Student*, the *Monthly Nurse*, etc. A still more modern instance of the kind is George Eliot's *Impressions of Theophrastus Such*, which derives its title from the Greek philosopher, Theophrastus, whose character-sketches were the original models of this kind of literature. The most popular character-book in Europe in the 17th century was La Bruyère's *Caractères*. But this was not published till 1588. In England the fashion had been set in 1614, by the *Characters* of Sir Thomas Overbury, who died by poison the year before his book was printed. One of Overbury's sketches--the *Fair and Happy Milkmaid*--is justly celebrated for its old-world sweetness and quaintness. "Her breath is her own, which scents all the year long of June, like a new-made hay-cock. She makes her hand hard with labor, and her heart soft with pity; and when winter evenings fall early, sitting at her merry wheel, she sings defiance to the giddy wheel of fortune. She bestows her year's wages at

next fair, and, in choosing her garments, counts no bravery in the world like decency. The garden and beehive are all her physic and surgery, and she lives the longer for it. She dares go alone and unfold sheep in the night, and fears no manner of ill, because she means none; yet to say truth, she is never alone, but is still accompanied with old songs, honest thoughts and prayers, but short ones. Thus lives she, and all her care is she may die in the spring-time, to have store of flowers stuck upon her winding-sheet." England was still merry England in the times of good Queen Bess, and rang with old songs, such as kept this milkmaid company; songs, said Bishop Joseph Hall, which were "sung to the wheel and sung unto the pail." Shakspeare loved their simple minstrelsy; he put some of them into the mouth of Ophelia, and scattered snatches of them through his plays, and wrote others like them himself:

"Now, good Cesario, but that piece of song,  
That old and antique song we heard last night,  
Methinks it did relieve my passion much,  
More than light airs and recollected terms  
Of these most brisk and giddy-paced times.  
Mark it, Cesario, it is old and plain.  
The knitters and the spinners in the sun  
And the free maids that weave their threads with bones  
Do use to chant it; it is silly sooth  
And dallies with the innocence of love  
Like the old age."

Many of these songs, so natural, fresh, and spontaneous, together with sonnets and other more elaborate forms of lyrical verse, were printed in miscellanies, such as the *Passionate Pilgrim*, *England's Helicon*, and *Davison's Poetical Rhapsody*. Some were anonymous, or were by poets of whom little more is known than their names. Others were by well-known writers, and others, again, were strewn through the plays of Lyly, Shakspeare, Jonson, Beaumont, Fletcher, and other dramatists. Series of love sonnets, like Spenser's *Amoretti* and Sidney's *Astrophel and Stella*, were written by Shakspeare, Daniel, Drayton, Drummond, Constable, Watson, and others, all dedicated to some mistress real or imaginary. Pastorals, too, were written in great number, such as William Browne's *Britannia's Pastorals* and *Shephera's Pipe* (1613-1616) and Marlowe's charmingly rocco little idyl, *The Passionate Shepherd to his Love*, which Shakspeare quoted in the *Merry Wives of Windsor*, and to which Sir Walter Raleigh wrote a reply. There were love stories in verse, like Arthur Brooke's *Romeo and Juliet* (the source of Shakspeare's tragedy), Marlowe's fragment, *Hero and Leander*, and Shakspeare's *Venus and Adonis*, and *Rape of Lucrece*, the first of these on an Italian and the other three on classical subjects, though handled in any thing but a classical manner. Wordsworth said finely of Shakspeare, that he "could not have written an epic: he would have died of a plethora of thought." Shakspeare's two narrative poems, indeed, are by no means models of their kind. The current of the story is choked at every turn, though it be with golden sand. It is significant of his dramatic habit of mind that dialogue and soliloquy usurp the place of narration, and that, in the *Rape of Lucrece* especially, the poet lingers over the analysis of motives and feelings, instead of hastening on with the action, as Chaucer, or any born story-teller, would have done. In Marlowe's poem there is the same spendthrift fancy, although not the same subtlety. In the first two divisions of the poem the story does, in some sort, get forward; but in the continuation, by George Chapman (who wrote the last four "sestiaids"), the path is utterly lost, "with woodbine and the gadding vine o'ergrown." One is reminded that modern poetry, if it has lost in richness, has gained in directness, when one compares any passage in Marlowe and Chapman's *Hero and Leander* with Byron's ringing lines:

"The wind is high on Helle's wave,  
As on that night of stormy water,  
When Love, who sent, forgot to save  
The young, the beautiful, the brave,  
The lonely hope of Sestos' daughter."

Marlowe's continuator, Chapman, wrote a number of plays, but he is best remembered by his royal translation of Homer, issued in parts from 1598-1615. This was not so much a literal translation of the Greek, as a great Elizabethan poem, inspired by Homer. It has Homer's fire, but not his simplicity; the

energy of Chapman's fancy kindling him to run beyond his text into all manner of figures and conceits. It was written, as has been said, as Homer would have written if he had been an Englishman of Chapman's time. Certainly all later versions--Pope's and Cowper's and Lord Derby's and Bryant's--seem pale against the glowing exuberance of Chapman's English. His verse was not the heroic line of ten syllables, chosen by most of the standard translators, but the long fourteen-syllabled measure, which degenerates easily into sing-song in the hands of a feeble metrist. In Chapman it is often harsh, but seldom tame, and in many passages it reproduces wonderfully the ocean-like roll of Homer's hexameters.

"From his bright helm and shield did burn a most unwearied fire,  
Like rich Autumnus' golden lamp, whose brightness men admire,  
Past all the other host of stars when, with his cheerful face,  
Fresh washed in lofty ocean waves, he doth the sky enchase."

Keats's fine ode, *On First Looking into Chapman's Homer*, is well-known. Fairfax's version of Tasso's *Jerusalem Delivered* (1600) is one of the best metrical translations in the language. The national pride in the achievements of Englishmen, by land and sea, found expression, not only in prose chronicles and in books, like Stow's *Survey of London*, and Harrison's *Description of England* (prefixed to Holinshed's *Chronicle*), but in long historical and descriptive poems, like William Warner's *Albion's England*, 1586; Samuel Daniel's *History of the Civil Wars*, 1595-1602; Michael Drayton's *Baron's Wars*, 1596, *England's Heroical Epistles*, 1598, and *Polyolbion*, 1613. The very plan of these works was fatal to their success. It is not easy to digest history and geography into poetry. Drayton was the most considerable poet of the three, but his *Polyolbion* was nothing more than "a gazeteer in rime," a topographical survey of England and Wales, with tedious personifications of rivers, mountains, and valleys, in thirty books and nearly one hundred thousand lines. It was Drayton who said of Marlowe, that he "had in him those brave translunary things that the first poets had;" and there are brave {98} things in Drayton, but they are only occasional passages, oases among dreary wastes of sand. His *Agincourt* is a spirited war-song, and his *Nymphidia*; or, *Court of Faery*, is not unworthy of comparison with Drake's *Culprit Fay*, and is interesting as bringing in Oberon and Robin Goodfellow, and the popular fairy lore of Shakspeare's *Midsummer Night's Dream*. The "well-linguaged Daniel," of whom Ben Jonson said that he was "a good honest man, but no poet," wrote, however, one fine meditative piece, his *Epistle to the Countess of Cumberland*, a sermon apparently on the text of the Roman poet Lucretius's famous passage in praise of philosophy,

"Suave mari magno, turbantibus aequora ventis," etc.

But the Elizabethan genius found its fullest and truest expression in the drama. It is a common phenomenon in the history of literature that some old literary form or mold will run along for centuries without having any thing poured into it worth keeping, until the moment comes when the genius of the time seizes it and makes it the vehicle of immortal thought and passion. Such was in England the fortune of the stage play. At a time when Chaucer was writing character-sketches that were really dramatic, the formal drama consisted of rude miracle plays that had no literary quality whatever. These were taken from the Bible and acted at first by the priests as illustrations of Scripture history and additions to the church service on feasts and saints' days. Afterward the town guilds, or incorporated trades, took hold of them and produced them annually on scaffolds in the open air. In some English cities, as Coventry and Chester, they continued to be performed almost to the close of the 16th century. And in the celebrated *Passion Play*, at Oberammergau, in Bavaria, we have an instance of a miracle play that has survived to our own day. These were followed by the moral plays, in which allegorical characters, such as Clergy, Lusty Juventus, Riches, Folly, and Good Demeanaunce, were the persons of the drama. The comic character in the miracle plays had been the Devil, and he was retained in some of the moralities side by side with the abstract vice, who became the clown or fool of Shaksperian comedy. The "formal Vice, Iniquity," as Shakspeare calls him, had it for his business to belabor the roaring Devil with his wooden sword

. . "with his dagger of lath  
In his rage and his wrath  
Cries 'Aha!' to the Devil,  
'Pare your nails, Goodman Evil!'"

He survives also in the harlequin of the pantomimes, and in Mr. Punch, of the puppet shows, who kills the Devil and carries him off on his back, when the latter is sent to fetch him to hell for his crimes.

Masques and interludes--the latter a species of short farce--were popular at the Court of Henry VIII. Elisabeth was often entertained at the universities or at the inns of court with Latin plays, or with translations from Seneca, Euripides, and Ariosto. Original comedies and tragedies began to be written, modeled upon Terence, and Seneca, and chronicle histories founded on the annals of English kings. There was a Master of the Revels at court, whose duty it was to select plays to be performed before the queen, and these were acted by the children of the Royal Chapel, or by the choir boys of St. Paul's Cathedral. These early plays are of interest to students of the history of the drama, and throw much light upon the construction of later plays, like Shakspeare's; but they are rude and inartistic, and without any literary quality. There were also private companies of actors maintained by wealthy noblemen, like the Earl of Leicester, and bands of strolling players, who acted in inn-yards and bear-gardens. It was not until stationary theaters were built and stock companies of actors regularly licensed and established, that any plays were produced which deserve the name of literature. In 1576 the first play-house was built in London. This was the Black Friars, which was located within the liberties of the dissolved monastery of the Black Friars, in order to be outside of the jurisdiction of the Mayor and Corporation, who were Puritan, and determined in their opposition to the stage. For the same reason the {101} Theater and the Curtain were built in the same year, outside the city walls in Shoreditch. Later the Rose, the Globe, and the Swan, were erected on the Bankside, across the Thames, and play-goers resorting to them were accustomed to "take boat." These early theaters were of the rudest construction. The six-penny spectators, or "groundlings," stood in the yard, or pit, which had neither floor nor roof. The shilling spectators sat on the stage, where they were accommodated with stools and tobacco pipes, and whence they chaffed the actors or the "opposed rascality" in the yard. There was no scenery, and the female parts were taken by boys. Plays were acted in the afternoon. A placard, with the letters "Venice," or "Rome," or whatever, indicated the place of the action. With such rude appliances must Shakspeare bring before his audience the midnight battlements of Elsinore and the moonlit garden of the Capulets. The dramatists had to throw themselves upon the imagination of their public, and it says much for the imaginative temper of the public of that day, that it responded to the appeal. It suffered the poet to transport it over wide intervals of space and time, and "with aid of some few foot and half-foot words, fight over York and Lancaster's long jars." Pedantry undertook, even at the very beginnings of the Elisabethan drama, to shackle it with the so-called rules of Aristotle, or classical unities of time and place, to make it keep violent action off the stage and comedy distinct from tragedy. But the playwrights appealed from the critics to the truer sympathies of the audience, and they decided for freedom and action, rather than restraint and recitation. Hence our national drama is of Shakspeare, and not of Racine. By 1603 there were twelve play-houses in London in full blast, although the city then numbered only one hundred and fifty thousand inhabitants. Fresh plays were produced every year. The theater was more to the Englishman of that time than it has ever been before or since. It was his club, his novel, his newspaper all in one. No great drama has ever flourished apart from a living stage, and it was fortunate that the Elisabethan dramatists were, almost all of them, actors and familiar with stage effect. Even the few exceptions, like Beaumont and Fletcher, who were young men of good birth and fortune, and not dependent on their pens, were probably intimate with the actors, lived in a theatrical atmosphere, and knew practically how plays should be put on. It had now become possible to earn a livelihood as an actor and playwright. Richard Burbage and Edward Alleyn, the leading actors of their generation, made large fortunes. Shakspeare himself made enough from his share in the profits of the Globe to retire with a competence, some seven years before his death, and purchase a handsome property in his native Stratford. Accordingly, shortly after 1580, a number of men of real talent began to write for the stage as a career. These were young graduates of the universities, Marlowe, Greene, Peele, Kyd, Lyly, Lodge, and others, who came up to town and led a Bohemian life as actors and playwrights. Most of them were wild and dissipated, and ended in wretchedness. Peele died of a disease brought on by his evil courses; Greene, in extreme destitution, from a surfeit of Rhenish wine and pickled herring; and Marlowe was stabbed in a tavern brawl. The Euphuist Lyly produced eight plays from 1584 to 1601. They were written for court entertainments, in prose and mostly on mythological subjects. They have little dramatic power, but the dialogue is brisk and vivacious, and there are several pretty songs in them. All the characters talk Euphuism. The best of these was Alexander and Campaspe, the plot of which is briefly as follows. Alexander has fallen in love with his beautiful captive, Campaspe, and employs the artist Apelles to paint her portrait. During the sittings, Apelles becomes enamored of his subject and declares his passion, which

is returned. Alexander discovers their secret, but magnanimously forgives the treason and joins the lovers' hands. The situation is a good one, and capable of strong treatment in the hands of a real dramatist. But Lyly slips smoothly over the crisis of the action and, in place of passionate scenes, gives {104} us clever discourses and soliloquies, or, at best, a light interchange of question and answer, full of conceits, repartees, and double meanings. For example:

"Apel. Whom do you love best in the world?"

"Camp. He that made me last in the world.

"Apel. That was a God.

"Camp. I had thought it had been a man," etc.

Lyly's service to the drama consisted in his introduction of an easy and sparkling prose as the language of high comedy, and Shakspeare's indebtedness to the fashion thus set is seen in such passages as the wit combats between Benedict and Beatrice in *Much Ado about Nothing*, greatly superior as they are to any thing of the kind in Lyly. The most important of the dramatists, who were Shakspeare's forerunners, or early contemporaries, was Christopher or--as he was familiarly called--Kit Marlowe. Born in the same year with Shakspeare (1564), he died in 1593, at which date his great successor is thought to have written no original plays, except the *Comedy of Errors* and *Love's Labour's Lost*. Marlowe first popularized blank verse as the language of tragedy in his *Tamburlaine*, written before 1587, and in subsequent plays he brought it to a degree of strength and flexibility which left little for Shakspeare to do but to take it as he found it. *Tamburlaine* was a crude, violent piece, full of exaggeration and bombast, but with passages here and there of splendid declamation, justifying Ben Jonson's phrase, "Marlowe's mighty line." Jonson, however, ridiculed, in his *Discoveries*, the "scenical strutting and furious vociferation" of Marlowe's hero; and Shakspeare put a quotation from *Tamburlaine* into the mouth of his ranting Pistol. Marlowe's *Edward II.* was the most regularly constructed and evenly written of his plays. It was the best historical drama on the stage before Shakspeare, and not undeserving of the comparison which it has provoked with the latter's *Richard II.* But the most interesting of Marlowe's plays, to a modern reader, is the *Tragical History of Doctor Faustus*. The subject is the same as in Goethe's *Faust*, and Goethe, who knew the English play, spoke of it as greatly planned. The opening of Marlowe's *Faustus* is very similar to Goethe's. His hero, wearied with unprofitable studies, and filled with a mighty lust for knowledge and the enjoyment of life, sells his soul to the Devil in return for a few years of supernatural power. The tragic irony of the story might seem to lie in the frivolous use which Faustus makes of his dearly bought power, wasting it in practical jokes and feats of legerdemain; but of this Marlowe was probably unconscious. The love story of Margaret, which is the central point of Goethe's drama, is entirely wanting in Marlowe's, and so is the subtle conception of Goethe's Mephistophiles. Marlowe's handling of the supernatural is materialistic and downright, as befitted an age which believed in witchcraft. The greatest part of the English *Faustus* is the last scene, in which the agony and terror of suspense with which the magician awaits the stroke of the clock that signals his doom are powerfully drawn.

"O lente, lente currite, noctis equi!"

The stars move still, time runs, the clock will strike.

O soul, be changed into little water-drops,

And fall into the ocean, ne'er be found!"

Marlowe's genius was passionate and irregular. He had no humor, and the comic portions of *Faustus* are scenes of low buffoonery.

George Peele's masterpiece, *David and Bethsabe*, was also, in many respects, a fine play, though its beauties were poetic rather than dramatic, consisting not in the characterization--which is feeble--but in the eastern luxuriance of the imagery. There is one noble chorus--

"O proud revolt of a presumptuous man," etc.

which reminds one of passages in Milton's *Samson Agonistes*, and occasionally Peele rises to such high Aeschylean audacities as this:

"At him the thunder shall discharge his bolt,  
And his fair spouse, with bright and fiery wings,  
Sit ever burning on his hateful bones."

Robert Greene was a very unequal writer. His plays are slovenly and careless in construction, and he puts classical allusions into the mouths of milkmaids and serving boys, with the grotesque pedantry and want of keeping common among the playwrights of the early stage. He has, notwithstanding, in his comedy parts, more natural lightness and grace than either Marlowe or Peele. In his *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay*, and his *Pinner of Wakefield*, there is a fresh breath, as of the green English country, in such passages as the description of Oxford, the scene at Harleston Fair, and the picture of the dairy in the keeper's lodge at merry Fressingfield. In all these ante-Shaksperian dramatists there was a defect of art proper to the first comers in a new literary departure. As compared not only with Shakspeare, but with later writers, who had the inestimable advantage of his example, their work was full of imperfection, hesitation, experiment. Marlowe was probably, in native genius, the equal at least of Fletcher or Webster, but his plays, as a whole, are certainly not equal to theirs. They wrote in a more developed state of the art. But the work of this early school settled the shape which the English drama was to take. It fixed the practice and traditions of the national theater. It decided that the drama was to deal with the whole of life, the real and the ideal, tragedy and comedy, prose and verse, in the same play, without limitations of time, place, and action. It decided that the English play was to be an action, and not a dialogue, bringing boldly upon the mimic scene feasts, dances, processions, hangings, riots, plays within plays, drunken revels, beatings, battle, murder, and sudden death. It established blank verse, with occasional riming couplets at the close of a scene or of a long speech, as the language of the tragedy and high comedy parts, and prose as the language of the low comedy and "business" parts. And it introduced songs, a feature of which Shakspeare made exquisite use. Shakspeare, indeed, like all great poets, invented no new form of literature, but touched old forms to finer purposes, refining every thing, discarding nothing. Even the old chorus and dumb show he employed, though sparingly, as also the old jig, or comic song, which the clown used to give between the acts. Of the life of William Shakspeare, the greatest dramatic poet of the world, so little is known that it has been possible for ingenious persons to construct a theory--and support it with some show of reason--that the plays which pass under his name were really written by Bacon or some one else. There is no danger of this paradox ever making serious headway, for the historical evidence that Shakspeare wrote Shakspeare's plays, though not overwhelming, is sufficient. But it is startling to think that the greatest creative genius of his day, or perhaps of all time, was suffered to slip out of life so quietly that his title to his own works could even be questioned only two hundred and fifty years after the event. That the single authorship of the Homeric poems should be doubted is not so strange, for Homer is almost prehistoric. But Shakspeare was a modern Englishman, and at the time of his death the first English colony in America was already nine years old. The important known facts of his life can be told almost in a sentence. He was born at Stratford-on-Avon in 1564, married when he was eighteen, went to London probably in 1587, and became an actor, playwright, and stockholder in the company which owned the Blackfriars and the Globe Theaters. He seemingly prospered in his calling and retired about 1609 to Stratford, where he lived in the house that he had bought some years before, and where he died in 1616. His *Venus and Adonis* was printed in 1593, the *Rape of Lucrece* in 1594, and his *Sonnets* in 1609. So far as is known, only eighteen of the thirty-seven plays generally attributed to Shakspeare were printed during his life-time. These were printed singly, in quarto shape, and were little more than stage books, or librettos. The first collected edition of his works was the so-called "First Folio" of 1623, published by his fellow-actors, Heming and Condell. No contemporary of Shakspeare thought it worth while to write a life of the stage-player. There are a number of references to him in the literature of the time; some generous, as in Ben Jonson's well-known verses; others singularly unappreciative, like Webster's mention of "the right happy and copious industry of Master Shakspeare." But all these together do not begin to amount to the sum of what was said about Spenser, or Sidney, or Raleigh, or Ben Jonson. There is, indeed, nothing to show that his contemporaries understood what a man they had among them in the person of "Our English Terence, Mr. Will Shakespeare!" The age, for the rest, was not a self-conscious one, nor greatly given to review writing and literary biography. Nor is there enough of self-revelation in Shakspeare's plays to aid the reader in forming a notion of the man. He lost his identity completely in the characters of his plays, as it is the duty of a dramatic writer to do. His sonnets have been

examined carefully in search of internal evidence as to his character and life, but the speculations founded upon them have been more ingenious than convincing. Shakspeare probably began by touching up old plays. Henry VI. and the bloody tragedy of Titus Andronicus, if Shakspeare's at all, are doubtless only his revision of pieces already on the stage. The Taming of the Shrew seems to be an old play worked over by Shakspeare and some other dramatist, and traces of another hand are thought to be visible in parts of Henry VIII., Pericles, and Timon of Athens. Such partnerships were common among the Elisabethan dramatists, the most illustrious example being the long association of Beaumont and Fletcher. The plays in the First Folio were divided into histories, comedies, and tragedies, and it will be convenient to notice them briefly in that order. It was a stirring time when the young adventurer came to London to try his fortune. Elisabeth had finally thrown down the gage of battle to Catholic Europe, by the execution of Mary Stuart, in 1587. The following year saw the destruction of the colossal Armada, which Spain had sent to revenge Mary's death, and hard upon these events followed the gallant exploits of Grenville, Essex, and Raleigh. That Shakspeare shared the exultant patriotism of the times, and the sense of their aloofness from the continent of Europe, which was now born in the breasts of Englishmen, is evident from many a passage in his plays.

"This happy breed of men, this little world,  
This precious stone set in a silver sea,  
This blessed plot, this earth, this realm, this England,  
This land of such dear souls, this dear, dear land,  
England, bound in with the triumphant sea!"

His English histories are ten in number. Of these King John and Henry VIII. are isolated plays. The others form a consecutive series, in the following order: Richard III., the two parts of Henry IV., Henry V., the three parts of Henry VI., and Richard III. This series may be divided into two, each forming a tetralogy, or group of four plays. In the first the subject is the rise of the house of Lancaster. But the power of the Red Rose was founded in usurpation. In the second group, accordingly, comes the Nemesis, in the civil wars of the Roses, reaching their catastrophe in the downfall of both Lancaster and York, and the tyranny of Gloucester. The happy conclusion is finally reached in the last play of the series, when this new usurper is overthrown in turn, and Henry VII., the first Tudor sovereign, ascends the throne, and restores the Lancastrian inheritance, purified, by bloody atonement, from the stain of Richard II.'s murder. These eight plays are, as it were, the eight acts of one great drama; and if such a thing were possible, they should be represented on successive nights, like the parts of a Greek trilogy. In order of composition, the second group came first. Henry VI. is strikingly inferior to the others. Richard III. is a good acting play, and its popularity has been sustained by a series of great tragedians, who have taken the part of the king. But, in a literary sense, it is unequal to Richard II., or the two parts of Henry IV. The latter is unquestionably Shakspeare's greatest historical tragedy, and it contains his master-creation in the region of low comedy, the immortal Falstaff. The constructive art with which Shakspeare shaped history into drama is well seen in comparing his King John with the two plays on that subject, which were already on the stage. These, like all the other old "Chronicle histories," such as Thomas Lord Cromwell and the Famous Victories of Henry V., follow a merely chronological, or biographical, order, giving events loosely, as they occurred, without any unity of effect, or any reference to their bearing on the catastrophe. Shakspeare's order was logical. He compressed and selected, disregarding the fact of history oftentimes, in favor of the higher truth of fiction; bringing together a crime and its punishment, as cause and effect, even though they had no such relation in the chronicle, and were separated, perhaps, by many years. Shakspeare's first two comedies were experiments. Love's Labour's Lost was a play of manners, with hardly any plot. It brought together a number of humors, that is, oddities and affectations of various sorts, and played them off on one another, as Ben Jonson afterward did in his comedies of humor. Shakspeare never returned to this type of play, unless, perhaps, in the Taming of the Shrew. There the story turned on a single "humor," Katherine's bad temper, just as the story in Jonson's Silent Woman turned on Morose's hatred of noise. The Taming of the Shrew is, therefore, one of the least Shaksperian of Shakspeare's plays; a bourgeois, domestic comedy, with a very narrow interest. It belongs to the school of French comedy, like Moliere's *Malade Imaginaire*, not to the romantic comedy of Shakspeare and Fletcher. The Comedy of Errors was an experiment of an exactly opposite kind. It was a play, purely of incident; a farce, in which the main improbability being granted, namely, that the twin Antipholi and twin Dromios are so alike that they cannot be distinguished, all the amusing complications follow naturally enough. There is little character-drawing in the play. Any two pairs of twins, in the same predicament, would be equally droll. The fun lies in the situation. This was a comedy

of the Latin school, and resembled the *Menaechmi* of Plautus. Shakspeare never returned to this type of play, though there is an element of "errors" in *Midsummer Night's Dream*. In the *Two Gentlemen of Verona* he finally hit upon that species of romantic comedy which he may be said to have invented or created out of the scattered materials at hand in the works of his predecessors. In this play, as in the *Merchant of Venice*, *Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Much Ado about Nothing*, *As You Like It*, *Twelfth Night*, *Winters Tale*, *All's Well that Ends Well*, *Measure for Measure*, and the *Tempest*, the plan of construction is as follows. There is one main intrigue carried out by the high comedy characters, and a secondary intrigue, or underplot, by the low comedy characters. The former is by no means purely comic, but admits the presentation of the noblest motives, the strongest passions, and the most delicate graces of romantic poetry. In some of the plays it has a prevailing lightness and gayety, as in *As You Like It* and *Twelfth Night*. In others, like *Measure for Measure*, it is barely saved from becoming tragedy by the happy close. Shylock certainly remains a tragic figure, even to the end, and a play like *Winter's Tale*, in which the painful situation is prolonged for years, is only technically a comedy. Such dramas, indeed, were called, on many of the title-pages of the time, "tragi-comedies." The low comedy interlude, on the other hand, was broadly comic. It was cunningly interwoven with the texture of the play, sometimes loosely, and by way of variety or relief, as in the episode of *Touchstone* and *Audrey*, in *As You Like It*; sometimes closely, as in the case of *Dogberry* and *Verges*, in *Much Ado about Nothing*, where the blundering of the watch is made to bring about the denouement of the main action. The *Merry Wives of Windsor* is an exception to this plan of construction. It is Shakspeare's only play of contemporary, middle-class English life, and is written almost throughout in prose. It is his only pure comedy, except the *Taming of the Shrew*. Shakspeare did not abandon comedy when writing tragedy, though he turned it to a new account. The two species graded into one another. Thus *Cymbeline* is, in its fortunate ending, really as much of a comedy as *Winter's Tale*--to which its plot bears a resemblance--and is only technically a tragedy, because it contains a violent death. In some of the tragedies, as *Macbeth* and *Julius Caesar*, the comedy element is reduced to a minimum. But in others, as *Romeo and Juliet*, and *Hamlet*, it heightens the tragic feeling by the irony of contrast. Akin to this is the use to which Shakspeare put the old *Vice*, or *Clown*, of the moralities. The *Fool* in *Lear*, *Touchstone* in *As You Like It*, and *Thersites* in *Troilus and Cressida*, are a sort of parody of the function of the Greek chorus, commenting the action of the drama with scraps of bitter, or half-crazy, philosophy, and wonderful gleams of insight into the depths of man's nature. The earliest of Shakspeare's tragedies, unless *Titus Andronicus* be his, was, doubtless, *Romeo and Juliet*, which is full of the passion and poetry of youth and of first love. It contains a large proportion of riming lines, which is usually a sign in Shakspeare of early work. He dropped rime more and more in his later plays, and his blank verse grew freer and more varied in its pauses and the number of its feet. *Romeo and Juliet* is also unique, among his tragedies, in this respect, that the catastrophe is brought about by a fatality, as in the Greek drama. It was Shakspeare's habit to work out his tragic conclusions from within, through character, rather than through external chances. This is true of all the great tragedies of his middle life, *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *Lear*, *Macbeth*, in every one of which the catastrophe is involved in the character and actions of the hero. This is so, in a special sense, in *Hamlet*, the subtlest of all Shakspeare's plays, and if not his masterpiece, at any rate the one which has most attracted and puzzled the greatest minds. It is observable that in Shakspeare's comedies there is no one central figure, but that, in passing into tragedy, he intensified and concentrated the attention upon a single character. This difference is seen, even in the naming of the plays; the tragedies always take their titles from their heroes, the comedies never. Somewhat later, probably, than the tragedies already mentioned, were the three Roman plays, *Julius Caesar*, *Coriolanus*, and *Antony and Cleopatra*. It is characteristic of Shakspeare that he invented the plot of none of his plays, but took material that he found at hand. In these Roman tragedies, he followed *Plutarch* closely, and yet, even in so doing, gave, if possible, a greater evidence of real creative power than when he borrowed a mere outline of a story from some Italian novelist. It is most instructive to compare *Julius Caesar* with *Ben Jonson's Catiline and Sejanus*. *Jonson* was careful not to go beyond his text. In *Catiline* he translates almost literally the whole of *Cicero's* first oration against *Catiline*. *Sejanus* is a mosaic of passages, from *Tacitus* and *Suetonius*. There is none of this dead learning in Shakspeare's play. Having grasped the conception of the characters of *Brutus*, *Cassius*, and *Mark Anthony*, as *Plutarch* gave them, he pushed them out into their consequences in every word and act, so independently of his original, and yet so harmoniously with it, that the reader knows that he is reading history, and needs no further warrant for it than Shakspeare's own. *Timon of Athens* is the least agreeable and most monotonous of Shakspeare's undoubted tragedies, and *Troilus and Cressida*, said *Coleridge*, is the hardest to characterize. The figures of the old Homeric world fare but hardly under the glaring light of modern standards of morality which Shakspeare turns upon them. *Ajax* becomes a stupid bully, *Ulysses* a crafty politician, and



swift-footed Achilles a vain and sulky chief of faction. In losing their ideal remoteness, the heroes of the Iliad lose their poetic quality, and the lover of Homer experiences an unpleasant disenchantment.

It was customary in the 18th century to speak of Shakspeare as a rude though prodigious genius. Even Milton could describe him as "warbling his native wood-notes wild." But a truer criticism, beginning in England with Coleridge, has shown that he was also a profound artist. It is true that he wrote for his audiences, and that his art is not every-where and at all points perfect. But a great artist will contrive, as Shakspeare did, to reconcile practical exigencies, like those of the public stage, with the finer requirements of his art. Strained interpretations have been put upon this or that item in Shakspeare's plays; and yet it is generally true that some deeper reason can be assigned for his method in a given case than that "the audience liked puns," or, "the audience liked ghosts." Compare, for example, his delicate management of the supernatural with Marlowe's procedure in Faustus. Shakspeare's age believed in witches, elves, and apparitions; and yet there is always something shadowy or allegorical in his use of such machinery. The ghost in Hamlet is merely an embodied suspicion. Banquo's wraith, which is invisible to all but Macbeth, is the haunting of an evil conscience. The witches in the same play are but the promptings of ambition, thrown into a human shape, so as to become actors in the drama. In the same way, the fairies in Midsummer Night's Dream are the personified caprices of the lovers, and they are unseen by the human characters, whose likes and dislikes they control, save in the instance where Bottom is "translated" (that is, becomes mad) and has sight of the invisible world. So in the Tempest, Ariel is the spirit of the air and Caliban of the earth, ministering, with more or less of unwillingness, to man's necessities.

Shakspeare is the most universal of writers. He touches more men at more points than Homer, or Dante, or Goethe. The deepest wisdom, the sweetest poetry, the widest range of character, are combined in his plays. He made the English language an organ of expression unexcelled in the history of literature. Yet he is not an English poet simply, but a world-poet. Germany has made him her own, and the Latin races, though at first hindered in a true appreciation of him by the canons of classical taste, have at length learned to know him. An ever-growing mass of Shaksperian literature, in the way of comment and interpretation, critical, textual, historical, or illustrative, testifies to the durability and growth of his fame. Above all, his plays still keep, and probably always will keep, the stage. It is common to speak of Shakspeare and the other Elisabethan dramatists as if they stood, in some sense, on a level. But in truth there is an almost measureless distance between him and all his contemporaries. The rest shared with him in the mighty influences of the age. Their plays are touched here and there with the power and splendor of which they were all joint heirs. But, as a whole, they are obsolete. They live in books, but not in the hearts and on the tongues of men. The most remarkable of the dramatists contemporary with Shakspeare was Ben Jonson, whose robust figure is in striking contrast with the other's gracious impersonality. Jonson was nine years younger than Shakspeare. He was educated at Westminster School, served as a soldier in the low countries, became an actor in Henslowe's company, and was twice imprisoned--once for killing a fellow-actor in a duel, and once for his part in the comedy of Eastward Hoe, which gave offense to King James. He lived down to the times of Charles I. (1635), and became the acknowledged arbiter of English letters and the center of convivial wit combats at the Mermaid, the Devil, and other famous London taverns.

"What things have we seen  
Done at the Mermaid; heard words that have been  
So nimble and so full of subtle flame,  
As if that every one from whom they came  
Had meant to put his whole wit in a jest,  
And had resolved to live a fool the rest  
Of his dull life."

The inscription on his tomb, in Westminster Abbey, is simply

"O rare Ben Jonson!"

Jonson's comedies were modeled upon the *vetus comædia* of Aristophanes, which was satirical in purpose, and they belonged to an entirely different school from Shakspeare's. They were classical and not romantic, and were pure comedies, admitting no admixture of tragic motives. There is hardly one lovely or beautiful

character in the entire range of his dramatic creations. They were comedies not of character, in the high sense of the word, but of manners or humors. His design was to lash the follies and vices of the day, and his dramatis persona consisted for the most part of gulls, impostors, fops, cowards, swaggering braggarts, and "Pauls men." In his first play, *Every Man in his Humor* (acted in 1598), in *Every Man Out of his Humor*, *Bartholomew Fair*, and indeed, in all of his comedies, his subject was the "spongy humors of the time," that is, the fashionable affectations, the whims, oddities, and eccentric developments of London life. His procedure was to bring together a number of these fantastic humorists, to play them off upon each other, involve them in all manner of comical misadventures, and render them utterly ridiculous and contemptible. There was thus a perishable element in his art, for manners change; and however effective this exposure of contemporary affectations may have been, before an audience of Jonson's day, it is as hard for a modern reader to detect his points as it will be for a reader two hundred years hence to understand the satire upon the aesthetic craze in such pieces of the present day, as *Patience or the Colonel*. Nevertheless, a patient reader, with the help of copious foot-notes, can gradually put together for himself an image of that world of obsolete humors in which Jonson's comedy dwells, and can admire the dramatist's solid good {122} sense, his great learning, his skill in construction, and the astonishing fertility of his invention. His characters are not revealed from within, like Shakspeare's, but built up painfully from outside by a succession of minute, laborious particulars. The difference will be plainly manifest if such a character as *Slender*, in the *Merry Wives of Windsor*, be compared with any one of the inexhaustible variety of idiots in Jonson's plays; with *Master Stephen*, for example, in *Every Man in his Humor*; or, if *Falstaff* be put side by side with *Captain Bobadil*, in the same comedy, perhaps Jonson's masterpiece in the way of comic caricature. *Cynthia's Revels* was a satire on the courtiers and the *Poetaster* on Jonson's literary enemies. The *Alchemist* was an exposure of quackery, and is one of his best comedies, but somewhat overweighted with learning. *Volpone* is the most powerful of all his dramas, but is a harsh and disagreeable piece; and the state of society which it depicts is too revolting for comedy. The *Silent Woman* is, perhaps, the easiest of all Jonson's plays for a modern reader to follow and appreciate. There is a distinct plot to it, the situation is extremely ludicrous, and the emphasis is laid upon single humor or eccentricity, as in some of Moliere's lighter comedies, like *Le Malade Imaginaire*, or *Le Médecin malgré lui*. In spite of his heaviness in drama, Jonson had a light enough touch in lyric poetry. His songs have not the careless sweetness of Shakspeare's, but they have a grace of their own. Such pieces as his *Love's Triumph*, *Hymn to Diana*, *The Noble Mind*, and the adaptation from *Philostratus*,

"Drink to me only with thine eyes,"

and many others entitle their author to rank among the first English lyrists. Some of these occur in his two collections of miscellaneous verse, the *Forest and Underwoods*; others in the numerous masques which he composed. These were a species of entertainment, very popular at the court of James I., combining dialogue with music, intricate dances, and costly scenery. Jonson left an unfinished pastoral drama, the *Sad Shepherd*, which, though not equal to Fletcher's *Faithful Shepherdess*, contains passages of great beauty, one, especially, descriptive of the shepherdess

"Earine,  
 Who had her very being and her name  
 With the first buds and breathings of the spring,  
 Born with the primrose and the violet  
 And earliest roses blown."

1. Ward's *History of English Dramatic Literature*.
2. Palgrave's *Golden Treasury of Songs and Lyrics*.
3. *The Courtly Poets from Raleigh to Montrose*. Edited by J. Hannah.
4. *Sir Philip Sidney's Arcadia*. (First and Second Books.)
5. *Bacon's Essays*. Edited by W. Aldis Wright
6. *The Cambridge Shakspeare*. [Clark & Wright.]
7. *Charles Lamb's Specimens of English Dramatic Poets*.
8. *Ben Jonson's Volpone and Silent Woman*. (Cunningham's or Gifford's Edition.)

Francis Beaumont. Letter to Ben Jonson.

## CHAPTER IV.

### THE AGE OF MILTON. 1608-1674

The Elizabethan age proper closed with the death of the queen, and the accession of James I., in 1603, but the literature of the fifty years following was quite as rich as that of the half-century that had passed since she came to the throne, in 1557. The same qualities of thought and style which had marked the writers of her reign, prolonged themselves in their successors, through the reigns of the first two Stuart kings and the Commonwealth. Yet there was a change in spirit. Literature is only one of the many forms in which the national mind expresses itself. In periods of political revolution, literature, leaving the serene air of fine art, partakes the violent agitation of the times. There were seeds of civil and religious discord in Elizabethan England. As between the two parties in the Church there was a compromise and a truce rather than a final settlement. The Anglican doctrine was partly Calvinistic and partly Arminian. The form of government was Episcopal, but there was a large body of Presbyterians in the Church who desired a change. In the ritual and ceremonies many "rags of popery" had been retained, which the extreme reformers wished to tear away. But Elizabeth was a worldly-minded woman, impatient of theological disputes. Though circumstances had made her the champion of Protestantism in Europe, she kept many Catholic notions, disapproved, for example, of the marriage of priests, and hated sermons. She was jealous of her prerogative in the State, and in the Church she enforced uniformity. The authors of the Martin Marprelate pamphlets against the bishops, were punished by death or imprisonment. While the queen lived things were kept well together and England was at one in face of the common foe. Admiral Howard, who commanded the English naval forces against the Armada, was a Catholic. But during the reigns of James I. (1603-1625) and Charles I. (1625-1649) Puritanism grew stronger through repression. "England," says the historian Green, "became the people of a book, and that book the Bible." The power of the king was used to impose the power of the bishops upon the English and Scotch Churches until religious discontent became also political discontent, and finally overthrew the throne. The writers of this period divided more and more into two hostile camps. On the side of Church and king was the bulk of the learning and genius of the time. But on the side of free religion and the Parliament were the stern conviction, the fiery zeal, the excited imagination of English Puritanism. The spokesman of this movement was Milton, whose great figure dominates the literary history of his generation, as Shakspeare's does of the generation preceding. The drama went on in the course marked out for it by Shakspeare's example, until the theaters were closed, by Parliament, in 1642. Of the Stuart dramatists, the most important were Beaumont and Fletcher, all of whose plays were produced during the reign of James I. These were fifty-three in number, but only thirteen of them were joint productions. Francis Beaumont was twenty years younger than Shakspeare, and died a few years before him. He was the son of a judge of the Common Pleas. His collaborator, John Fletcher, a son of the bishop of London, was five years older than Beaumont, and survived him nine years. He was much the more prolific of the two and wrote alone some forty plays. Although the life of one of these partners was contemporaneous with Shakspeare's, their works exhibit a later phase of the dramatic art. The Stuart dramatists followed the lead of Shakspeare rather than of Ben Jonson. Their plays, like the former's, belong to the romantic drama. They present a poetic and idealized version of life, deal with the highest passions and the wildest buffoonery, and introduce a great variety of those daring situations and incidents which we agree to call romantic. But while Shakspeare seldom or never overstepped the modesty of nature, his successors ran into every license. They sought to stimulate the jaded appetite of their audience by exhibiting monstrosities of character, unnatural lusts, subtleties of crime, virtues and vices both in excess. Beaumont and Fletcher's plays are much easier and more agreeable reading than Ben Jonson's. Though often loose in their plots and without that consistency in the development of their characters which distinguished Jonson's more conscientious workmanship, they are full of graceful dialogue and beautiful poetry. Dryden said that after the Restoration two of their plays were acted for one of Shakspeare's or Jonson's throughout the year, and he added, that they "understood and imitated the conversation of gentlemen much better, whose wild debaucheries and quickness of wit in repartees no poet can ever paint as they have done." Wild debauchery was certainly not the mark of a gentleman in Shakspeare, nor was it altogether so in Beaumont and Fletcher. Their gentlemen are gallant and passionate lovers, gay cavaliers, generous, courageous, courteous--according to the fashion

of their times--and sensitive on the point of honor. They are far superior to the cold-blooded rakes of Dryden and the Restoration comedy. Still the manners and language in Beaumont and Fletcher's plays are extremely licentious, and it is not hard to sympathize with the objections to the theater expressed by the Puritan writer, William Prynne, who, after denouncing the long hair of the cavaliers in his tract, *The {129} Unloveliness of Lovelocks*, attacked the stage, in 1633, with *Histrion-mastix: the Player's Scourge*; an offense for which he was fined, imprisoned, pilloried, and had his ears cropped. Coleridge said that Shakspeare was coarse, but never gross. He had the healthy coarseness of nature herself. But Beaumont and Fletcher's pages are corrupt. Even their chaste women are immodest in language and thought. They use not merely that frankness of speech which was a fashion of the times, but a profusion of obscene imagery which could not proceed from a pure mind. Chastity with them is rather a bodily accident than a virtue of the heart, says Coleridge. Among the best of their light comedies are *The Chances*, *The Scornful Lady*, *The Spanish Curate*, and *Rule a Wife and Have a Wife*. But far superior to these are their tragedies and tragicomedies, *The Maia's Tragedy*, *Philaster*, *A King and No King*--all written jointly--and *Valentinian and Thierry and Theodoret*, written by Fletcher alone, but perhaps, in part, sketched out by Beaumont. The tragic masterpiece of Beaumont and Fletcher is *The Maid's Tragedy*, a powerful but repulsive play, which sheds a singular light not only upon its authors' dramatic methods, but also upon the attitude toward royalty favored by the doctrine of the divine right of kings, which grew up under the Stuarts. The heroine, Evadne, has been in secret a mistress of the king, who marries her to Amintor, a gentleman of his court, because, as she explains to her bridegroom, on the wedding night,

"I must have one  
To father children, and to bear the name  
Of husband to me, that my sin may be  
More honorable."

This scene is, perhaps, the most affecting and impressive in the whole range of Beaumont and Fletcher's drama. Yet when Evadne names the king as her paramour, Amintor exclaims:

"O thou hast named a word that wipes away  
All thoughts revengeful. In that sacred name  
'The king' there lies a terror. What frail man  
Dares lift his hand against it? Let the gods  
Speak to him when they please; till when, let us  
Suffer and wait."

And the play ends with the words

"On lustful kings,  
Unlooked-for sudden deaths from heaven are sent,  
But cursed is he that is their instrument."

Aspatia, in this tragedy, is a good instance of Beaumont and Fletcher's pathetic characters. She is troth-plight wife to Amintor, and after he, by the king's command, has forsaken her for Evadne, she disguises herself as a man, provokes her unfaithful lover to a duel, and dies under his sword, blessing the hand that killed her. This is a common type in Beaumont and Fletcher, and was drawn originally from Shakspeare's *Ophelia*. All their good women have the instinctive fidelity of a dog, and a superhuman patience and devotion, a "gentle forlornness" under wrongs, which is painted with an almost feminine tenderness. In *Philaster*, or *Love Lies Bleeding*, Euphrasia, conceiving a hopeless passion for Philaster--who is in love with Arethusa--puts on the dress of a page and enters his service. He employs her to carry messages to his lady-love, just as Viola, in *Twelfth Night*, is sent by the Duke to Olivia. Philaster is persuaded by slanderers that his page and his lady have been unfaithful to him, and in his jealous fury he wounds Euphrasia with his sword. Afterward, convinced of the boy's fidelity, he asks forgiveness, whereto Euphrasia replies,

"Alas, my lord, my life is not a thing  
Worthy your noble thoughts. 'Tis not a life,

"Tis but a piece of childhood thrown away."

Beaumont and Fletcher's love-lorn maids wear the willow very sweetly, but in all their piteous passages there is nothing equal to the natural pathos--the pathos which arises from the deep springs of character--of that one brief question and answer in King Lear.

"Lear. So young and so untender?"

"Cordelia. So young, my lord, and true."

The disguise of a woman in man's apparel is a common incident in the romantic drama; and the fact, that on the Elizabethan stage the female parts were taken by boys, made the deception easier. Viola's situation in Twelfth Night is precisely similar to Euphrasia's, but there is a difference in the handling of the device which is characteristic of a distinction between Shakspeare's art and that of his contemporaries. The audience in Twelfth Night is taken into confidence and made aware of Viola's real nature from the start, while Euphrasia's incognito is preserved till the fifth act, and then disclosed by an accident. This kind of mystification and surprise was a trick below Shakspeare. In this instance, moreover, it involved a departure from dramatic probability. Euphrasia could, at any moment, by revealing her identity, have averted the greatest sufferings and dangers from Philaster, Arethusa, and herself, and the only motive for her keeping silence is represented to have been a feeling of maidenly shame at her position. Such strained and fantastic motives are too often made the pivot of the action in Beaumont and Fletcher's tragi-comedies. Their characters have not the depth and truth of Shakspeare's, nor are they drawn so sharply. One reads their plays with pleasure and remembers here and there a passage of fine poetry, or a noble or lovely trait. But their characters, as wholes, leave a fading impression. Who, even after a single reading or representation, ever forgets Falstaff, or Shylock, or King Lear? The moral inferiority of Beaumont and Fletcher is well seen in such a play as A King and No King. Here Arbaces falls in love with his sister, and, after a furious conflict in his own mind, finally succumbs to his guilty passion. He is rescued from the consequences of his weakness by the discovery that Panthea is not, in fact, his sister. But this is to cut the knot and not to untie it. It leaves the denouement to chance, and not to those moral forces through which Shakspeare always wrought his conclusions. Arbaces has failed, and the piece of luck which keeps his failure innocent is rejected by every right-feeling spectator. In one of John Ford's tragedies, the situation which in A King and No King is only apparent, becomes real, and incest is boldly made the subject of the play. Ford pushed the morbid and unnatural in character and passion into even wilder extremes than Beaumont and Fletcher. His best play, the Broken Heart, is a prolonged and unrelieved torture of the feelings. Fletcher's Faithful Shepherdess is the best English pastoral drama. Its choral songs are richly and sweetly modulated, and the influence of the whole poem upon Milton is very apparent in his Comus. The Knight of the Burning Pestle, written by Beaumont and Fletcher jointly, was the first burlesque comedy in the language, and is excellent fooling. Beaumont and Fletcher's blank verse is musical, but less masculine than Marlowe's or Shakspeare's, by reason of their excessive use of extra syllables and feminine endings. In John Webster the fondness for the abnormal and sensational themes, which beset the Stuart stage, showed itself in the exaggeration of the terrible into the horrible. Fear, in Shakspeare--as in the great murder scene in Macbeth--is a pure passion; but in Webster it is mingled with something physically repulsive. Thus his Duchess of Malfi is presented in the dark with a dead man's hand, and is told that it is the hand of her murdered husband. She is shown a dance of madmen and, "behind a traverse, the artificial figures of her children, appearing as if dead." Treated in this elaborate fashion, that "terror," which Aristotle said it was one of the objects of tragedy to move, loses half its dignity. Webster's images have the smell of the charnel house about them.

"She would not after the report keep fresh  
As long as flowers on graves."

"We are only like dead walls or vaulted graves,  
That, ruined, yield no echo.  
O this gloomy world!  
In what a shadow or deep pit of darkness  
Doth womanish and fearful mankind live!"

Webster had an intense and somber genius. In diction he was the most Shaksperian of the Elisabethan dramatists, and there are sudden gleams of beauty among his dark horrors, which light up a whole scene with some abrupt touch of feeling.

"Cover her face; mine eyes dazzle; she died young,"

says the brother of the Duchess, when he has procured her murder and stands before the corpse. Vittoria Corombona is described in the old editions as "a night-piece," and it should, indeed, be acted by the shuddering light of torches, and with the cry of the screech-owl to punctuate the speeches. The scene of Webster's two best tragedies was laid, like many of Ford's, Cyril Tourneur's, and Beaumont and Fletcher's, in Italy--the wicked and splendid Italy of the Renaissance, which had such a fascination for the Elisabethan imagination. It was to them the land of the Borgias and the Cenci; of families of proud nobles, luxurious, cultivated, but full of revenges and ferocious cunning; subtle poisoners, who killed with a perfumed glove or fan; parricides, atheists, committers of unnamable crimes, and inventors of strange and delicate varieties of sin. But a very few have here been mentioned of the great host of dramatists who kept the theaters busy through the reigns of Elisabeth, James I., and Charles I. The last of the race was James Shirley, who died in 1666, and whose thirty-eight plays were written during the reign of Charles I. and the Commonwealth. In the miscellaneous prose and poetry of this period there is lacking the free, exulting, creative impulse of the elder generation, but there is a soberer feeling and a certain scholarly choiceness which commend themselves to readers of bookish tastes. Even that quaintness of thought, which is a mark of the Commonwealth writers, is not without its attraction for a nice literary palate. Prose became now of greater relative importance than ever before. Almost every distinguished writer of the time lent his pen to one or the other party in the great theological and political controversy of the time. There were famous theologians, like Hales, Chillingworth, and Baxter; historians and antiquaries, like Selden, Knolles, and Cotton; philosophers, such as Hobbes, Lord Herbert of Cherbury, and More, the Platonist; and writers in rural science--which now entered upon its modern, experimental phase, under the stimulus of Bacon's writings--among whom may be mentioned Wallis, the mathematician; Boyle, the chemist, and Harvey, the discoverer of the circulation of the blood. These are outside of our subject, but in the strictly literary prose of the time, the same spirit of roused inquiry is manifest, and the same disposition to a thorough and exhaustive treatment of a subject which is proper to the scientific attitude of mind. The line between true and false science, however, had not yet been drawn. The age was pedantic, and appealed too much to the authority of antiquity. Hence we have such monuments of perverse and curious erudition as Robert Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy*, 1621; and Sir Thomas Browne's *Pseudodoxia Epidemica, or Inquiries into Vulgar and Common Errors*, 1646. The former of these was the work of an Oxford scholar, an astrologer, who cast his own horoscope, and a victim himself of the atrabilious humor, from which he sought relief in listening to the ribaldry of barge-men, and in compiling this *Anatomy*, in which the causes, symptoms, prognostics, and cures of melancholy are considered in numerous partitions, sections, members, and subsections. The work is a mosaic of quotations. All literature is ransacked for anecdotes and instances, and the book has thus become a mine of out-of-the-way learning, in which later writers have dug. Lawrence Sterne helped himself freely to Burton's treasures, and Dr. Johnson said that the *Anatomy* was the only book that ever took him out of bed two hours sooner than he wished to rise. The vulgar and common errors which Sir Thomas Browne set himself to refute, were such as these: That dolphins are crooked, that Jews stink, that a man hath one rib less than a woman, that Xerxes's army drank up rivers, that cicades are bred out of cuckoo-spittle, that Hannibal split Alps with vinegar, together with many similar fallacies touching Pope Joan, the Wandering Jew, the decuman or tenth wave, the blackness of negroes, Friar Bacon's brazen head, etc. Another book in which great learning and ingenuity were applied to trifling ends, was the same author's *Garden of Cyrus*; or, the *Quincuncial Lozenge or Network Plantations of the Ancients*, in which a mystical meaning is sought in the occurrence throughout nature and art of the figure of the quincunx or lozenge. Browne was a physician of Norwich, where his library, museum, aviary, and botanic garden were thought worthy of a special visit by the Royal Society. He was an antiquary and a naturalist, and deeply read in the schoolmen and the Christian fathers. He was a mystic, and a writer of a rich and peculiar imagination, whose thoughts have impressed themselves upon many kindred minds, like Coleridge, De Quincey, and Emerson. Two of his books belong to literature, *Religio Medici*, published in 1642, and *Hydriotaphia*; or, *Urn Burial*, 1658, a discourse upon rites of burial and incremation, suggested by some Roman funeral urns, dug up in Norfolk. Browne's style, though too highly Latinized, is a good example of Commonwealth prose, that stately, cumbrous, brocaded prose, which had something of the flow and

measure of verse, rather than the quicker, colloquial movement of modern writing. Browne stood aloof from the disputes of his time, and in his very subjects there is a calm and meditative remoteness from the daily interests of men. His *Religio Medici* is full of a wise tolerance and a singular elevation of feeling. "At the sight of a cross, or crucifix, I can dispense with my hat, but scarce with the thought or memory of my Saviour." "They only had the advantage of a bold and noble faith, who lived before his coming." "They go the fairest way to heaven, that would serve God without a hell." "All things are artificial, for Nature is the art of God." The last chapter of the *Urn Burial* is an almost rithmical descant on mortality and oblivion. The style kindles slowly into a somber eloquence. It is the most impressive and extraordinary passage in the prose literature of the time. Browne, like Hamlet, loved to "consider too curiously." His subtlety led him to "pose his apprehension with those involved enigmas and riddles of the Trinity--with incarnation and resurrection;" and to start odd inquiries; "what song the Syrens sang, or what name Achilles assumed when he hid himself among women;" or whether, after Lazarus was raised from the dead, "his heir might lawfully detain his inheritance." The quaintness of his phrase appears at every turn. "Charles the Fifth can never hope to live within two Methuselahs of Hector." "Generations pass, while some trees stand, and old families survive not three oaks." "Mummy is become merchandise; Mizraim cures wounds, and Pharaoh is sold for balsams." One of the pleasantest of old English humorists is Thomas Fuller, who was a chaplain in the royal army during the civil war, and wrote, among other things, a *Church History of Britain*; a book of religious meditations, *Good Thoughts in Bad Times*, and a "character" book, *The Holy and Profane State*. His most important work, the *Worthies of England*, was published in 1662, the year after his death. This was a description of every English county; its natural commodities, manufactures, wonders, proverbs, etc., with brief biographies of its memorable persons. Fuller had a well-stored memory, sound piety, and excellent common sense. Wit was his leading intellectual trait, and the quaintness which he shared with his contemporaries appears in his writings in a fondness for puns, droll turns of expressions, and bits of eccentric suggestion. His prose, unlike Browne's, Milton's, and Jeremy Taylor's, is brief, simple, and pithy. His dry vein of humor was imitated by the American Cotton Mather, in his *Magnalia*, and by many of the English and New England divines of the 17th century. Jeremy Taylor was also a chaplain in the king's army, was several times imprisoned for his opinions, and was afterward made, by Charles II., Bishop of Down and Connor. He is a devotional rather than a theological writer, and his *Holy Living* and *Holy Dying* are religious classics. Taylor, like Sidney, was a "warbler of poetic prose." He has been called the prose Spenser, and his English has the opulence, the gentle elaboration, the "linked sweetness long drawn out" of the poet of the Faery Queene. In fullness and resonance, Taylor's diction resembles that of the great orators, though it lacks their nervous energy. His pathos is exquisitely tender, and his numerous similes have Spenser's pictorial amplitude. Some of them have become commonplaces for admiration, notably his description of the flight of the skylark, and the sentence in which he compares the gradual awakening of the human faculties to the sunrise, which "first opens a little eye of heaven, and sends away the spirits of darkness, and gives light to a cock, and calls up the lark to matins, and by and by gilds the fringes of a cloud, and peeps over the eastern hills." Perhaps the most impressive single passage of Taylor's is the concluding chapter in *Holy Dying*. From the midst of the sickening paraphernalia of death which he there accumulates, rises that delicate image of the fading rose, one of the most perfect things in its wording, in all our prose literature: "But so have I seen a rose newly springing from the clefts of its hood, and at first it was as fair as the morning, and full with the dew of heaven as a lamb's fleece; but when a ruder breath had forced open its virgin modesty, and dismantled its too youthful and unripe retirements, it began to put on darkness and to decline to softness and the symptoms of a sickly age; it bowed the head and broke its stock; and at night, having lost some of its leaves and all its beauty, it fell into the portion of weeds and outworn faces." With the progress of knowledge and discussion many kinds of prose literature, which were not absolutely new, now began to receive wider extension. Of this sort are the *Letters from Italy*, and other miscellanies included in the *Reliquiae Wottonianae*, or remains of Sir Henry Wotton, English ambassador at Venice in the reign of James I., and subsequently Provost of Eton College. Also the *Table Talk*--full of incisive remarks--left by John Selden, whom Milton pronounced the first scholar of his age, and who was a distinguished authority in legal antiquities and international law, furnished notes to Drayton's *Polyolbion*, and wrote upon Eastern religions, and upon the Arundel marbles. Literary biography was represented by the charming little *Lives of good old Izaak Walton*, the first edition of whose *Compleat Angler* was printed in 1653. The lives were five in number, of Hooker, Wotton, Donne, Herbert, and Sanderson. Several of these were personal friends of the author, and Sir Henry Wotton was a brother of the angle. The *Compleat Angler*, though not the first piece of sporting literature in English, is unquestionably the most popular, and still remains a favorite with "all that are lovers of virtue, and dare trust in providence, and be quiet, and go

a-angling." As in Ascham's *Toxophilus*, the instruction is conveyed in dialogue form, but the technical part of the book is relieved by many delightful digressions. Piscator and his pupil Venator pursue their talk under a honeysuckle hedge or a sycamore tree during a passing shower. They repair, after the day's fishing, to some honest ale-house, with lavender in the window, and a score of ballads stuck about the wall, where they sing catches--"old-fashioned poetry but choicely good"--composed by the author or his friends, drink barley wine, and eat their trout or chub. They encounter milkmaids, who sing to them and give them a draft of the red cow's milk, and they never cease their praises of the angler's life, of rural contentment among the cowslip meadows, and the quiet streams of Thames, or Lea, or Shawford Brook. The decay of a great literary school is usually signalized by the exaggeration of its characteristic traits. The manner of the Elizabethan poets was pushed into mannerism by their successors. That manner, at its best, was hardly a simple one, but in the Stuart and Commonwealth writers it became mere extravagance. Thus Phineas Fletcher--a cousin of the dramatist--composed a long Spenserian allegory, the *Purple Island*, descriptive of the human body. George Herbert and others made anagrams and verses shaped like an altar, a cross, or a pair of Easter wings. This group of poets was named, by Dr. Johnson, in his *Life of Cowley*, the metaphysical school. Other critics have preferred to call them the fantastic or conceited school, the later Euphuists, or the English Marinists and Gongorists, after the poets Marino and Gongora, who brought this fashion to its extreme in Italy and in Spain. The English conceptistas were mainly clergymen of the established Church, Donne, Herbert, Vaughan, Quarles, and Herrick. But Crashaw was a Roman Catholic, and Cowley--the latest of them--a layman. The one who set the fashion was Dr. John Donne. Dean of St. Paul's, whom Dryden pronounced a great wit, but not a great poet, and whom Ben Jonson esteemed the best poet in the world for some things, but likely to be forgotten for want of being understood. Besides satires and epistles in verse, he composed amatory poems in his youth, and divine poems in his age, both kinds distinguished by such subtle obscurity, and far-fetched ingenuities, that they read like a series of puzzles. When this poet has occasion to write a valediction to his mistress upon going into France, he compares their temporary separation to that of a pair of compasses:

"Such wilt thou be to me, who must,  
Like the other foot obliquely run;  
Thy firmness makes my circle just,  
And makes me end where I begun."

If he would persuade her to marriage he calls her attention to a flea--

"Me it sucked first and now sucks thee,  
And in this flea our two bloods mingled be."

He says that the flea is their marriage-temple, and bids her forbear to kill it lest she thereby commit murder, suicide, and sacrilege all in one. Donne's figures are scholastic and smell of the lamp. He ransacked cosmography, astrology, alchemy, optics, the canon law, and the divinity of the schoolmen for ink-horn terms and similes. He was in verse what Browne was in prose. He loved to play with distinctions, hyperboles, paradoxes, the very casuistry and dialectics of love or devotion.

"Thou canst not every day give me thy heart:  
If thou canst give it then thou never gav'st it;  
Love's riddles are that though thy heart depart,  
It stays at home and thou with losing sav'st it."

Donne's verse is usually as uncouth as his thought. But there is a real passion slumbering under these ashy heaps of conceit, and occasionally {145} a pure flame darts up, as in the justly admired lines:

"Her pure and eloquent blood  
Spoke in her cheek and so divinely wrought  
That one might almost say her body thought."

This description of Donne is true, with modifications, of all the metaphysical poets. They had the same forced and unnatural style. The ordinary laws of the association of ideas were reversed with them. It was



not the nearest, but the remotest, association that was called up. "Their attempts," said Johnson, "were always analytic: they broke every image into fragments." The finest spirit among them was "holy George Herbert," whose Temple was published in 1633. The titles in this volume were such as the following: Christmas, Easter, Good Friday, Holy Baptism, The Cross, The Church Porch, Church Music, The Holy Scriptures, Redemption, Faith, Doomsday. Never since, except, perhaps, in Keble's Christian Year, have the ecclesiastic ideals of the Anglican Church--the "beauty of holiness"--found such sweet expression in poetry. The verses entitled Virtue--

"Sweet day so cool, so calm, so bright," etc.

are known to most readers, as well as the line,

"Who sweeps a room, as for thy laws, makes that  
and the action fine."

The quaintly named pieces, the Elixir, the Collar, the Pulley, are full of deep thought and spiritual feeling. But Herbert's poetry is constantly disfigured by bad taste. Take this passage from Whitsunday,

"Listen, sweet dove, unto my song,  
And spread thy golden wings on me,  
Hatching my tender heart so long,  
Till it get wing and fly away with thee,"

which is almost as ludicrous as the epitaph, written by his contemporary, Carew, on the daughter of Sir Thomas Wentworth, whose soul

. . . "grew so fast within  
It broke the outward shell of sin,  
And so was hatched a cherubin."

Another of these Church poets was Henry Vaughan, "the Silurist," or Welshman, whose fine piece, the Retreat, has been often compared with Wordsworth's Ode on the Intimations of Immortality. Francis Quarles' Divine Emblems long remained a favorite book with religious readers, both in Old and New England. Emblem books, in which engravings of a figurative design were accompanied with explanatory letterpress in verse, were a popular class of literature in the 17th century. The most famous of them all were Jacob Catt's Dutch emblems.

One of the most delightful of English lyric poets is Robert Herrick, whose Hesperides, 1633 has lately received such sympathetic illustration from the pencil of an American artist, Mr. E. A. Abbey. Herrick was a clergyman of the English Church, and was expelled by the Puritans from his living, the vicarage of Dean Prior, in Devonshire. The most quoted of his religious poems is, How to Keep a True Lent. But it may be doubted whether his tastes were prevailingly clerical; his poetry certainly was not. He was a disciple of Ben Jonson and his boon companion at

. . . "those lyric feasts  
Made at the Sun,  
The Dog, the Triple Tun;  
Where we such clusters had  
As made us nobly wild, not mad.  
And yet each verse of thine  
Outdid the meat, outdid the frolic wine."

Herrick's Noble Numbers seldom rises above the expression of a cheerful gratitude and contentment. He had not the subtlety and elevation of Herbert, but he surpassed him in the grace, melody, sensuous beauty, and fresh lyrical impulse of his verse. The conceits of the metaphysical school appear in Herrick only in the

form of an occasional pretty quaintness. He is the poet of English parish festivals and of English flowers, the primrose, the whitethorn, the daffodil. He sang the praises of the country life, love songs to "Julia," and hymns of thanksgiving for simple blessings. He has been called the English Catullus, but he strikes rather the Horatian note of *Carpe diem*, and regret at the shortness of life and youth in many of his best-known poems, such as *Gather ye Rose-buds while ye may*, and *To Corinna, To Go a Maying*.

Abraham Cowley is now less remembered for his poetry than for his pleasant volume of *Essays*, published after the Restoration; but he was thought in his own time a better poet than Milton. His collection of love songs--the *Mistress*--is a mass of cold conceits, in the metaphysical manner; but his elegies on Crashaw and Harvey have much dignity and natural feeling. He introduced the Pindaric ode into English, and wrote an epic poem on a biblical subject--the *Davideis*--now quite unreadable. Cowley was a royalist and followed the exiled court to France. Side by side with the Church poets were the cavaliers--Carew, Waller, Lovelace, Suckling, L'Estrange, and others--gallant courtiers and officers in the royal army, who mingled love and loyalty in their strains. Colonel Richard Lovelace, who lost every thing in the king's service and was several times imprisoned, wrote two famous songs--*To Lucasta on going to the Wars*--in which occur the lines,

"I could not love thee, dear, so much,  
Loved I not honor more."

and *To Althaea from Prison*, in which he sings "the sweetness, mercy, majesty, and glories of his king," and declares that "stone walls do not a prison make, nor iron bars a cage." Another of the cavaliers was sir John Suckling, who formed a plot to rescue the Earl of Stratford, raised a troop of horse for Charles I., was impeached by the Parliament and fled to France. He was a man of wit and pleasure, who penned a number of gay trifles, but has been saved from oblivion chiefly by his exquisite *Ballad upon a Wedding*. Thomas Carew and Edmund Waller were poets of the same stamp--graceful and easy, but shallow in feeling. Waller, who followed the court to Paris, was the author of two songs, which are still favorites, *Go, Lovely Rose*, and *On a Girdle*, and he first introduced the smooth correct manner of writing in couplets, which Dryden and Pope carried to perfection. Gallantry rather than love was the inspiration of these courtly singers. In such verses as Carew's *Encouragements to a Lover*, and George Wither's *The Manly Heart*--

"If she be not so to me,  
What care I how fair she be?"

we see the revolt against the high, passionate, Sidneian love of the Elizabethan sonneteers, and the note of persiflage that was to mark the lyrical verse of the Restoration. But the poetry of the cavaliers reached its high-water mark in one fiery-hearted song by the noble and unfortunate James Graham, Marquis of Montrose, who invaded Scotland in the interest of Charles II., and was taken prisoner and put to death at Edinburgh in 1650.

"My dear and only love, I pray  
That little world of thee  
Be governed by no other sway  
Than purest monarchy."

In language borrowed from the politics of the time, he cautions his mistress against synods or committees in her heart; swears to make her glorious by his pen and famous by his sword; and with that fine recklessness which distinguished the dashing troopers of Prince Rupert, he adds, in words that have been often quoted,

"He either fears his fate too much,  
Or his deserts are small,  
That dares not put it to the touch  
To gain or lose it all."

John Milton, the greatest English poet except Shakspeare, was born in London in 1608. His father was a scrivener, an educated man, and a musical composer of some merit. At his home Milton was surrounded

with all the influences of a refined and well ordered Puritan household of the better class. He inherited his father's musical tastes, and during the latter part of his life, he spent a part of every afternoon in playing the organ. No poet has written more beautifully of music than Milton. One of his sonnets was addressed to Henry Lawes, the composer, who wrote the airs to the songs in *Comus*. Milton's education was most careful and thorough. He spent seven years at Cambridge where, from his personal beauty and fastidious habits, he was called "The lady of Christ's." At Horton, in Buckinghamshire, where his father had a country seat, he passed five years more, perfecting himself in his studies, and then traveled for fifteen months, mainly in Italy, visiting Naples and Rome, but residing at Florence. Here he saw Galileo, a prisoner of the Inquisition "for thinking otherwise in astronomy than his Dominican and Franciscan licensers thought." Milton is the most scholarly and the most truly classical of English poets. His Latin verse, for elegance and correctness, ranks with Addison's; and his Italian poems were the admiration of the Tuscan scholars. But his learning appears in his poetry only in the form of a fine and chastened result, and not in laborious allusion and pedantic citation, as too often in Ben Jonson, for instance. "My father," he wrote, "destined me, while yet a little child, for the study of humane letters." He was also destined for the ministry, but, "coming to some maturity of years and perceiving what tyranny had invaded the Church, . . . I thought it better to prefer a blameless silence, before the sacred office of speaking, bought and begun with servitude and forswearing." Other hands than a bishop's were laid upon his head. "He who would not be frustrate of his hope to write well hereafter," he says, "ought himself to be a true poem." And he adds that his "natural haughtiness" saved him from all impurity of living. Milton had a sublime self-respect. The dignity and earnestness of the Puritan gentleman blended in his training with the culture of the Renaissance. Born into an age of spiritual conflict, he dedicated his gift to the service of Heaven, and he became, like Heine, a valiant soldier in the war for liberation. He was the poet of a cause, and his song was keyed to

"The Dorian mood  
Of flutes and soft recorders such as raised  
To height of noblest temper, heroes old  
Arming to battle."

On comparing Milton with Shakspeare, with his universal sympathies and receptive imagination, one perceives a loss in breadth, but a gain in intense personal conviction. He introduced a new note into English poetry, the passion for truth and the feeling of religious sublimity. Milton's was an heroic age, and its song must be lyric rather than dramatic; its singer must be in the fight and of it.

Of the verses which he wrote at Cambridge, the most important was his splendid ode *On the Morning of Christ's Nativity*. At Horton he wrote, among other things, the companion pieces, *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*, of a kind quite new in English, giving to the landscape an expression in harmony with two contrasted moods. *Comus*, which belongs to the same period, was the perfection of the Elizabethan court masque, and was presented at Ludlow Castle in 1634, on the occasion of the installation of the Earl of Bridgewater as Lord President of Wales. Under the guise of a skillful addition to the Homeric allegory of Circe, with her cup of enchantment, it was a Puritan song in praise of chastity and temperance. *Lycidas*, in like manner, was the perfection of the Elizabethan {153} pastoral elegy. It was contributed to a volume of memorial verses on the death of Edward King, a Cambridge friend of Milton's, who was drowned in the Irish Channel in 1637. In one stern strain, which is put into the mouth of St. Peter, the author "foretells the ruin of our corrupted clergy, then at their height."

"But that two-handed engine at the door  
Stands ready to smite once and smite no more."

This was Milton's last utterance in English verse before the outbreak of the civil war, and it sounds the alarm of the impending struggle. In technical quality *Lycidas* is the most wonderful of all Milton's poems. The cunningly intricate harmony of the verse, the pressed and packed language with its fullness of meaning and allusion make it worthy of the minutest study. In these early poems, Milton, merely as a poet, is at his best. Something of the Elizabethan style still clings to them; but their grave sweetness, their choice wording, their originality in epithet, name, and phrase, were novelties of Milton's own. His English masters were Spenser, Fletcher, and Sylvester, the translator of Du Bartas's *La Sepmaine*, but nothing of Spenser's prolixity, or Fletcher's effeminacy, or Sylvester's quaintness is found in Milton's pure, energetic diction. He inherited their beauties, but his taste had been tempered to a finer edge by his studies in Greek and Hebrew

poetry. He was the last of the Elisabethans, and {154} his style was at once the crown of the old and a departure into the new. In masque, elegy, and sonnet, he set the seal to the Elisabethan poetry, said the last word, and closed one great literary era.

In 1639 the breach between Charles I. and his Parliament brought Milton back from Italy. "I thought it base to be traveling at my ease for amusement, while my fellow-countrymen at home were fighting for liberty." For the next twenty years he threw himself into the contest, and poured forth a succession of tracts, in English and Latin, upon the various public questions at issue. As a political thinker, Milton had what Bacon calls "the humor of a scholar." In a country of endowed grammar schools and universities hardly emerged from a mediaeval discipline and curriculum, he wanted to set up Greek gymnasia and philosophical schools, after the fashion of the Porch and the Academy. He would have imposed an Athenian democracy upon a people trained in the traditions of monarchy and episcopacy. At the very moment when England had grown tired of the Protectorate and was preparing to welcome back the Stuarts, he was writing *An Easy and Ready Way to Establish a Free Commonwealth*. Milton acknowledged that in prose he had the use of his left hand only. There are passages of fervid eloquence, where the style swells into a kind of lofty chant, with a rithmical rise and fall to it, as in parts of the *English Book of Common Prayer*. But in general his sentences are long and involved, full of inventions and latinized constructions. Controversy at that day was conducted on scholastic lines. Each disputant, instead of appealing at once to the arguments of expediency and common sense, began with a formidable display of learning, ransacking Greek and Latin authors and the fathers of the Church for opinions in support of his own position. These authorities he deployed at tedious length and followed them up with heavy scurrilities and "excusations," by way of attack and defense. The dispute between Milton and Salmasius over the execution of Charles I. was like a duel between two knights in full armor striking at each other with ponderous maces. The very titles of these pamphlets are enough to frighten off a modern reader: *A Confutation of the Animadversions upon a Defense of a Humble Remonstrance against a Treatise, entitled Of Reformation*. The most interesting of Milton's prose tracts is his *Areopagitica: A Speech for the Liberty of Unlicensed Printing*, 1644. The arguments in this are of permanent force; but if the reader will compare it, or *Jeremy Taylor's Liberty of Prophesying*, with *Locke's Letters on Toleration*, he will see how much clearer and more convincing is the modern method of discussion, introduced by writers like *Hobbes* and *Locke* and *Dryden*. Under the Protectorate Milton was appointed Latin Secretary to the Council of State. In the diplomatic correspondence which was his official duty, and in the composition of his tract, *Defensio pro Populo Anglicano*, he overtaxed his eyes, and in 1654 became totally blind. The only poetry of Milton's belonging to the years 1640-1660 are a few sonnets of the pure Italian form, mainly called forth by public occasions. By the Elisabethans the sonnet had been used mainly in love poetry. In Milton's hands, said *Wordsworth*, "the thing became a trumpet." Some of his were addressed to political leaders, like *Fairfax*, *Cromwell*, and *Sir Henry Vane*; and of these the best is, perhaps, the sonnet written on the massacre of the *Vaudois Protestants*--"a collect in verse," it has been called--which has the fire of a Hebrew prophet invoking the divine wrath upon the oppressors of Israel. Two were on his own blindness, and in these there is not one selfish repining, but only a regret that the value of his service is impaired-- "Will God exact day labor, light denied?"

After the restoration of the Stuarts, in 1660, Milton was for a while in peril, by reason of the part that he had taken against the king. But

"On evil days though fallen, and evil tongues,  
In darkness and with dangers compassed round  
And solitude,"

he bated no jot of heart or hope. Henceforth he becomes the most heroic and affecting figure in English literary history. Years before he had planned an epic poem on the subject of *King Arthur*, and again a sacred tragedy on man's fall and redemption. These experiments finally took shape in *Paradise Lost*, which was given to the world in 1667. This is the epic of English Puritanism and of Protestant Christianity. It was Milton's purpose to

"assert eternal Providence  
And justify the ways of God to men,"

or, in other words, to embody his theological system in verse. This gives a doctrinal rigidity and even dryness to parts of the *Paradise Lost*, which injure its effect as a poem. His "God the father turns a school divine:" his Christ, as has been wittily said, is "God's good boy:" the discourses of Raphael to Adam are scholastic lectures: Adam himself is too sophisticated for the state of innocence, and Eve is somewhat insipid. The real protagonist of the poem is Satan, upon whose mighty figure Milton unconsciously bestowed something of his own nature, and whose words of defiance might almost have come from some Republican leader when the Good Old Cause went down.

"What though the field be lost?  
All is not lost, the unconquerable will  
And study of revenge, immortal hate,  
And courage never to submit or yield."

But when all has been said that can be said in disparagement or qualification, *Paradise Lost* remains the foremost of English poems and the sublimest of all epics. Even in those parts where theology encroaches most upon poetry, the diction, though often heavy, is never languid. Milton's blank verse in itself is enough to bear up the most prosaic theme, and so is his epic English, a style more massive and splendid than Shakspeare's, and comparable, like Tertullian's Latin, to a river of molten gold. Of the countless single beauties that sow his page

"Thick as autumnal leaves that strew the brooks  
In Valombrosa,"

there is no room to speak, nor of the astonishing fullness of substance and multitude of thoughts which have caused the *Paradise Lost* to be called the book of universal knowledge. "The heat of Milton's mind," said Dr. Johnson, "might be said to sublimate his learning and throw off into his work the spirit of science, unmingled with its grosser parts." The truth of this remark is clearly seen upon a comparison of Milton's description of the creation, for example, with corresponding passages in Sylvester's *Divine Weeks and Works* (translated from the Huguenot poet, Du Bartas), which was, in some sense, his original. But the most heroic thing in Milton's heroic poem is Milton. There are no strains in *Paradise Lost* so absorbing as those in which the poet breaks the strict epic bounds and speaks directly of himself, as in the majestic lament over his own blindness, and in the invocation to Urania, which open the third and seventh books. Every-where, too, one reads between the lines. We think of the dissolute cavaliers, as Milton himself undoubtedly was thinking of them, when we read of "the sons of Belial flown with insolence and wine," or when the Puritan turns among the sweet landscapes of Eden, to denounce

"court amours  
Mixed dance, or wanton mask, or midnight ball,  
Or serenade which the starved lover sings  
To his proud fair, best quitted with disdain."

And we think of Milton among the triumphant royalists when we read of the Seraph Abdiel "faithful found among the faithless."

"Nor number nor example with him wrought  
To swerve from truth or change his constant mind,  
Though single. From amidst them forth he passed,  
Long way through hostile scorn, which he sustained  
Superior, nor of violence feared aught:  
And with retorted scorn his back he turned  
On those proud towers to swift destruction doomed."

*Paradise Regained* and *Samson Agonistes* were published in 1671. The first of these treated in four books Christ's temptation in the wilderness, a subject that had already been handled in the Spenserian allegorical manner by Giles Fletcher, a brother of the Purple Islander, in his *Christ's Victory and Triumph*, 1610. The

superiority of *Paradise Lost* to its sequel is not without significance. The Puritans were Old Testament men. Their God was the Hebrew Jehovah, whose single divinity the Catholic mythology had overlaid with the figures of the Son, the Virgin Mary, and the saints. They identified themselves in thought with his chosen people, with the militant theocracy of the Jews. Their sword was the sword of the Lord and of Gideon. "To your tents, O Israel," was the cry of the London mob when the bishops were committed to the Tower. And when the fog lifted, on the morning of the battle of Dunbar, Cromwell exclaimed, "Let God arise and let his enemies be scattered: like as the sun riseth, so shalt thou drive them away." *Samson Agonistes*, though Hebrew in theme and in spirit, was in form a Greek tragedy. It had chorus and semi-chorus, and preserved the so-called dramatic unities; that is, the scene was unchanged, and there were no intervals of time between the acts. In accordance with the rules of the Greek theater, but two speakers appeared upon the stage at once, and there was no violent action. The death of Samson is related by a messenger. Milton's reason for the choice of this subject is obvious. He himself was Samson, shorn of his strength, blind, and alone among enemies; given over

"to the unjust tribunals, under change of times,  
And condemnation of the ungrateful multitude."

As Milton grew older he discarded more and more the graces of poetry, and relied purely upon the structure and the thought. In *Paradise Lost*, although there is little resemblance to Elizabethan work—such as one notices in *Comus* and the Christmas hymn—yet the style is rich, especially in the earlier books. But in *Paradise Regained* it is severe to bareness, and in *Samson*, even to ruggedness. Like Michelangelo, with whose genius he had much in common, Milton became impatient of finish or of mere beauty. He blocked out his work in masses, left rough places and surfaces not filled in, and inclined to express his meaning by a symbol, rather than work it out in detail. It was a part of his austerity, his increasing preference for structural over decorative methods, to give up rhyme for blank verse. His latest poem, *Samson Agonistes*, a metrical study of the highest interest.

Milton was not quite alone among the poets of his time in espousing the popular cause. Andrew Marvell, who was his assistant in the Latin secretaryship and sat in Parliament for Hull, after the Restoration, was a good Republican, and wrote a fine Horatian Ode upon Cromwell's Return from Ireland. There is also a rare imaginative quality in his *Song of the Exiles in Bermuda*, *Thoughts in a Garden*, and *The Girl Describes her Fawn*. George Wither, who was imprisoned for his satires, also took the side of the Parliament, but there is little that is distinctively Puritan in his poetry.

1. *Milton's Poetical Works*. Edited by David Masson. Macmillan.
2. *Selections from Milton's Prose*. Edited by F. D. Myers. (Parchment Series.)
3. *England's Antiphon*. By George Macdonald.
4. Robert Herrick's *Hesperides*.
5. *Sir Thomas Browne's Religio Medici and Hydriotaphia*. Edited by Willis Bund. Sampson Low & Co., 1873.
6. Thomas Fuller's *Good Thoughts in Bad Times*.
7. Izaak Walton's *Compleat Angler*.

## CHAPTER V.

### FROM THE RESTORATION TO THE DEATH OF POPE.

#### 1660-1744.

The Stuart Restoration was a period of descent from poetry to prose, from passion and imagination to wit and understanding. The serious, exalted mood of the Civil War and the Commonwealth had spent itself and issued in disillusion. There followed a generation of wits, logical, skeptical, and prosaic, without earnestness, as without principle. The characteristic literature of such a time is criticism, satire, and burlesque, and such, indeed, continued to be the course of English literary history for a century after the return of the Stuarts. The age was not a stupid one, but one of active inquiry. The Royal Society, for the cultivation of the natural sciences, was founded in 1662. There were able divines in the pulpit and at the universities--Barrow, Tillotson, Stillingfleet, South, and others: scholars, like Bentley; historians, like Clarendon and Burnet; scientists, like Boyle and Newton; philosophers, like Hobbes and Locke. But of poetry, in any high sense of the word, there was little between the time of Milton and the time of Goldsmith and Gray.

The English writers of this period were strongly influenced by the contemporary literature of France, by the comedies of Molière, the tragedies of Corneille and Racine, and the satires, epistles, and versified essays of Boileau. Many of the Restoration writers--Waller, Cowley, Davenant, Wycherley, Villiers, and others--had been in France during the exile, and brought back with them French tastes. John Dryden (1631-1700), who is the great literary figure of his generation, has been called the first of the moderns. From the reign of Charles II., indeed, we may date the beginnings of modern English life. What we call "society" was forming, the town, the London world. "Coffee, which makes the politician wise," had just been introduced, and the ordinaries of Ben Jonson's time gave way to coffee-houses, like Will's and Button's, which became the head-quarters of literary and political gossip. The two great English parties, as we know them to-day, were organized: the words Whig and Tory date from this reign. French etiquette and fashions came in and French phrases of convenience—such as *coup de grace*, *bel esprit*, etc.--began to appear in English prose. Literature became intensely urban and partisan. It reflected city life, the disputes of faction, and the personal quarrels of authors. The politics of the Great Rebellion had been of heroic proportions, and found fitting expression in song. But in the Revolution of 1688 the issues were constitutional and to be settled by the arguments of lawyers. Measures were in question rather than principles, and there was little inspiration to the poet in Exclusion Bills and Acts of Settlement.

Court and society, in the reign of Charles II. and James II., were shockingly dissolute, and in literature, as in life, the reaction against Puritanism went to great extremes. The social life of the time is faithfully reflected in the diary of Samuel Pepys. He was a simple-minded man, the son of a London tailor, and became, himself, secretary to the admiralty. His diary was kept in cipher, and published only in 1825. Being written for his own eye, it is singularly outspoken; and its naïve, gossipy, confidential tone makes it a most diverting book, as it is, historically, a most valuable one.

Perhaps the most popular book of its time was Samuel Butler's *Hudibras* (1663-64), a burlesque romance in ridicule of the Puritans. The king carried a copy of it in his pocket, and Pepys testifies that it was quoted and praised on all sides. *Ridicule of the Puritans* was nothing new. *Zeal-of-the-land Busy*, in Ben Jonson's *Bartholomew Fair*, is an early instance of the kind. There was nothing laughable about the earnestness of men like Cromwell, Milton, Algernon Sidney, and Sir Henry Vane. But even the French Revolution had its humors; and as the English Puritan Revolution gathered head and the extremer sectaries pressed to the front--Quakers, New Lights, Fifth Monarchy Men, Ranters, etc.--its grotesque sides came uppermost. Butler's hero is a Presbyterian Justice of the Peace who sallies forth with his secretary, Ralpho--an Independent and Anabaptist--like Don Quixote with Sancho Panza, to suppress May games and bear-baitings. (Macaulay, it will be remembered, said that the Puritans disapproved of bear-baiting, not because it gave pain to the bear, but because it gave pleasure to the spectators.) The humor of *Hudibras* is not of the finest. The knight and squire are discomfited in broadly comic adventures, hardly removed from the rough, physical drolleries of a pantomime or a circus. The deep heart-laughter of Cervantes, the pathos on which his humor rests, is, of course, not to be looked for in Butler. But he had wit of a sharp, logical kind, and his

style surprises with all manner of verbal antics. He is almost as great a phrase-master as Pope, though in a coarser kind. His verse is a smart doggerel, and his poem has furnished many stock sayings, as, for example,

"'Tis strange what difference there can be  
"Twixt tweedle-dum and tweedle-dee."

Hudibras has had many imitators, not the least successful of whom was the American John Trumbull, in his revolutionary satire *M'Fingal*, some couplets of which are generally quoted as Butler's, as, for example,

"No man e'er felt the halter draw  
With good opinion of the law."

The rebound against Puritanism is seen no less plainly in the drama of the Restoration, and the {167} stage now took vengeance for its enforced silence under the Protectorate. Two theaters were opened under the patronage, respectively, of the king and of his brother, the Duke of York. The manager of the latter, Sir William Davenant--who had fought on the king's side, been knighted for his services, escaped to France, and was afterward captured and imprisoned in England for two years--had managed to evade the law against stage plays as early as 1656, by presenting his *Siege of Rhodes* as an "opera," with instrumental music and dialogue in recitative, after a fashion newly sprung up in Italy. This he brought out again in 1661, with the dialogue recast into riming couplets in the French fashion. Movable painted scenery was now introduced from France, and actresses took the female parts formerly played by boys. This last innovation was said to be at the request of the king, one of whose mistresses, the famous Nell Gwynne, was the favorite actress at the King's Theater. Upon the stage, thus reconstructed, the so-called "classical" rules of the French theater were followed, at least in theory. The Louis XIV. writers were not purely creative, like Shakspeare and his contemporaries in England, but critical and self-conscious. The Academy had been formed in 1636, for the preservation of the purity of the French language, and discussion abounded on the principles and methods of literary art. Corneille not only wrote tragedies, but essays on tragedy, and one in particular on the Three Unities. Dryden followed his example in his *Essay of Dramatic Poesie* (1667), in which he treated of the unities, and argued for the use of rime in tragedy in preference to blank verse. His own practice varied. Most of his tragedies were written in rime, but in the best of them, *All for Love*, 1678, founded on Shakspeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*, he returned to blank verse. One of the principles of the classical school was to keep comedy and tragedy distinct. The tragic dramatists of the Restoration, Dryden, Howard, Settle, Crowne, Lee, and others, composed what they called "heroic plays," such as the *Indian Emperor*, the *Conquest of Granada*, the *Duke of Lerma*, the *Empress of Morocco*, the *Destruction of Jerusalem*, *Nero*, and the *Rival Queens*. The titles of these pieces indicate their character. Their heroes were great historic personages. Subject and treatment were alike remote from nature and real life. The diction was stilted and artificial, and pompous declamation took the place of action and genuine passion. The tragedies of Racine seem chill to an Englishman brought up on Shakspeare, but to see how great an artist Racine was, in his own somewhat narrow way, one has but to compare his *Phedre*, or *Iphigenie*, with Dryden's ranting tragedy of *Tyrannic Love*. These bombastic heroic plays were made the subject of a capital burlesque, the *Rehearsal*, by George Villiers, Duke of Buckingham, acted in 1671 at the King's Theater. The indebtedness of the English stage to the French did not stop with a general adoption of its dramatic methods, but extended to direct imitation and translation. Dryden's comedy, *An Evening's Love*, was adapted from Thomas Corneille's *Le Feint Astrologue*, and his *Sir Martin Mar-all*, from Molière's *L'Etourdi*. Shadwell borrowed his *Miser* from Molière, and Otway made versions of Racine's *Bérénice* and Molière's *Fourberies de Scapin*. Wycherley's *Country Wife* and *Plain Dealer*, although not translations, were based, in a sense, upon Molière's *Ecole des Femmes* and *Le Misanthrope*. The only one of the tragic dramatists of the Restoration who prolonged the traditions of the Elisabethan stage, was Otway, whose *Venice Preserved*, written in blank verse, still keeps the boards. There are fine passages in Dryden's heroic plays, passages weighty in thought and nobly sonorous in language. There is one great scene (between Antony and Ventidius) in his *All for Love*. And one, at least, of his comedies, the *Spanish Friar*, is skillfully constructed. But his nature was not pliable enough for the drama, and he acknowledged that, in writing for the stage, he "forced his genius." In sharp contrast with these heroic plays was the comic drama of the Restoration, the plays of Wycherley, Killigrew, Etherege, Farquhar, Van Brugh, Congreve, and



others; plays like the *Country Wife*, the *Parson's Wedding*, *She Would if She Could*, the *Beaux' Stratagem*, the *Relapse*, and the *Way of the World*. These were in prose, and represented the gay world and the surface of fashionable life. Amorous intrigue was their constantly recurring theme. Some of them were written expressly in ridicule of the Puritans. Such was the *Committee* of Dryden's brother-in-law, Sir Robert Howard, the hero of which is a distressed gentleman, and the villain a London cit, and president of the committee appointed by Parliament to sit upon the sequestration of the estates of royalists. Such were also the *Roundheads* and the *Banished Cavaliers* of Mrs. Aphra Behn, who was a female spy in the service of Charles II., at Antwerp, and one of the coarsest of the Restoration comedians. The profession of piety had become so disagreeable that a shameless cynicism was now considered the mark of a gentleman. The ideal hero of Wycherley or Etherege was the witty young profligate, who had seen life, and learned to disbelieve in virtue. His highest qualities were a contempt for cant, physical courage, a sort of spendthrift generosity, and a good-natured readiness to back up a friend in a quarrel, or an amour. Virtue was bourgeois--reserved for London trades-people. A man must be either a rake or a hypocrite. The gentlemen were rakes, the city people were hypocrites. Their wives, however, were all in love with the gentlemen, and it was the proper thing to seduce them, and to borrow their husbands' money. For the first and last time, perhaps, in the history of the English drama, the sympathy of the audience was deliberately sought for the seducer and the rogue, and the laugh turned against the dishonored husband and the honest man. (Contrast this with Shakspeare's *Merry Wives of Windsor*.) The women were represented as worse than the men--scheming, ignorant, and corrupt. The dialogue in the best of these plays was easy, lively, and witty; the situations in some of them audacious almost beyond belief. Under a thin varnish of good breeding, the sentiments and manners were really brutal. The loosest gallants of Beaumont and Fletcher's theater retain a fineness of feeling and that politesse de coeur--which marks the gentleman. They are poetic creatures, and own a capacity for romantic passion. But the Manlys and Homers of the Restoration comedy have a prosaic, cold-blooded profligacy that disgusts. Charles Lamb, in his ingenious essay on "The Artificial Comedy of the Last Century," apologized for the Restoration stage, on the ground that it represented a world of whim and unreality in which the ordinary laws of morality had no application. But Macaulay answered truly, that at no time has the stage been closer in its imitation of real life. The theater of Wycherley and Etherege was but the counterpart of that social condition which we read of in Pepys's Diary, and in the Memoirs of the Chevalier de Grammont. This prose comedy of manners was not, indeed, "artificial" at all, in the sense in which the contemporary tragedy--the "heroic play"--was artificial. It was, on the contrary, far more natural, and, intellectually, of much higher value. In 1698 Jeremy Collier, a non-juring Jacobite clergyman, published his *Short View of the Immorality and Profaneness of the English Stage*, which did much toward reforming the practice of the dramatists. The formal characteristics, without the immorality, of the Restoration comedy, re-appeared briefly in Goldsmith's *She Stoops to Conquer*, 1772, and Sheridan's *Rival*, *School for Scandal*, and *Critic*, 1775-9, our last strictly "classical" comedies. None of this school of English comedians approached their model, Molière. He excelled his imitators not only in his French urbanity--the polished wit and delicate grace of his style--but in the dexterous unfolding of his plot, and in the wisdom and truth of his criticism of life, and his insight into character. It is a symptom of the false taste of the age that Shakspeare's plays were rewritten for the Restoration stage. Davenant made new versions of *Macbeth* and *Julius Caesar*, substituting rime for blank verse. In conjunction with Dryden, he altered the *Tempest*, complicating the intrigue by the introduction of a male counterpart to Miranda--a youth who had never seen a woman. Shadwell "improved" *Timon of Athens*, and Nahum Tate furnished a new fifth act to *King Lear*, which turned the play into a comedy! In the prologue to his doctored version of *Troilus and Cressida*, Dryden made the ghost of Shakspeare speak of himself as

"Untaught, unpracticed in a barbarous age."

Thomas Rymer, whom Pope pronounced a good critic, was very severe upon Shakspeare in his *Remarks on the Tragedies of the Last Age*; and in his *Short View of Tragedy*, 1693, he said, "In the neighing of a horse or in the growling of a mastiff, there is more humanity than, many times, in the tragical flights of Shakspeare." "To Deptford by water," writes Pepys, in his diary for August 20, 1666, "reading *Othello*, *Moor of Venice*; which I ever heretofore esteemed a mighty good play; but, having so lately read the *Adventures of Five Hours*, it seems a mean thing." In undramatic poetry the new school, both in England and in France, took its point of departure in a reform against the extravagances of the Marinists, or conceited poets, specially represented in England by Donne and Cowley. The new poets, both in their theory and practice, insisted upon correctness, clearness, polish, moderation, and good sense. Boileau's *L'Art Poétique*, 1673, inspired by Horace's *Ars Poetica*, was a treatise in verse upon the rules of correct

composition, and it gave the law in criticism for over a century, not only in France, but in Germany and England. It gave English poetry a didactic turn and started the fashion of writing critical essays in riming couplets. The Earl of Mulgrave published two "poems" of this kind, an *Essay on Satire*, and an *Essay on Poetry*. The Earl of Roscommon--who, said Addison, "makes even rules a noble poetry"--made a metrical version of Horace's *Ars Poetica*, and wrote an original *Essay on Translated Verse*. Of the same kind were Addison's epistle to Sacheverel, entitled *An Account of the Greatest English Poets*, and Pope's *Essay on Criticism*, 1711, which was nothing more than versified maxims of rhetoric, put with Pope's usual point and brilliancy. The classicism of the 18th century, it has been said, was a classicism in red heels and a periwig. It was Latin rather than Greek; it turned to the least imaginative side of Latin literature and found its models, not in Vergil, Catullus, and Lucretius, but in the satires, epistles, and didactic pieces of Juvenal, Horace, and Persius. The chosen medium of the new poetry was the heroic couplet. This had, of course, been used before by English poets as far back as Chaucer. The greater part of the *Canterbury Tales* was written in heroic couplets. But now a new strength and precision were given to the familiar measure by imprisoning the sense within the limit of the couplet, and by treating each line as also a unit in itself. Edmund Waller had written verse of this kind as early as the reign of Charles I. He, said Dryden, "first showed us to conclude the sense most commonly in distichs, which, in the verse of those before him, runs on for so many lines together that the reader is out of breath to overtake it." Sir John Denham, also, in his *Cooper's Hill*, 1643, had written such verse as this:

"O, could I flow like thee, and make thy stream  
 My great example as it is my theme!  
 {175}  
 Though deep yet clear, though gentle yet not dull,  
 Strong without rage, without o'erflowing full."

Here we have the regular flow, and the nice balance between the first and second member of each couplet, and the first and second part of each line, which characterized the verse of Dryden and Pope.

"Waller was smooth, but Dryden taught to join  
 The varying verse, the full resounding line,  
 The long resounding march and energy divine."

Thus wrote Pope, using for the nonce the triplet and alexandrine by which Dryden frequently varied the couplet. Pope himself added a greater neatness and polish to Dryden's verse and brought the system to such monotonous perfection that he "made poetry a mere mechanic art."

The lyrical poetry of this generation was almost entirely worthless. The dissolute wits of Charles the Second's court, Sedley, Rochester, Sackville, and the "mob of gentlemen who wrote with ease" threw off a few amatory trifles; but the age was not spontaneous or sincere enough for genuine song. Cowley introduced the Pindaric ode, a highly artificial form of the lyric, in which the language was tortured into a kind of spurious grandeur, and the meter teased into a sound and fury, signifying nothing. Cowley's Pindarics were filled with something which passed for fire, but has now utterly gone out. Nevertheless, the fashion spread, and "he who could do nothing else," said Dr. Johnson, "could write like Pindar." The best of these odes was Dryden's famous *Alexander's Feast*, written for a celebration of St. Cecilia's day by a musical club. To this same fashion, also, we owe Gray's two fine odes, the *Progress of Poesy* and the *Bard*, written a half-century later. Dryden was not so much a great poet, as a solid thinker, with a splendid mastery of expression, who used his energetic verse as a vehicle for political argument and satire. His first noteworthy poem, *Annus Mirabilis*, 1667, was a narrative of the public events of the year 1666, namely: the Dutch war and the great fire of London. The subject of *Absalom and Ahitophel*--the first part of which appeared in 1681--was the alleged plot of the Whig leader, the Earl of Shaftesbury, to defeat the succession of the Duke of York, afterward James II., by securing the throne to Monmouth, a natural son of Charles II. The parallel afforded by the story of Absalom's revolt against David was wrought out by Dryden with admirable ingenuity and keeping. He was at his best in satirical character-sketches, such as the brilliant portraits in this poem of Shaftesbury, as the false counselor, Ahitophel, and of the Duke of Buckingham as Zimri. The latter was Dryden's reply to the *Rehearsal*. *Absalom and Ahitophel* was followed by the *Medal*, a continuation of the same subject, and *Mac Flecknoe*, a personal onslaught on the "true blue Protestant

poet," Thomas Shadwell, a political and literary foe of Dryden. Flecknoe, an obscure Irish poetaster, being about to retire from the throne of duncedom, resolved to settle the succession upon his son, Shadwell, whose claims to the inheritance are vigorously asserted.

"The rest to some faint meaning make pretense,  
But Shadwell never deviates into sense. . . .  
The midwife laid her hand on his thick skull  
With this prophetic blessing--Be thou dull."

Dryden is our first great satirist. The formal satire had been written in the reign of Elisabeth by Donne, and by Joseph Hall, Bishop of Exeter, and subsequently by Marston, the dramatist, by Wither, Marvell, and others; but all of these failed through an over violence of language, and a purpose too pronouncedly moral. They had no lightness of touch, no irony and mischief. They bore down too hard, imitated Juvenal, and lashed English society in terms befitting the corruption of Imperial Rome. They denounced, instructed, preached, did every thing but satirize. The satirist must raise a laugh. Donne and Hall abused men in classes: priests were worldly, lawyers greedy, courtiers obsequious, etc. But the easy scorn of Dryden and the delightful malice of Pope gave a pungent personal interest to their sarcasm, infinitely more effective than these commonplaces of satire. Dryden was as happy in controversy as in satire, and is unexcelled in the power to reason in verse. His *Religio Laici*, 1682, was a poem in defense of the {178} English Church. But when James II. came to the throne Dryden turned Catholic and wrote the *Hind and Panther*, 1687, to vindicate his new belief. Dryden had the misfortune to be dependent upon royal patronage and upon a corrupt stage. He sold his pen to the court, and in his comedies he was heavily and deliberately lewd, a sin which he afterward acknowledged and regretted. Milton's "soul was like a star and dwelt apart," but Dryden wrote for the trampling multitude. He had a coarseness of moral fiber, but was not malignant in his satire, being of a large, careless, and forgetting nature. He had that masculine, enduring cast of mind which gathers heat and clearness from motion, and grows better with age. His *Fables--modernizations from Chaucer and translations from Boccaccio--written the year before he died*, are among his best works. Dryden is also our first critic of any importance. His critical essays were mostly written as prefaces or dedications to his poems and plays. But his *Essay on Dramatic Poesie*, which Dr. Johnson called our "first regular and valuable treatise on the art of writing," was in the shape of a Platonic dialogue. When not misled by the French classicism of his day, Dryden was an admirable critic, full of penetration and sound sense. He was the earliest writer, too, of modern literary prose. If the imitation of French models was an injury to poetry it was a benefit to prose. The best modern prose is French, and it was the essayists of the Gallicised Restoration age--Cowley, Sir William Temple, and, above all, Dryden--who gave modern English prose that simplicity, directness, and colloquial air, which marks it off from the more artificial diction of Milton, Taylor, and Browne. A few books whose shaping influences lay in the past belong by their date to this period. John Bunyan, a poor tinker, whose reading was almost wholly in the Bible and Fox's *Book of Martyrs*, imprisoned for twelve years in Bedford jail for preaching at conventicles, wrote and, in 1678, published his *Pilgrim's Progress*, the greatest of religious allegories. Bunyan's spiritual experiences were so real to him that they took visible concrete shape in his imagination as men, women, cities, landscapes. It is the simplest, the most transparent of allegories. Unlike the *Faery Queene*, the story of *Pilgrim's Progress* has no reason for existing apart from its inner meaning, and yet its reality is so vivid that children read of *Vanity Fair* and the *Slough of Despond* and *Doubting Castle* and the *Valley of the Shadow of Death* with the same belief with which they read of *Crusoe's cave* or *Aladdin's palace*. It is a long step from the Bedford tinker to the cultivated poet of *Paradise Lost*. They represent the poles of the Puritan party. Yet it may admit of a doubt, whether the Puritan epic is, in essentials, as vital and original a work as the Puritan allegory. They both came out quietly and made little noise at first. But the *Pilgrim's Progress* got at once into circulation, and not even a single copy of the first edition remains. Milton, too--who received 10 pounds for the copyright of *Paradise Lost--seemingly found that "fit audience though few"* for which he prayed, as his poem reached its second impression in five years (1672). Dryden visited him in his retirement and asked leave to turn it into rime and put it on the stage as an opera. "Ay," said Milton, good humoredly, "you may tag my verses." And accordingly they appeared, duly tagged, in Dryden's operatic masque, the *State of Innocence*. In this startling conjunction we have the two ages in a nut-shell: the Commonwealth was an epic, the Restoration an opera. The literary period covered by the life of Pope, 1688-1744, is marked off by no distinct line from the generation before it. Taste continued to be governed by the precepts of Boileau and the French classical school. Poetry remained chiefly didactic and satirical,

and satire in Pope's hands was more personal even than in Dryden's, and addressed itself less to public issues. The literature of the "Augustan age" of Queen Anne (1702-1714) was still more a literature of the town and of fashionable society than that of the Restoration had been. It was also closely involved with party struggles of Whig and Tory, and the ablest pens on either side were taken into alliance by the political leaders. Swift was in high favor with the Tory ministers, Oxford and Bolingbroke, and his pamphlets, the *Public Spirit of the Whigs* and the *Conduct of the Allies*, were rewarded with the deanery of St. Patrick's, Dublin. Addison became Secretary of State under a Whig government. Prior was in the diplomatic service. Daniel De Foe, the author of *Robinson Crusoe*, 1719, was a prolific political writer, conducted his *Review* in the interest of the Whigs and was imprisoned and pilloried for his ironical pamphlet, *The Shortest Way with the Dissenters*. Steele, who was a violent writer on the Whig side, held various public offices, such as Commissioner of Stamps and Commissioner for Forfeited Estates, and sat in Parliament. After the Revolution of 1688 the manners and morals of English society were somewhat on the mend. The court of William and Mary, and of their successor, Queen Anne, set no such example of open profligacy as that of Charles II. But there was much hard drinking, gambling, dueling, and intrigue in London, and vice was fashionable till Addison partly preached and partly laughed it down in the *Spectator*. The women were mostly frivolous and uneducated, and not unfrequently fast. They are spoken of with systematic disrespect by nearly every writer of the time, except Steele. "Every woman," wrote Pope, "is at heart a rake." The reading public had now become large enough to make letters a profession. Dr. Johnson said that Pope was the first writer in whose case the book-seller took the place of the patron. His translation of Homer, published by subscription, brought him between eight and nine thousand pounds and made him independent. But the activity of the press produced a swarm of poorly-paid hack-writers, penny-a-liners, who lived from hand to mouth and did small literary jobs to order. Many of these inhabited Grub Street, and their lampoons against Pope and others of their more successful rivals called out Pope's *Dunciad*, or epic of the dunces, by way of retaliation. The politics of the time were sordid and consisted mainly of an ignoble scramble for office. The Whigs were fighting to maintain the Act of Succession in favor of the House of Hanover, and the Tories were secretly intriguing with the exiled Stuarts. Many of the leaders, such as the great Whig champion, John Churchill, Duke of Marlborough, were without political principle or even personal honesty. The Church, too, was in a condition of spiritual deadness. Bishoprics and livings were sold and given to political favorites. Clergymen, like Swift and Lawrence Sterne, were worldly in their lives and immoral in their writings, and were practically unbelievers. The growing religious skepticism appeared in the Deist controversy. Numbers of men in high position were Deists; the Earl of Shaftesbury, for example, and Pope's brilliant friend, Henry St. John, Lord Bolingbroke, the head of the Tory ministry, whose political writings had much influence upon his young French acquaintance, Voltaire. Pope was a Roman Catholic, though there is little to show it in his writings, and the underlying thought of his famous *Essay on Man* was furnished him by Bolingbroke. The letters of the cold-hearted Chesterfield to his son were accepted as a manual of conduct, and La Rochefoucauld's cynical maxims were quoted as authority on life and human nature. Said Swift:

"As Rochefoucauld his maxims drew  
From nature, I believe them true.  
They argue no corrupted mind  
In him; the fault is in mankind."

The succession which Dryden had willed to Congreve was taken up by Alexander Pope. He was a man quite unlike Dryden, sickly, deformed, morbidly precocious, and spiteful; nevertheless he joined on to and continued Dryden. He was more careful in his literary workmanship than his great forerunner, and in his *Moral Essays* and *Satires* he brought the Horatian epistle in verse, the formal satire and that species of didactic poem of which Boileau had given the first example, to an exquisite perfection of finish and verbal art. Dryden had translated Vergil, and so Pope translated Homer. The throne of the dunces, which Dryden had conferred upon Shadwell, Pope, in his *Dunciad*, passed on to two of his own literary foes, Theobald and Colley Cibber. There is a great waste of strength in this elaborate squib, and most of the petty writers, whose names it has preserved, as has been said, like flies in amber, are now quite unknown. But, although we have to read it with notes, to get the point of its allusions, it is easy to see what execution it must have done at the time, and it is impossible to withhold admiration from the wit, the wickedness, the triumphant mischief of the thing. The sketch of Addison--who had offended Pope by praising a rival translation of Homer--as "Atticus," is as brilliant as any thing of the kind in Dryden. Pope's very malignity made his sting

sharper than Dryden's. He secreted venom, and worked out his revenges deliberately, bringing all the resources of his art to bear upon the question of how to give the most pain most cleverly. Pope's masterpiece is, perhaps, the Rape of the Lock, a mock heroic poem, a "dwarf Iliad," recounting, in five cantos, a society quarrel, which arose from Lord Petre's cutting a lock of hair from the head of Mrs. Arabella Fermor. Boileau, in his Lutrin, had treated, with the same epic dignity, a dispute over the placing of the reading desk in a parish church. Pope was the Homer of the drawing-room, the boudoir, the tea-urn, the ombre-party, the sedan-chair, the parrot cage, and the lap-dogs. This poem, in its sparkle and airy grace, is the topmost blossom of a highly artificial society, the quintessence of whatever poetry was possible in those

"Teacup times of hood and hoop,  
And when the patch was worn,"

with whose decorative features, at least, the recent Queen Anne revival has made this generation familiar. It may be said of it, as Thackeray said of Gay's pastorals: "It is to poetry what charming little Dresden china figures are to sculpture, graceful, minikin, fantastic, with a certain beauty always accompanying them." The Rape of the Lock, perhaps, stops short of beauty, but it attains elegance and prettiness in a supreme degree. In imitation of the gods and goddesses in the Iliad, who intermeddle for or against the human characters, Pope introduced the Sylphs of the Rosicrucian philosophy. We may measure the distance between imagination and fancy, if we will compare these little filagree creatures with Shakspeare's elves, whose occupation it was

"To tread the ooze of the salt deep,  
Or run upon the sharp wind of the north, . . .  
Or on the beached margent of the sea,  
To dance their ringlets to the whispering wind."

Very different were the offices of Pope's fays:

"Our humble province is to tend the fair;  
Not a less pleasing, though less glorious, care;  
To save the powder from too rude a gale,  
Nor let the imprisoned essences exhale. . . .  
Nay oft in dreams invention we bestow  
To change a flounce or add a furbelow."

Pope was not a great poet; it has been doubted whether he was a poet at all. He does not touch the heart, or stimulate the imagination, as the true poet always does. In the poetry of nature, and the poetry of passion, he was altogether impotent. His Windsor Forest and his Pastorals are artificial and false, not written with "the eye upon the object." His epistle of Eloisa to Abelard is declamatory and academic, and leaves the reader cold. The only one of his poems which is at all possessed with feeling is his pathetic Elegy to the Memory of an Unfortunate Lady. But he was a great literary artist. Within the cramped and starved regularity of the heroic couplet, which the fashion of the time and his own habit of mind imposed upon him, he secured the largest variety of modulation and emphasis of which that verse was capable. He used antithesis, periphrasis, and climax with great skill. His example dominated English poetry for nearly a century, and even now, when a poet like Dr. Holmes, for example, would write satire or humorous verse of a dignified kind, he turns instinctively to the measure and manner of Pope. He was not a consecutive thinker, like Dryden, and cared less about the truth of his thought than about the pointedness of its expression. His language was closer-grained than Dryden's. His great art was the art of putting things. He is more quoted than any other English poet, but Shakspeare. He struck the average intelligence, the common sense of English readers, and furnished it with neat, portable formulas, so that it no longer needed to "vent its observation in mangled terms," but could pour itself out compactly, artistically, in little, ready-made molds. But his high-wrought brilliancy, this unceasing point, soon fatigue. His poems read like a series of epigrams; and every line has a hit or an effect. From the reign of Queen Anne date the beginnings of the periodical essay. Newspapers had been published since the time of the Civil War; at first irregularly, and

then regularly. But no literature of permanent value appeared in periodical form until Richard Steele started the *Tatler*, in 1709. In this he was soon joined by his friend, Joseph Addison and in its successor the *Spectator*, the first number of which was issued March 1, 1711, Addison's contributions outnumbered Steele's. The *Tatler* was published on three, the *Spectator* on six, days of the week. The *Tatler* gave political news, but each number of the *Spectator* consisted of a single essay. The object of these periodicals was to reflect the passing humors of the time, and to satirize the follies and minor immoralities of the town. "I shall endeavor," wrote Addison, in the tenth paper of the *Spectator*, "to enliven morality with wit, and to temper wit with morality. . . . It was said of Socrates that he brought Philosophy down from Heaven to inhabit among men; and I shall be ambitious to have it said of me that I have brought Philosophy out of closets and libraries, schools and colleges, to dwell in clubs and assemblies, at tea-tables and in coffee-houses." Addison's satire was never personal. He was a moderate man, and did what he could to restrain Steele's intemperate party zeal. His character was dignified and pure, and his strongest emotion seems to have been his religious feeling. One of his contemporaries called him "a parson in a tie wig," and he wrote several excellent hymns. His mission was that of censor of the public taste. Sometimes he lectures and sometimes he preaches, and in his Saturday papers, he brought his wide reading and nice scholarship into service for the instruction of his readers. Such was the series of essays, in which he gave an elaborate review of *Paradise Lost*. Such also was his famous paper, the *Vision of Mirza*, an oriental allegory of human life. The adoption of this slightly pedagogic tone was justified by the prevalent ignorance and frivolity of the age. But the lighter portions of the *Spectator* are those which have worn the best. Their style is at once correct and easy, and it is as a humorist, a sly observer of manners, and above all, a delightful talker, that Addison is best known to posterity. In the personal sketches of the members of the *Spectator* Club, of Will Honeycomb, Captain Sentry, Sir Andrew Freeport, and, above all, Sir Roger de Coverley, the quaint and honest country gentleman, may be found the nucleus of the modern prose fiction of character. Addison's humor is always a trifle grave. There is no whimsy, no frolic in it, as in Sterne or Lamb. "He thinks justly," said Dr. Johnson, "but he thinks faintly." The *Spectator* had a host of followers, from the somewhat heavy *Rambler* and *Idler* of Johnson, down to the *Salmagundi* papers of our own Irving, who was, perhaps, Addison's latest and {189} best literary descendant. In his own age Addison made some figure as a poet and dramatist. His Campaign, celebrating the victory of Blenheim, had one much-admired couplet, in which Marlborough was likened to the angel of tempest, who  
 "Pleased the Almighty's orders to perform,  
 Rides in the whirlwind and directs the storm."

His stately, classical tragedy, *Cato*, which was acted at Drury Lane Theater in 1712, with immense applause, was pronounced by Dr. Johnson "unquestionably the noblest production of Addison's genius." It is, notwithstanding, cold and tedious, as a whole, though it has some fine declamatory passages--in particular the soliloquy of *Cato* in the fifth act--

"It must be so: Plato, thou reasonest well," etc.

The greatest of the Queen Anne wits, and one of the most savage and powerful satirists that ever lived, was Jonathan Swift. As secretary in the family of Sir William Temple, and domestic chaplain to the Earl of Berkeley, he had known in youth the bitterness of poverty and dependence. Afterward he wrote himself into influence with the Tory ministry, and was promised a bishopric, but was put off with the deanery of St. Patrick's, and retired to Ireland to "die like a poisoned rat in a hole." His life was made tragical by the forecast of the madness which finally overtook him. "The stage darkened," said Scott, "ere the curtain fell." Insanity deepened into idiocy and a hideous silence, and for three years before his death he spoke hardly ever a word. He had directed that his tombstone should bear the inscription, *Ubi saeva indignatio cor ulterius lacerare nequit*. "So great a man he seems to me," wrote Thackeray, "that thinking of him is like thinking of an empire falling." Swift's first noteworthy publication was his *Tale of a Tub*, 1704, a satire on religious differences. But his great work was *Gulliver's Travels*, 1726, the book in which his hate and scorn of mankind, and the long rage of mortified pride and thwarted ambition found their fullest expression. Children read the voyages to Lilliput and Brobdingnag, to the flying island of Laputa and the country of the Houyhnhnms, as they read *Robinson Crusoe*, as stories of wonderful adventure. Swift had all of De Foe's realism, his power of giving veri-similitude to his narrative by the invention of a vast number of small, exact, consistent details. But underneath its fairy tales, *Gulliver's Travels* is a satire, far more radical than any of Dryden's or Pope's, because directed, not against particular parties or persons, but against human

nature. In his account of Lilliput and Brobdingnag, Swift tries to show--looking first through one end of the telescope and then through the other--that human greatness, goodness, beauty disappear if the scale be altered a little. If men were six inches high instead of six feet--such is the logic of his tale--their wars, governments, science, religion--all their institutions, in fine, and all the courage, wisdom, and virtue by which these have been built up, would appear laughable. On the other hand, if they were sixty feet high instead of six, they would become disgusting. The complexion of the finest ladies would show blotches, hairs, excrescences, and an overpowering effluvia would breathe from the pores of the skin. Finally, in his loathsome caricature of mankind, as Yahoos, he contrasts them to their shame with the beasts, and sets instinct above reason. The method of Swift's satire was grave irony. Among his minor writings in this kind are his Argument against Abolishing Christianity, his Modest Proposal for utilizing the surplus population of Ireland by eating the babies of the poor, and his Predictions of Isaac Bickerstaff. In the last he predicted the death of one Partridge, an almanac maker, at a certain day and hour. When the time set was past, he published a minute account of Partridge's last moments; and when the subject of this excellent fooling printed an indignant denial of his own death, Swift answered very temperately, proving that he was dead and remonstrating with him on the violence of his language. "To call a man a fool and villain, an impudent fellow, only for differing from him in a point merely speculative, is, in my humble opinion, a very improper style for a person of his education." Swift wrote verses as well as prose, but their motive was the reverse of poetical. His gross and cynical humor vulgarized whatever it touched. He leaves us no illusions, and not only strips his subject, but flays it and shows the raw muscles beneath the skin. He delighted to dwell upon the lowest bodily functions of human nature. "He saw bloodshot," said Thackeray.

1. Macaulay's Essay, The Comic Dramatists of the Restoration.
2. The Poetical Works of John Dryden. Globe Edition. Macmillan & Co.
3. Thackeray's English Humorists of the Last Century.
4. Sir Roger de Coverley. New York: Harper, 1878.
5. Swift's Tale of a Tub, Gulliver's Travels, Directions to Servants, Polite Conversation, The Great Question Debated, Verses on the Death of Dean Swift.
6. The Poetical Works of Alexander Pope. Globe Edition. Macmillan & Co.

## CHAPTER VI.

### FROM THE DEATH OF POPE TO THE FRENCH REVOLUTION.

#### 1744-1789

Pope's example continued potent for fifty years after his death. Especially was this so in satiric and didactic poetry. Not only Dr. Johnson's adaptations from Juvenal, London, 1738, and the *Vanity of Human Wishes*, 1749, but Gifford's *Baviad*, 1791, and *Maeviad*, 1795, and Byron's *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers*, 1809, were in the verse and manner of Pope. In Johnson's *Lives of the Poets*, 1781, Dryden and Pope are treated as the two greatest English poets. But long before this a revolution in literary taste had begun, a movement which is variously described as *The Return to Nature*, or *The Rise of the New Romantic School*. For nearly a hundred years poetry had dealt with manners and the life of towns, the gay, prosaic life of Congreve or of Pope. The sole concession to the life of nature was the old pastoral, which, in the hands of cockneys, like Pope and Ambrose Philips, who merely repeated stock descriptions at second or third hand, became even more artificial than a *Beggar's Opera* or a *Rape of the {194} Lock*. These, at least, were true to their environment, and were natural, just because they were artificial. But the *Seasons* of James Thomson, published in installments from 1726-30, had opened a new field. Their theme was the English landscape, as varied by the changes of the year, and they were written by a true lover and observer of nature. Mark Akenside's *Pleasures of Imagination*, 1744, published the year of Pope's death, was written like the *Seasons*, in blank verse; and although its language had much of the formal, didactic cast of the Queen Anne poets, it pointed unmistakably in the new direction. Thomson had painted the soft beauties of a highly cultivated land--lawns, gardens, forest-preserves, orchards, and sheep-walks. But now a fresh note was struck in the literature, not of England alone, but of Germany and France--romanticism, the chief element in which was a love of the wild. Poets turned from the lameness of modern existence to savage nature and the heroic simplicity of life among primitive tribes. In France, Rousseau introduced the idea of the natural man, following his instincts in disregard of social conventions. In Germany Bodmer published, in 1753, the first edition of the old German epic, the *Nibelungen Lied*. Works of a similar tendency in England were the odes of William Collins and Thomas Gray, published between 1747-57, especially Collins's *Ode on the Superstitions of the Highlands*, and Gray's *Bard*, a pindaric, in which the last survivor of the Welsh bards invokes vengeance on {195} Edward I., the destroyer of his guild. Gray and Mason, his friend and editor, made translations from the ancient Welsh and Norse poetry. Thomas Percy's *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry*, 1765, aroused a taste for old ballads. Richard Hurd's *Letters on Chivalry and Romance*, Thomas Warton's *History of English Poetry*, 1774-78, Tyrwhitt's critical edition of Chaucer, and Horace Walpole's Gothic romance, the *Castle of Otranto*, 1765, stimulated this awakened interest in the picturesque aspects of feudal life, and contributed to the fondness for supernatural and mediaeval subjects. James Beattie's *Minstrel*, 1771, described the educating influence of Scottish mountain scenery upon the genius of a young poet. But the most remarkable instances of this passion for wild nature and the romantic past were the *Poems of Ossian* and Thomas Chatterton's literary forgeries. In 1762 James Macpherson published the first installment of what professed to be a translation of the poems of Ossian, a Gaelic bard, whom tradition placed in the 3d century. Macpherson said that he made his version--including two complete epics, *Fingal* and *Temora*, from Gaelic MSS., which he had collected in the Scottish Highlands. A fierce controversy at once sprang up over the genuineness of these remains. Macpherson was challenged to produce his originals, and when, many years after, he published the Gaelic text, it was asserted that this was nothing but a translation of his own English into modern Gaelic. Of the MSS. which he professed to have found not a scrap remained: the Gaelic text was printed from transcriptions in Macpherson's handwriting or in that of his secretaries. But whether these poems were the work of Ossian or of Macpherson, they made a deep impression upon the time. Napoleon admired them greatly, and Goethe inserted passages from the "*Songs of Selma*" in his *Sorrows of Werther*. Macpherson composed--or translated--them in an abrupt, rhapsodical prose, resembling the English version of *Job* or of the prophecies of Isaiah. They filled the minds of their readers with images of vague sublimity and desolation; the mountain torrent, the mist on the hills, the ghosts of heroes half seen by the setting moon, the thistle in the ruined courts of chieftains, the grass whistling on the windy heath, the gray rock by the blue stream of Lutha, and the cliffs of sea-surrounded Gormal. "A tale of the times of old!" "Why, thou wanderer unseen! Thou bender of the thistle of Lora; why, thou breeze of the valley, hast thou left mine ear? I hear no distant roar of streams! No sound of the harp from the rock! Come, thou huntress of Lutha, Malvina, call back his soul to the bard. I look



forward to Lochlin of lakes, to the dark billowy bay of U-thorno, where Fingal descends from Ocean, from the roar of winds. Few are the heroes of Morven in a land unknown." Thomas Chatterton, who died by his own hand in 1770, at the age of seventeen, is one of the most wonderful examples of precocity in the history of literature. His father had been sexton of the ancient Church of St. Mary Redcliff, in Bristol, and the boy's sensitive imagination took the stamp of his surroundings. He taught himself to read from a black-letter Bible. He drew charcoal sketches of churches, castles, knightly tombs, and heraldic blazonry. When only eleven years old, he began the fabrication of documents in prose and verse, which he ascribed to a fictitious Thomas Rowley, a secular priest at Bristol in the 15th century. Chatterton pretended to have found these among the contents of an old chest in the muniment room of St. Mary Redcliff's. The Rowley poems included two tragedies, *Aella* and *Goddwyn*, two cantos of a long poem on the Battle of Hastings, and a number of ballads and minor pieces. Chatterton had no precise knowledge of early English, or even of Chaucer. His method of working was as follows: He made himself a manuscript glossary of the words marked as archaic in Bailey's and Kersey's English dictionaries, composed his poems first in modern language, and then turned them into ancient spelling, and substituted here and there the old words in his glossary for their modern equivalents. Naturally he made many mistakes, and though Horace Walpole, to whom he sent some of his pieces, was unable to detect the forgery, his friends, Gray and Mason, to whom he submitted them, at once pronounced them spurious. Nevertheless there was a controversy over Rowley, hardly less obstinate than that over Ossian, a controversy made possible only by the then almost universal ignorance of the forms, scansion, and vocabulary of early English poetry. Chatterton's poems are of little value in themselves, but they are the record of an industry and imitative quickness, marvelous in a mere child, and they show how, with the instinct of genius, he threw himself into the main literary current of his time. Discarding the couplet of Pope, the poets now went back for models to the Elizabethan writers. Thomas Warton published, in 1753, his *Observations on the Faerie Queene*. Beattie's *Minstrel*, Thomson's *Castle of Indolence*, William Shenstone's *Schoolmistress*, and John Dyer's *Fleece*, were all written in the Spenserian stanza. Shenstone gave a partly humorous effect to his poem by imitating Spenser's archaisms, and Thomson reproduced in many passages the copious harmony and luxuriant imagery of the *Faerie Queene*. The *Fleece* was a poem on English wool-growing, after the fashion of Vergil's *Georgics*. The subject was unfortunate, for, as Dr. Johnson said, it is impossible to make poetry out of serges and druggets. Dyer's *Grongar Hill*, which mingles reflection with natural description in the manner of Gray's *Elegy* written in a Country Churchyard, was composed in the octosyllabic verse of Milton's *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*. Milton's minor poems, which had hitherto been neglected, exercised a great influence on Collins and Gray. Collins's *Ode to Simplicity* was written in the stanza of Milton's *Nativity*, and his exquisite unrimed *Ode to Evening* was a study in versification, after Milton's translation of Horace's *Ode to Pyrrha*, in the original meters. Shakspeare began to be studied more reverently: numerous critical editions of his plays were issued, and Garrick restored his pure text to the stage. Collins was an enthusiastic student of Shakspeare, and one of his sweetest poems, the *Dirge in Cymbeline*, was inspired by the tragedy of *Cymbeline*. The verse of Gray, Collins, and the Warton brothers, abounds in verbal reminiscences of Shakspeare; but their genius was not allied to his, being exclusively lyrical, and not at all dramatic. The Muse of this romantic school was Fancy rather than Passion. A thoughtful melancholy, a gentle, scholarly pensiveness, the spirit of Milton's *Il Penseroso*, pervades their poetry. Gray was a fastidious scholar, who produced very little, but that little of the finest quality. His famous *Elegy*, expressing a meditative mood in language of the choicest perfection, is the representative poem of the second half of the 18th century, as the *Rape of the Lock* is of the first. The romanticists were quietists, and their scenery is characteristic. They loved solitude and evening, the twilight vale, the mossy hermitage, ruins, glens, and caves. Their style was elegant and academic, retaining a little of the stilted poetic diction of their classical {200} forerunners. Personification and periphrasis were their favorite mannerisms: Collins's *Odes* were largely addressed to abstractions, such as Fear, Pity, Liberty, Mercy, and Simplicity. A poet in their dialect was always a "bard;" a countryman was "the untutored swain," and a woman was a "nymph" or "the fair," just as in Dryden and Pope. Thomson is perpetually mindful of Vergil, and afraid to speak simply. He uses too many Latin epithets, like *amusive* and *precipitant*, and calls a fish-line "The floating line snatched from the hoary steed." They left much for Cowper and Wordsworth to do in the way of infusing the new blood of a strong, racy English into our exhausted poetic diction. Their poetry is impersonal, bookish, literary. It lacks emotional force, except now and then in Gray's immortal *Elegy*, in his *Ode on a Distant Prospect of Eton College*, in Collins's lines, *On the Death of Thomson*, and his little ode beginning, "How sleep the brave?" The new school did not lack critical expounders of its principles and practice. Joseph Warton published, in 1756, the first volume of his *Essay on the Genius and Writings of Pope*, an elaborate review of Pope's

writings seriatim, doing him certainly full justice, but ranking him below Shakspeare, Spenser, and Milton. "Wit and satire," wrote Warton, "are transitory and perishable, but nature and passion are eternal. . . . He stuck to describing modern manners; but those manners, because they are familiar, artificial, and polished, are, in their very nature, unfit for any lofty effort of the Muse. Whatever poetical enthusiasm he actually possessed he withheld and stifled. Surely it is no narrow and niggardly encomium to say, he is the great Poet of Reason, the first of Ethical authors in verse." Warton illustrated his critical positions by quoting freely not only from Spenser and Milton, but from recent poets, like Thomson, Gray, Collins, and Dyer. He testified that the Seasons had "been very instrumental in diffusing a general taste for the beauties of nature and landscape." It was symptomatic of the change in literary taste that the natural or English school of landscape gardening now began to displace the French and Dutch fashion of clipped hedges, regular parterres, etc., and that Gothic architecture came into repute. Horace Walpole was a virtuoso in Gothic art, and in his castle, at Strawberry Hill, he made a collection of ancient armor, illuminated MSS., and bric-a-brac of all kinds. Gray had been Walpole's traveling companion in France and Italy, and the two had quarreled and separated, but were afterward reconciled. From Walpole's private printing-press, at Strawberry Hill, Gray's two "sister odes," the Bard and the Progress of Poesy, were first printed, in 1757. Both Gray and Walpole were good correspondents, and their printed letters are among the most delightful literature of the kind. The central figure among the English men of letters of that generation was Samuel Johnson (1709-84), whose memory has been preserved less by his own writings than by James Boswell's famous Life of Johnson, published in 1791. Boswell was a Scotch laird and advocate, who first met Johnson in London, when the latter was fifty-four years old. Boswell was not a very wise or witty person, but he revered the worth and intellect which shone through his subject's uncouth exterior. He followed him about, note-book in hand, bore all his snubbings patiently, and made the best biography ever written. It is related that the doctor once said that if he thought Boswell meant to write his life, he should prevent it by taking Boswell's. And yet Johnson's own writings and this biography of him have changed places in relative importance so completely, that Carlyle predicted that the former would soon be reduced to notes on the latter; and Macaulay said that the man who was known to his contemporaries as a great writer was known to posterity as an agreeable companion. Johnson was one of those rugged, eccentric, self-developed characters, so common among the English. He was the son of a Lichfield book-seller, and after a course at Oxford, which was cut short by poverty, and an unsuccessful career as a school-master, he had come up to London, in 1737, where he supported himself for many years as a book-seller's hack. Gradually his great learning and abilities, his ready social wit and powers as a talker, caused his company to be sought at the tables of those whom he called "the great." He was a clubbable man, and he drew about him at the tavern a group of the most distinguished intellects of the time, Edmund Burke, the orator and statesman, Oliver Goldsmith, Sir Joshua Reynolds, the portrait painter, and David Garrick, the great actor, who had been a pupil in Johnson's school, near Lichfield. Johnson was the typical John Bull of the last century. His oddities, virtues, and prejudices were thoroughly English. He hated Frenchmen, Scotchmen, and Americans, and had a cockneyish attachment to London. He was a high Tory, and an orthodox churchman; he loved a lord in the abstract, and yet he asserted a sturdy independence against any lord in particular. He was deeply religious, but had an abiding fear of death. He was burly in person, and slovenly in dress, his shirt-frill always covered with snuff. He was a great diner out, an inordinate tea-drinker, and a voracious and untidy feeder. An inherited scrofula, which often took the form of hypochondria and threatened to affect his brain, deprived him of control over the muscles of his face. Boswell describes how his features worked, how he snorted, grunted, whistled, and rolled about in his chair when getting ready to speak. He records his minutest traits, such as his habit of pocketing the orange peels at the club, and his superstitious way of touching all the posts between his house and the Mitre Tavern, going back to do it, if he skipped one by chance. Though bearish in his manners and arrogant in dispute, especially when talking "for victory," Johnson had a large and tender heart. He loved his ugly, old wife--twenty-one years his senior--and he had his house full of unfortunates--a blind woman, an invalid surgeon, a destitute widow, a negro servant--whom he supported for many years, and bore with all their ill-humors patiently. Among Johnson's numerous writings the ones best entitled to remembrance are, perhaps, his Dictionary of the English Language, 1755; his moral tale, Rasselas, 1759; the introduction to his Edition of Shakspeare, 1765; and his Lives of the Poets, 1781. Johnson wrote a sonorous, cadenced prose, full of big Latin words and balanced clauses. Here is a sentence, for example, from his Visit to the Hebrides: "We were now treading that illustrious island which was once the luminary of the Caledonian regions, whence savage clans and roving barbarians derived the benefits of knowledge and the blessings of religion. To abstract the mind from all local emotion would be impossible, if it were endeavored, and would be foolish, if it were possible." The

difference between his colloquial style and his book style is well illustrated in the instance cited by Macaulay. Speaking of Villier's Rehearsal, Johnson said, "It has not wit enough to keep it sweet;" then paused and added--translating English into Johnsonese--"it has not vitality sufficient to preserve it from putrefaction." There is more of this in Johnson's Rambler and Idler papers than in his latest work, the Lives of the Poets. In this he showed himself a sound and judicious critic, though with decided limitations. His understanding was solid, but he was a thorough classicist, and his taste in poetry was formed on Pope. He was unjust to Milton and to his own contemporaries, Gray, Collins, Shenstone, and Dyer. He had no sense of the higher and subtler graces of romantic poetry, and he had a comical indifference to the "beauties of nature." When Boswell once ventured to remark that poor Scotland had, at least, some "noble, wild prospects," the doctor replied that the noblest prospect a Scotchman ever saw was the road that led to London. The English novel of real life had its origin at this time. Books like De Foe's Robinson Crusoe, Captain Singleton, Journal of the Plague, etc., were tales of incident and adventure rather than novels. The novel deals primarily with character and with the interaction of characters upon one another, as developed by a regular plot. The first English novelist, in the modern sense of the word, was Samuel Richardson, a printer, who began authorship in his fiftieth year with his Pamela, the story of a young servant girl, who resisted the seductions of her master, and finally, as the reward of her virtue, became his wife. Clarissa Harlowe, 1748, was the tragical history of a high spirited young lady, who being driven from home by her family, because she refused to marry the suitor selected for her, fell into the toils of Lovelace, an accomplished rake. After struggling heroically against every form of artifice and violence, she was at last drugged and ruined. She died of a broken heart, and Lovelace, borne down by remorse, was killed in a duel by a cousin of Clarissa. Sir Charles Grandison, 1753, was Richardson's portrait of an ideal fine gentleman, whose stately doings fill eight volumes, but who seems to the modern reader a bore and a prig. All of these novels were written in the form of letters passing between the characters, a method which fitted Richardson's subjective cast of mind. He knew little of life, but he identified himself intensely with his principal character and produced a strong effect by minute, accumulated touches. Clarissa Harlowe is his masterpiece, though even in that the situation is painfully prolonged, the heroine's virtue is self-conscious and rhetorical, and there is something almost ludicrously unnatural in the copiousness with which she pours herself out in gushing epistles to her female correspondent at the very moment when she is beset with dangers, persecuted, agonized, and driven nearly mad. In Richardson's novels appears, for the first time, that sentimentalism which now began to infect European literature. Pamela was translated into French and German, and fell in with that current of popular feeling which found fullest expression in Rousseau's Nouvelle Heloise, 1759, and Goethe's Leiden des Jungen Werther, which set all the world a-weeping in 1774. Coleridge said that to pass from Richardson's books to those of Henry Fielding was like going into the fresh air from a close room heated by stoves. Richardson, it has been affirmed, knew man, but Fielding knew men. The latter's first novel, Joseph Andrews, 1742, was begun as a travesty of Pamela. The hero, a brother of Pamela, was a young footman in the employ of Lady Booby, from whom his virtue suffered a like assault to that made upon Pamela's by her master. This reversal of the natural situation was in itself full of laughable possibilities, had the book gone on simply as a burlesque. But the exuberance of Fielding's genius led him beyond his original design. This hero, leaving Lady Booby's service, goes traveling with good Parson Adams, and is soon engaged in a series of comical and rather boisterous adventures. Fielding had seen life, and his characters were painted from the life with a bold, free hand. He was a gentleman by birth, and had made acquaintance with society and the town in 1727, when he was a handsome, stalwart young fellow, with high animal spirits and a great appetite for pleasure. He soon ran himself into debt and began writing for the stage; married, and spent his wife's fortune, living for awhile in much splendor as a country gentleman, and afterward in a reduced condition as a rural justice with a salary of 500 pounds of "the dirtiest money on earth." Fielding's masterpiece was Tom Jones, 1749, and it remains one of the best of English novels. Its hero is very much after Fielding's own heart, wild, spendthrift, warm-hearted, forgiving, and greatly in need of forgiveness. The same type of character, with the lines deepened, reappears in Captain Booth, in Amelia, 1751, the heroine of which is a portrait of Fielding's wife. With Tom Jones is contrasted Blifil, the embodiment of meanness, hypocrisy, and cowardice. Sophia Western, the heroine, is one of Fielding's most admirable creations. For the regulated morality of Richardson, with its somewhat old-grannified air, Fielding substituted instinct. His virtuous characters are virtuous by impulse only, and his ideal of character is manliness. In Jonathan Wild the hero is a highwayman. This novel is ironical, a sort of prose mock-heroic, and is one of the strongest, though certainly the least pleasing, of Fielding's writings. Tobias Smollett was an inferior Fielding with a difference. He was a Scotch ship-surgeon and had spent some time in the West Indies. He introduced into fiction the now familiar figure of

the British tar, in the persons of Tom Bowling and Commodore Trunnion, as Fielding had introduced, in Squire Western, the equally national type of the hard-swearing, deep-drinking, fox-hunting Tory squire. Both Fielding and Smollett were of the hearty British "beef-and-beer" school; their novels are downright, energetic, coarse, and high-blooded; low life, physical life, runs riot through their pages--tavern brawls, the breaking of pates, and the off-hand courtship of country wenches. Smollett's books, such as Roderick Random, 1748, Peregrine Pickle, 1751, and Ferdinand Count Fathom, 1752, were more purely stories of broadly comic adventure than Fielding's. The latter's view of life was by no means idyllic; but with Smollett this English realism ran into vulgarity and a hard Scotch literalness, and character was pushed to caricature. "The generous wine of Fielding," says Taine, "in Smollett's hands becomes brandy of the dram-shop." A partial exception to this is to be found in his last and best novel, Humphrey Clinker, 1770. The influence of Cervantes and of the French novelist, Le Sage, who finished his *Adventures of Gil Blas* in 1735, are very perceptible in Smollett.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### FROM THE DEATH OF SCOTT TO THE PRESENT TIME.

#### 1832-1886

The literature of the past fifty years is too close to our eyes to enable the critic to pronounce a final judgment, or the literary historian to get a true perspective. Many of the principal writers of the time are still living, and many others have been dead but a few years. This concluding chapter, therefore, will be devoted to the consideration of the few who stand forth, incontestably, as the leaders of literary thought, and who seem likely, under all future changes of fashion and taste, to remain representative of their generation. As regards form, the most striking fact in the history of the period under review is the immense preponderance in its imaginative literature of prose fiction, of the novel of real life. The novel has become to the solitary reader of to-day what the stage play was to the audiences of Elisabeth's reign, or the periodical essay, like the *Tatlers* and *Spectators*, to the clubs and breakfast-tables of Queen Anne's. And, if its criticism of life is less concentrated and brilliant than the drama gives, it is far more searching and minute. No period has ever left in its literary records so complete a picture of its whole society as the period which is just closing. At any other time than the present, the names of authors like Charlotte Brontë, Charles Kingsley, and Charles Reade--names which are here merely mentioned in passing--besides many others which want of space forbids us even to mention--would be of capital importance. As it is, we must limit our review to the three acknowledged masters of modern English fiction, Charles Dickens (1812-1870), William Makepeace Thackeray (1811-1863), and "George Eliot" (Mary Ann Evans, 1819-1880). It is sometimes helpful to reduce a great writer to his lowest term, in order to see what the prevailing bent of his genius is. This lowest term may often be found in his early work, before experience of the world has overlaid his original impulse with foreign accretions. Dickens was much more than a humorist, Thackeray than a satirist, and George Eliot than a moralist; but they had their starting-points respectively in humor, in burlesque, and in strong ethical and religious feeling. Dickens began with a broadly comic series of papers, contributed to the *Old Magazine* and the *Evening Chronicle*, and reprinted in book form, in 1836, as *Sketches by Boz*. The success of these suggested to a firm of publishers the preparation of a number of similar sketches of the misadventures of cockney sportsmen, to accompany plates by the comic draughtsman, Mr. R. Seymour. This suggestion resulted in the *Pickwick Papers*, published in monthly installments, in 1836-1837. The series grew, under Dickens's hand, into a continuous, though rather loosely strung narrative of the doings of a set of characters, conceived with such exuberant and novel humor that it took the public by storm, and raised its author at once to fame. *Pickwick* is by no means Dickens's best, but it is his most characteristic, and most popular, book. At the time that he wrote these early sketches he was a reporter for the *Morning Chronicle*. His naturally acute powers of observation had been trained in this pursuit to the utmost efficiency, and there always continued to be about his descriptive writing a reportorial and newspaper air. He had the eye for effect, the sharp fidelity to detail, the instinct for rapidly seizing upon and exaggerating the salient point, which are developed by the requirements of modern journalism. Dickens knew London as no one else has ever known it, and, in particular, he knew its hideous and grotesque recesses, with the strange developments of human nature that abide there; slums like Tom-all-Alone's, in *Bleak House*; the river-side haunts of *Rogue Riderhood*, in *Our Mutual Friend*; as well as the old inns, like the "White Hart," and the "dusky purlieu of the law." As a man, his favorite occupation was walking the streets, where, as a child, he had picked up the most valuable part of his education. His tramps about London--often after nightfall--sometimes extended to fifteen miles in a day. He knew, too, the shifts of poverty. His father--some traits of whom are preserved in Mr. Micawber--was imprisoned for debt in the Marshalsea prison, where his wife took lodging with him, while Charles, then a boy of ten, was employed at six shillings a week to cover blacking-pots in Warner's blacking warehouse. The hardships and loneliness of this part of his life are told under a thin disguise in Dickens's masterpiece, *David Copperfield*, the most autobiographical of his novels. From these young experiences he gained that insight into the lives of the lower classes, and that sympathy with children and with the poor which shine out in his pathetic sketches of *Little Nell*, in *The Old Curiosity Shop*, of *Paul Dombey*, of *Poor Jo*, in *Bleak House*, of "the Marchioness," and a hundred other figures. In *Oliver Twist*, contributed, during 1837-1838, to Bentley's *Miscellany*, a monthly magazine of which Dickens was editor, he produced his first regular novel. In this story of the criminal classes the author showed a tragic power which he had not hitherto exhibited. Thenceforward his career was a series of dazzling successes. It is impossible here to particularize his numerous novels,

sketches, short tales, and "Christmas Stories"--the latter a fashion which he inaugurated, and which has produced a whole literature in itself. In *Nicholas Nickleby*, 1839; *Master Humphrey's Clock*, 1840; *Martin Chuzzlewit*, 1844; *Dombey and Son*, 1848; *David Copperfield*, 1850; and *Bleak House*, 1853, there is no falling off in strength. The last named was, in some respects, and especially in the skillful construction of the plot, his best novel. In some of his latest books, as *Great Expectations*, 1861, and *Our Mutual Friend*, 1865, there are signs of a decline. This showed itself in an unnatural exaggeration of characters and motives, and a painful straining after humorous effects; faults, indeed, from which Dickens was never wholly free. There was a histrionic side to him, which came out in his fondness for private theatricals, in which he exhibited remarkable talent, and in the dramatic action which he introduced into the delightful public readings from his works that he gave before vast audiences all over the United Kingdom, and in his two visits to America. It is not surprising, either, to learn that upon the stage his preference was for melodrama and farce. His own serious writing was always dangerously close to the melodramatic, and his humor to the farcical. There is much false art, bad taste, and even vulgarity in Dickens. He was never quite a gentleman, and never succeeded well in drawing gentlemen or ladies. In the region of low comedy he is easily the most original, the most inexhaustible, the most wonderful of modern humorists. Creations such as Mrs. Nickleby, Mr. Micawber, Sam Weller, Sairy Gamp, take rank with Falstaff and Dogberry; while many others, like Dick Swiveller, Stiggins, Chadband, Mrs. Jellyby, and Julia Mills are almost equally good. In the innumerable swarm of minor characters with which he has enriched our comic literature, there is no indistinctness. Indeed, the objection that has been made to him is that his characters are too distinct--that he puts labels on them; that they are often mere personifications of a single trick of speech or manner, which becomes tedious and unnatural by repetition; thus, Grandfather Smallweed is always settling down into his cushion, and having to be shaken up; Mr. Jellyby is always sitting with his head against the wall; Peggotty is always bursting her buttons off, etc., etc. As Dickens's humorous characters tend perpetually to run into caricatures and grotesques, so his sentiment, from the same excess, slops over too frequently into "gush," and into a too deliberate and protracted attack upon the pity. A favorite humorous device in his style is a stately and roundabout way of telling a trivial incident as where, for example, Mr. Roker "muttered certain unpleasant invocations concerning his own eyes, limbs, and circulating fluids;" or where the drunken man who is singing comic songs in the Fleet received from Mr. Smangle "a gentle intimation, through the medium of the water-jug, that his audience were not musically disposed." This manner was original with Dickens, though he may have taken a hint of it from the mock heroic language of Jonathan Wild; but as practiced by a thousand imitators, ever since, it has gradually become a burden. It would not be the whole truth to say that the difference between the humor of Thackeray and Dickens is the same as between that of Shakspeare and Ben Jonson. Yet it is true that the "humors" of Ben Jonson have an analogy with the extremer instances of Dickens's character sketches in this respect, namely: that they are both studies of the eccentric, the abnormal, the whimsical, rather than of the typical and universal--studies of manners, rather than of whole characters. And it is easily conceivable that, at no distant day, the oddities of Captain Cuttle, Department Turveydrop, Mark Tapley, and Newman Noggs will seem as far-fetched and impossible as those of Captain Otter, Fastidious Brisk, and Sir Amorous La-Foole. When Dickens was looking about for some one to take Seymour's place as illustrator of *Pickwick*, Thackeray applied for the job, but without success. He was then a young man of twenty-five, and still hesitating between art and literature. He had begun to draw caricatures with his pencil when a schoolboy at the Charter House, and to scribble them with his pen when a student at Cambridge, editing *The Snob*, a weekly under-graduate paper, and parodying the prize poem *Timbuctoo* of his contemporary at the university, Alfred Tennyson. Then he went abroad to study art, passing a season at Weimar, where he met Goethe and filled the albums of the young Saxon ladies with caricatures; afterward living, in the Latin Quarter at Paris, a Bohemian existence, studying art in a desultory way, and seeing men and cities; accumulating portfolios full of sketches, but laying up stores of material to be used afterward to greater advantage when he should settle upon his true medium of expression. By 1837, having lost his fortune of 500 pounds a year in speculation and gambling, he began to contribute to *Fraser's*, and thereafter to the *New Monthly*, *Cruikshank's Comic Almanac*, *Punch*, and other periodicals, clever burlesques, art criticisms by "Michael Angelo Titmarsh," *Yellow Plush Papers*, and all manner of skits, satirical character sketches, and humorous tales, like the *Great Hoggarty Diamond* and the *Luck of Barry Lyndon*. Some of these were collected in the *Paris Sketch-Book*, 1840, and the *Irish Sketch-Book*, 1843; but Thackeray was slow in winning recognition, and it was not until the publication of his first great novel, *Vanity Fair*, in monthly parts, during 1846-1848, that he achieved any thing like the general reputation which Dickens had reached at a bound. *Vanity Fair* described itself, on its title-page, as "a novel without a hero." It was also a novel

without a plot--in the sense in which *Bleak House* or *Nicholas Nickleby* had a plot--and in that respect it set the fashion for the latest school of realistic fiction, being a transcript of life, without necessary beginning or end. Indeed, one of the pleasantest things to a reader of Thackeray is the way which his characters have of re-appearing, as old acquaintances, in his different books; just as, in real life, people drop out of mind and then turn up again in other years and places. *Vanity Fair* is Thackeray's masterpiece, but it is not the best introduction to his writings. There are no illusions in it, and, to a young reader fresh from Scott's romances or Dickens's sympathetic extravagances, it will seem hard and repellant. But men who, like Thackeray, have seen life and tasted its bitterness and felt its hollowness, know how to prize it. Thackeray does not merely expose the cant, the emptiness, the self-seeking, the false pretenses, flunkeyism, and snobbery--the "mean admiration of mean things"--in the great world of London society: his keen, unsparring vision detects the base alloy in the purest natures. There are no "heroes" in his books, no perfect characters. Even his good women, such as Helen and Laura Pendennis, are capable of cruel injustice toward less fortunate sisters, like little Fanny; and Amelia Sedley is led, by blind feminine instinct, to snub and tyrannize over poor Dobbin. The shabby miseries of life, the numbing and belittling influences of failure and poverty upon the most generous natures, are the tragic themes which Thackeray handles by preference. He has been called a cynic, but the boyish playfulness of his humor and his kindly spirit are incompatible with cynicism. Charlotte Brontë said that Fielding was the vulture and Thackeray the eagle. The comparison would have been truer if made between Swift and Thackeray. Swift was a cynic; his pen was driven by hate, but Thackeray's by love, and it was not in bitterness but in sadness that the latter laid bare the wickedness of the world. He was himself a thorough man of the world, and he had that dislike for a display of feeling which characterizes the modern Englishman. But behind his satiric mask he concealed the manliest tenderness, and a reverence for every thing in human nature that is good and true. Thackeray's other great novels are *Pendennis*, 1849; *Henry Esmond*, 1852; and *The Newcomes*, 1855--the last of which contains his most lovable character, the pathetic and immortal figure of Colonel Newcome, a creation worthy to stand, in its dignity and its sublime weakness, by the side of Don Quixote. It was alleged against Thackeray that he made all his good characters, like Major Dobbin and Amelia Sedley and Colonel Newcome, intellectually feeble, and his brilliant characters, like Becky Sharp and Lord Steyne and Blanche Amory, morally bad. This is not entirely true, but the other complaint--that his women are inferior to his men--is true in a general way. Somewhat inferior to his other novels were *The Virginians*, 1858, and *The Adventures of Philip*, 1862. All of these were stories of contemporary life, except *Henry Esmond* and its sequel, *The Virginians*, which, though not precisely historical fictions, introduced historical figures, such as Washington and the Earl of Peterborough. Their period of action was the 18th century, and the dialogue was a cunning imitation of the language of that time. Thackeray was strongly attracted by the 18th century. His literary teachers were Addison, Swift, Steele, Gay, Johnson, Richardson, Goldsmith, Fielding, Smollett, and Sterne, and his special master and model was Fielding. He projected a history of the century, and his studies in this kind took shape in his two charming series of lectures on *The English Humorists* and *The Four Georges*. These he delivered in England and in America, to which country he, like Dickens, made two several visits. Thackeray's genius was, perhaps, less astonishing than Dickens's, less fertile, spontaneous, and inventive; but his art is sounder, and his delineation of character more truthful. After one has formed a taste for his books, Dickens's sentiment will seem overdone, and much of his humor will have the air of buffoonery. Thackeray had the advantage in another particular: he described the life of the upper classes, and Dickens of the lower. It may be true that the latter offers richer material to the novelist, in the play of elementary passions and in strong, native developments of character. It is true, also, that Thackeray approached "society" rather to satirize it than to set forth its agreeableness. Yet, after all, it is "the great world" which he describes, that world upon which the broadening and refining processes of a high civilization have done their utmost, and which, consequently, must possess an intellectual interest superior to any thing in the life of London thieves, traveling showmen, and coachees. Thackeray is the equal of Swift as a satirist, of Dickens as a humorist, and of Scott as a novelist. The one element lacking in him--and which Scott had in a high degree---is the poetic imagination. "I have no brains above my eyes," he said; "I describe what I see." Hence there is wanting in his creations that final charm which Shakspeare's have. For what the eyes see is not all. The great woman who wrote under the pen-name of George Eliot was a humorist, too. She had a rich, deep humor of her own, and a wit that crystallized into sayings which are not epigrams, only because their wisdom strikes more than their smartness. But humor was not, as with Thackeray and Dickens, her point of view. A country girl, the daughter of a land agent and surveyor at Nuneaton, in Warwickshire, her early letters and journals exhibit a Calvinistic gravity and moral severity. Later, when her truth to her convictions led her to renounce the Christian belief, she carried into Positivism the same religious

earnestness, and wrote the one English hymn of the religion of humanity: "O, let me join the choir invisible," etc. Her first published work was a translation of Strauss's *Leben Jesu*, 1846. In 1851 she went to London and became one of the editors of the Radical organ, the *Westminster Review*. Here she formed a connection--a marriage in all but the name--with George Henry Lewes, who was, like herself, a freethinker, and who published, among other things, a *Biographical History of Philosophy*. Lewes had also written fiction, and it was at his suggestion that his wife undertook story writing. Her *Scenes of Clerical Life* were contributed to *Blackwood's Magazine* for 1857, and published in book form in the following year. *Adam Bede* followed in 1859, the *Mill on the Floss* in 1860, *Silas Marner* in 1861, *Romola* in 1863, *Felix Holt* in 1866, and *Middlemarch* in 1872. All of these, except *Romola*, are tales of provincial, and largely of domestic, life in the midland counties. *Romola* is a historical novel, the scene of which is Florence, in the 15th century, the Florence of Macchiavelli and of Savonarola. George Eliot's method was very different from that of Thackeray or Dickens. She did not crowd her canvas with the swarming life of cities. Her figures are comparatively few, and they are selected from the middle-class families of rural parishes or small towns, amid that atmosphere of "fine old leisure," whose disappearance she lamented. Her drama is a still life drama, intensely and profoundly inward. Character is the stuff that she works in, and she deals with it more subtly than Thackeray. With him the tragedy is produced by the pressure of society and its false standards upon the individual; with her, by the malign influence of individuals upon one another. She watches "the stealthy convergence of human fates," the intersection at various angles of the planes of character, the power that the lower nature has to thwart, stupefy, or corrupt the higher, which has become entangled with it in the mesh of destiny. At the bottom of every one of her stories, there is a problem of the conscience or the intellect. In this respect she resembles Hawthorne, though she is not, like him, a romancer, but a realist. There is a melancholy philosophy in her books, most of which are tales of failure or frustration. The *Mill on the Floss* contains a large element of autobiography, and its heroine, Maggie Tulliver, is, perhaps, her idealized self. Her aspirations after a fuller and nobler existence are condemned to struggle against the resistance of a narrow, provincial environment, and the pressure of untoward fates. She is tempted to seek an escape even through a desperate throwing off of moral obligations, and is driven back to her duty only to die by a sudden stroke of destiny. "Life is a bad business," wrote George Eliot, in a letter to a friend, "and we must make the most of it." *Adam Bede* is, in construction, the most perfect of her novels, and *Silas Marner* of her shorter stories. Her analytic habit gained more and more upon her as she wrote. *Middlemarch*, in some respects her greatest book, lacks the unity of her earlier novels, and the story tends to become subordinate to the working out of character stories and social problems. The philosophic speculations, which she shared with her husband, were seemingly unfavorable to her artistic growth, a circumstance which comes apparent in her last novel, *Daniel Deronda*, 1877. Finally in the *Impressions of Theophrastus Such*, 1879, she abandoned narrative altogether, and recurred to that type of "character" books which we have met, as a flourishing department of literature in the 17th century, represented by such works as Earle's *Microcosmographie* and Fuller's *Holy and Profane State*. The moral of George Eliot's writings is not obtruded. She never made the artistic mistake of writing a novel of purpose, or what the Germans call a *tendenz-roman*; as Dickens did, for example, when he attacked imprisonment for debt, in *Pickwick*; the poor laws, in *Oliver Twist*; the Court of Chancery, in *Bleak House*; and the Circumlocution office, in *Little Dorrit*. Next to the novel, the essay has been the most overflowing literary form used by the writers of this generation--a form, characteristic, it may be, of an age which "lectures, not creates." It is not the essay of Bacon, nor yet of Addison, nor of Lamb, but attempts a complete treatment. Indeed, many longish books, like Carlyle's *Heroes and Hero Worship* and Ruskin's *Modern Painters*, are, in spirit, rather literary essays than formal treatises. The most popular essayist and historian of his time was Thomas Babington Macaulay, (1800-1859), an active and versatile man, who won splendid success in many fields of labor. He was prominent in public life as one of the leading orators and writers of the Whig party. He sat many times in the House of Commons, as member for Calne, for Leeds, and for Edinburgh, and took a distinguished part in the debates on the Reform bill of 1832. He held office in several Whig governments, and during his four years' service in British India, as member of the Supreme Council of Calcutta, he did valuable work in promoting education in that province, and in codifying the Indian penal law. After his return to England, and especially after the publication of his *History of England from The Accession of James II.*, honors and appointments of all kinds were showered upon him. In 1857 he was raised to the peerage as Baron Macaulay of Rothley. Macaulay's equipment, as a writer on historical and biographical subjects, was, in some points, unique. His reading was prodigious, and his memory so tenacious, that it was said, with but little exaggeration, that he never forgot any thing that he had read. He could repeat the whole of *Paradise Lost* by heart, and thought it probable that he could rewrite Sir Charles Grandison from



memory. In his books, in his speeches in the House of Commons, and in private conversation--for he was an eager and fluent talker, running on often for hours at a stretch--he was never at a loss to fortify and illustrate his positions by citation after citation of dates, names, facts of all kinds, and passages quoted verbatim from his multifarious reading. The first of Macaulay's writings to attract general notice was his article on Milton, printed in the August number of the *Edinburgh Review*, for 1825. The editor, Lord Jeffrey, in acknowledging the receipt of the MS., wrote to his new contributor, "The more I think, the less I can conceive where you picked up that style." That celebrated style--about which so much has since been written--was an index to the mental character of its owner. Macaulay was of a confident, sanguine, impetuous nature. He had great common sense, and he saw what he saw quickly and clearly, but he did not see very far below the surface. He wrote with the conviction of an advocate, and the easy omniscience of a man whose learning is really nothing more than "general information," raised to a very high power, rather than with the subtle penetration of an original or truly philosophic intellect, like Coleridge's or De Quincey's. He always had at hand explanations of events or of characters, which were admirably easy and simple--too simple, indeed, for the complicated phenomena which they professed to explain. His style was clear, animated, showy, and even its faults were of an exciting kind. It was his habit to give piquancy to his writing by putting things concretely. Thus, instead of saying, in general terms--as Hume or Gibbon might have done--that the Normans and Saxons began to mingle about 1200, he says: "The great grandsons of those who had fought under William and the great grandsons of those who had fought under Harold began to draw near to each other." Macaulay was a great scene painter, who neglected delicate truths of detail for exaggerated distemper effects. He used the rhetorical machinery of climax and hyperbole for all that it was worth, and he "made points"--as in his essay on Bacon--by creating antithesis. In his *History of England*, he inaugurated the picturesque method of historical writing. The book was as fascinating as any novel. Macaulay, like Scott, had the historic imagination, though his method of turning history into romance was very different from Scott's. Among his essays, the best are those which, like the ones on Lord Clive, Warren Hastings, and Frederick the Great, deal with historical subjects; or those which deal with literary subjects under their public historic relations, such as the essays on Addison, Bunyan, and *The Comic Dramatists of the Restoration*. "I have never written a page of criticism on poetry, or the fine arts," wrote Macaulay, "which I would not burn if I had the power." Nevertheless his own *Lays of Ancient Rome*, 1842, are good, stirring verse of the emphatic and declamatory kind, though their quality may be rather rhetorical than poetic. Our critical time has not forborne to criticize itself, and perhaps the writer who impressed himself most strongly upon his generation was the one who railed most desperately against the "spirit of the age." Thomas Carlyle (1795-1881) was occupied between 1822 and 1830 chiefly in imparting to the British public a knowledge of German literature. He published, among other things, a *Life of Schiller*, a translation of Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister*, and two volumes of translations from the German romancers--Tieck, Hoffmann, Richter, and Fouque, and contributed to the *Edinburgh and Foreign Review*, articles on Goethe, Werner, Novalis, Richter, German playwrights, the *Nibelungen Lied*, etc. His own diction became more and more tinctured with Germanisms. There was something Gothic in his taste, which was attracted by the lawless, the grotesque, and the whimsical in the writings of Jean Paul Richter. His favorite among English humorists was Sterne, who has a share of these same qualities. He spoke disparagingly of "the sensuous literature of the Greeks," and preferred the Norse to the Hellenic mythology. Even in his admirable critical essays on Burns, on Richter, on Scott, Diderot, and Voltaire, which are free from his later mannerism--written in English, and not in Carlylese--his sense of spirit is always more lively than his sense of form. He finally became so impatient of art as to maintain--half-seriously--the paradox that Shakspeare would have done better to write in prose. In three of these early essays--on the *Signs of the Times*, 1829; on *History*, 1830; and on *Characteristics*, 1831--are to be found the germs of all his later writings. The first of these was an arraignment of the mechanical spirit of the age. In every province of thought he discovered too great a reliance upon systems, institutions, machinery, instead of upon men. Thus, in religion, we have Bible Societies, "machines for converting the heathen." "In defect of Raphaels and Angelos and Mozarts, we have royal academies of painting, sculpture, music." In like manner, he complains, government is a machine. "Its duties and faults are not those of a father, but of an active parish-constable." Against the "police theory," as distinguished from the "paternal" theory of government, Carlyle protested with ever-shriller iteration. In *Chartism*, 1839; *Past and Present*, 1843; and *Latter-day Pamphlets*, 1850, he denounced this laissez faire idea. The business of government, he repeated, is to govern; but this view makes it its business to refrain from governing. He fought most fiercely against the conclusions of political economy, "the dismal science," which, he said, affirmed that men were guided exclusively by their stomachs. He protested, too, against the Utilitarians, followers of Bentham and Mill, with their "greatest happiness

principle," which reduced virtue to a profit-and-loss account. Carlyle took issue with modern liberalism; he ridiculed the self-gratulation of the time, all the talk about progress of the species, unexampled prosperity, etc. But he was reactionary without being conservative. He had studied the French Revolution, and he saw the fateful, irresistible approach of democracy. He had no faith in government "by counting noses," and he hated talking parliaments; but neither did he put trust in an aristocracy that spent its time in "preserving the game." What he wanted was a great individual ruler, a real king or hero; and this doctrine he set forth afterward most fully in *Hero Worship*, 1841, and illustrated in his lives of representative heroes, such as his *Cromwell's Letters and Speeches*, 1845, and his great *History of Frederick the Great*, 1858-1865. Cromwell and Frederick were well enough; but as Carlyle grew older, his admiration for mere force grew, and his latest hero was none other than that infamous Dr. Francia, the South American dictator, whose career of bloody and crafty crime horrified the civilized world. The essay on History was a protest against the scientific view of history which attempts to explain away and account for the wonderful. "Wonder," he wrote in *Sartor Resartus*, "is the basis of all worship." He defined history as "the essence of innumerable biographies." "Mr. Carlyle," said the Italian patriot, Mazzini, "comprehends only the individual. The nationality of Italy is, in his eyes, the glory of having produced Dante and Christopher Columbus." This trait comes out in his greatest book, *The French Revolution*, 1837, which is a mighty tragedy, enacted by a few leading characters, Mirabeau, Danton, Napoleon. He loved to emphasize the superiority of history over fiction as dramatic material. The third of the three essays mentioned was a *Jeremiad* on the morbid self-consciousness of the age, which shows itself in religion and philosophy, as skepticism and introspective metaphysics; and in literature, as sentimentalism, and "view-hunting." But Carlyle's epoch-making book was *Sartor Resartus* (*The Tailor Retailored*), published in *Fraser's Magazine* for 1833-1834, and first reprinted in book form in America. This was a satire upon shams, conventions, the disguises which overlaid the most spiritual realities of the soul. It purported to be the life and "clothes-philosophy" of a certain Diogenes Teufelsdröckh, Professor der Allerlei Wissenschaft--of things in general--in the University of Weissnichtwo. "Society," said Carlyle, "is founded upon cloth," following the suggestions of Lear's speech to the naked bedlam beggar: "Thou art the thing itself: unaccommodated man is no more but such a poor, bare, forked animal as thou art;" and borrowing also, perhaps, an ironical hint from a paragraph in Swift's *Tale of a Tub*: "A sect was established who held the universe to be a large suit of clothes. . . . If certain ermines or furs be placed in a certain position, we style them a judge; and so an apt conjunction of lawn and black satin we entitle a bishop." In *Sartor Resartus* Carlyle let himself go. It was willful, uncouth, amorphous, titanic. There was something monstrous in the combination, the hot heart of the Scot married to the transcendental dream of Germany. It was not English, said the reviewers; it was not sense; it was disfigured by obscurity and "mysticism." Nevertheless even the thin-witted and the dry-witted had to acknowledge the powerful beauty of many chapters and passages, rich with humor, eloquence, poetry, deep-hearted tenderness, or passionate scorn. Carlyle was a voracious reader, and the plunder {288} of whole literatures is strewn over his pages. He flung about the resources of the language with a giant's strength, and made new words at every turn. The concreteness and the swarming fertility of his mind are evidenced by his enormous vocabulary, computed greatly to exceed Shakspeare's, or any other single writer's in the English tongue. His style lacks the crowning grace of simplicity and repose. It astonishes, but it also fatigues. Carlyle's influence has consisted more in his attitude than in any special truth which he has preached. It has been the influence of a moralist, of a practical, rather than a speculative, philosopher. "The end of man," he wrote, "is an action, not a thought." He has not been able to persuade the time that it is going wrong, but his criticisms have been wholesomely corrective of its self-conceit. In a democratic age he has insisted upon the undemocratic virtues of obedience, silence, and reverence. Ehrfurcht--reverence--the text of his address to the students of Edinburgh University, in 1866, is the last word of his philosophy. In 1830 Alfred Tennyson (1809- ----), a young graduate of Cambridge, published a thin duodecimo of 154 pages, entitled *Poems, Chiefly Lyrical*. The pieces in this little volume, like the *Sleeping Beauty*, *Ode to Memory*, and *Recollections of the Arabian Nights*, were full of color, fragrance, melody; but they had a dream-like character, and were without definite theme, resembling an artist's studies, or {289} exercises in music--a few touches of the brush, a few sweet chords, but no aria. A number of them--*Claribel*, *Lilian*, *Adeline*, *Isabel*, *Mariana*, *Madeline*--were sketches of women; not character portraits, like Browning's *Men and Women*, but impressions of temperament, of delicately, differentiated types of feminine beauty. In *Mariana*, expanded from a hint of the forsaken maid, in Shakspeare's *Measure for Measure*, "*Mariana at the moated grange*," the poet showed an art then peculiar, but since grown familiar, of heightening the central feeling by landscape accessories. The level waste, the stagnant sluices, the neglected garden, the wind in the single poplar, re-enforce, by their monotonous sympathy, the loneliness, the hopeless waiting and

weariness of life in the one human figure of the poem. In *Mariana*, the *Ode to Memory*, and the *Dying Swan*, it was the fens of Cambridge and of his native Lincolnshire that furnished Tennyson's scenery.

"Stretched wide and wild, the waste enormous marsh,  
Where from the frequent bridge,  
Like emblems of infinity,  
The trenched waters run from sky to sky."

A second collection, published in 1833, exhibited a greater scope and variety, but was still in his earlier manner. The studies of feminine types were continued in *Margaret*, *Fatima*, *Eleanore*, *Mariana in the South*, and *A Dream of Fair Women*, suggested by Chaucer's *Legend of Good Women*. In the *Lady of Shalott*, the poet first touched the Arthurian legends. The subject is the same as that of *Elaine*, in the *Idylls of the King*, but the treatment is shadowy, and even allegorical. In *Oenone and the Lotus Eaters*, he handled Homeric subjects, but in a romantic fashion, which contrasts markedly with the style of his later pieces, *Ulysses* and *Tithonus*. These last have the true classic severity, and are among the noblest specimens of weighty and sonorous blank verse in modern poetry. In general, Tennyson's art is unclassical. It is rich, ornate, composite, not statuesque, so much as picturesque. He is a great painter, and the critics complain that in passages calling for movement and action--a battle, a tournament, or the like--his figures stand still as in a tableau; and they contrast such passages unfavorably with scenes of the same kind in Scott, and with Browning's spirited ballad, *How we brought the Good News from Ghent to Aix*. In the *Palace of Art*, these elaborate pictorial effects were combined with allegory; in the *Lotus Eaters*, with that expressive treatment of landscape, noted in *Mariana*; the lotus land, "in which it seemed always afternoon," reflecting and promoting the enchanted indolence of the heroes. Two of the pieces in this 1833 volume, the *May Queen* and the *Miller's Daughter*, were Tennyson's first poems of the affections, and as ballads of simple, rustic life, they anticipated his more perfect idyls in blank verse, such as *Dora*, the *Brook*, *Edwin Morris*, and the *Gardener's Daughter*. The songs in the *Miller's Daughter* had a more spontaneous, lyrical movement than any thing that he had yet published, and foretold the lovely songs which interlude the divisions of the *Princess*, the famous *Bugle Song*, the no-less famous *Cradle Song*, and the rest. In 1833 Tennyson's friend, Arthur Hallam, died, and the effect of this great sorrow upon the poet was to deepen and strengthen the character of his genius. It turned his mind in upon itself, and set it brooding over questions which his poetry had so far left untouched; the meaning of life and death, the uses of adversity, the future of the race, the immortality of the soul, and the dealings of God with mankind. "Thou madest Death; and, lo, thy foot Is on the skull which thou hast made." His elegy on Hallam, *In Memoriam*, was not published till 1850. He kept it by him all those years, adding section after section, gathering up into it whatever reflections crystallized about its central theme. It is his most intellectual and most individual work, a great song of sorrow and consolation. In 1842 he published a third collection of poems, among which were *Locksley Hall*, displaying a new strength of passion; *Ulysses*, suggested by a passage in Dante: pieces of a speculative cast, like the *Two Voices* and the *Vision of Sin*; the song *Break, Break, Break*, which precluded *In Memoriam*; and, lastly, some additional gropings toward the subject of the Arthurian romance, such as *Sir Galahad*, *Sir Launcelot and Queen Guinevere* and *Morte d' Arthur*. The last was in blank verse, and, as afterward incorporated in the *Passing of Arthur*, forms one of the best passages in the *Idylls of the King*. The *Princess*, a Medley, published in 1849, represents the eclectic character of Tennyson's art; a medieval tale with an admixture of modern sentiment, and with the very modern problem of woman's sphere for its theme. The first four *Idylls of the King*, 1859, with those since added, constitute, when taken together, an epic poem on the old story of King Arthur. Tennyson went to Malory's *Morte d' Arthur* for his material, but the outline of the first idyl, *Enid*, was taken from Lady Charlotte Guest's translation of the Welsh *Mabinogion*. In the idyl of *Guinevere* Tennyson's genius reached its high-water mark. The interview between Arthur and his fallen queen is marked by a moral sublimity and a tragic intensity which move the soul as nobly as any scene in modern literature. Here, at least, the art is pure and not "decorated;" the effect is produced by the simplest means, and all is just, natural, and grand. *Maud*--a love novel in verse--published in 1855, and considerably enlarged in 1856, had great sweetness and beauty, particularly in its lyrical portions, but it was uneven in execution, imperfect in design, and marred by lapses into mawkishness and excesses in language. Since 1860 Tennyson has added little of permanent value to his work. His dramatic experiments, like *Queen Mary*, are not, on the whole, successful, though it would be unjust to deny dramatic power to the poet who has written, upon one hand, *Guinevere* and the *Passing of Arthur*, and upon the other the homely, dialectic monologue of the *Northern Farmer*. When we tire of

Tennyson's smooth perfection, of an art that is over exquisite, and a beauty that is well-nigh too beautiful, and crave a rougher touch, and a meaning that will not yield itself too readily, we turn to the thorny pages of his great contemporary, Robert Browning (1812- ----). Dr. Holmes says that Tennyson is white meat and Browning is dark meat. A masculine taste, it is inferred, is shown in a preference for the gamier flavor. Browning makes us think; his poems are puzzles, and furnish business for "Browning Societies." There are no Tennyson societies, because Tennyson is his own interpreter. Intellect in a poet may display itself quite as properly in the construction of his poem as in its content; we value a building for its architecture, and not entirely for the amount of timber in it. Browning's thought never wears so thin as Tennyson's sometimes does in his latest verse, where the trick of his style goes on of itself with nothing behind it. Tennyson, at his worst, is weak. Browning, when not at his best, is hoarse. Hoarseness, in itself, is no sign of strength. In Browning, however, the failure is in art, not in thought.

He chooses his subjects from abnormal character types, such as are presented, for example, in Caliban upon Setebos, the Grammarian's Funeral, My Last Duchess, and Mr. Sludge, the Medium. These are all psychological studies, in which the poet gets into the inner consciousness of a monster, a pedant, a criminal, and a quack, and gives their point of view. They are dramatic soliloquies; but the poet's self-identification with each of his creations, in turn, remains incomplete. His curious, analytic observation, his way of looking at the soul from outside, gives a doubleness to the monologues in his Dramatic Lyrics, 1845, Men and Women, 1855, Dramatis Personae, 1864, and other collections of the kind. The words are the words of Caliban or Mr. Sludge; but the voice is the voice of Robert Browning. His first complete poem, Paracelsus, 1835, aimed to give the true inwardness of the career of the famous 16th century doctor, whose name became a synonym with charlatan. His second, Sordello, 1840, traced the struggles of an Italian poet who lived before Dante, and could not reconcile his life with his art. Paracelsus was hard, but Sordello was incomprehensible. Mr. Browning has denied that he is ever perversely crabbed or obscure. Every great artist must be allowed to say things in his own way, and obscurity has its artistic uses, as the Gothic builders knew. But there are two kinds of obscurity in literature. One is inseparable from the subtlety and difficulty of the thought or the compression and pregnant indirectness of the phrase. Instances of this occur in the clear deeps of Dante, Shakspeare, and Goethe. The other comes from a vice of style, a willfully enigmatic and unnatural way of expressing thought. Both kinds of obscurity exist in Browning. He is a deep and subtle thinker; but he is also a very eccentric writer, abrupt, harsh, disjointed. It has been well said that the reader of Browning learns a new dialect. But one need not grudge the labor that is rewarded with an intellectual pleasure so peculiar and so stimulating. The odd, grotesque impression made by his poetry arises, in part, from his desire to use the artistic values of ugliness, as well as of obscurity; to avoid the shallow prettiness that comes from blinking the disagreeable truth: not to leave the saltiness out of the sea. Whenever he emerges into clearness, as he does in hundreds of places, he is a poet of great qualities. There are a fire and a swing in his Cavalier Tunes, and in pieces like the Glove and the Lost Leader; and humor in such ballads as the Pied Piper of Hamelin and the Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister, which appeal to the most conservative reader. He seldom deals directly in the pathetic, but now and then, as in Evelyn Hope, the Last Ride Together, or the Incident of the French Camp, a tenderness comes over the strong verse

"as sheathes  
A film the mother eagle's eye,  
When her bruised eaglet breathes."

Perhaps the most astonishing example of Browning's mental vigor is the huge composition, entitled The Ring and the Book, 1868, a narrative poem in twenty-one thousand lines, in which the same story is repeated eleven times in eleven different ways. It is the story of a criminal trial which occurred at Rome about 1700, the trial of one Count Guido for the murder of his young wife. First the poet tells the tale himself; then he tells what one-half of the world says and what the other; then he gives the deposition of the dying girl, the testimony of witnesses, the speech made by the count in his own defense, the arguments of counsel, etc., and, finally, the judgment of the pope. So wonderful are Browning's resources in casuistry, and so cunningly does he ravel the intricate motives at play in this tragedy and lay bare the secrets of the heart, that the interest increases at each repetition of the tale. He studied the Middle Age carefully, not for its picturesque externals, its feudalisms, chivalries, and the like; but because he found it a rich quarry of spiritual monstrosities, strange outcroppings of fanaticism, superstition, and moral and mental distortion of

all shapes. It furnished him especially with a great variety of ecclesiastical types, such as are painted in *Fra Lippo Lippi*, *Bishop Blougram's Apology*, and *The Bishop Orders his Tomb in St. Praxed's Church*. Browning's dramatic instinct has always attracted him to the stage. His tragedy, *Stratford* (1837), was written for Macready, and put on at Covent Garden Theater, but without pronounced success. He has written many fine dramatic poems, like *Pippa Passes*, *Colombo's Birthday*, and *In a Balcony*; and at least two good acting plays, *Luria* and *A Blot in the Scutcheon*. The last named has recently been given to the American public, with Lawrence Barrett's careful and intelligent presentation of the leading rôle. The motive of the tragedy is somewhat strained and fantastic, but it is, notwithstanding, very effective on the stage. It gives one an unwonted thrill to listen to a play, by a living English writer, which is really literature. One gets a faint idea of what it must have been to assist at the first night of *Hamlet*.

## OUTLINE SKETCH OF AMERICAN LITERATURE.

### CHAPTER I.

#### THE COLONIAL PERIOD.

##### 1607-1765.

The writings of our colonial era have a much greater importance as history than as literature. It would be unfair to judge of the intellectual vigor of the English colonists in America by the books that they wrote; those "stern men with empires in their brains" had more pressing work to do than the making of books. The first settlers, indeed, were brought face to face with strange and exciting conditions--the sea, the wilderness, the Indians, the flora and fauna of a new world--things which seem stimulating to the imagination, and incidents and experiences which might have lent themselves easily to poetry or romance. Of all these they wrote back to England reports which were faithful and sometimes vivid, but which, upon the whole, hardly rise into the region of literature. "New England," said Hawthorne, "was then in a state incomparably more picturesque than at present." But to a contemporary that old New England of the seventeenth century doubtless seemed any thing but picturesque, filled with grim, hard, worky-day realities. The planters both of Virginia and Massachusetts were decimated by sickness and starvation, constantly threatened by Indian wars, and troubled by quarrels among themselves and fears of disturbance from England. The wrangles between the royal governors and the House of Burgesses in the Old Dominion, and the theological squabbles in New England, which fill our colonial records, are petty and wearisome to read of. At least, they would be so did we not bear in mind to what imperial destinies these conflicts were slowly educating the little communities which had hardly as yet secured a foothold on the edge of the raw continent. Even a century and a half after the Jamestown and Plymouth settlements, when the American plantations had grown strong and flourishing, and commerce was building up large towns, and there were wealth and generous living and fine society, the "good old colony days when we lived under the king," had yielded little in the way of literature that is of any permanent interest. There would seem to be something in the relation of a colony to the mother country which dooms the thought and art of the former to a hopeless provincialism. Canada and Australia are great provinces, wealthier and more populous than the thirteen colonies at the time of their separation from England. They have cities whose inhabitants number hundreds of thousands, well equipped universities, libraries, cathedrals, costly public buildings, all the outward appliances of an advanced civilization; and yet what have Canada and Australia contributed to British literature? American literature had no infancy. That engaging naïveté and that heroic rudeness which give a charm to the early popular tales and songs of Europe find, of course, no counterpart on our soil. Instead of emerging from the twilight of the past, the first American writings were produced under the garish noon of a modern and learned age. Decrepitude rather than youthfulness is the mark of a colonial literature. The poets, in particular, instead of finding a challenge to their imagination in the new life about them, are apt to go on imitating the cast off literary fashions of the mother country. America was settled by Englishmen who were contemporary with the greatest names in English literature. Jamestown was planted in 1607, nine years before Shakspeare's death, and the hero of that enterprize, Captain John Smith, may not improbably have been a personal acquaintance of the great dramatist. "They have acted my fatal tragedies on the stage," wrote Smith. Many circumstances in *The Tempest* were doubtless suggested by the wreck of the *Sea Venture* on "the still vext Bermoothes," as described by William Strachey in his *True Repertory of the Wrack and Redemption of Sir Thomas Gates*, written at Jamestown, and published at London in 1510. Shakspeare's contemporary, Michael Drayton, the poet of the *Polyolbion*, addressed a spirited valedictory ode to the three shiploads of "brave, heroic minds" who sailed from London in 1606 to colonize Virginia; an ode which ended with the prophecy of a future American literature:

"And as there plenty grows  
Of laurel every-where,--  
Apollo's sacred tree--  
You it may see  
A poet's brows

To crown, that may sing there."

Another English poet, Samuel Daniel, the author of the Civil Wars, had also prophesied in a similar strain:

"And who in time knows whither we may vent  
The treasure of our tongue, to what strange shores~.~.~.  
What worlds in the yet unformed Occident  
May come refined with accents that are ours."

It needed but a slight movement in the balances of fate, and Walter Raleigh might have been reckoned among the poets of America. He was one of the original promoters of the Virginia colony, and he made voyages in person to Newfoundland and Guiana. And more unlikely things have happened than that when John Milton left Cambridge in 1632, he should have been tempted to follow Winthrop and the colonists of Massachusetts Bay, who had sailed two years before. Sir Henry Vane, the younger, who was afterward Milton's friend--

"Vane, young in years, but in sage counsel old"--

came over in 1635, and was for a short time Governor of Massachusetts. These are idle speculations, and yet, when we reflect that Oliver Cromwell was on the point of embarking for America when he was prevented by the king's officers, we may, for the nonce, "let our frail thoughts dally with false surmise," and fancy by how narrow a chance Paradise Lost missed being written in Boston. But, as a rule, the members of the literary guild are not quick to emigrate. They like the feeling of an old and rich civilization about them, a state of society which America has only begun to reach during the present century.

Virginia and New England, says Lowell, were the "two great distributing centers of the English race." The men who colonized the country between the Capes of Virginia were not drawn, to any large extent, from the literary or bookish classes in the Old Country. Many of the first settlers were gentlemen--too many, Captain Smith thought, for the good of the plantation. Some among these were men of worth and spirit, "of good means and great parentage." Such was, for example, George Percy, a younger brother of the Earl of Northumberland, who was one of the original adventurers, and the author of A Discourse of the Plantation of the Southern Colony of Virginia, which contains a graphic narrative of the fever and famine summer of 1607 at Jamestown. But many of these gentlemen were idlers, "unruly gallants, packed thither by their friends to escape ill destinies;" dissipated younger sons, soldiers of fortune, who came over after the gold which was supposed to abound in the new country, and who spent their time in playing bowls and drinking at the tavern as soon as there was any tavern. With these was a sprinkling of mechanics and farmers, indented servants, and the off-scourings of the London streets, fruit of press gangs and jail deliveries, sent over to "work in the plantations."

Nor were the conditions of life afterward in Virginia very favorable to literary growth. The planters lived isolated on great estates, which had water fronts on the rivers that flow into the Chesapeake. There the tobacco, the chief staple of the country, was loaded directly upon the trading vessels that tied up to the long, narrow wharves of the plantations. Surrounded by his slaves, and visited occasionally by a distant neighbor, the Virginia country gentleman lived a free and careless life. He was fond of fox-hunting, horse-racing, and cock-fighting. There were no large towns, and the planters met each other mainly on occasion of a county court or the assembling of the Burgesses. The court-house was the nucleus of social and political life in Virginia as the town-meeting was in New England. In such a state of society schools were necessarily few, and popular education did not exist. Sir William Berkeley, who was the royal governor of the colony from 1641 to 1677, said, in 1670, "I thank God there are no free schools nor printing, and I hope we shall not have these hundred years." In the matter of printing, this pious wish was well-nigh realized. The first press set up in the colony, about 1681, was soon suppressed, and found no successor until the year 1729. From that date until some ten years before the Revolution one printing-press answered the needs of Virginia, and this was under official control. The earliest newspaper in the colony was the Virginia Gazette, established in 1736.

In the absence of schools the higher education naturally languished. Some of the planters were taught at home by tutors, and others went to England and entered the universities. But these were few in number, and there was no college in the colony until more than half a century after the foundation of Harvard in the younger province of Massachusetts. The college of William and Mary was established at Williamsburg chiefly by the exertions of the Rev. James Blair, a Scotch divine, who was sent by the Bishop of London as "commissary" to the Church in Virginia. The college received its charter in 1693, and held its first commencement in 1700. It is perhaps significant of the difference between the Puritans of New England and the so-called "Cavaliers" of Virginia, that while the former founded and supported Harvard College in 1636, and Yale in 1701, of {328} their own motion, and at their own expense, William and Mary received its endowment from the crown, being provided for in part by a deed of lands and in part by a tax of a penny a pound on all tobacco exported from the colony. In return for this royal grant the college was to present yearly to the king two copies of Latin verse. It is reported of the young Virginian gentlemen who resorted to the new college that they brought their plantation manners with them, and were accustomed to "keep race-horses at the college, and bet at the billiard or other gaming tables." William and Mary College did a good work for the colony, and educated some of the great Virginians of the Revolutionary era, but it has never been a large or flourishing institution, and has held no such relation to the intellectual development of its section as Harvard and Yale have held in the colonies of Massachusetts and Connecticut. Even after the foundation of the University of Virginia, in which Jefferson took a conspicuous part, southern youths were commonly sent to the North for their education, and at the time of the outbreak of the civil war there was a large contingent of southern students in several northern colleges, notably in Princeton and Yale. Naturally, the first books written in America were descriptions of the country and narratives of the vicissitudes of the infant settlements, which were sent home to be printed for the information of the English public and the encouragement of {329} further immigration. Among books of this kind produced in Virginia the earliest and most noteworthy were the writings of that famous soldier of fortune, Captain John Smith. The first of these was his True Relation, namely, "of such occurrences and accidents of note as hath happened in Virginia since the first planting of that colony," printed at London in 1608. Among Smith's other books, the most important is perhaps his General History of Virginia (London, 1624), a compilation of various narratives by different hands, but passing under his name. Smith was a man of a restless and daring spirit, full of resource, impatient of contradiction, and of a somewhat vainglorious nature, with an appetite for the marvelous and a disposition to draw the long bow. He had seen service in many parts of the world, and his wonderful adventures lost nothing in the telling. It was alleged against him that the evidence of his prowess rested almost entirely on his own testimony. His truthfulness in essentials has not, perhaps, been successfully impugned, but his narratives have suffered by the embellishments with which he has colored them, and, in particular, the charming story of Pocohontas saving his life at the risk of her own--the one romance of early Virginian history--has passed into the realm of legend. Captain Smith's writings have small literary value apart from the interest of the events which they describe, and the diverting but forcible personality which they unconsciously display. They are the rough-hewn records of a busy man of action, whose sword was mightier than his pen. As Smith returned to England after two years in Virginia, and did not permanently cast in his lot with the settlement of which he had been for a time the leading spirit, he can hardly be claimed as an American author. No more can Mr. George Sandys, who came to Virginia in the train of Governor Wyat, in 1621, and completed his excellent metrical translation of Ovid on the banks of the James, in the midst of the Indian massacre of 1622, "limned" as he writes "by that imperfect light which was snatched from the hours of night and repose, having wars and tumults to bring it to light instead of the muses." Sandys went back to England for good, probably as early as 1625, and can, therefore, no more be reckoned as the first American poet, on the strength of his paraphrase of the Metamorphoses, than he can be reckoned the earliest Yankee inventor, because he "introduced the first water-mill into America." The literature of colonial Virginia, and of the southern colonies which took their point of departure from Virginia, is almost wholly of this historical and descriptive kind. A great part of it is concerned with the internal affairs of the province, such as "Bacon's Rebellion," in 1676, one of the most striking episodes in our ante-revolutionary annals, and of which there exist a number of narratives, some of them anonymous, and only rescued from a manuscript condition a hundred years after the event. Another part is concerned with the explorations of new territory. Such were the "Westover Manuscripts," left by Colonel William Byrd, who was appointed in 1729 one of the commissioners to fix the boundary between Virginia and North Carolina, and gave an account of the survey in his History of the Dividing Line, which was only printed in 1841. Colonel Byrd is one of the most brilliant figures of colonial Virginia, and a type of the Old Virginia gentleman. He had been sent to England for his education, where he was admitted to the bar of the



Middle Temple, elected a Fellow of the Royal Society, and formed an intimate friendship with Charles Boyle, the Earl of Orrery. He held many offices in the government of the colony, and founded the cities of Richmond and Petersburg. His estates were large, and at Westover--where he had one of the finest private libraries in America--he exercised a baronial hospitality, blending the usual profusion of plantation life with the elegance of a traveled scholar and "picked man of countries." Colonel Byrd was rather an amateur in literature. His *History of the Dividing Line* is written with a jocularly which rises occasionally into real humor, and which gives to the painful journey through the wilderness the air of a holiday expedition. Similar in tone were his diaries of *A Progress to the Mines* and *A Journey to the Land of Eden* in North Carolina. The first formal historian of Virginia was Robert Beverley, "a native and inhabitant of the place," whose *History of Virginia* was printed at London in 1705. Beverley was a rich planter and large slave owner, who, being in London in 1703, was shown by his bookseller the manuscript of a forthcoming work, Oldmixon's *British Empire in America*. Beverley was set upon writing his history by the inaccuracies in this, and likewise because the province "has been so misrepresented to the common people of England as to make them believe that the servants in Virginia are made to draw in cart and plow, and that the country turns all people black," an impression which lingers still in parts of Europe. The most original portions of the book are those in which the author puts down his personal observations of the plants and animals of the New World, and particularly the account of the Indians, to which his third book is devoted, and which is accompanied by valuable plates. Beverley's knowledge of these matters was evidently at first hand, and his descriptions here are very fresh and interesting. The more strictly historical part of his work is not free from prejudice and inaccuracy. A more critical, detailed, and impartial, but much less readable, work was William Stith's *History of the First Discovery and Settlement of Virginia*, 1747, which brought the subject down only to the year 1624. Stith was a clergyman, and at one time a professor in William and Mary College. The Virginians were staunch royalists and churchmen. The Church of England was established by law, and non-conformity was persecuted in various ways. Three missionaries were sent to the colony in 1642 by the Puritans of New England, two from Braintree, Massachusetts, and one from New Haven. They were not suffered to preach, but many resorted to them in private houses, until, being finally driven out by fines and imprisonments, they took refuge in Catholic Maryland. The Virginia clergy were not, as a body, very much of a force in education or literature. Many of them, by reason of the scattering and dispersed condition of their parishes, lived as domestic chaplains with the wealthier planters, and partook of their illiteracy and their passion for gaming and hunting. Few of them inherited the zeal of Alexander Whitaker, the "Apostle of Virginia," who came over in 1611 to preach to the colonists and convert the Indians, and who published in furtherance of those ends *Good News from Virginia*, in 1613, three years before his death by drowning in James River. The conditions were much more favorable for the production of a literature in New England than in the southern colonies. The free and genial existence of the "Old Dominion" had no counterpart among the settlers of Plymouth and Massachusetts Bay, and the Puritans must have been rather unpleasant people to live with for persons of a different way of thinking. But their intensity of character, their respect for learning, and the heroic mood which sustained them through the hardships and dangers of their great enterprise are amply reflected in their own writings. If these are not so much literature as the raw materials of literature, they have at least been fortunate in finding interpreters among their descendants, and no modern Virginian has done for the memory of the Jamestown planters what Hawthorne, Whittier, Longfellow, and others have done in casting the glamour of poetry and romance over the lives of the founders of New England. Cotton Mather, in his *Magnalia*, quotes the following passage from one of those election sermons, delivered before the General Court of Massachusetts, which formed for many years the great annual intellectual event of the colony: "The question was often put unto our predecessors, What went ye out into the wilderness to see? And the answer to it is not only too excellent but too notorious to be dissembled.~.~.~. We came hither because we would have our posterity settled under the pure and full dispensations of the gospel, defended by rulers that should be of ourselves." The New England colonies were, in fact, theocracies. Their leaders were clergymen or laymen, whose zeal for the faith was no whit inferior to that of the ministers themselves. Church and State were one. The freeman's oath was only administered to Church members, and there was no place in the social system for unbelievers or dissenters. The Pilgrim fathers regarded their transplantation to the New World as an exile, and nothing is more touching in their written records than the repeated expressions of love and longing toward the old home which they had left, and even toward that Church of England from which they had sorrowfully separated themselves. It was not in any light or adventurous spirit that they faced the perils of the sea and the wilderness. "This howling wilderness," "these ends of the earth," "these goings down of the sun," are some of the epithets which they constantly applied to the land of their exile. Nevertheless they had come to stay,

and, unlike Smith and Percy and Sandys, the early historians and writers of New England cast in their lots permanently with the new settlements. A few, indeed, went back after 1640--Mather says some ten or twelve of the ministers of the first "classis" or immigration were among them--when the victory of the Puritanic party in Parliament opened a career for them in England, and made their presence there seem in some cases a duty. The celebrated Hugh Peters, for example, who was afterward Oliver Cromwell's chaplain, and was beheaded after the Restoration, went back in 1641, and in 1647 Nathaniel Ward, the minister of Ipswich, Massachusetts, and author of a quaint book against toleration, entitled *The Simple Cobbler of Agawam*, written in America and published shortly after its author's arrival in England. The Civil War, too, put a stop to further emigration from England until after the Restoration in 1660. The mass of the Puritan immigration consisted of men of the middle class, artisans and husbandmen, the most useful members of a new colony. But their leaders were clergymen educated at the universities, and especially at Emanuel College, Cambridge, the great Puritan college; their civil magistrates were also in great part gentlemen of education and substance, like the elder Winthrop, who was learned in the law, and Theophilus Eaton, first governor of New Haven, who was a London merchant of good estate. It is computed that there were in New England during the first generation as many university graduates as in any community of equal population in the old country. Almost the first care of the settlers was to establish schools. Every town of fifty families was required by law to maintain a common school, and every town of a hundred families a grammar or Latin school. In 1636, only sixteen years after the landing of the Pilgrims on Plymouth Rock, Harvard College was founded at Newtown, whose name was thereupon changed to Cambridge, the General Court held at Boston on September 8, 1680, having already advanced 400 pounds "by way of essay towards the building of something to begin a college." "An university," says Mather, "which hath been to these plantations, for the good literature there cultivated, sal Gentium~.~.~. and a river, without the streams whereof these regions would have been mere unwatered places for the devil." By 1701 Harvard had put forth a vigorous offshoot, Yale College, at New Haven, the settlers of New Haven and Connecticut plantations having increased sufficiently to need a college at their own doors. A printing press was set up at Cambridge in 1639, which was under the oversight of the university authorities, and afterwards of licensers appointed by the civil power. The press was no more free in Massachusetts than in Virginia, and that "liberty of unlicensed printing," for which the Puritan Milton had pleaded in his *Areopagitica*, in 1644, was unknown in Puritan New England until some twenty years before the outbreak of the Revolutionary War. "The Freeman's Oath" and an almanac were issued from the Cambridge press in 1639, and in 1640 the first English book printed in America, a collection of the psalms in meter, made by various ministers, and known as the Bay Psalm Book. The poetry of this version was worse, if possible, than that of Sternhold and Hopkins's famous rendering; but it is noteworthy that one of the principal translators was that devoted "Apostle to the Indians," the Rev. John Eliot, who, in 1661-63, translated the Bible into the Algonkin tongue. Eliot hoped and toiled a lifetime for the conversion of those "salvages," "tawnies," "devil-worshippers," for whom our early writers have usually nothing but bad words. They have been destroyed instead of converted; but his (so entitled) *Mamusse Wunneetupanatamwe Up-Biblum God naneeswe Nukkone Testament kah wonk Wusku Testament*--the first Bible printed in America--remains a monument of missionary zeal and a work of great value to students of the Indian languages. A modern writer has said that, to one looking back on the history of old New England, it seems as though the sun shone but dimly there, and the landscape was always dark and wintry. Such is the impression which one carries away from the perusal of books like Bradford's and Winthrop's Journals, or Mather's *Wonders of the Invisible World*: an impression of gloom, of night and cold, of mysterious fears besieging the infant settlements, scattered in a narrow fringe "between the groaning forest and the shore." The Indian terror hung over New England for more than half a century, or until the issue of King Philip's War, in 1676, relieved the colonists of any danger of a general massacre. Added to this were the perplexities caused by the earnest resolve of the settlers to keep their New English Eden free from the intrusion of the serpent in the shape of heretical sects in religion. The Puritanism of Massachusetts was an orthodox and conservative Puritanism. The later and more grotesque out-crops of the movement in the old England found no toleration in the new. But these refugees for conscience' sake were compelled in turn to persecute Antinomians, Separatists, Familists, Libertines, Anti-pedobaptists, and later, Quakers, and still later, Enthusiasts, who swarmed into their precincts and troubled the Churches with "prophesyings" and novel opinions. Some of these were banished, others were flogged or imprisoned, and a few were put to death. Of the exiles the most noteworthy was Roger Williams, an impetuous, warm-hearted man, who was so far in advance of his age as to deny the power of the civil magistrate in cases of conscience, or who, in other words, maintained the modern doctrine of the separation of Church and State. Williams was driven away from the Massachusetts

colony--where he had been minister of the Church at Salem--and with a few followers fled into the southern wilderness, and settled at Providence. There and in the neighboring plantation of Rhode Island, for which he obtained a charter, he established his patriarchal rule, and gave freedom of worship to all comers. Williams was a prolific writer on theological subjects, the most important of his writings being, perhaps, his *Bloody Tenent of Persecution*, 1644, and a supplement to the same called out by a reply to the former work from the pen of Mr. John Cotton, minister of the First Church at Boston, entitled *The Bloody Tenent Washed and made White in the Blood of the Lamb*. Williams was also a friend to the Indians, whose lands, he thought, should not be taken from them without payment, and he anticipated Eliot by writing, in 1643, a *Key into the Language of America*. Although at odds with the theology of Massachusetts Bay, Williams remained in correspondence with Winthrop and others in Boston, by whom he was highly esteemed. He visited England in 1643 and 1652, and made the acquaintance of John Milton. Besides the threat of an Indian war and their anxious concern for the purity of the Gospel in their Churches, the colonists were haunted by superstitious forebodings of the darkest kind. It seemed to them that Satan, angered by the setting up of the kingdom of the saints in America, had "come down in great wrath," and was present among them, sometimes even in visible shape, to terrify and tempt. Special providences and unusual phenomena, like earthquakes, mirages, and the northern lights, are gravely recorded by Winthrop and Mather and others as portents of supernatural persecutions. Thus Mrs. Anne Hutchinson, the celebrated leader of the Familists, having, according to rumor, been delivered of a monstrous birth, the Rev. John Cotton, in open assembly, at Boston, upon a lecture day, "thereupon gathered that it might signify her error in denying inherent righteousness." "There will be an unusual range of the devil among us," wrote Mather, "a little before the second coming of our Lord. The evening wolves will be much abroad when we are near the evening of the world." This belief culminated in the horrible witchcraft delusion at Salem in 1692, that "spectral puppet play," which, beginning with the malicious pranks of a few children who {341} accused certain uncanny old women and other persons of mean condition and suspected lives of having tormented them with magic, gradually drew into its vortex victims of the highest character, and resulted in the judicial murder of over nineteen people. Many of the possessed pretended to have been visited by the apparition of a little black man, who urged them to inscribe their names in a red book which he carried--a sort of muster-roll of those who had forsworn God's service for the devil's. Others testified to having been present at meetings of witches in the forest. It is difficult now to read without contempt the "evidence" which grave justices and learned divines considered sufficient to condemn to death men and women of unblemished lives. It is true that the belief in witchcraft was general at that time all over the civilized world, and that sporadic cases of witch-burnings had occurred in different parts of America and Europe. Sir Thomas Browne, in his *Religio Medici*, 1635, affirmed his belief in witches, and pronounced those who doubted of them "a sort of atheist." But the superstition came to a head in the Salem trials and executions, and was the more shocking from the general high level of intelligence in the community in which these were held. It would be well if those who lament the decay of "faith" would remember what things were done in New England in the name of faith less than two hundred years ago. It is not wonderful that, to the Massachusetts Puritans of the seventeenth century, the mysterious forest held no beautiful suggestion; to them it was simply a grim and hideous wilderness, whose dark aisles were the ambush of prowling savages and the rendezvous of those other "devil-worshippers" who celebrated there a kind of vulgar Walpurgis night. The most important of original sources for the history of the settlement of New England are the journals of William Bradford, first governor of Plymouth, and John Winthrop, the second governor of Massachusetts, which hold a place corresponding to the writings of Captain John Smith in the Virginia colony, but are much more sober and trustworthy. Bradford's *History of Plymouth Plantation* covers the period from 1620 to 1646. The manuscript was used by later annalists, but remained unpublished, as a whole, until 1855, having been lost during the war of the revolution and recovered long afterward in England. Winthrop's *Journal, or History of New England*, begun on shipboard in 1630, and extending to 1649, was not published entire until 1826. It is of equal authority with Bradford's, and perhaps, on the whole, the more important of the two, as the colony of Massachusetts Bay, whose history it narrates, greatly outwent Plymouth in wealth and population, though not in priority of settlement. The interest of Winthrop's *Journal* lies in the events that it records rather than in any charm in the historian's manner of recording them. His style is pragmatic, and some of the incidents which he gravely notes are trivial to the modern mind, though instructive as to our forefathers' way of thinking. For instance, of the year 1632: "At Watertown there was (in the view of divers witnesses) a great combat between a mouse and a snake, and after a long fight the mouse prevailed and killed the snake. The pastor of Boston, Mr. Wilson, a very sincere, holy man, hearing of it, gave this interpretation: that the snake was the devil, the mouse was a poor, contemptible people, which God had

brought hither, which should overcome Satan here and dispossess him of his kingdom." The reader of Winthrop's Journal comes every-where upon hints which the imagination has since shaped into poetry and romance. The germs of many of Longfellow's New England Tragedies, of Hawthorne's Maypole of Merrymount, of Endicott's Red Cross, and of Whittier's John Underhill and The Familists' Hymn are all to be found in some dry, brief entry of the old Puritan diarist. "Robert Cole, having been oft punished for drunkenness, was now ordered to wear a red D about his neck for a year" to wit, the year 1633, and thereby gave occasion to the greatest American romance, The Scarlet Letter. The famous apparition of the phantom ship in New Haven harbor, "upon the top of the poop a man standing with one hand akimbo under his left side, and in his right hand a sword stretched out toward the sea," was first chronicled by Winthrop under the year 1648. This meteorological phenomenon took on the dimensions of a full-grown myth some forty years later, as related, with many embellishments, by Rev. James Pierpont, of New Haven, in a letter to Cotton Mather. Winthrop put great faith in special providences, and among other instances narrates, not without a certain grim satisfaction, how "the Mary Rose, a ship of Bristol, of about 200 tons," lying before Charleston, was blown in pieces with her own powder, being twenty-one barrels, wherein the judgment of God appeared, "for the master and company were many of them profane scoffers at us and at the ordinances of religion here." Without any effort at dramatic portraiture or character sketching, Winthrop managed in all simplicity, and by the plain relation of facts, to leave a clear impression of many of the prominent figures in the first Massachusetts immigration. In particular there gradually arises from the entries in his diary a very distinct and diverting outline of Captain John Underhill, celebrated in Whittier's poem. He was one of the few professional soldiers who came over with the Puritan fathers, such as John Mason, the hero of the Pequot War, and Miles Standish, whose Courtship Longfellow sang. He had seen service in the Low Countries, and in pleading the privilege of his profession "he insisted much upon the liberty which all States do allow to military officers for free speech, etc., and that himself had spoken sometimes as freely to Count Nassau." Captain Underhill gave the colony no end of {345} trouble, both by his scandalous living and his heresies in religion. Having been seduced into Familistical opinions by Mrs. Anne Hutchinson, who was banished for her beliefs, he was had up before the General Court and questioned, among other points, as to his own report of the manner of his conversion. "He had lain under a spirit of bondage and a legal way for years, and could get no assurance, till, at length, as he was taking a pipe of tobacco, the Spirit set home an absolute promise of free grace with such assurance and joy as he never since doubted of his good estate, neither should he, though he should fall into sin.~.~.~. The Lord's day following he made a speech in the assembly, showing that as the Lord was pleased to convert Paul as he was in persecuting, etc., so he might manifest himself to him as he was taking the moderate use of the creature called tobacco." The gallant captain, being banished the colony, betook himself to the falls of the Piscataquack (Exeter, N. H.), where the Rev. John Wheelwright, another adherent of Mrs. Hutchinson, had gathered a congregation. Being made governor of this plantation, Underhill sent letters to the Massachusetts magistrates, breathing reproaches and imprecations of vengeance. But meanwhile it was discovered that he had been living in adultery at Boston with a young woman whom he had seduced, the wife of a cooper, and the captain was forced to make public confession, which he did with great unction and in a manner highly dramatic. "He came in his worst clothes (being accustomed to take great pride in his bravery and neatness), without a band, in a foul linen cap, and pulled close to his eyes, and standing upon a form, he did, with many deep sighs and abundance of tears, lay open his wicked course." There is a lurking humor in the grave Winthrop's detailed account of Underhill's doings. Winthrop's own personality comes out well in his Journal. He was a born leader of men, a conditor imperii, just, moderate, patient, wise, and his narrative gives, upon the whole, a favorable impression of the general prudence and fair-mindedness of the Massachusetts settlers in their dealings with one another, with the Indians, and with the neighboring plantations. Considering our forefathers' errand and calling into this wilderness, it is not strange that their chief literary staples were sermons and tracts in controversial theology. Multitudes of these were written and published by the divines of the first generation, such as John Cotton, Thomas Shepard, John Norton, Peter Bulkley, and Thomas Hooker, the founder of Hartford, of whom it was finely said that "when he was doing his Master's business he would put a king into his pocket." Nor were their successors in the second or the third generation any less industrious and prolific. They rest from their labors and their works do follow them. Their sermons and theological treatises are not literature, they are for the most part dry, heavy, and dogmatic, but they exhibit great learning, logical acuteness, and an earnestness which sometimes rises into eloquence. The pulpit ruled New England, and the sermon was the great intellectual engine of the time. The serious thinking of the Puritans was given almost exclusively to religion; the other world was all their art. The daily secular events of life, the aspects of nature, the vicissitude of the seasons, were important enough

to find record in print only in so far as they manifested God's dealings with his people. So much was the sermon depended upon to furnish literary food that it was the general custom of serious minded laymen to take down the words of the discourse in their note-books. Franklin, in his Autobiography, describes this as the constant habit of his grandfather, Peter Folger; and Mather, in his life of the elder Winthrop, says that "tho' he wrote not after the preacher, yet such was his attention and such his retention in hearing, that he repeated unto his family the sermons which he had heard in the congregation." These discourses were commonly of great length; twice, or sometimes thrice, the pulpit hour-glass was silently inverted while the orator pursued his theme even unto n'thly. The book which best sums up the life and thought of this old New England of the seventeenth century is Cotton Mather's *Magnalia Christi Americana*. Mather was by birth a member of that clerical aristocracy which developed later into Dr. Holmes's "Brahmin Caste of New England." His maternal grandfather was John Cotton. His father was Increase Mather, the most learned divine of his generation in New England, minister of the North Church of Boston, President of Harvard College, and author, inter alia, of that characteristically Puritan book, *An Essay for the Recording of Illustrious Providences*. Cotton Mather himself was a monster of erudition and a prodigy of diligence. He was graduated from Harvard at fifteen. He ordered his daily life and conversation by a system of minute observances. He was a book-worm, whose life was spent between his library and his pulpit, and his published works number upward of three hundred and eighty. Of these the most important is the *Magnalia*, 1702, an ecclesiastical history of New England from 1620 to 1698, divided into seven parts: I. Antiquities; II. Lives of the Governors; III. Lives of Sixty Famous Divines; IV. A History of Harvard College, with biographies of its eminent graduates; V. Acts and Monuments of the Faith; VI. Wonderful Providences; VII. The Wars of the Lord, that is, an account of the Afflictions and Disturbances of the Churches and the Conflicts with the Indians. The plan of the work thus united that of Fuller's *Worthies of England* and Church History with that of Wood's *Athenae Oxonienses* and Fox's *Book of Martyrs*. Mather's prose was of the kind which the English Commonwealth writers used. He was younger by a generation than Dryden; but as literary fashions are slower to change in a colony than in the {349} mother country, that nimble English which Dryden and the Restoration essayists introduced had not yet displaced in New England the older manner. Mather wrote in the full and pregnant style of Taylor, Milton, Browne, Fuller, and Burton, a style ponderous with learning and stiff with allusions, digressions, conceits, anecdotes, and quotations from the Greek and the Latin. A page of the *Magnalia* is almost as richly mottled with italics as one from the *Anatomy of Melancholy*, and the quaintness which Mather caught from his favorite Fuller disports itself in textual pun and marginal anagram and the fantastic sub-titles of his books and chapters. He speaks of Thomas Hooker as having "angled many scores of souls into the kingdom of heaven," anagrammatizes Mrs. Hutchinson's surname into "the non-such;" and having occasion to speak of Mr. Urian Oaks's election to the presidency of Harvard College, enlarges upon the circumstance as follows: "We all know that Britain knew nothing more famous than their ancient sect of DRUIDS; the philosophers, whose order, they say, was instituted by one Samothes, which is in English as much as to say, an heavenly man. The Celtic name Deru, for an Oak was that from whence they received their denomination; as at this very day the Welch call this tree Drew, and this order of men Derwyddon. But there are no small antiquaries who derive this oaken religion and philosophy from the Oaks of Mamre, where the Patriarch Abraham had as well a dwelling as an altar. That Oaken-Plain and the eminent OAK under which Abraham lodged was extant in the days of Constantine, as Isidore, Jerom, and Sozomen have assured us. Yea, there are shrewd probabilities that Noah himself had lived in this very Oak-plain before him; for this very place was called Oyye, which was the name of Noah, so styled from the Oggyan (subcineritiis panibus) sacrifices, which he did use to offer in this renowned Grove. And it was from this example that the ancients and particularly that the Druids of the nations, chose oaken retirements for their studies. Reader, let us now, upon another account, behold the students of Harvard College, as a rendezvous of happy Druids, under the influences of so rare a president. But, alas! our joy must be short-lived, for on July 25, 1681, the stroke of a sudden death felled the tree,

"Qui tantum inter caput extulit omnes  
Quantum lenta solent inter viberna cypressi.

"Mr. Oakes thus being transplanted into the better world, the  
presidentship was immediately tendered unto Mr. Increase Mather."

This will suffice as an example of the bad taste and laborious pedantry which disfigured Mather's writing. In its substance the book is a perfect thesaurus; and inasmuch as nothing is unimportant in the history of the

beginnings of such a nation as this is and is destined to be, the *Magnalia* will always remain a valuable and interesting work. Cotton Mather, born in 1663, was of the second generation of Americans, his grandfather being of the immigration, but his father a native of Dorchester, Mass. A comparison of his writings and of the writings of his contemporaries with the works of Bradford, Winthrop, Hooker, and others of the original colonists, shows that the simple and heroic faith of the Pilgrims had hardened into formalism and doctrinal rigidity. The leaders of the Puritan exodus, notwithstanding their intolerance of errors in belief, were comparatively broad-minded men. They were sharers in a great national movement, and they came over when their cause was warm with the glow of martyrdom and on the eve of its coming triumph at home. After the Restoration, in 1660, the currents of national feeling no longer circulated so freely through this distant member of the body politic, and thought in America became more provincial. The English dissenters, though socially at a disadvantage as compared with the Church of England, had the great benefit of living at the center of national life, and of feeling about them the pressure of vast bodies of people who did not think as they did. In New England, for many generations, the dominant sect had things all its own way, a condition of things which is not healthy for any sect or party. Hence Mather and the divines of his time appear in their writings very much like so many Puritan bishops, jealous of their prerogatives, magnifying their apostolate, and careful to maintain their authority over the laity. Mather had an appetite for the marvelous, and took a leading part in the witchcraft trials, of which he gave an account in his *Wonders of the Invisible World*, 1693. To the quaint pages of the *Magnalia* our modern authors have resorted as to a collection of romances or fairy tales. Whittier, for example, took from thence the subject of his poem *The Garrison of Cape Anne*; and Hawthorne embodied in *Grandfather's Chair* the most elaborate of Mather's biographies. This was the life of Sir William Phipps, who, from being a poor shepherd boy in his native province of Maine, rose to be the royal governor of Massachusetts, and the story of whose wonderful adventures in raising the freight of a Spanish treasure ship, sunk on a reef near Port de la Plata, reads less like sober fact than like some ancient fable, with talk of the Spanish main, bullion, and plate and jewels and "pieces of eight." Of Mather's generation was Samuel Sewall, Chief Justice of Massachusetts, a singularly gracious and venerable figure, who is intimately known through his *Diary* kept from 1673 to 1729. This has been compared with the more famous diary of Samuel Pepys, which it resembles in its confidential character and the completeness of its self-revelation, but to which it is as much inferior in historic interest as "the petty province here" was inferior in political and social importance to "Britain far away." For the most part it is a chronicle of small beer, the diarist jotting down the minutiae of his domestic life and private affairs, even to the recording of such haps as this: "March 23, I had my hair cut by G. Barret." But it also affords instructive glimpses of public events, such as King Philip's War, the Quaker troubles, the English Revolution of 1688, etc. It bears about the same relation to New England history at the close of the seventeenth century as Bradford's and Winthrop's journals bear to that of the first generation. Sewall was one of the justices who presided at the trial of the Salem witches; but for the part which he took in that wretched affair he made such atonement as was possible, by open confession of his mistake and his remorse in the presence of the Church. Sewall was one of the first writers against African slavery, in his brief tract, *The Selling of Joseph*, printed at Boston in 1700. His *Phenomena Quaedam Apocalyptica*, a mystical interpretation of prophecies concerning the New Jerusalem, which he identifies with America, is remembered only because Whittier, in his *Prophecy of Samuel Sewall*, has paraphrased one poetic passage, which shows a loving observation of nature very rare in our colonial writers. Of poetry, indeed, or, in fact, of pure literature, in the narrower sense--that is, of the imaginative representation of life--there was little or none in the colonial period. There were no novels, no plays, no satires, and--until the example of the *Spectator* had begun to work on this side the water--no experiments even at the lighter forms {354} of essay writing, character sketches, and literary criticism. There was verse of a certain kind, but the most generous stretch of the term would hardly allow it to be called poetry. Many of the early divines of New England relieved their pens, in the intervals of sermon writing, of epigrams, elegies, eulogistic verses, and similar grave trifles distinguished by the crabbed wit of the so-called "metaphysical poets," whose manner was in fashion when the Puritans left England; the manner of Donne and Cowley, and those darlings of the New English muse, the *Emblems of Quarles* and the *Divine Week of Du Bartas*, as translated by Sylvester. The *Magnalia* contains a number of these things in Latin and English, and is itself well bolstered with complimentary introductions in meter by the author's friends. For example:

COTTONIUS MATHERUS.

ANAGRAM.

Tuos Tecum Ornasti.

"While thus the dead in thy rare pages rise  
Thine, with thyself, thou dost immortalise,  
To view the odds thy learned lives invite  
'Twixt Eleutherian and Edomite.  
But all succeeding ages shall despair  
A fitting monument for thee to rear.  
Thy own rich pen (peace, silly Momus, peace!)  
Hath given them a lasting writ of ease."

The epitaphs and mortuary verses were especially ingenious in the matter of puns, anagrams, and similar conceits. The death of the Rev. Samuel Stone, of Hartford, afforded an opportunity of this sort not to be missed, and his threnodist accordingly celebrated him as a "whetstone," a "loadstone," an "Ebenezer"--

"A stone for kingly David's use so fit  
As would not fail Goliah's front to hit," etc.

The most characteristic, popular, and widely circulated poem of colonial New England was Michael Wigglesworth's Day of Doom (1662), a kind of doggerel Inferno, which went through nine editions, and "was the solace," says Lowell, "of every fireside, the flicker of the pine-knots by which it was coned perhaps adding a livelier relish to its premonitions of eternal combustion." Wigglesworth had not the technical equipment of a poet. His verse is sing-song, his language rude and monotonous, and the lurid horrors of his material hell are more likely to move mirth than fear in a modern reader. But there are an unmistakable vigor of imagination and a sincerity of belief in his gloomy poem which hold it far above contempt, and easily account for its universal currency among a people like the Puritans. One stanza has been often quoted for its grim concession to unregenerate infants of "the easiest room in hell"--a limbus infantum which even Origen need not have scrupled at. The most authoritative expounder of New England Calvinism was Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758), a native of Connecticut, and a graduate of Yale, who was minister for more than twenty years over the Church in Northampton, Mass., afterward missionary to the Stockbridge Indians, and at the time of his death had just been inaugurated president of Princeton College. By virtue of his Inquiry into the Freedom of the Will, 1754, Edwards holds rank as the subtlest metaphysician of his age. This treatise was composed to justify, on philosophical grounds, the Calvinistic doctrines of foreordination and election by grace, though its arguments are curiously coincident with those of the scientific necessitarians, whose conclusions are as far asunder from Edwards's "as from the center thrice to the utmost pole." His writings belong to theology rather than to literature, but there is an intensity and a spiritual elevation about them, apart from the profundity and acuteness of the thought, which lift them here and there into the finer ether of purely emotional or imaginative art. He dwelt rather upon the terrors than the comfort of the word, and his chosen themes were the dogmas of predestination, original sin, total depravity, and eternal punishment. The titles of his sermons are significant: Men Naturally God's Enemies, Wrath upon the Wicked to the Uttermost, The Final Judgment, etc. "A natural man," he wrote in the first of these discourses, "has a heart like the heart of a devil.~.~.~. The heart of a natural man is as destitute of love to God as a dead, stiff, cold corpse is of vital heat." Perhaps the most famous of Edwards's sermons was Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God, preached at Enfield, Conn., July 8, 1741, "at a time of great awakenings," and upon the ominous text, Their foot shall slide in due time. "The God that holds you over the pit of hell" runs an oft-quoted passage from this powerful denunciation of the wrath to come, "much as one holds a spider or some loathsome insect over the fire, abhors you, and is dreadfully provoked.~.~.~. You are ten thousand times more abominable in his eyes than the most hateful venomous serpent is in ours.~.~.~. You hang by a slender thread, with the flames of divine wrath flashing about it.~.~.~. If you cry to God to pity you, he will be so far from pitying you in your doleful case that he will only tread you under foot.~.~.~. He will crush out your blood and make it fly, and it shall be sprinkled on his garments so as to stain all his raiment." But Edwards was a rapt soul, possessed with the love as well as the fear of the God, and there are passages of sweet and exalted feeling in his Treatise Concerning Religious Affections, 1746. Such is his portrait of Sarah Pierpont, "a young lady in New Haven," who afterward became his wife, and

who "will sometimes go about from place to place singing sweetly, and no one knows for what. She loves to be alone, walking in the fields and groves, and seems to have some one invisible always conversing with her." Edwards's printed works number thirty-six titles. A complete edition of them in ten volumes was published in 1829 by his great-grandson, Sereno Dwight. The memoranda from Edwards's note-books, quoted by his editor and biographer, exhibit a remarkable precocity. Even as a school-boy and a college student he had made deep guesses in physics as well as metaphysics, and, as might have been predicted of a youth of his philosophical insight and ideal cast of mind, he had early anticipated Berkeley in denying the existence of matter. In passing from Mather to Edwards, we step from the seventeenth to the eighteenth century. There is the same difference between them in style and turn of thought as between Milton and Locke, or between Fuller and Dryden. The learned digressions, the witty conceits, the perpetual interlarding of the text with scraps of Latin, have fallen off, even as the full-bottomed wig and the clerical gown and bands have been laid aside for the undistinguishing dress of the modern minister. In Edwards's English all is simple, precise, direct, and business-like. Benjamin Franklin (1706-1790), who was strictly contemporary with Edwards, was a contrast to him in every respect. As Edwards represents the spirituality and other-worldliness of Puritanism, Franklin stands for the worldly and secular side of American character, and he illustrates the development of the New England Englishman into the modern Yankee. Clear rather than subtle, without ideality or romance or fineness of emotion or poetic lift, intensely practical and utilitarian, broad-minded, inventive, shrewd, versatile, Franklin's sturdy figure {359} became typical of his time and his people. He was the first and the only man of letters in colonial America who acquired a cosmopolitan fame, and impressed his characteristic Americanism upon the mind of Europe. He was the embodiment of common sense and of the useful virtues; with the enterprise but without the nervousness of his modern compatriots, uniting the philosopher's openness of mind with the sagacity and quickness of resource of the self-made business man. He was representative also of his age, an age of aufklärung, eclaireissement, or "clearing up." By the middle of the eighteenth century a change had taken place in American society. Trade had increased between the different colonies; Boston, New York, and Philadelphia were considerable towns; democratic feeling was spreading; over forty newspapers were published in America at the outbreak of the Revolution; politics claimed more attention than formerly, and theology less. With all this intercourse and mutual reaction of the various colonies upon one another, the isolated theocracy of New England naturally relaxed somewhat of its grip on the minds of the laity. When Franklin was a printer's apprentice in Boston, setting type on his brother's New England Courant, the fourth American newspaper, he got hold of an odd volume of the Spectator, and formed his style upon Addison, whose manner he afterward imitated in his Busy-Body papers in the Philadelphia Weekly Mercury. He also read Locke and the English deistical {360} writers, Collins and Shaftesbury, and became himself a deist and free-thinker; and subsequently when practicing his trade in London, in 1724-26, he made the acquaintance of Dr. Mandeville, author of the Fable of the Bees, at a pale-ale house in Cheapside, called "The Horns," where the famous free-thinker presided over a club of wits and boon companions. Though a native of Boston, Franklin is identified with Philadelphia, whither he arrived in 1723, a runaway 'prentice boy, "whose stock of cash consisted of a Dutch dollar and about a shilling in copper." The description in his Autobiography of his walking up Market Street munching a loaf of bread, and passing his future wife, standing on her father's doorstep, has become almost as familiar as the anecdote about Whittington and his cat. It was in the practical sphere that Franklin was greatest, as an originator and executor of projects for the general welfare. The list of his public services is almost endless. He organized the Philadelphia fire department and street cleaning service, and the colonial postal system which grew into the United States Post Office Department. He started the Philadelphia public library, the American Philosophical Society, the University of Pennsylvania, and the first American magazine, The General Magazine and Historical Chronicle; so that he was almost singly the father of whatever intellectual life the Pennsylvania colony could boast of. In 1754, when commissioners from the colonies met at Albany, Franklin proposed a plan, which was adopted, for the union of all the colonies under one government. But all these things, as well as his mission to England in 1757, on behalf of the Pennsylvania Assembly in its dispute with the proprietaries; his share in the Declaration of Independence--of which he was one of the signers--and his residence in France as Ambassador of the United Colonies, belong to the political history of the country; to the history of American science belong his celebrated experiments in electricity, and his benefits to mankind in both of these departments were aptly summed up in the famous epigram of the French statesman Turgot:

"Erupuit coelo fulmen sceptrumque tyrannis."



Franklin's success in Europe was such as no American had yet achieved, as few Americans since him have achieved. Hume and Voltaire were among his acquaintances and his professed admirers. In France he was fairly idolized, and when he died Mirabeau announced, "The genius which has freed America and poured a flood of light over Europe has returned to the bosom of the Divinity."

Franklin was a great man, but hardly a great writer, though as a writer, too, he had many admirable and some great qualities. Among these were the crystal clearness and simplicity of his style. His more strictly literary performances, such as his essays after the Spectator, hardly rise above mediocrity, and are neither better nor worse than other imitations of Addison. But in some of his lighter bagatelles there are a homely wisdom and a charming playfulness which have won them enduring favor. Such are his famous story of the Whistle, his Dialogue between Franklin and the Gout, his letters to Madame Helvetius, and his verses entitled Paper. The greater portion of his writings consists of papers on general politics, commerce, and political economy, contributions to the public questions of his day. These are of the nature of journalism rather than of literature, and many of them were published in his newspaper, the Pennsylvania Gazette, the medium through which for many years he most strongly influenced American opinion. The most popular of his writings were his Autobiography and Poor Richard's Almanac. The former of these was begun in 1771, resumed in 1788, but never completed. It has remained the most widely current book in our colonial literature. Poor Richard's Almanac, begun in 1732 and continued for about twenty-five years, had an annual circulation of ten thousand copies. It was filled with proverbial sayings in prose and verse, inculcating the virtues of industry, honesty, and frugality. Some of these were original with Franklin, others were selected from the proverbial wisdom of the ages, but a new force was given them by pungent turns of expression. Poor Richard's saws were such as these: "Little strokes fell great oaks;" "Three removes are as bad as a fire;" "Early to bed and early to rise makes a man healthy, wealthy, and wise;" "Never leave that till tomorrow which you can do to-day;" "What maintains one vice would bring up two children;" "It is hard for an empty bag to stand upright." Now and then there are truths of a higher kind than these in Franklin, and Sainte Beuve, the great French critic, quotes, as an example of his occasional finer moods, the saying, "Truth and sincerity have a certain distinguishing native luster about them which cannot be counterfeited; they are like fire and flame that cannot be painted." But the sage who invented the Franklin stove had no disdain of small utilities; and in general the last word of his philosophy is well expressed in a passage of his Autobiography: "Human felicity is produced not so much by great pieces of good fortune, that seldom happen, as by little advantages that occur every day; thus, if you teach a poor young man to shave himself and keep his razor in order, you may contribute more to the happiness of his life than in giving him a thousand guineas."

## CHAPTER II.

### THE REVOLUTIONARY PERIOD.

#### 1765-1815.

It will be convenient to treat the fifty years which elapsed between the meeting at New York, in 1765, of a Congress of delegates from nine colonies, to protest against the Stamp Act, and the close of the second war with England, in 1815, as, for literary purposes, a single period. This half century was the formative era of the American nation. Historically it is divisible into the years of revolution and the years of construction. But the men who led the movement for independence were also, in great part, the same who guided in shaping the Constitution of the new republic, and the intellectual impress of the whole period is one and the same. The character of the age was as distinctly political as that of the colonial era--in New England at least--was theological; and literature must still continue to borrow its interest from history. Pure literature, or what, for want of a better term we call belles lettres, was not born in America until the nineteenth century was well under way. It is true that the Revolution had its humor, its poetry, and even its fiction; but these were strictly for the home market. They hardly penetrated the consciousness of Europe at all, and are not to be compared with the contemporary work of English authors like Cowper and Sheridan and Burke. Their importance for us to-day is rather antiquarian than literary, though the most noteworthy of them will be mentioned in due course in the present chapter. It is also true that one or two of Irving's early books fall within the last years of the period now under consideration. But literary epochs overlap one another at the edges, and these writings may best be postponed to a subsequent chapter. Among the most characteristic products of the intellectual stir that preceded and accompanied the revolutionary movement, were the speeches of political orators like Samuel Adams, James Otis, and Josiah Quincy in Massachusetts, and Patrick Henry in Virginia. Oratory is the art of a free people, and as in the forensic assemblies of Greece and Rome, and in the Parliament of Great Britain, so in the conventions and congresses of revolutionary America it sprang up and flourished naturally. The age, moreover, was an eloquent, not to say a rhetorical age; and the influence of Johnson's orotund prose, of the declamatory Letters of Junius, and of the speeches of Burke, Fox, Sheridan, and the elder Pitt is perceptible in the debates of our early congresses. The fame of a great orator, like that of a great actor, is largely traditional. The spoken word transferred to the printed page loses the glow which resided in the man and the moment. A speech is good if it attains its aim, if it moves the hearers to the end which is sought. But the fact that this end is often temporary and occasional, rather than universal and permanent explains why so few speeches are really literature. If this is true, even where the words of an orator are preserved exactly as they were spoken, it is doubly true when we have only the testimony of contemporaries as to the effect which the oration produced. The fiery utterances of Adams, Otis, and Quincy were either not reported at all or very imperfectly reported, so that posterity can judge of them only at second hand. Patrick Henry has fared better, many of his orations being preserved in substance, if not in the letter, in Wirt's biography. Of these the most famous was the defiant speech in the Convention of Delegates, March 28, 1775, throwing down the gauge of battle to the British ministry. The ringing sentences of this challenge are still declaimed by school boys, and many of them remain as familiar as household words. "I have but one lamp by which my feet are guided, and that is the lamp of experience. I know of no way of judging of the future but by the past.~.~.~. Gentlemen may cry peace, peace, but there is no peace.~.~.~. Is life so dear, or peace so sweet, as to be purchased at the price of chains and slavery! Forbid it, Almighty God! I know not what course others may take, but as for me, give me liberty, or give me death!" The eloquence of Patrick Henry was fervid rather than weighty or rich. But if such specimens of the oratory of the American patriots as have come down to us fail to account for the wonderful impression that their words are said to have produced upon their fellow-countrymen, we should remember that they are at a disadvantage when read instead of heard. The imagination should supply all those accessories which gave them vitality when first pronounced: the living presence and voice of the speaker; the listening Senate; the grave excitement of the hour and of the impending conflict. The wordiness and exaggeration; the highly latinized diction; the rhapsodies about freedom which hundreds of Fourth-of-July addresses have since turned into platitudes--all these coming hot from the lips of men whose actions in the field confirmed the earnestness of their speech--were effective enough in the crisis and for the purpose to which they were addressed. The press was an agent in the cause of liberty no less potent than the platform, and patriots such as Adams, Otis, Quincy, Warren, and Hancock wrote constantly for the newspapers essays and letters on the public questions of the time signed "Vindex," "Hyperion," "Independent," "Brutus," "Cassius," and the

like, and couched in language which to the taste of to-day seems rather over rhetorical. Among the most important of these political essays were the Circular Letter to each Colonial Legislature, published by Adams and Otis in 1768; Quincy's Observations on the Boston Port Bill, 1774, and Otis's Rights of the British Colonies, a pamphlet of one hundred and twenty pages, printed in 1764. No collection of Otis's writings has ever been made. The life of Quincy, published by his son, preserves for posterity his journals and correspondence, his newspaper essays, and his speeches at the bar, taken from the Massachusetts law reports. Among the political literature which is of perennial interest to the American people are such State documents as the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution of the United States, and the messages, inaugural addresses, and other writings of our early presidents. Thomas Jefferson, the third president of the United States, and the father of the Democratic party, was the author of the Declaration of Independence, whose opening sentences have become commonplaces in the memory of all readers. One sentence in particular has been as a shibboleth, or war-cry, or declaration of faith among Democrats of all shades of opinion: "We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." Not so familiar to modern readers is the following, which an English historian of our literature calls "the most eloquent clause of that great document," and "the most interesting suppressed passage in American literature." Jefferson {370} was a southerner, but even at that early day the South had grown sensitive on the subject of slavery, and Jefferson's arraignment of King George for promoting the "peculiar institution" was left out from the final draft of the Declaration in deference to southern members. "He has waged cruel war against human nature itself, violating its most sacred rights of life and liberty, in the persons of a distant people who never offended him, captivating and carrying them into slavery in another hemisphere, or to incur miserable death in their transportation thither. This piratical warfare, the opprobrium of infidel powers, is the warfare of the Christian king of Great Britain. Determined to keep open a market where men should be bought and sold, he has prostituted his negative by suppressing every legislative attempt to restrain this execrable commerce. And, that this assemblage of horrors might want no fact of distinguished dye, he is now exciting those very people to rise in arms against us, and purchase that liberty of which he deprived them by murdering the people upon whom he obtruded them, and thus paying off former crimes committed against the liberties of one people by crimes which he urges them to commit against the lives of another." The tone of apology or defense which Calhoun and other southern statesmen afterward adopted on the subject of slavery was not taken by the men of Jefferson's generation. Another famous Virginian, John Randolph of Roanoke, himself a slaveholder, in his speech on the militia bill in the House of Representatives, December 10, 1811, said: "I speak from facts when I say that the night-bell never tolls for fire in Richmond that the mother does not hug her infant more closely to her bosom." This was said apropos of the danger of a servile insurrection in the event of a war with England--a war which actually broke out in the year following, but was not attended with the slave rising which Randolph predicted. Randolph was a thorough-going "States rights" man, and though opposed to slavery on principle, he cried hands off to any interference by the General Government with the domestic institutions of the States. His speeches read better than most of his contemporaries. They are interesting in their exhibit of a bitter and eccentric individuality, witty, incisive, and expressed in a pungent and familiar style which contrasts refreshingly with the diplomatic language and glittering generalities of most congressional oratory, whose verbiage seems to keep its subject always at arm's length. Another noteworthy writing of Jefferson's was his Inaugural Address of March 4, 1801, with its programme of "equal and exact justice to all men, of whatever state or persuasion, religious or political; peace, commerce, and honest friendship with all nations, entangling alliances with none; the support of the State governments in all their rights;~.~.~. absolute acquiescence in the decisions of the majority;~.~.~. the supremacy of the civil over the military authority; economy in the public expense; freedom of religion, freedom of the press, and freedom of person under the protection of the habeas corpus, and trial by juries impartially selected." During his six years' residence in France, as American Minister, Jefferson had become indoctrinated with the principles of French democracy. His main service and that of his party--the Democratic or, as it was then called, the Republican party--to the young republic was in its insistence upon toleration of all beliefs and upon the freedom of the individual from all forms of governmental restraint. Jefferson has some claims, to rank as an author in general literature. Educated at William and Mary College in the old Virginia capital, Williamsburg, he became the founder of the University of Virginia, in which he made special provision for the study of Anglo-Saxon, and in which the liberal scheme of instruction and discipline was conformed, in theory at least, to the "university idea." His Notes on Virginia are not without literary quality, and one description, in particular, has been often quoted--the passage of the Potomac through the Blue Ridge--in

which is this poetically imaginative touch: "The mountain being cloven asunder, she presents to your eye, through the cleft, a small catch of smooth blue horizon, at an infinite distance in the plain country, inviting you, as it were, from the riot and tumult roaring around, to pass through the breach and participate of the calm below." After the conclusion of peace with England, in 1783, political discussion centered about the Constitution, which in 1788 took the place of the looser Articles of Confederation adopted in 1778. The Constitution as finally ratified was a compromise between two parties--the Federalists, who wanted a strong central government, and the Anti-Federalists (afterward called Republicans, or Democrats), who wished to preserve State sovereignty. The debates on the adoption of the Constitution, both in the General Convention of the States, which met at Philadelphia in 1787, and in the separate State Conventions called to ratify its action, form a valuable body of comment and illustration upon the instrument itself. One of the most notable of the speeches in opposition was Patrick Henry's address before the Virginia Convention. "That this is a consolidated government," he said, "is demonstrably clear; and the danger of such a government is, to my mind, very striking." The leader of the Federal party was Alexander Hamilton, the ablest constructive intellect among the statesmen of our revolutionary era, of whom Talleyrand said that he "had never known his equal;" whom Guizot classed with "the men who have best known the vital principles and fundamental conditions of a government worthy of its name and mission." Hamilton's speech On the Expediency of Adopting the Federal Constitution, delivered in the Convention of New York, June 24, 1788, was a masterly statement of the necessity and advantages of the Union. But the most complete exposition of the constitutional philosophy of the Federal party was the series of eighty-five papers entitled the *Federalist*, printed during the years 1787-88, and mostly in the *Independent Journal of New York*, over the signature "Publius." These were the work of Hamilton, of John Jay, afterward Chief Justice, and of James Madison, afterward President of the United States. The *Federalist* papers, though written in a somewhat ponderous diction, are among the great landmarks of American history, and were in themselves a political education to the generation that read them. Hamilton was a brilliant and versatile figure, a persuasive orator, a forcible writer, and as Secretary of the Treasury under Washington the foremost of American financiers. He was killed, in a duel, by Aaron Burr, at Hoboken, in 1804. The *Federalists* were victorious, and under the provisions of the new Constitution George Washington was inaugurated first President of the United States, on March 4, 1789. Washington's writings have been collected by Jared Sparks. They consist of journals, letters, messages, addresses, and public documents, for the most part plain and business-like in manner, and without any literary pretensions. The most elaborate and the best known of them is his Farewell Address, issued on his retirement from the presidency in 1796. In the composition of this he was assisted by Madison, Hamilton, and Jay. It is wise in substance and dignified, though somewhat stilted in expression. The correspondence of John Adams, second President of the United States, and his diary, kept from 1755-85, should also be mentioned as important sources for a full knowledge of this period. In the long life-and-death struggle of Great Britain against the French Republic and its successor, Napoleon Bonaparte, the *Federalist* party in this country naturally sympathized with England, and the Jeffersonian Democracy with France. The *Federalists*, who distrusted the sweeping abstractions of the French Revolution, and clung to the conservative notions of a checked and balanced freedom, inherited from English precedent, were accused of monarchical and aristocratic leanings. On their side they were not slow to accuse their adversaries of French atheism and French Jacobinism. By a singular reversal of the natural order of things the strength of the *Federalist* party was in New England, which was socially democratic, while the strength of the Jeffersonians was in the South, whose social structure--owing to the system of slavery--was intensely aristocratic. The war of 1812 with England was so unpopular in New England, by reason of the injury which it threatened to inflict on its commerce, that the Hartford Convention of 1814 was more than suspected of a design to bring about the secession of New England from the Union. A good deal of oratory was called out by the debates on the commercial treaty with Great Britain, negotiated by Jay in 1795, by the Alien and Sedition Law of 1798, and by other pieces of *Federalist* legislation, previous to the downfall of that party and the election of Jefferson to the presidency in 1800. The best of the *Federalist* orators during those years was Fisher Ames, of Massachusetts, and the best of his orations was, perhaps, his speech on the British treaty in the House of Representatives, April 18, 1796. The speech was, in great measure, a protest against American chauvinism and the violation of international obligations. "It has been said the world ought to rejoice if Britain was sunk in the sea; if where there are now men and wealth and laws and liberty, there was no more than a sand bank for sea-monsters to fatten on; space for the storms of the ocean to mingle in conflict.~.~.~. What is patriotism? Is it a narrow affection for the spot where a man was born? Are the very clods where we tread entitled to this ardent preference because they are greener?~.~.~. I see no exception to the respect that is paid among nations to the law of

good faith.~.~. It is observed by barbarians--a whiff of tobacco smoke or a string of beads gives not merely binding force but sanctity to treaties. Even in Algiers a truce may be bought for money, but, when ratified, even Algiers is too wise or too just to disown and annul its obligation." Ames was a scholar, and his speeches are more finished and thoughtful, more literary, in a way, than those of his contemporaries. His eulogiums on Washington and Hamilton are elaborate tributes, rather excessive, perhaps, in laudation and in classical allusions. In all the oratory of the revolutionary period there is nothing equal in deep and condensed energy of feeling to the single clause in Lincoln's Gettysburg Address, "that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain." A prominent figure during and after the War of the Revolution was Thomas Paine, or, as he was somewhat disrespectfully called, "Tom Paine." He was a dissenting minister who, conceiving himself ill treated by the British Government, came to Philadelphia in 1774 and threw himself heart and soul into the colonial cause. His pamphlet, *Common Sense*, issued in 1776, began with the famous words: "These are the times that try men's souls." This was followed by the *Crisis*, a series of political essays advocating independence and the establishment of a republic, published in periodical form, though at irregular intervals. Paine's rough and vigorous advocacy was of great service to the American patriots. His writings were popular and his arguments were of a kind easily understood by plain people, addressing themselves to the common sense, the prejudices and passions of unlettered readers. He afterward went to France and took an active part in the popular movement there, crossing swords with Burke in his *Rights of Man*, 1791-92, written in defense of the French Revolution. He was one of the two foreigners who sat in the Convention; but falling under suspicion during the days of the terror, he was committed to the prison of the Luxembourg and only released upon the fall of Robespierre July 27, 1794. While in prison he wrote a portion of his best known work, the *Age of Reason*. This appeared in two parts in 1794 and 1795, the manuscript of the first part having been intrusted to Joel Barlow, the American poet, who happened to be in Paris when Paine was sent to prison. The *Age of Reason* damaged Paine's reputation in America, where the name of "Tom Paine" became a stench in the nostrils of the godly and a synonym for atheism and blasphemy. His book was denounced from a hundred pulpits, and copies of it were carefully locked away from the sight of "the young," whose religious beliefs it might undermine. It was, in effect, a crude and popular statement of the Deistic argument against Christianity. What the cutting logic and persiflage--the sourire hideux--of Voltaire had done in France, Paine, with coarser materials, essayed to do for the English-speaking populations. Deism was in the air of the time; Franklin, Jefferson, Ethan Alien, Joel Barlow, and other prominent Americans were openly or unavowedly deistic. Free thought, somehow, went along with democratic opinions, and was a part of the liberal movement of the age. Paine was a man without reverence, imagination, or religious feeling. He was no scholar, and he was not troubled by any perception of the deeper and subtler aspects of the questions which he touched. In his examination of the Old and New Testaments, he insisted that the Bible was an imposition and a forgery, full of lies, absurdities, and obscenities. Supernatural Christianity, with all its mysteries and miracles, was a fraud practiced by priests upon the people, and churches were instruments of oppression in the hands of tyrants. This way of accounting for Christianity would not now be accepted by even the most "advanced" thinkers. The contest between skepticism and revelation has long since shifted to other grounds. Both the philosophy and the temper of the *Age of Reason* belong to the eighteenth century. But Paine's downright pugnacious method of attack was effective with shrewd, half-educated doubters, and in America well-thumbed copies of his book passed from hand to hand in many a rural tavern or store, where the village atheist wrestled in debate with the deacon or the school-master. Paine rested his argument against Christianity upon the familiar grounds of the incredibility of miracles, the falsity of prophecy, the cruelty or immorality of Moses and David and other Old Testament worthies, the disagreement of the evangelists in their gospels, etc. The spirit of his book and his competence as a critic are illustrated by his saying of the New Testament: "Any person who could tell a story of an apparition, or of a man's walking, could have made such books, for the story is most wretchedly told. The sum total of a parson's learning is a b, ab, and hic, haec, hoc, and this is more than sufficient to have enabled them, had they lived at the time, to have written all the books of the New Testament." When we turn from the political and controversial writings of the Revolution to such lighter literature as existed, we find little that would deserve mention in a more crowded period. The few things in this kind that have kept afloat on the current of time--rari nantes in gurgite vasto--attract attention rather by reason of their fewness than of any special excellence that they have. During the eighteenth century American literature continued to accommodate itself to changes of caste in the old country. The so-called classical or Augustan writers of the reign of Queen Anne replaced other models of style: the *Spectator* set the fashion of almost all of our lighter prose, from Franklin's *Busybody* down to the time of Irving, who perpetuated the Addisonian tradition later than any English writer. The influence of Locke, of

Dr. Johnson, and of the Parliamentary orators has already been mentioned. In poetry the example of Pope was dominant, so that we find, for example, William Livingston, who became governor of New Jersey and a member of the Continental Congress, writing in 1747 a poem on Philosophic Solitude which reproduces the trick of Pope's antitheses and climaxes with the imagery of the Rape of the Lock, and the didactic morality of the Imitations from Horace and the Moral Essays:

"Let ardent heroes seek renown in arms,  
Pant after fame and rush to war's alarms;  
To shining palaces let fools resort  
And dunces cringe to be esteemed at court.  
Mine be the pleasure of a rural life,  
From noise remote and ignorant of strife,  
Far from the painted belle and white-gloved beau,  
The lawless masquerade and midnight show;  
From ladies, lap-dogs, courtiers, garters, stars,  
Fops, fiddlers, tyrants, emperors, and czars."

The most popular poem of the Revolutionary period was John Trumbull's *McFingal*, published in part at Philadelphia in 1775, and in complete shape at Hartford in 1782. It went through more than thirty editions in America, and was several times reprinted in England. *McFingal* was a satire in four cantos, directed against the American Loyalists, and modeled quite closely upon Butler's mock heroic poem, *Hudibras*. As Butler's hero sallies forth to put down May games and bear-baitings, so the tory *McFingal* goes out against the liberty-poles and bon-fires of the patriots, but is tarred and feathered, and otherwise ill entreated, and finally takes refuge in the camp of General Gage at Boston. The poem is written with smartness and vivacity, attains often to drollery and sometimes to genuine humor. It remains one of the best of American political satires, and unquestionably the most successful of the many imitations of *Hudibras*, whose manner it follows so closely that some of its lines, which have passed into currency as proverbs, are generally attributed to Butler. For example:

"No man e'er felt the halter draw  
With good opinion of the law."

Or this:

"For any man with half an eye  
What stands before him may espy;  
But optics sharp it needs, I ween,  
To see what is not to be seen."

Trumbull's wit did not spare the vulnerable points of his own countrymen, as in his sharp skit at slavery in the couplet about the newly adopted flag of the Confederation:

"Inscribed with inconsistent types  
Of Liberty and thirteen stripes."

Trumbull was one of a group of Connecticut literati, who made much noise in their time as the "Hartford Wits." The other members of the group were Lemuel Hopkins, David Humphreys, Joel Barlow, Elihu Smith, Theodore Dwight, and Richard Alsop. Trumbull, Humphreys, and Barlow had formed a friendship and a kind of literary partnership at Yale, where they were contemporaries of each other and of Timothy Dwight. During the war they served in the army in various capacities, and at its close they found themselves again together for a few years at Hartford, where they formed a club that met weekly for social and literary purposes. Their presence lent a sort of *éclat* to the little provincial capital, and their writings made it for a time an intellectual center quite as important as Boston or Philadelphia or New York. The Hartford Wits were staunch Federalists, and used their pens freely in support of the administrations of Washington and Adams, and in ridicule of Jefferson and the Democrats. In 1786-87 Trumbull, Hopkins, Barlow, and Humphreys published in the *New Haven Gazette* a series of satirical papers entitled the

Anarchiad, suggested by the English Rolliad, and purporting to be extracts from an ancient epic on "the Restoration of Chaos and Substantial Night." These papers were an effort to correct, by ridicule, the anarchic condition of things which preceded the adoption of the Federal Constitution in 1789. It was a time of great confusion and discontent, when, in parts of the country, Democratic mobs were protesting against the vote of five years' pay by the Continental Congress to the officers of the American army. The Anarchiad was followed by the Echo and the Political Green House, written mostly by Alsop and Theodore Dwight, and similar in character and tendency to the earlier series. Time has greatly blunted the edge of these satires, but they were influential in their day, and are an important part of the literature of the old Federalist party.

Humphreys became afterward distinguished in the diplomatic service, and was, successively, ambassador to Portugal and to Spain, whence he introduced into America the breed of merino sheep. He had been on Washington's staff during the war, and was several times an inmate of his house at Mount Vernon, where he produced, in 1785, the best known of his writings, Mount Vernon, an ode of a rather mild description, which once had admirers. Joel Barlow cuts a larger figure in contemporary letters. After leaving Hartford, in 1788, he went to France, where he resided for seventeen years, made a fortune in speculations, and became imbued with French principles, writing a song in praise of the Guillotine, which gave great scandal to his old friends at home. In 1805 he returned to America, and built a fine residence near Washington, which he called Kalorama. Barlow's literary fame, in his own generation, rested upon his prodigious epic, the Columbiad. The first form of this was the Vision of Columbus, published at Hartford in 1787. This he afterward recast and enlarged into the Columbiad, issued in Philadelphia in 1807, and dedicated to Robert Fulton, the inventor of the steamboat. This was by far the most sumptuous piece of book-making that had then been published in America, and was embellished with plates executed by the best London engravers.

The Columbiad was a grandiose performance, and has been the theme of much ridicule by later writers. Hawthorne suggested its being dramatized, and put on to the accompaniment of artillery and thunder and lightning; and E. P. Whipple declared that "no critic in the last fifty years had read more than a hundred lines of it." In its ambitiousness and its length it was symptomatic of the spirit of the age which was patriotically determined to create, by tour de force, a national literature of a size commensurate with the scale of American nature and the destinies of the republic. As America was bigger than Argos and Troy, we ought to have a bigger epic than the Iliad. Accordingly, Barlow makes Hesper fetch Columbus from his prison to a "hill of vision," where he unrolls before his eye a panorama of the history of America, or, as our bards then preferred to call it, Columbia. He shows him the conquest of Mexico by Cortez; the rise and fall of the kingdom of the Incas in Peru; the settlements of the English Colonies in North America; the old French and Indian Wars; the Revolution, ending with a prophecy of the future greatness of the new-born nation. The machinery of the Vision was borrowed from the 11th and 12th books of Paradise Lost. Barlow's verse was the ten-syllabled rhyming couplet of Pope, and his poetic style was distinguished by the vague, glittering imagery and the false sublimity which marked the epic attempts of the Queen Anne poets. Though Barlow was but a masquerader in true heroic, he showed himself a true poet in mock heroic. His Hasty Pudding, written in Savoy in 1793, and dedicated to Mrs. Washington, was thoroughly American, in subject at least, and its humor, though over-elaborate, is good. One couplet in particular has prevailed against oblivion:

"E'en in thy native regions how I blush  
To hear the Pennsylvanians call thee Mush!"

Another Connecticut poet--one of the seven who were fondly named "The Pleiads of Connecticut"--was Timothy Dwight, whose Conquest of Canaan, written shortly after his graduation from college, but not published till 1785, was, like the Columbiad, an experiment toward the domestication of the epic muse in America. It was written like Barlow's poem, in rhymed couplets, and the patriotic impulse of the time shows oddly in the introduction of our Revolutionary War, by way of episode, among the wars of Israel. Greenfield Hill, 1794, was an idyllic and moralizing poem, descriptive of a rural parish in Connecticut of which the author was for a time the pastor. It is not quite without merit; shows plainly the influence of Goldsmith, Thomson, and Beattie, but as a whole is tedious and tame. Byron was amused that there should have been an American poet christened Timothy, and it is to be feared that amusement would have been the chief emotion kindled in the breast of the wicked Voltaire had he ever chanced to see the stern dedication to

himself of the same poet's *Triumph of Infidelity*, 1788. Much more important than Dwight's poetry was his able *Theology Explained and Defended*, 1794, a restatement, with modifications, of the Calvinism of Jonathan Edwards, which was accepted by the Congregational churches of New England as an authoritative exponent of the orthodoxy of the time. His *Travels in New England and New York*, including descriptions of Niagara, the White Mountains, Lake George, the Catskills, and other passages of natural scenery, not so familiar then as now, was published posthumously in 1821, was praised by Southey, and is still readable. As President of Yale College from 1795 to 1817, Dwight, by his learning and ability, his sympathy with young men, and the force and dignity of his character, exerted a great influence in the community. The strong political bias of the time drew into its vortex most of the miscellaneous literature that was produced. A number of ballads, serious and comic, Whig and Tory, dealing with the battles and other incidents of the long war, enjoyed a wide circulation in the newspapers, or were hawked about in printed broadsides. Most of these have no literary merit, and are now mere antiquarian curiosities. A favorite piece on the Tory side was the *Cow Chase*, a cleverish parody on *Chevy Chase*, written by the gallant and unfortunate Major Andre, at the expense of "Mad" Anthony Wayne. The national song *Yankee Doodle* was evolved during the Revolution, and, as is the case with *John Brown's Body* and many other popular melodies, some obscurity hangs about its origin. The air was an old one, and the words of the chorus seem to have been adapted or corrupted from a Dutch song, and applied in derision to the Provincials by the soldiers of the British army as early as 1755. Like many another nickname, the term *Yankee Doodle* was taken up by the nicknamed and proudly made their own. The stanza, "*Yankee Doodle came to town,*" etc., antedates the war; but the first complete set of words to the tune was the *Yankee's Return from Camp*, which is apparently of the year 1775. The most popular humorous ballad on the Whig side was the *Battle of the Kegs*, founded on a laughable incident of the campaign at Philadelphia. This was written by Francis Hopkinson, a Philadelphian, and one of the signers of the Declaration of Independence. Hopkinson has some title to rank as one of the earliest American humorists. Without the keen wit of *McFingal* some of his *Miscellaneous Essays and Occasional Writings*, published in 1792, have more geniality and heartiness than *Trumbull's satire*. His *Letter on Whitewashing* is a bit of domestic humor that foretokes the *Danbury News man*, and his *Modern Learning*, 1784, a burlesque on college examinations, in which a salt-box is described from the point of view of metaphysics, logic, natural philosophy, mathematics, anatomy, surgery and chemistry, long kept its place in school-readers and other collections. His son, Joseph Hopkinson, wrote the song of *Hail Columbia*, which is saved from insignificance only by the music to which it was married, the then popular air of "*The President's March.*" The words were written in 1798, on the eve of a threatened war with France, and at a time when party spirit ran high. It was sung nightly by crowds in the streets, and for a whole season by a favorite singer at the theater; for by this time there were theaters in Philadelphia, in New York, and even in Puritanic Boston. Much better than *Hail Columbia* was the *Star Spangled Banner*, the words of which were composed by Francis Scott Key, a Marylander, during the bombardment by the British of Fort McHenry, near Baltimore, in 1812. More pretentious than these was the once celebrated ode of Robert Treat Paine, Jr., *Adams and Liberty*, recited at an anniversary of the Massachusetts Charitable Fire Society. The sale of this is said to have netted its author over \$750, but it is, notwithstanding, a very wooden performance. Paine was a young Harvard graduate, who had married an actress playing at the old Federal Street Theater, the first play-house opened in Boston, in 1794. His name was originally Thomas, but this was changed for him by the Massachusetts Legislature, because he did not wish to be confounded with the author of the *Age of Reason*. "Dim are those names erstwhile in battle loud," and many an old Revolutionary worthy who fought for liberty with sword and pen is now utterly forgotten, or consigned to the limbo of *Duyckinck's Cyclopaedia* and *Griswold's Poets of America*. Here and there a line has, by accident, survived to do {390} duty as a motto or inscription, while all its context is buried in oblivion. Few have read any thing more of Jonathan M. Sewall's, for example, than the couplet,

"No pent-up Utica contracts your powers,  
But the whole boundless continent is yours,"

taken from his *Epilogue to Cato*, written in 1778.

Another Revolutionary poet was Philip Freneau; "that rascal Freneau," as Washington called him, when annoyed by the attacks upon his administration in *Freneau's National Gazette*. He was of Huguenot descent, was a classmate of Madison at Princeton College, was taken prisoner by the British during the war, and when the war was over, engaged in journalism, as an ardent supporter of Jefferson and the Democrats.



Freneau's patriotic verses and political lampoons are now unreadable; but he deserves to rank as the first real American poet, by virtue of his *Wild Honeysuckle*, *Indian Burying Ground*, *Indian Student*, and a few other little pieces, which exhibit a grace and delicacy inherited, perhaps, with his French blood. Indeed, to speak strictly, all of the "poets" hitherto mentioned were nothing but rhymers but in Freneau we meet with something of beauty and artistic feeling; something which still keeps his verses fresh. In his treatment of Indian themes, in particular, appear for the first time a sense of the picturesque and poetic elements in the character and wild life of the red man, and that pensive sentiment which the fading away of the tribes toward the sunset has left in the wake of their retreating footsteps. In this Freneau anticipates Cooper and Longfellow, though his work is slight compared with the *Leatherstocking Tales* or *Hiawatha*. At the time when the Revolutionary War broke out the population of the colonies was over three millions; Philadelphia had thirty thousand inhabitants, and the frontier had retired to a comfortable distance from the sea-board. The Indian had already grown legendary to town dwellers, and Freneau fetches his *Indian Student* not from the outskirts of the settlement, but from the remote backwoods of the State:

"From Susquehanna's farthest springs,  
Where savage tribes pursue their game  
(His blanket tied with yellow strings),  
A shepherd of the forest came."

Campbell "lifted"--in his poem *O'Connor's Child*--the last line of the following stanza from Freneau's *Indian Burying Ground*:

"By midnight moons, o'er moistening dews,  
In vestments for the chase arrayed,  
The hunter still the deer pursues--  
The hunter and the deer a shade."

And Walter Scott did Freneau the honor to borrow, in *Marmion*, the final line of one of the stanzas of his poem on the battle of Eutaw Springs:

"They saw their injured country's woe,  
The flaming town, the wasted field;  
Then rushed to meet the insulting foe;  
They took the spear, but left the shield."

Scott inquired of an American gentleman who wished him the authorship of this poem, which he had by heart, and pronounced it as fine a thing of the kind as there was in the language.

The American drama and American prose fiction had their beginnings during the period now under review. A company of English players came to this country in 1752 and made the tour of many of the principal towns. The first play acted here by professionals on a public stage was the *Merchant of Venice*, which was given by the English company at Williamsburg, Va., in 1752. The first regular theater building was at Annapolis, Md., where in the same year this troupe performed, among other pieces, Farquhar's *Beaux' Stratagem*. In 1753 a theater was built in New York, and one in 1759 in Philadelphia. The Quakers of Philadelphia and the Puritans of Boston were strenuously opposed to the acting of plays, and in the latter city the players were several times arrested during the performances, under a Massachusetts law forbidding dramatic performances. At Newport, R. I., on the other hand, which was a health resort for planters from the Southern States and the West Indies. {393} and the largest slave-market in the North, the actors were hospitably received. The first play known to have been written by an American was the *Prince of Parthia*, 1765, a closet drama, by Thomas Godfrey, of Philadelphia. The first play by an American writer, acted by professionals in a public theater, was *Royal Tyler's Contrast*, performed in New York in 1786. The former of these was very high tragedy, and the latter very low comedy; and neither of them is otherwise remarkable than as being the first of a long line of indifferent dramas. There is, in fact, no American dramatic literature worth speaking of; not a single American play of even the second rank, unless we except a few graceful parlor comedies, like Mr. Howell's *Elevator* and *Sleeping-Car*. Royal Tyler, the author of the *Contrast*, cut quite a figure in his day as a wit and journalist, and eventually became Chief Justice of

Vermont. His comedy, the *Georgia Spec*, 1797, had a great run in Boston, and his *Algerine Captive*, published in the same year, was one of the earliest American novels. It was a rambling tale of adventure, constructed somewhat upon the plan of Smollett's novels and dealing with the piracies which led to the war between the United States and Algiers in 1815. Charles Brockden Brown, the first American novelist of any note, was also the first professional man of letters in this country who supported himself entirely by his pen. He was born in {394} Philadelphia in 1771, lived a part of his life in New York and part in his native city, where he started, in 1803, the *Literary Magazine and American Register*. During the years 1798-1801 he published in rapid succession six romances, *Wieland*, *Ormond*, *Arthur Mervyn*, *Edgar Huntley*, *Clara Howard*, and *Jane Talbot*. Brown was an invalid and something of a recluse, with a relish for the ghastly in incident and the morbid in character. He was in some points a prophecy of Poe and Hawthorne, though his art was greatly inferior to Poe's, and almost infinitely so to Hawthorne's. His books belong more properly to the contemporary school of fiction in England which preceded the "Waverley Novels"--to the class that includes Beckford's *Vathek*, Godwin's *Caleb Williams* and *St. Leon*, Mrs. Shelley's *Frankenstein*, and such "Gothic" romances as Lewis's *Monk*, Walpole's *Castle of Otranto*, and Mrs. Radcliffe's *Mysteries of Udolpho*. A distinguishing characteristic of this whole school is what we may call the clumsy-horrible. Brown's romances are not wanting in inventive power, in occasional situations that are intensely thrilling, and in subtle analysis of character; but they are fatally defective in art. The narrative is by turns abrupt and tiresomely prolix, proceeding not so much by dialogue as by elaborate dissection and discussion of motives and states of mind, interspersed with the author's reflections. The wild improbabilities of plot and the unnatural and even monstrous developments of character are in startling contrast with the old-fashioned preciseness of the language; the conversations, when there are any, being conducted in that insipid dialect in which a fine woman was called an "elegant female." The following is a sample description of one of Brown's heroines, and is taken from his novel of *Ormond*, the leading character in which--a combination of unearthly intellect with fiendish wickedness--is thought to have been suggested by Aaron Burr: "Helena Cleves was endowed with every feminine and fascinating quality. Her features were modified by the most transient sentiments and were the seat of a softness at all times blushful and bewitching. All those graces of symmetry, smoothness and lustre, which assemble in the imagination of the painter when he calls from the bosom of her natal deep the Paphian divinity, blended their perfections in the shade, complexion, and hair of this lady." But, alas! "Helena's intellectual deficiencies could not be concealed. She was proficient in the elements of no science. The doctrine of lines and surfaces was as disproportionate with her intellects as with those of the mock-bird. She had not reasoned on the principles of human action, nor examined the structure of society.~.~.~. She could not commune in their native dialect with the sages of Rome and Athens.~.~.~. The constitution of nature, the attributes of its Author, the arrangement of the parts of the external universe, and the substance, modes of operation, and ultimate destiny of human intelligence were enigmas unsolved and insoluble by her." Brown frequently raises a superstructure of mystery on a basis ludicrously weak. Thus the hero of his first novel, *Wieland* (whose father anticipates "Old Krook," in Dickens's *Bleak House*, by dying of spontaneous combustion), is led on by what he mistakes for spiritual voices to kill his wife and children; and the voices turn out to be produced by the ventriloquism of one Carwin, the villain of the story. Similarly in *Edgar Huntley*, the plot turns upon the phenomena of sleep-walking. Brown had the good sense to place the scene of his romances in his own country, and the only passages in them which have now a living interest are his descriptions of wilderness scenery in *Edgar Huntley*, and his graphic account in *Arthur Mervyn* of the yellow-fever epidemic in Philadelphia in 1793. Shelley was an admirer of Brown, and his experiments in prose fiction, such as *Zastrozzi* and *St. Irvyne the Rosicrucian*, are of the same abnormal and speculative type. Another book which falls within this period was the *Journal*, 1774, of John Woolman, a New Jersey Quaker, which has received the highest praise from Channing, Charles Lamb, and many others. "Get the writings of John Woolman by heart," wrote Lamb, "and love the early Quakers." The charm of this journal resides in its singular sweetness and innocence of feeling, the "deep inward stillness" peculiar to the people called Quakers. Apart from his constant use of certain phrases peculiar to the Friends, Woolman's English is also remarkably graceful and pure, the transparent medium of a soul absolutely sincere, and tender and humble in its sincerity. When not working at his trade as a tailor, Woolman spent his time in visiting and ministering to the monthly, quarterly, and yearly meetings of Friends, traveling on horseback to their scattered communities in the backwoods of Virginia and North Carolina, and northward along the coast as far as Boston and Nantucket. He was under a "concern" and a "heavy exercise" touching the keeping of slaves, and by his writing and speaking did much to influence the Quakers against slavery. His love went out, indeed, to all the wretched and oppressed; to sailors, and to the Indians in particular. One of his most perilous journeys was made to the

settlements of Moravian Indians in the wilderness of Western Pennsylvania, at Bethlehem, and at Wehaloosing, on the Susquehanna. Some of the scruples which Woolman felt, and the quaint naïveté with which he expresses them, may make the modern reader smile--but it is a smile which is very close to a tear. Thus, when in England--where he died in 1772--he would not ride nor send a letter by mail-coach, because the poor post-boys were compelled to ride long stages in winter nights, and were sometimes frozen to death. "So great is the hurry in the spirit of this world, that in aiming to do business quickly and to gain wealth, the creation at this day doth loudly groan." Again, having reflected that war was caused by luxury in dress, etc., the use of dyed garments grew uneasy to him, and he got and wore a hat of the natural color of the fur. "In attending meetings, this singularity was a trial to me~.~.~. and some Friends, who knew not from what motives I wore it, grew shy of me~.~.~. Those who spoke with me I generally informed, in a few words, that I believed my wearing it was not in my own will."

## CHAPTER III.

### THE ERA OF NATIONAL EXPANSION.

#### 1815-1837.

The attempt to preserve a strictly chronological order must here be abandoned. About all the American literature in existence, that is of any value as literature, is the product of the past three quarters of a century, and the men who produced it, though older or younger, were still contemporaries. Irving's Knickerbocker's History of New York, 1809, was published within the recollection of some yet living, and the venerable poet, Richard H. Dana--Irving's junior by only four years--survived to 1879, when the youngest of the generation of writers that now occupy public attention had already won their spurs. Bryant, whose *Thanatopsis* was printed in 1816, lived down to 1878. He saw the beginnings of our national literature, and he saw almost as much of the latest phase of it as we see to-day in this year 1887. Still, even within the limits of a single life-time, there have been progress and change. And so, while it will happen that the consideration of writers a part of whose work falls between the dates at the head of this chapter may be postponed to subsequent chapters, we may in a general way follow the sequence of time.

The period between the close of the second war with England, in 1815, and the great financial crash of 1837, has been called, in language attributed to President Monroe, "the era of good feeling." It was a time of peace and prosperity, of rapid growth in population and rapid extension of territory. The new nation was entering upon its vast estates and beginning to realize its manifest destiny. The peace with Great Britain, by calling off the Canadian Indians and the other tribes in alliance with England, had opened up the North-west to settlement. Ohio had been admitted as a State in 1802; but at the time of President Monroe's tour, in 1817, Cincinnati had only seven thousand inhabitants, and half of the State was unsettled. The Ohio River flowed for most of its course through an unbroken wilderness. Chicago was merely a fort. Hitherto the emigration to the West had been sporadic; now it took on the dimensions of a general and almost a concerted exodus. This movement was stimulated in New England by the cold summer of 1816 and the late spring of 1817, which produced a scarcity of food that amounted in parts of the interior to a veritable famine. All through this period sounded the axe of the pioneer clearing the forest about his log cabin, and the rumble of the canvas-covered emigrant wagon over the primitive highways which crossed the Alleghanies or followed the valley of the Mohawk. S. G. Goodrich, known in letters as "Peter Parley," in his *Recollections of a Lifetime*, 1856, describes the part of the movement which he had witnessed as a boy in Fairfield County, Conn.: "I remember very well the tide of emigration through Connecticut, on its way to the West, during the summer of 1817. Some persons went in covered wagons--frequently a family consisting of father, mother, and nine small children, with one at the breast--some on foot, and some crowded together under the cover, with kettles, gridirons, feather beds, crockery, and the family Bible, Watts's Psalms and Hymns, and Webster's Spelling-book--the lares and penates of the household. Others started in ox-carts, and trudged on at the rate of ten miles a day. . . . Many of these persons were in a state of poverty, and begged their way as they went. Some died before they reached the expected Canaan; many perished after their arrival from fatigue and privation; and others from the fever and ague, which was then certain to attack the new settlers. It was, I think, in 1818 that I published a small tract entitled *Tother Side of Oldo*--that is, the other view, in contrast to the popular notion that it was the paradise of the world. It was written by Dr. Hand--a talented young physician of Berlin--who had made a visit to the West about these days. It consisted mainly of vivid but painful pictures of the accidents and incidents attending this wholesale migration. The roads over the Alleghanies, between Philadelphia and Pittsburg, were then rude, steep, and dangerous, and some of the more precipitous slopes were consequently strewn with the carcasses of wagons, carts, horses, oxen, which had made shipwreck in their perilous descents." But in spite of the hardships of the settler's life, the spirit of that time, as reflected in its writings, was a hopeful and a light-hearted one. "Westward the course of empire takes its way," runs the famous line from Berkeley's poem on America. The New Englanders who removed to the Western Reserve went there to better themselves; and their children found themselves the owners of broad acres of virgin soil, in place of the stony hill pastures of Berkshire and Litchfield. There was an attraction, too, about the wild, free life of the frontiersman, with all its perils and discomforts. The life of Daniel Boone, the pioneer of Kentucky--that "dark and bloody ground"--is a genuine romance. Hardly less picturesque was the old river life of the Ohio boatmen, before the coming of steam banished their queer craft from the water. Between 1810 and 1840 the center of

population in the United States had moved from the Potomac to the neighborhood of Clarksburg, in West Virginia, and the population itself had increased from seven to seventeen millions. The gain was made partly in the East and South, but the general drift was westward. During the years now under review, the following new States were admitted, in the order named: Indiana, Mississippi, Illinois, Alabama, Maine, Missouri, Arkansas, Michigan. Kentucky and Tennessee had been made States in the last years of the eighteenth century, and Louisiana--acquired by purchase from France--in 1812. The settlers, in their westward march, left large tracts of wilderness behind them. They took up first the rich bottom lands along the river courses, the Ohio and Miami and Licking, and later the valleys of the Mississippi and Missouri, and the shores of the great lakes. But there still remained back woods in New York and Pennsylvania, though the cities of New York and Philadelphia had each a population of more than one hundred thousand in 1815. When the Erie Canal was opened, in 1825, it ran through a primitive forest. N. P. Willis, who went by canal to Buffalo and Niagara in 1827, describes the houses and stores at Rochester as standing among the burnt stumps left by the first settlers. In the same year that saw the opening of this great water way, the Indian tribes, numbering now about one hundred and thirty thousand souls, were moved across the Mississippi. Their power had been broken by General Harrison's victory over Tecumseh at the battle of Tippecanoe, in 1811, and they were in fact mere remnants and fragments of the race which had hung upon the skirts of civilization, and disputed the advance of the white man for two centuries. It was not until some years later than this that railroads began to take an important share in opening up new country. The restless energy, the love of adventure, the sanguine anticipation which characterized American thought at this time, the picturesque contrasts to be seen in each mushroom town where civilization was encroaching on the raw edge of the wilderness--all these found expression, not only in such well-known books as *Copper's Pioneers*, 1823, and *Irving's Tour on the Prairies*, 1835, but in the minor literature which is read to-day, if at all, not for its own sake, but for the light that it throws on the history of national development: in such books as *Paulding's story of Westward Ho!* and his poem, *The Backwoodsman*, 1818; or as *Timothy Flint's Recollections*, 1826, and his *Geography and History of the Mississippi Valley*, 1827. It was not an age of great books, but it was an age of large ideas and expanding prospects. The new consciousness of empire uttered itself hastily, crudely, ran into buncombe, "spread-eagleism," and other noisy forms of patriotic exultation; but it was thoroughly democratic and American. Though literature--or at least the best literature of the time--was not yet emancipated from English models, thought and life, at any rate, were no longer in bondage--no longer provincial. And it is significant that the party in office during these years was the Democratic, the party which had broken most completely with conservative traditions. The famous "Monroe doctrine" was a pronouncement of this aggressive democracy, and though the Federalists returned to power for a single term, under John Quincy Adams (1825-1829,) Andrew Jackson received the largest number of electoral votes, and Adams was only chosen by the House of Representatives in the absence of a majority vote for any one candidate. At the close of his term "Old Hickory," the hero of the people, the most characteristically democratic of our Presidents, and the first backwoodsman who entered the White House, was borne into office on a wave of popular enthusiasm. We have now arrived at the time when American literature, in the higher and stricter sense of the term, really began to have an existence. S. G. Goodrich, who settled at Hartford as a bookseller and publisher in 1818, says, in his *Recollections*: "About this time I began to think of trying to bring out original American works. . . . The general impression was that we had not, and could not have, a literature. It was the precise point at which Sidney Smith had uttered that bitter taunt in the *Edinburgh Review*, 'Who reads an American book?' . . . It was positively injurious to the commercial credit of a bookseller to undertake American works." Washington Irving (1783-1859) was the first American author whose books, as books, obtained recognition abroad; whose name was thought worthy of mention beside the names of English contemporary authors, like Byron, Scott, and Coleridge. He was also the first American writer whose writings are still read for their own sake. We read *Mather's Magnalia*, and *Franklin's Autobiography*, and *Trumbull's McFingal*--if we read them at all--as history, and to learn about the times or the men. But we read the *Sketch Book*, and *Knickerbocker's History of New York*, and the *Conquest of Granada* for themselves, and for the pleasure that they give as pieces of literary art. We have arrived, too, at a time when we may apply a more cosmopolitan standard to the works of American writers, and may disregard many a minor author whose productions would have cut some figure had they come to light amid the poverty of our colonial age. Hundreds of these forgotten names, with specimens of their unread writings, are consigned to a limbo of immortality in the pages of *Duyckinck's Cyclopedia*, and of *Griswold's Poets of America and Prose Writers of America*. We may select here for special mention, and as most representative of the thought of their time, the names of Irving, Cooper, Webster, and Channing. A generation was now coming upon the stage

who could recall no other government in this country than the government of the United States, and to whom the Revolutionary War was but a tradition. Born in the very year of the peace, it was a part of Irving's mission, by the sympathetic charm of his writings and by the cordial recognition which he won in both countries, to allay the soreness which the second war, of 1812-15, had left between England and America. He was well fitted for the task of mediator. Conservative by nature, early drawn to the venerable worship of the Episcopal Church, retrospective in his tastes, with a preference for the past and its historic associations which, even in young America, led him to invest the Hudson and the region about New York with a legendary interest, he wrote of American themes in an English fashion, and interpreted to an American public the mellow attractiveness that he found in the life and scenery of Old England. He lived in both countries, and loved them both; and it is hard to say whether Irving is more of an English or of an American writer. His first visit to Europe, in 1804-6, occupied nearly two years. From 1815 to 1832 he was abroad continuously, and his "domicile," as the lawyers say, during these seventeen years was really in England, though a portion of his time was spent upon the continent, and several successive years in Spain, where he engaged upon the *Life of Columbus*, the *Conquest of Granada*, the *Companions of Columbus*, and the *Alhambra*, all published between 1828-32. From 1842 to 1846 he was again in Spain as American Minister at Madrid. Irving was the last and greatest of the Addisonians. His boyish letters, signed "Jonathan Oldstyle," contributed in 1802 to his brother's newspaper, the *Morning Chronicle*, were, like Franklin's *Busybody*, close imitations of the *Spectator*. To the same family belonged his *Salmagundi* papers, 1807, a series of town-satires on New York society, written in conjunction with his brother William and with James K. Paulding. The little tales, essays, and sketches which compose the *Sketch Book* were written in England, and published in America, in periodical numbers, in 1819-20. In this, which is in some respects his best book, he still maintained that attitude of observation and spectatorship taught him by Addison. The volume had a motto taken from Burton, "I have no wife nor children, good or bad, to provide for--a mere spectator of other men's fortunes," etc.; and "The Author's Account of Himself" began in true Addisonian fashion: "I was always fond of visiting new scenes and observing strange characters and manners." But though never violently "American," like some later writers who have consciously sought to throw off the trammels of English tradition, Irving was in a real way original. His most distinct addition to our national literature was in his creation of what has been called "the Knickerbocker legend." He was the first to make use, for literary purposes, of the old Dutch traditions which clustered about the romantic scenery of the Hudson. Col. T. W. Higginson, in his *History of the United States*, tells how "Mrs. Josiah Quincy, sailing up that river in 1786, when Irving was a child three years old, records that the captain of the sloop had a legend, either supernatural or traditional, for every scene, and not a mountain reared its head unconnected with some marvelous story." The material thus at hand Irving shaped into his *Knickerbocker's History of New York*, into the immortal story of Rip Van Winkle, and the *Legend of Sleepy Hollow* (both published in the *Sketch Book*), and in later additions to the same realm of fiction, such as Dolph Heyliger in *Bracebridge Hall*, the *Money Diggers*, *Wolfert Webber*, and *Kidd the Pirate*, in the *Tales of a Traveler*, and in some of the miscellanies from the *Knickerbocker Magazine*, collected into a volume, in 1855, under the title of *Wolfert's Roost*. The book which made Irving's reputation was his *Knickerbocker's History of New York*, 1809, a burlesque chronicle, making fun of the old Dutch settlers of New Amsterdam, and attributed, by a familiar and now somewhat threadbare device, to a little old gentleman named Diedrich Knickerbocker, whose manuscript had come into the editor's hands. The book was gravely dedicated to the New York Historical Society, and it is said to have been quoted, as authentic history, by a certain German scholar named Goeller, in a note on a passage in Thucydides. This story, though well vouched, is hard of belief: for Knickerbocker, though excellent fooling, has nothing of the grave irony of Swift in his *Modest Proposal* or of Defoe in his *Short Way with Dissenters*. Its mock-heroic intention is as transparent as in Fielding's parodies of Homer, which it somewhat resembles, particularly in the delightfully absurd description of the mustering of the clans under Peter Stuyvesant and the attack on the Swedish Fort Christina. *Knickerbocker's History of New York* was a real addition to the comic literature of the world; a work of genuine humor, original and vital. Walter Scott said that it reminded him closely of Swift, and had touches resembling Sterne. It is not necessary to claim for Irving's little masterpiece a place beside Gulliver's *Travels* and *Tristram Shandy*. But it was, at least, the first American book in the lighter departments of literature which needed no apology and stood squarely on its own legs. It was written, too, at just the right time. Although New Amsterdam had become New York as early as 1664, the impress of its first settlers, with their quaint conservative ways, was still upon it when Irving was a boy. The descendants of the Dutch families formed a definite element not only in Manhattan, but all up along the kills of the Hudson, at Albany, at Schenectady, in Westchester County, at Hoboken, and Communipaw, localities made familiar to

him in many a ramble and excursion. He lived to see the little provincial town of his birth grow into a great metropolis, in which all national characteristics were blended together, and a tide of immigration from Europe and New England flowed over the old landmarks and obliterated them utterly. Although Irving was the first to reveal to his countrymen the literary possibilities of their early history, it must be acknowledged that with modern American life he had little sympathy. He hated politics, and in the restless democratic movement of the time, as we have described it, he found no inspiration. This moderate and placid gentleman, with his distrust of all kinds of fanaticism, had no liking for the Puritans or for their descendants, the New England Yankees, if we may judge from his sketch of Ichabod Crane, in the Legend of Sleepy Hollow. His genius was reminiscent, and his imagination, like Scott's, was the historic imagination. In crude America his fancy took refuge in the picturesque aspects of the past, in "survivals" like the Knickerbocker Dutch and the Acadian peasants, whose isolated communities on the lower Mississippi he visited and described. He turned naturally to the ripe civilization of the Old World. He was our first picturesque tourist, the first "American in Europe." He rediscovered England, whose ancient churches, quiet landscapes, memory-haunted cities, Christmas celebrations, and rural festivals had for him an unending attraction. With pictures of these, for the most part, he filled the pages of the Sketch Book and Bracebridge Hall, 1822. Delightful as are these English sketches, in which the author conducts his readers to Windsor Castle, or Stratford-on-Avon, or the Boar's Head Tavern, or sits beside him on the box of the old English stage-coach, or shares with him the Yuletide cheer at the ancient English country house, their interest has somewhat faded. The pathos of the Broken Heart and the Pride of the Village, the mild satire of the Art of Book Making, the rather obvious reflections in Westminster Abbey are not exactly to the taste of this generation. They are the literature of leisure and retrospection; and already Irving's gentle elaboration, the refined and slightly artificial beauty of his style, and his persistently genial and sympathetic attitude have begun to pall upon readers who demand a more nervous and accented kind of writing. It is felt that a little roughness, a little harshness, even, would give relief to his pictures of life. There is, for instance, something a little irritating in the old-fashioned courtliness of his manner toward women; and one reads with a certain impatience smoothly punctuated passages like the following: "As the vine, which has long twined its graceful foliage about the oak, and been lifted by it into sunshine, will, when the hardy plant is rifted by the thunderbolt, cling round it with its caressing tendrils, and bind up its shattered boughs, so is it beautifully ordered by Providence that woman, who is the mere dependent and ornament of man in his happier hours, should be his stay and solace when smitten with sudden calamity; winding herself into the rugged recesses of his nature, tenderly supporting the drooping head, and binding up the broken heart." Irving's gifts were sentiment and humor, with an imagination sufficiently fertile, and an observation sufficiently acute to support those two main qualities, but inadequate to the service of strong passion or subtle thinking, though his pathos, indeed, sometimes reached intensity. His humor was always delicate and kindly; his sentiment never degenerated into sentimentality. His diction was graceful and elegant--too elegant, perhaps; and in his modesty he attributed the success of his books in England to the astonishment of Englishmen that an American could write good English. In Spanish history and legend Irving found a still newer and richer field for his fancy to work upon. He had not the analytic and philosophical mind of a great historian, and the merits of his Conquest of Granada and Life of Columbus are rather belletristisch than scientific. But he brought to these undertakings the same eager love of the romantic past which had determined the character of his writings in America and England, and the result--whether we call it history or romance--is at all events charming as literature. His Life of Washington--completed in 1859--was his magnum opus, and is accepted as standard authority. Mahomet and His Successors, 1850, was comparatively a failure. But of all Irving's biographies, his Life of Oliver Goldsmith, 1849, was the most spontaneous and perhaps the best. He did not impose it upon himself as a task, but wrote it from a native and loving sympathy with his subject, and it is, therefore, one of the choicest literary memoirs in the language.

When Irving returned to America, in 1832, he was the recipient of almost national honors. He had received the medal of the Royal Society of Literature and the degree of D.C.L. from Oxford University, and had made American literature known and respected abroad. In his modest home at Sunnyside, on the banks of the river over which he had been the first to throw the witchery of poetry and romance, he was attended to the last by the admiring affection of his countrymen. He had the love and praises of the foremost English writers of his own generation and the generation which followed--of Scott, Byron, Coleridge, Thackeray, and Dickens, some of whom had been among his personal friends. He is not the greatest of American authors, but the influence of his writings is sweet and wholesome, and it is in many ways fortunate that the

first American man of letters who made himself heard in Europe should have been in all particulars a gentleman. Connected with Irving, at least by name and locality, were a number of authors who resided in the city of New York and who are known as the Knickerbocker writers, perhaps because they were contributors to the Knickerbocker Magazine. One of these was James K. Paulding, a connection of Irving by marriage, and his partner in the Salmagundi Papers. Paulding became Secretary of the Navy under Van Buren, and lived down to the year 1860. He was a voluminous author, but his writings had no power of continuance, and are already obsolete, with the possible exception of his novel, the Dutchman's Fireside, 1831. A finer spirit than Paulding was Joseph Rodman Drake, a young poet of great promise, who died in 1820, at the age of twenty-five. Drake's patriotic lyric, the American Flag, is certainly the most spirited thing of the kind in our poetic literature, and greatly superior to such national anthems as Hail Columbia and the Star Spangled Banner. His Culprit Fay, published in 1819, was the best poem that had yet appeared in America, if we except Bryant's Thanatopsis, which was three years the elder. The Culprit Fay was a fairy story, in which, following Irving's lead, Drake undertook to throw the glamour of poetry about the Highlands of the Hudson. Edgar Poe said that the poem was fanciful rather than imaginative; but it is prettily and even brilliantly fanciful, and has maintained its popularity to the present time. Such verse as the following--which seems to show that Drake had been reading Coleridge's Christabel, published three years before--was something new in American poetry:

"The winds are whist and the owl is still,  
The bat in the shelvy rock is hid,  
And naught is heard on the lonely hill,  
But the cricket's chirp and the answer shrill,  
Of the gauze-winged katydid,  
And the plaint of the wailing whip-poor-will  
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Who moans unseen, and ceaseless sings  
Ever a note of wail and woe,  
Till morning spreads her rosy wings,  
And earth and sky in her glances glow."

Here we have, at last, the whip-poor-will, an American bird, and not the conventional lark or nightingale, although the elves of the Old World seem scarcely at home on the banks of the Hudson. Drake's memory has been kept fresh not only by his own poetry, but by the beautiful elegy written by his friend Fitz-Greene Halleck, the first stanza of which is universally known:

"Green be the turf above thee,  
Friend of my better days;  
None knew thee but to love thee,  
Nor named thee but to praise."

Halleck was born in Guilford, Connecticut, whither he retired in 1849, and resided there till his death in 1867. But his literary career is identified with New York. He was associated with Drake in writing the Croaker Papers, a series of humorous and satirical verses contributed in 1814 to the Evening Post. These were of a merely local and temporary interest; but Halleck's fine ode, Marco Bozzaris--though declaimed until it has become hackneyed--gives him a sure title to a remembrance; and his Alnwick Castle, a monody, half serious and half playful on the contrasts between feudal associations and modern life, has much of that pensive lightness which characterizes Præd's best vers de société.

A friend of Drake and Halleck was James Fenimore Cooper (1789-1851), the first American novelist of distinction, and, if a popularity which has endured for nearly three quarters of a century is any test, still the most successful of all American novelists. Cooper was far more intensely American than Irving, and his books reached an even wider public. "They are published as soon as he produces them," said Morse, the electrician, in 1833, "in thirty-four different places in Europe. They have been seen by American travelers



in the languages of Turkey and Persia, in Constantinople, in Egypt, at Jerusalem, at Ispahan." Cooper wrote altogether too much; he published, besides his fictions, a Naval History of the United States, a series of naval biographies, works of travel, and a great deal of controversial matter. He wrote over thirty novels, the greater part of which are little better than trash, and tedious trash at that. This is especially true of his tendenz novels and his novels of society. He was a man of strongly marked individuality, fiery, pugnacious, sensitive to criticism, and abounding in prejudices. He was embittered by the scurrilous attacks made upon him by a portion of the American press, and spent a great deal of time and energy in conducting libel suits against the newspapers. In the same spirit he used fiction as a vehicle for attack upon the abuses and follies of American life. Nearly all of his novels, written with this design, are worthless. Nor was Cooper well equipped by nature and temperament for depicting character and passion in social life. Even in his best romances his heroines and his "leading juveniles"--to borrow a term from the amateur stage--are insipid and conventional. He was no satirist, and his humor was not of a high order. He was a rapid and uneven writer, and, unlike Irving, he had no style. Where Cooper was great was in the story, in the invention of incidents and plots, in a power of narrative and description in tales of wild adventure which keeps the reader in breathless excitement to the end of the book. He originated the novel of the sea and the novel of the wilderness. He created the Indian of literature; and in this, his peculiar field, although he has had countless imitators, he has had no equals. Cooper's experiences had prepared him well for the kingship of this new realm in the world of fiction. His childhood was passed on the borders of Otsego Lake, when central New York was still a wilderness, with boundless forests stretching westward, broken only here and there by the clearings of the pioneers. He was taken from college (Yale) when still a lad, and sent to sea in a merchant vessel, before the mast. Afterward he entered the navy and did duty on the high seas and upon Lake Ontario, then surrounded by virgin forests. He married and resigned his commission in 1811, just before the outbreak of the war with England, so that he missed the opportunity of seeing active service in any of those engagements on the ocean and our great lakes which were so glorious to American arms. But he always retained an active interest in naval affairs. His first successful novel was *The Spy*, 1821, a tale of the Revolutionary War, the scene of which was laid in Westchester County, N. Y., where the author was then residing. The hero of this story, Harvey Birch, was one of the most skillfully drawn figures on his canvas. In 1823 he published the *Pioneers*, a work somewhat overladen with description, in which he drew for material upon his boyish recollections of frontier life at Cooperstown. This was the first of the series of five romances known as the *Leatherstocking Tales*. The others were the *Last of the Mohicans*, 1826; the *Prairie*, 1827; the *Pathfinder*, 1840; and the *Deerslayer*, 1841. The hero of this series, Natty Bumppo, or "Leatherstocking," was Cooper's one great creation in the sphere of character, his most original addition to the literature of the world in the way of a new human type. This backwoods philosopher--to the conception of whom the historic exploits of Daniel Boone perhaps supplied some hints; unschooled, but moved by noble impulses and a natural sense of piety and justice; passionately attached to the wilderness, and following its westering edge even unto the prairies--this man of the woods was the first real American in fiction. Hardly less individual and vital were the various types of Indian character, in *Chingachgook*, *Uncas*, *Hist*, and the *Huron* warriors. Inferior to these, but still vigorously though somewhat roughly drawn, were the waifs and strays of civilization, whom duty, or the hope of gain, or the love of adventure, or the outlawry of crime had driven to the wilderness--the solitary trapper, the reckless young frontiersman, the officers and men of out-post garrisons. Whether Cooper's Indian was the real being, or an idealized and rather melo-dramatic version of the truth, has been a subject of dispute. However this be, he has taken his place in the domain of art, and it is safe to say that his standing there is secure. No boy will ever give him up. Equally good with the *Leatherstocking* novels, and especially national, were Cooper's tales of the sea, or at least the two best of them--the *Pilot*, 1823, founded upon the daring exploits of John Paul Jones, and the *Red Rover*, 1828. But here, though Cooper still holds the sea, he has had to admit competitors; and *Britannia*, who rules the waves in song, has put in some claim to a share in the domain of nautical fiction in the persons of Mr. W. Clarke Russell and others. Though Cooper's novels do not meet the deeper needs of the heart and the imagination, their appeal to the universal love of a story is perennial. We devour them when we are boys, and if we do not often return to them when we are men, that is perhaps only because we have read them before, and "know the ending." They are good yarns for the fore-castle and the camp-fire; and the scholar in his study, though he may put the *Deerslayer* or the *Last of the Mohicans* away on the top-shelf, will take it down now and again, and sit up half the night over it. Before dismissing the belles-lettres writings of this period, mention should be made of a few poems of the fugitive kind which seem to have taken a permanent place in popular regard. John Howard Payne, a native of Long Island, a wandering actor and playwright, who died American Consul at Tunis in 1852, wrote about 1820 for Covent Garden Theater

an opera, entitled *Clari*, the libretto of which included the now famous song of *Home, Sweet Home*. Its literary pretensions were of the humblest kind, but it spoke a true word which touched the Anglo-Saxon heart in its tenderest spot, and being happily married to a plaintive air was sold by the hundred thousand, and is evidently destined to be sung forever. A like success has attended the *Old Oaken Bucket*, composed by Samuel Woodworth, a printer and journalist from Massachusetts, whose other poems, of which two collections were issued in 1818 and 1826, were soon forgotten. Richard Henry Wilde, an Irishman by birth, a gentleman of scholarly tastes and accomplishments, who wrote a great deal on Italian literature, and sat for several terms in Congress as Representative of the State of Georgia, was the author of the favorite song, *My Life is Like the Summer Rose*. Another Southerner, and a member of a distinguished Southern family, was Edward Coate Pinkney, who served nine years in the navy, and died in 1828, at the age of twenty-six, having published in 1825 a small volume of lyrical poems which had a fire and a grace uncommon at that time in American verse. One of these, *A Health*, beginning

"I fill this cup to one made up of loveliness alone,"

though perhaps somewhat overpraised by Edgar Poe, has rare beauty of thought and expression. John Quincy Adams, sixth President of the United States (1825-29), was a man of culture and of literary tastes. He published his lectures on rhetoric delivered during his tenure of the Boylston Professorship at Harvard in 1806-09; he left a voluminous diary, which has been edited since his death in 1848; and among his experiments in poetry is one of considerable merit, entitled the *Wants of Man*, an ironical sermon on Goldsmith's text:

"Man wants but little here below  
Nor wants that little long."

As this poem is a curiously close anticipation of Dr. Holmes's *Contentment*, so the very popular ballad, *Old Grimes*, written about 1818, by Albert Gorton Greene, an undergraduate of Brown University in Rhode Island, is in some respects an anticipation of Holmes's quaintly pathetic *Last Leaf*.

The political literature and public oratory of the United States during this period, although not absolutely of less importance than that which preceded and followed the Declaration of Independence and the adoption of the Constitution, demands less relative attention in a history of literature by reason of the growth of other departments of thought. The age was a political one, but no longer exclusively political. The debates of the time centered about the question of "State Rights," and the main forum of discussion was the old Senate chamber, then made illustrious by the presence of Clay, Webster, and Calhoun. The slavery question, which had threatened trouble, was put off for awhile by the Missouri Compromise of 1820, only to break out more fiercely in the debates on the Wilmot Proviso, and the Kansas and Nebraska Bill. Meanwhile the Abolition movement had been transferred to the press and the platform. Garrison started his *Liberator* in 1830, and the Antislavery Society was founded in 1833. The Whig party, which had inherited the constitutional principles of the old Federal party, advocated internal improvements at national expense and a high protective tariff. The State Rights party, which was strongest at the South, opposed these views, and in 1832 South Carolina claimed the right to "nullify" the tariff imposed by the general government. The leader of this party was John Caldwell Calhoun, a South Carolinian, who in his speech in the United States Senate, on February 13, 1832, on Nullification and the Force Bill, set forth most authoritatively the "Carolina doctrine." Calhoun was a great debater, but hardly a great orator. His speeches are the arguments of a lawyer and a strict constitutionalist, severely logical, and with a sincere conviction in the soundness of his case. Their language is free from bad rhetoric; the reasoning is cogent, but there is an absence of emotion and imagination; they contain few quotable things, and no passages of commanding eloquence, such as strew the orations of Webster and Burke. They are not, in short, literature. Again, the speeches of Henry Clay, of Kentucky, the leader of the Whigs, whose persuasive oratory is a matter of tradition, disappoint in the reading. The fire has gone out of them.

Not so with Daniel Webster, the greatest of American forensic orators, if, indeed, he be not the greatest of all orators who have used the English tongue. Webster's speeches are of the kind that have power to move after the voice of the speaker is still. The thought and the passion in them lay hold on feelings of patriotism more lasting than the issues of the moment. It is, indeed, true of Webster's speeches, as of all speeches, that

they are known to posterity more by single brilliant passages than as wholes. In oratory the occasion is of the essence of the thing, and only those parts of an address which are permanent and universal in their appeal take their place in literature. But of such detachable passages there are happily many in Webster's orations. One great thought underlay all his public life, the thought of the Union; of American nationality. What in Hamilton had been a principle of political philosophy had become in Webster a passionate conviction. The Union was his idol, and he was intolerant of any faction which threatened it from any quarter, whether the Nullifiers of South Carolina or the Abolitionists of the North. It is this thought which gives grandeur and elevation to all his utterances, and especially to the wonderful peroration of his reply to Hayne, on Mr. Foot's resolution touching the sale of the public lands, delivered in the Senate on January 26, 1830, whose closing words, "liberty and union, now and forever, one and inseparable," became the rallying cry of a great cause. Similar in sentiment was his famous speech of March 7, 1850, On the Constitution and the Union, which gave so much offense to the extreme Antislavery party, who held with Garrison that a Constitution which protected slavery was "a league with death and a covenant with hell." It is not claiming too much for Webster to assert that the sentences of these and other speeches, memorized and declaimed by thousands of school-boys throughout the North, did as much as any single influence to train up a generation in hatred of secession, and to send into the fields of the civil war armies of men animated with the stern resolution to fight till the last drop of blood was shed, rather than allow the Union to be dissolved. The figure of this great senator is one of the most imposing in American annals. The masculine force of his personality impressed itself upon men of a very different stamp--upon the unworldly Emerson, and upon the captious Carlyle, whose respect was not willingly accorded to any contemporary, much less to a representative of American democracy. Webster's looks and manner were characteristic. His form was massive, his skull and jaw solid, the underlip projecting, and the mouth firmly and grimly shut; his complexion was swarthy, and his black, deep set eyes, under shaggy brows, glowed with a smoldering fire. He was rather silent in society; his delivery in debate was grave and weighty, rather than fervid. His oratory was massive and sometimes even ponderous. It may be questioned whether an American orator of to-day, with intellectual abilities equal to Webster's--if such a one there were--would permit himself the use of sonorous and elaborate pictures like the famous period which follows: "On this question of principle, while actual suffering was yet afar off, they raised their flag against a power, to which, for purposes of foreign conquest and subjugation, Rome, in the height of her glory, is not to be compared; a power which has dotted over the surface of the whole globe with her possessions and military posts, whose morning drum-beat, following the sun and keeping company with the hours, circles the earth with one continuous and unbroken strain of the martial airs of England." The secret of this kind of oratory has been lost. The present generation distrusts rhetorical ornament, and likes something swifter, simpler, and more familiar in its speakers. But every thing, in declamation of this sort, depends on the way in which it is done. Webster did it supremely well; a smaller man would merely have made buncombe of it. Among the legal orators of the time the foremost was Rufus Choate, an eloquent pleader, and, like Webster, a United States Senator from Massachusetts. Some of his speeches, though excessively rhetorical, have literary quality, and are nearly as effective in print as Webster's own. Another Massachusetts orator, Edward Everett, who in his time was successively professor in Harvard College, Unitarian minister in Boston, editor of the North American Review, member of both houses of Congress, Minister to England, Governor of his State, and President of Harvard, was a speaker of great finish and elegance. His addresses were mainly of the memorial and anniversary kind, and were rather lectures and Ph. B. K. prologues than speeches. Everett was an instance of careful culture bestowed on a soil of no very great natural richness. It is doubtful whether his classical orations on Washington, the Republic, Bunker Hill Monument, and kindred themes, have enough of the breath of life in them to preserve them much longer in recollection. New England, during these years, did not take that leading part in the purely literary development of the country which it afterward assumed. It had no names to match against those of Irving and Cooper. Drake and Halleck--slender as was their performance in point of quantity--were better poets than the Boston bards, Charles Sprague, whose Shakespeare Ode, delivered at the Boston theater in 1823, was locally famous; and Richard Henry Dana, whose longish narrative poem, the *Buccaneer*, 1827, once had admirers. But Boston has at no time been without a serious intellectual life of its own, nor without a circle of highly educated men of literary pursuits, even in default of great geniuses. The North American Review, established in 1815, though it has been wittily described as "ponderously revolving through space" for a few years after its foundation, did not exist in an absolute vacuum, but was scholarly, if somewhat heavy. Webster, to be sure, was a Massachusetts man--as were Everett and Choate--but his triumphs were won in the wider field of national politics. There was, however, a movement at this time in the intellectual life of Boston and Eastern

Massachusetts, which, though not immediately contributory to the finer kinds of literature, prepared the way, by its clarifying and stimulating influences, for the eminent writers of the next generation. This was the Unitarian revolt against Puritan orthodoxy, in which William Ellery Channing was the principal leader. In a community so intensely theological as New England it was natural that any {430} new movement in thought should find its point of departure in the churches. Accordingly, the progressive and democratic spirit of the age, which in other parts of the country took other shapes, assumed in Massachusetts the form of "liberal Christianity." Arminianism, Socinianism, and other phases of anti-Trinitarian doctrine, had been latent in some of the Congregational churches of Massachusetts for a number of years. But about 1812 the heresy broke out openly, and within a few years from that date most of the oldest and wealthiest church societies of Boston and its vicinity had gone over to Unitarianism, and Harvard College had been captured, too. In the controversy that ensued, and which was carried on in numerous books, pamphlets, sermons, and periodicals, there were eminent disputants on both sides. So far as this controversy was concerned with the theological doctrine of the Trinity, it has no place in a history of literature. But the issue went far beyond that. Channing asserted the dignity of human nature against the Calvinistic doctrine of innate depravity, and affirmed the rights of human reason and man's capacity to judge of God. "We must start in religion from our own souls," he said. And in his *Moral Argument against Calvinism*, 1820, he wrote: "Nothing is gained to piety by degrading human nature, for in the competency of this nature to know and judge of God all piety has its foundation." In opposition to Edwards's doctrine of necessity, he emphasized the freedom of the will. He maintained that the Calvinistic dogmas of original sin, foreordination, election by grace, and eternal punishment were inconsistent with the divine perfection, and made God a monster. In Channing's view the great sanction of religious truth is the moral sanction, is its agreement with the laws of conscience. He was a passionate vindicator of the liberty of the individual not only as against political oppression but against the tyranny of public opinion over thought and conscience: "We were made for free action. This alone is life, and enters into all that is good and great." This jealous love of freedom inspired all that he did and wrote. It led him to join the Antislavery party. It expressed itself in his elaborate arraignment of Napoleon in the Unitarian organ, the *Christian Examiner*, for 1827-28; in his *Remarks on Associations*, and his paper *On the Character and Writings of John Milton*, 1826. This was his most considerable contribution to literary criticism. It took for a text Milton's recently discovered *Treatise on Christian Doctrine*--the tendency of which was anti-Trinitarian--but it began with a general defense of poetry against "those who are accustomed to speak of poetry as light reading." This would now seem a somewhat superfluous introduction to an article in any American review. But it shows the nature of the milieu through which the liberal movement in Boston had to make its way. To re-assert the dignity and usefulness of the beautiful arts was, perhaps, the chief service which the Massachusetts Unitarians rendered to humanism. The traditional prejudice of the Puritans against the ornamental side of life had to be softened before polite literature could find a congenial atmosphere in New England. In Channing's *Remarks on National Literature*, reviewing a work published in 1823, he asks the question, "Do we possess what may be called a national literature?" and answers it, by implication at least, in the negative. That we do now possess a national literature is in great part due to the influence of Channing and his associates, although his own writings, being in the main controversial and, therefore, of temporary interest, may not themselves take rank among the permanent treasures of that literature.

## CHAPTER IV.

### THE CONCORD WRITERS.

#### 1837-1861.

There has been but one movement in the history of the American mind which has given to literature a group of writers having coherence enough to merit the name of a school. This was the great humanitarian movement, or series of movements, in New England, which, beginning in the Unitarianism of Channing, ran through its later phase in Transcendentalism, and spent its last strength in the antislavery agitation and the enthusiasms of the Civil War. The second stage of this intellectual and social revolt was Transcendentalism, of which Emerson wrote, in 1842: "The history of genius and of religion in these times will be the history of this tendency." It culminated about 1840-41 in the establishment of the Dial and the Brook Farm Community, although Emerson had given the signal a few years before in his little volume entitled *Nature*, 1836, his Phi-Beta Kappa address at Harvard on the American Scholar, 1837, and his address in 1838 before the Divinity School at Cambridge. Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882) was the prophet of the sect, and Concord was its Mecca; but the influence of the new ideas was not confined to the little group of professed Transcendentalists; it extended to all the young writers within reach, who struck their roots deeper into the soil that it had loosened and freshened. We owe to it, in great measure, not merely Emerson, Alcott, Margaret Fuller, and Thoreau, but Hawthorne, Lowell, Whittier, and Holmes. In its strictest sense Transcendentalism was a restatement of the idealistic philosophy, and an application of its beliefs to religion, nature, and life. But in a looser sense, and as including the more outward manifestations which drew popular attention most strongly, it was the name given to that spirit of dissent and protest, of universal inquiry and experiment, which marked the third and fourth decades of this century in America, and especially in New England. The movement was contemporary with political revolutions in Europe and with the preaching of many novel gospels in religion, in sociology, in science, education, medicine, and hygiene. New sects were formed, like the Swedenborgians, Universalists, Spiritualists, Millerites, Second Adventists, Shakers, Mormons, and Come-outers, some of whom believed in trances, miracles, and direct revelations from the divine Spirit; others in the quick coming of Christ, as deduced from the opening of the seals and the number of the beast in the Apocalypse; and still others in the reorganization of society and of the family on a different basis. New systems of education were tried, suggested by the writings of the Swiss reformer, Pestalozzi, and others. The pseudo-sciences of mesmerism and of phrenology, as taught by Gall and Spurzheim, had numerous followers. In medicine, homeopathy, hydropathy, and what Dr. Holmes calls "kindred delusions," made many disciples. Numbers of persons, influenced by the doctrines of Graham and other vegetarians, abjured the use of animal food, as injurious not only to health but to a finer spirituality. Not a few refused to vote or pay taxes. The writings of Fourier and St. Simon were translated, and societies were established where co-operation and a community of goods should take the place of selfish competition. About the year 1840 there were some thirty of these "phalansteries" in America, many of which had their organs in the shape of weekly or monthly journals, which advocated the principle of Association. The best known of these was probably the *Harbinger*, the mouth-piece of the famous Brook Farm Community, which was founded at West Roxbury, Mass., in 1841, and lasted till 1847. The head man of Brook Farm was George Ripley, a Unitarian clergyman, who had resigned his pulpit in Boston to go into the movement, and who after its failure became and remained for many years literary editor of the *New York Tribune*. Among his associates were Charles A. Dana--now the editor of the *Sun*--Margaret Fuller, Nathaniel Hawthorne and others not unknown to fame. The *Harbinger*, which ran from 1845 to 1849--two years after the break up of the community--had among its contributors many who were not Brook Farmers, but who sympathized more or less with the experiment. Of the number were Horace Greeley, Dr. F. H. Hedge--who did so much to introduce American readers to German literature--J. S. Dwight, the musical critic, C. P. Cranch, the poet, and younger men, like G. W. Curtis, and T. W. Higginson. A reader of to-day, looking into an odd volume of the *Harbinger*, will find in it some stimulating writing, together with a great deal of unintelligible talk about "Harmonic Unity," "Love Germination," and other matters now fallen silent. The most important literary result of this experiment at "plain living and high thinking," with its queer mixture of culture and agriculture, was Hawthorne's *Blithedale Romance*, which has for its background an idealized picture of the community life, whose heroine, Zenobia, has touches of Margaret Fuller; and whose hero, with his hobby of prison reform, was a type of the one-ideal philanthropists that abounded in such an environment. Hawthorne's attitude was always in part one of reserve and criticism, an

attitude which is apparent in the reminiscences of Brook Farm in his American Note Books, wherein he speaks with a certain resentment of "Miss Fuller's transcendental heifer," which hooked the other cows, and was evidently to Hawthorne's mind not unsymbolic in this respect of Miss Fuller herself. It was the day of seers and "Orphic" utterances; the air was full of the enthusiasm of humanity and thick with philanthropic projects and plans for the regeneration of the universe. The figure of the wild-eyed, long-haired reformer--the man with a panacea--the "crank" of our later terminology--became a familiar one. He abounded at non-resistance conventions and meetings of universal peace societies and of woman's rights associations. The movement had its grotesque aspects, which Lowell has described in his essay on Thoreau. "Bran had its apostles and the pre-sartorial simplicity of Adam its martyrs, tailored impromptu from the tar-pot. . . . Not a few impecunious zealots abjured the use of money (unless earned by other people), professing to live on the internal revenues of the spirit. . . . Communities were established where every thing was to be common but common sense." This ferment has long since subsided and much of what was then seething has gone off in vapor or other volatile products. But some very solid matters also have been precipitated, some crystals of poetry translucent, symmetrical, enduring. The immediate practical outcome was disappointing, and the external history of the agitation is a record of failed experiments, spurious sciences, Utopian philosophies, and sects founded only to dwindle away or be reabsorbed into some form of orthodoxy. In the eyes of the conservative, or the worldly-minded, or of the plain people who could not understand the enigmatic utterances of the reformers, the dangerous or ludicrous sides of transcendentalism were naturally uppermost. Nevertheless the movement was but a new avatar of the old Puritan spirit; its moral earnestness, its spirituality, its tenderness for the individual conscience. Puritanism, too, in its day had run into grotesque extremes. Emerson bore about the same relation to the absurder outcroppings of transcendentalism that Milton bore to the New Lights, Ranters, Fifth Monarchy Men, etc., of his time. There is in him that mingling of idealism with an abiding sanity, and even a Yankee shrewdness, which characterizes the race. The practical, inventive, calculating, money-getting side of the Yankee has been made sufficiently obvious. But the deep heart of New England is full of dreams, mysticism, romance:

"And in the day of sacrifice,  
 When heroes piled the pyre,  
 The dismal Massachusetts ice  
 Burned more than others' fire."

The one element which the odd and eccentric developments of this movement shared in common with the real philosophy of transcendentalism was the rejection of authority and the appeal to the private consciousness as the sole standard of truth and right. This principle certainly lay in the ethical systems of Kant and Fichte, the great transcendentalists of Germany. It had been strongly asserted by Channing. Nay, it was the starting point of Puritanism itself, which had drawn away from the ceremonial religion of the English Church and by its Congregational system had made each church society independent in doctrine and worship. And although Puritan orthodoxy in New England had grown rigid and dogmatic, it had never used the weapons of obscurantism. By encouraging education to the utmost it had shown its willingness to submit its beliefs to the fullest discussion and had put into the hands of dissent the means with which to attack them. In its theological aspect transcendentalism was a departure from conservative Unitarianism, as that had been from Calvinism. From Edwards to Channing, from Channing to Emerson and Theodore Parker, there was a natural and logical unfolding. Not logical in the sense that Channing accepted Edwards' premises and pushed them out to their conclusions, or that Parker accepted all of Channing's premises, but in the sense that the rigid pushing out of Edwards' premises into their conclusions by himself and his followers had brought about a moral *reductio ad absurdum* and a state of opinion against which Channing rebelled; and that Channing, as it seemed to Parker, stopped short in the carrying out of his own principles. Thus the "Channing Unitarians," while denying that Christ was God, had held that he was of {441} divine nature, was the Son of God, and had existed before he came into the world. While rejecting the doctrine of the "Vicarious sacrifice" they maintained that Christ was a mediator and intercessor, and that his supernatural nature was testified by miracles. For Parker and Emerson it was easy to take the step to the assertion that Christ was a good and great man, divine only in the sense that God possessed him more fully than any other man known in history; that it was his preaching and example that brought salvation to men, and not any special mediation or intercession, and that his own words and acts, and not miracles, are the only and the sufficient witness to his mission. In the view of the transcendentalists Christ was as human as Buddha, Socrates or Confucius, and the Bible was but one among the "Ethnical Scriptures" or sacred

writings of the peoples, passages from which were published in the transcendental organ, the Dial. As against these new views Channing Unitarianism occupied already a conservative position. The Unitarians as a body had never been very numerous outside of Eastern Massachusetts. They had a few churches in New York and in the larger cities and towns elsewhere, but the sect, as such, was a local one. Orthodoxy made a sturdy fight against the heresy, under leaders like Leonard Woods and Moses Stuart, of Andover, and Lyman Beecher, of Connecticut. In the neighboring State of Connecticut, for example, there was until lately, for a period of several years, no distinctly Unitarian congregation worshipping in a church edifice of its own. On the other hand, the Unitarians claimed, with justice, that their opinions had to a great extent modified the theology of the orthodox churches. The writings of Horace Bushnell, of Hartford, one of the most eminent Congregational divines, approach Unitarianism in their interpretation of the doctrine of the Atonement; and the "progressive orthodoxy" of Andover is certainly not the Calvinism of Thomas Hooker or of Jonathan Edwards. But it seemed to the transcendentalists that conservative Unitarianism was too negative and "cultured," and Margaret Fuller complained of the coldness of the Boston pulpits. While contrariwise the central thought of transcendentalism, that the soul has an immediate connection with God, was pronounced by Dr. Channing a "crude speculation." This was the thought of Emerson's address in 1838 before the Cambridge Divinity School, and it was at once made the object of attack by conservative Unitarians like Henry Ware and Andrews Norton. The latter in an address before the same audience, on the Latest Form of Infidelity, said: "Nothing is left that can be called Christianity if its miraculous character be denied. . . . There can be no intuition, no direct perception of the truth of Christianity." And in a pamphlet supporting the same side of the question he added: "It is not an intelligible error but a mere absurdity to maintain that we are conscious, or have an intuitive knowledge, of the being of God, of our own immortality . . . or of any other fact of religion." Ripley and Parker replied in Emerson's defense; but Emerson himself would never be drawn into controversy. He said that he could not argue. He announced truths; his method was that of the seer, not of the disputant. In 1832 Emerson, who was a Unitarian clergyman, and descended from eight generations of clergymen, had resigned the pastorate of the Second Church of Boston because he could not conscientiously administer the sacrament of the communion--which he regarded as a mere act of commemoration--in the sense in which it was understood by his parishioners. Thenceforth, though he sometimes occupied Unitarian pulpits, and was, indeed, all his life a kind of "lay preacher," he never assumed the pastorate of a church. The representative of transcendentalism in the pulpit was Theodore Parker, an eloquent preacher, an eager debater and a prolific writer on many subjects, whose collected works fill fourteen volumes. Parker was a man of strongly human traits, passionate, independent, intensely religious, but intensely radical, who made for himself a large personal following. The more advanced wing of the Unitarians were called, after him, "Parkerites." Many of the Unitarian churches refused to "fellowship" with him; and the large congregation, or audience, which assembled in Music Hall to hear his sermons was {444} stigmatized as a "boisterous assembly" which came to hear Parker preach irreligion. It has been said that, on its philosophical side, New England transcendentalism was a restatement of idealism. The impulse came from Germany, from the philosophical writings of Kant, Fichte, Jacobi, and Schelling, and from the works of Coleridge and Carlyle, who had domesticated German thought in England. In Channing's Remarks on a National Literature, quoted in our last chapter, the essayist urged that our scholars should study the authors of France and Germany as one means of emancipating American letters from a slavish dependence on British literature. And in fact German literature began, not long after, to be eagerly studied in New England. Emerson published an American edition of Carlyle's Miscellanies, including his essays on German writers that had appeared in England between 1822 and 1830. In 1838 Ripley began to publish Specimens of Foreign Standard Literature, which extended to fourteen volumes. In his work of translating and supplying introductions to the matter selected he was helped by Ripley, Margaret Fuller, John S. Dwight and others who had more or less connection with the transcendental movement. The definition of the new faith given by Emerson in his lecture on the Transcendentalist, 1842, is as follows: "What is popularly called transcendentalism among us is idealism. . . . The idealism of the present day acquired the name of transcendental from the use of that term by Immanuel Kant, who replied to the skeptical philosophy of Locke, which insisted that there was nothing in the intellect which was not previously in the experience of the senses, by showing that there was a very important class of ideas, or imperative forms, which did not come by experience, but through which experience was acquired; that these were intuitions of the mind itself, and he denominated them transcendental forms." Idealism denies the independent existence of matter. Transcendentalism claims for the innate ideas of God and the soul a higher assurance of reality than for the knowledge of the outside world derived through the senses. Emerson shares the "noble doubt" of idealism. He calls the universe a shade, a dream, "this great

apparition." "It is a sufficient account of that appearance we call the world," he wrote in *Nature*, "that God will teach a human mind, and so makes it the receiver of a certain number of congruent sensations which we call sun and moon, man and woman, house and trade. In my utter impotence to test the authenticity of the report of my senses, to know whether the impressions on me correspond with outlying objects, what difference does it make whether Orion is up there in heaven or some god paints the image in the firmament of the soul?" On the other hand our evidence of the existence of God and of our own souls, and our knowledge of right and wrong, are immediate, and are independent of the senses. We are in direct communication with the "Oversoul," the infinite Spirit. "The soul in man is the background of our being--an immensity not possessed, that cannot be possessed." "From within or from behind a light shines through us upon things, and makes us aware that we are nothing, but the light is all." Revelation is "an influx of the Divine mind into our mind. It is an ebb of the individual rivulet before the flowing surges of the sea of life." In moods of exaltation, and especially in the presence of nature, this contact of the individual soul with the absolute is felt. "All mean egotism vanishes. I become a transparent eyeball; I am nothing; I see all; the currents of the Universal Being circulate through me; I am part and particle of God." The existence and attributes of God are not deducible from history or from natural theology, but are thus directly given us in consciousness. In his essay on the Transcendentalist, Emerson says: "His experience inclines him to behold the procession of facts you call the world as flowing perpetually outward from an invisible, unsounded center in himself; center alike of him and of them and necessitating him to regard all things as having a subjective or relative existence--relative to that aforesaid Unknown Center of him. There is no bar or wall in the soul where man, the effect, ceases, and God, the cause, begins. We lie open on one side to the deeps of spiritual nature, to the attributes of God." {447} Emerson's point of view, though familiar to students of philosophy, is strange to the popular understanding, and hence has arisen the complaint of his obscurity. Moreover, he apprehended and expressed these ideas as a poet, in figurative and emotional language, and not as a metaphysician, in a formulated statement. His own position in relation to systematic philosophers is described in what he says of Plato, in his series of sketches entitled *Representative Men*, 1850: "He has not a system. The dearest disciples and defenders are at fault. He attempted a theory of the universe, and his theory is not complete or self-evident. One man thinks he means this, and another that; he has said one thing in one place, and the reverse of it in another place." It happens, therefore, that, to many students of more formal philosophies Emerson's meaning seems elusive, and he appears to write from temporary moods and to contradict himself. Had he attempted a reasoned exposition of the transcendental philosophy, instead of writing essays and poems, he might have added one more to the number of system-mongers; but he would not have taken that significant place which he occupies in the general literature of the time, nor exerted that wide influence upon younger writers which has been one of the stimulating forces in American thought. It was because Emerson was a poet that he is our Emerson. And yet it would be impossible to disentangle his peculiar philosophical ideas from the body of his writings and to leave the latter to stand upon their merits as literature merely. He is the poet of certain high abstractions, and his religion is central to all his work--excepting, perhaps, his *English Traits*, 1856, an acute study of national characteristics, and a few of his essays and verses, which are independent of any particular philosophical standpoint. When Emerson resigned his parish in 1832 he made a short trip to Europe, where he visited Carlyle at Craigenputtoch, and Landor at Florence. On his return he retired to his birthplace, the village of Concord, Massachusetts, and settled down among his books and his fields, becoming a sort of "glorified farmer," but issuing frequently from his retirement to instruct and delight audiences of thoughtful people at Boston and at other points all through the country. Emerson was the perfection of a lyceum lecturer. His manner was quiet but forcible; his voice of charming quality, and his enunciation clean cut and refined. The sentence was his unit in composition. His lectures seemed to begin anywhere and to end anywhere, and to resemble strings of exquisitely polished sayings rather than continuous discourses. His printed essays, with unimportant exceptions, were first written and delivered as lectures. In 1836 he published his first book, *Nature*, which remains the most systematic statement of his philosophy. It opened a fresh spring-head in American thought, and the words of its introduction announced that its author had broken with the past. "Why should not we also enjoy an original relation to the universe? Why should not we have a poetry and philosophy of insight and not of tradition, and a religion by revelation to us and not the history of theirs?" It took eleven years to sell five hundred copies of this little book. But the year following its publication the remarkable Phi Beta Kappa address at Cambridge, on the *American Scholar*, electrified the little public of the university. This is described by Lowell as "an event without any former parallel in our literary annals, a scene to be always treasured in the memory for its picturesqueness and its inspiration. What crowded and breathless aisles, what windows clustering with eager heads, what grim silence of foregone dissent!" To



Concord came many kindred spirits, drawn by Emerson's magnetic attraction. Thither came, from Connecticut, Amos Bronson Alcott, born a few years before Emerson, whom he outlived; a quaint and benignant figure, a visionary and a mystic even among the transcendentalists themselves, and one who lived in unworldly simplicity the life of the soul. Alcott had taught school at Cheshire, Conn., and afterward at Boston on an original plan--compelling his scholars, for example, to flog him, when they did wrong, instead of taking a flogging themselves. The experiment was successful until his *Conversations on the Gospels*, in Boston, and his insistence upon admitting colored children to his benches, offended conservative opinion and broke up his school. Alcott renounced the eating of animal food in 1835. He believed in the union of thought and manual labor, and supported himself for some years by the work of his hands, gardening, cutting wood, etc. He traveled into the West and elsewhere, holding conversations on philosophy, education, and religion. He set up a little community at the village of Harvard, which was rather less successful than Brook Farm, and he contributed *Orphic Sayings* to the *Dial*, which were harder for the exoteric to understand than even Emerson's *Brahma* or the *Over-soul*. Thither came, also, Sarah Margaret Fuller, the most intellectual woman of her time in America, an eager student of Greek and German literature and an ardent seeker after the True, the Good, and the Beautiful. She threw herself into many causes--temperance, antislavery, and the higher education of women. Her brilliant conversation classes in Boston attracted many "minds" of her own sex. Subsequently, as literary editor of the *New York Tribune*, she furnished a wider public with reviews and book-notice of great ability. She took part in the Brook Farm experiment, and she edited the *Dial* for a time, contributing to it the papers afterward expanded into her most considerable book, *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*. In 1846 she went abroad, and at Rome took part in the revolutionary movement of Mazzini, having charge of one of the hospitals during the siege of the city by the French. In 1847 she married an impecunious Italian nobleman, the Marquis Ossoli. In 1850 the ship on which she was returning to America, with her husband and child, was wrecked on Fire Island beach and all three were lost. Margaret Fuller's collected writings are somewhat disappointing, being mainly of temporary interest. She lives less through her books than through the memoirs of her friends, Emerson, James Freeman Clarke, T. W. Higginson, and others who knew her as a personal influence. Her strenuous and rather overbearing individuality made an impression not altogether agreeable upon many of her contemporaries. Lowell introduced a caricature of her as "Miranda" into his *Fable for Critics*, and Hawthorne's caustic sketch of her, preserved in the biography written by his son, has given great offense to her admirers. "Such a determination to eat this huge universe!" was Carlyle's characteristic comment on her appetite for knowledge and aspirations after perfection. To Concord also came Nathaniel Hawthorne, who took up his residence there first at the "Old Manse," and afterward at "The Wayside." Though naturally an idealist, he said that he came too late to Concord to fall decidedly under Emerson's influence. Of that he would have stood in little danger even had he come earlier. He appreciated the deep and subtle quality of Emerson's imagination, but his own shy genius always jealously guarded its independence and resented the too close approaches of an alien mind. Among the native disciples of Emerson at Concord the most noteworthy were Henry Thoreau, and his friend and biographer, William Ellery Channing, Jr., a nephew of the great Channing. Channing was a contributor to the *Dial*, and he published a volume of poems which elicited a fiercely contemptuous review from Edgar Poe. Though disfigured by affectation and obscurity, many of Channing's verses were distinguished by true poetic feeling, and the last line of his little piece, *A Poet's Hope*, "If my bark sink 'tis to another sea," has taken a permanent place in the literature of transcendentalism. The private organ of the transcendentalists was the *Dial*, a quarterly magazine, published from 1840 to 1844, and edited by Emerson and Margaret Fuller. Among its contributors, besides those already mentioned, were Ripley, Thoreau, Parker, James Freeman Clarke, Charles A. Dana, John S. Dwight, C. P. Cranch, Charles Emerson and William H. Channing, another nephew of Dr. Channing. It contained, along with a good deal of rubbish, some of the best poetry and prose that have been published in America. The most lasting part of its contents were the contributions of Emerson and Thoreau. But even as a whole, it is so unique a way-mark in the history of our literature that all its four volumes--copies of which {453} had become scarce--have been recently reprinted in answer to a demand certainly very unusual in the case of an extinct periodical. From time to time Emerson collected and published his lectures under various titles. A first series of *Essays* came out in 1841, and a second in 1844; the *Conduct of Life* in 1860, *Society and Solitude* in 1870, *Letters and Social Aims*, in 1876, and the *Fortune of the Republic* in 1878. In 1847 he issued a volume of *Poems*, and 1865 *Mayday and Other Poems*. These writings, as a whole, were variations on a single theme, expansions and illustrations of the philosophy set forth in *Nature*, and his early addresses. They were strikingly original, rich in thought, filled with wisdom, with lofty morality and spiritual religion. Emerson, said Lowell, first "cut the cable that bound us to English thought and gave us a

chance at the dangers and glories of blue water." Nevertheless, as it used to be the fashion to find an English analogue for every American writer, so that Cooper was called the American Scott, and Mrs. Sigourney was described as the Hemans of America, a well-worn critical tradition has coupled Emerson with Carlyle. That his mind received a nudge from Carlyle's early essays and from Sartor Resartus is beyond a doubt. They were life-long friends and correspondents, and Emerson's Representative Men is, in some sort, a counterpart of Carlyle's Hero Worship. But in temper and style the two writers were widely different. Carlyle's pessimism and dissatisfaction with the general drift of things gained upon him more and more, while Emerson was a consistent optimist to the end. The last of his writings published during his life-time, the Fortune of the Republic, contrasts strangely in its hopefulness with the desperation of Carlyle's later utterances. Even in presence of the doubt as to man's personal immortality he takes refuge in a high and stoical faith. "I think all sound minds rest on a certain preliminary conviction, namely: that if it be best that conscious personal life shall continue it will continue, and if not best, then it will not; and we, if we saw the whole, should of course see that it was better so." It is this conviction that gives to Emerson's writings their serenity and their tonic quality at the same time that it narrows the range of his dealings with life. As the idealist declines to cross-examine those facts which he regards as merely phenomenal, and looks upon this outward face of things as upon a mask not worthy to dismay the fixed soul, so the optimist turns away his eyes from the evil which he disposes of as merely negative, as the shadow of the good. Hawthorne's interest in the problem of sin finds little place in Emerson's philosophy. Passion comes not nigh him and Faust disturbs him with its disagreeableness. Pessimism is to him "the only skepticism." The greatest literature is that which is most broadly human, or, in other words, that which will square best with all philosophies. But Emerson's genius was interpretive rather than constructive. The poet dwells in the cheerful world of phenomena. He is most the poet who realizes most intensely the good and the bad of human life. But Idealism makes experience shadowy and subordinates action to contemplation. To it the cities of men, with their "frivolous populations," ". . . are but sailing foam-bells along thought's causing stream." Shakespere does not forget that the world will one day vanish "like the baseless fabric of a vision," and that we ourselves are "such stuff as dreams are made on;" but this is not the mood in which he dwells. Again: while it is for the philosopher to reduce variety to unity, it is the poet's task to detect the manifold under uniformity. In the great creative poets, in Shakespere and Dante and Goethe, how infinite the swarm of persons, the multitude of forms! But with Emerson the type is important, the common element. "In youth we are mad for persons. But the larger experience of man discovers the identical nature appearing through them all." "The same--the same!" he exclaims in his essay on Plato. "Friend and foe are of one stuff; the plowman, the plow and the furrow are of one stuff." And this is the thought in Brahma:

"They reckon ill who leave me out;  
 When me they fly I am the wings:  
 I am the doubter and the doubt,  
 And I the hymn the Brahmin sings."

It is not easy to fancy a writer who holds this altitude toward "persons" descending to the composition of a novel or a play. Emerson showed, indeed, a fine power of character analysis in his English Traits and Representative Men and in his memoirs of Thoreau and Margaret Fuller. There is even a sort of dramatic humor in his portrait of Socrates. But upon the whole he stands midway between constructive artists, whose instinct it is to tell a story or sing a song, and philosophers, like Schelling, who give poetic expression to a system of thought. He belongs to the class of minds of which Sir Thomas Browne is the best English example. He set a high value upon Browne, to whose style his own, though far more sententious, bears a resemblance. Browne's saying, for example, "All things are artificial, for nature is the art of God," sounds like Emerson, whose workmanship, for the rest, in his prose essays was exceedingly fine and close. He was not afraid to be homely and racy in expressing thought of the highest spirituality. "Hitch your wagon to a star" is a good instance of his favorite manner. Emerson's verse often seems careless in technique. Most of his pieces are scrappy and have the air of runic rimes, or little oracular "voicings"--as they say in Concord--in rhythmic shape, of single thoughts on "Worship," "Character," "Heroism," "Art," "Politics," "Culture," etc. The content is the important thing, and the form is too frequently awkward or bald. Sometimes, indeed, in the clear-obscure of Emerson's poetry the deep wisdom of the thought finds its most natural expression in the imaginative simplicity of the language. But though this artlessness in him became too frequently in his imitators, like Thoreau and Ellery Channing, an obtruded simplicity, among his own poems are many that leave nothing to be desired in point of wording and of verse. His Hymn Sung at the Completion of the

Concord Monument, in 1836, is the perfect model of an occasional poem. Its lines were on every one's lips at the time of the centennial celebrations in 1876, and "the shot heard round the world" has hardly echoed farther than the song which chronicled it. Equally current is the stanza from *Voluntaries*:

"So nigh is grandeur to our dust,  
So near is God to man,  
When Duty whispers low, 'Thou must,'  
The youth replies, 'I can.'"

So, too, the famous lines from the *Problem*:

"The hand that rounded Peter's dome,  
And groined the aisles of Christian Rome,  
Wrought in a sad sincerity.  
Himself from God he could not free;  
He builded better than he knew;  
The conscious stone to beauty grew."

The most noteworthy of Emerson's pupils was Henry David Thoreau, "the poet-naturalist." After his graduation from Harvard College, in 1837, Thoreau engaged in school teaching and in the manufacture of lead-pencils, but soon gave up all regular business and devoted himself to walking, reading, and the study of nature. He was at one time private tutor in a family on Staten Island, and he supported himself for a season by doing odd jobs in land surveying for the farmers about Concord. In 1845 he built, with his own hands, a small cabin on the banks of Walden Pond, near Concord, and lived there in seclusion for two years. His expenses during these years were nine cents a day, and he gave an account of his experiment in his most characteristic book, *Walden*, published in 1854. His *Week on the Concord and Merrimac Rivers* appeared in 1849. From time to time he went farther afield, and his journeys were reported in *Cape Cod*, *the Maine Woods*, *Excursions*, and *a Yankee in Canada*, all of which, as well as a volume of *Letters and Early Spring in Massachusetts*, have been given to the public since his death, which happened in 1862. No one has lived so close to nature, and written of it so intimately, as Thoreau. His life was a lesson in economy and a sermon on Emerson's text, "Lessen your denominator." He wished to reduce existence to the simplest terms--to

"live all alone  
Close to the bone,  
And where life is sweet  
Constantly eat."

He had a passion for the wild, and seems like an Anglo-Saxon reversion to the type of the Red Indian. The most distinctive note in Thoreau is his inhumanity. Emerson spoke of him as a "perfect piece of stoicism." "Man," said Thoreau, "is only the point on which I stand." He strove to realize the objective life of nature--nature in its aloofness from man; to identify himself, with the moose and the mountain. He listened, with his ear close to the ground, for the voice of the earth. "What are the trees saying?" he exclaimed. Following upon the trail of the lumberman he asked the primeval wilderness for its secret, and

"saw beneath dim aisles, in odorous beds,  
The slight linnaea hang its twin-born heads."

He tried to interpret the thought of Ktaadn and to fathom the meaning of the billows on the back of Cape Cod, in their indifference to the shipwrecked bodies that they rolled ashore. "After sitting in my chamber many days, reading the poets, I have been out early on a foggy morning and heard the cry of an owl in a neighboring wood as from a nature behind the common, unexplored by science or by literature. None of the feathered race has yet realized my youthful conceptions of the woodland depths. I had seen the red election-birds brought from their recesses on my comrade's string, and fancied that their plumage would assume stranger and more dazzling colors, like the tints of evening, in proportion as I advanced farther into the darkness and solitude of the forest. Still less have I seen such strong and wild tints on any poet's string."

It was on the mystical side that Thoreau apprehended transcendentalism. Mysticism has been defined as the soul's recognition of its identity with nature. This thought lies plainly in Schelling's philosophy, and he illustrated it by his famous figure of the magnet. Mind and nature are one; they are the positive and negative poles of the magnet. In man, the Absolute--that is, God--becomes conscious of himself; makes of himself, as nature, an object to himself as mind. "The souls of men," said Schelling, "are but the innumerable individual eyes with which our infinite World-Spirit beholds himself." This thought is also clearly present in Emerson's view of nature, and has caused him to be accused of pantheism. But if by pantheism is meant the doctrine that the underlying principle of the universe is matter or force, none of the transcendentalists was a pantheist. In their view nature was divine. Their poetry is always haunted by the sense of a spiritual reality which abides beyond the phenomena. Thus in Emerson's *Two Rivers*:

"Thy summer voice, Musketaquit,  
Repeats the music of the rain,  
But sweeter rivers pulsing flit  
Through thee as thou through Concord plain.

"Thou in thy narrow banks art pent:  
The stream I love unbounded goes;  
Through flood and sea and firmament,  
Through light, through life, it forward flows.

"I see the inundation sweet,  
I hear the spending of the stream,  
Through years, through men, through nature fleet,  
Through passion, thought, through power and dream."

This mood occurs frequently in Thoreau. The hard world of matter becomes suddenly all fluent and spiritual, and he sees himself in it--sees God. "This earth," he cries, "which is spread out like a map around me, is but the lining of my inmost soul exposed." "In me is the sucker that I see;" and, of *Walden Pond*,

"I am its stony shore,  
And the breeze that passes o'er."

"Suddenly old Time winked at me--ah, you know me, you rogue--and news had come that IT was well. That ancient universe is in such capital health, I think, undoubtedly, it will never die. . . . I see, smell, taste, hear, feel that everlasting something to which we are allied, at once our maker, our abode, our destiny, our very selves." It was something ulterior that Thoreau sought in nature. "The other world," he wrote, "is all my art: my pencils will draw no other: my jackknife will cut nothing else." Thoreau did not scorn, however, like Emerson, to "examine too microscopically the universal tablet." He was a close observer and accurate reporter of the ways of birds and plants and the minuter aspects of nature. He has had many followers, who have produced much pleasant literature on out-door life. But in none of them is there that unique combination of the poet, the naturalist and the mystic which gives his page its wild original flavor. He had the woodcraft of a hunter and the eye of a botanist, but his imagination did not stop short with the fact. The sound of a tree falling in the Maine woods was to him "as though a door had shut somewhere in the damp and shaggy wilderness." He saw small things in cosmic relations. His trip down the tame Concord has for the reader the excitement of a voyage of exploration into far and unknown regions. The river just above Sherman's Bridge, in time of flood "when the wind blows freshly on a raw March day, heaving up the surface into dark and sober billows," was like Lake Huron, "and you may run aground on Cranberry Island," and "get as good a freezing there as anywhere on the North-west coast." He said that most of the phenomena described in Kane's voyages could be observed in Concord. The literature of transcendentalism was like the light of the stars in a winter night, keen and cold and high. It had the pale cast of thought, and was almost too spiritual and remote to "hit the sense of mortal sight." But it was at least indigenous. If not an American literature--not national and not inclusive of all sides of American life--it was, at all events, a genuine New England literature and true to the spirit of its section. The tough Puritan stock had at last put forth a blossom which compared with the warm, robust growths of English soil even as the delicate wind

flower of the northern spring compares with the cowslips and daisies of old England. In 1842 Nathaniel Hawthorne (1804-1864) the greatest American romancer, came to Concord. He had recently left Brook Farm, had just been married, and with his bride he settled down in the "Old Manse" for three paradisaical years. A picture of this protracted honeymoon and this sequestered life, as tranquil as the slow stream on whose banks it was passed, is given in the introductory chapter to his *Mosses from an Old Manse*, 1846, and in the more personal and confidential records of his *American Note Books*, posthumously published. Hawthorne was thirty-eight when he took his place among the Concord literati. His childhood and youth had been spent partly at his birthplace, the old and already somewhat decayed sea-port town of Salem, and partly at his grandfather's farm on Sebago Lake, in Maine, then on the edge of the primitive forest. Maine did not become a State, indeed, until 1820, the year before Hawthorne entered Bowdoin College, whence he was graduated in 1825, in the same class with Henry W. Longfellow and one year behind Franklin Pierce, afterward President of the United States. After leaving college Hawthorne buried himself for years in the seclusion of his home at Salem. His mother, who was early widowed, had withdrawn entirely from the world. For months at a time Hawthorne kept his room, seeing no other society than that of his mother and sisters, reading all sorts of books and writing wild tales, most of which he destroyed as soon as he had written them. At twilight he would emerge from the house for a solitary ramble through the streets of the town or along the sea-side. Old Salem had much that was picturesque in its associations. It had been the scene of the witch trials in the seventeenth century, and it abounded in ancient mansions, the homes of retired whalers and India merchants. Hawthorne's father had been a ship captain, and many of his ancestors had followed the sea. One of his forefathers, moreover, had been a certain Judge Hawthorne, who in 1691 had sentenced several of the witches to death. The thought of this affected Hawthorne's imagination with a pleasing horror and he utilized it afterward in his *House of the Seven Gables*. Many of the old Salem houses, too, had their family histories, with now and then the hint of some obscure crime or dark misfortune which haunted posterity with its curse till all the stock died out, or fell into poverty and evil ways, as in the Pyncheon family of Hawthorne's romance. In the preface to the *Marble Faun* Hawthorne wrote: "No author without a trial can conceive of the difficulty of writing a romance about a country where there is no shadow, no antiquity, no mystery, no picturesque and gloomy wrong, nor any thing but a commonplace prosperity in broad and simple daylight." And yet it may be doubted whether any environment could have been found more fitted to his peculiar genius than this of his native town, or any preparation better calculated to ripen the faculty that was in him than these long, lonely years of waiting and brooding thought. From time to time he contributed a story or a sketch to some periodical, such as S. G. Goodrich's *Annual*, the *Token*, or the *Knickerbocker Magazine*. Some of these attracted the attention of the judicious; but they were anonymous and signed by various noms de plume, and their author was at this time--to use his own words--"the obscurest man of letters in America." In 1828 he had issued anonymously and at his own expense a short romance, entitled *Fanshawe*. It had little success, and copies of the first edition are now exceedingly rare. In 1837 he published a collection of his magazine pieces under the title, *Twice Told Tales*. The book was generously praised in the *North American Review* by his former classmate, Longfellow; and Edgar Poe showed his keen critical perception by predicting that the writer would easily put himself at the head of imaginative literature in America if he would discard allegory, drop short stories and compose a genuine romance. Poe compared Hawthorne's work with that of the German romancer, Tieck, and it is interesting to find confirmation of this dictum in passages of the *American Note Books*, in which Hawthorne speaks of laboring over Tieck with a German dictionary. The {466} *Twice Told Tales* are the work of a recluse, who makes guesses at life from a knowledge of his own heart, acquired by a habit of introspection, but who has had little contact with men. Many of them were shadowy and others were morbid and unwholesome. But their gloom was of an interior kind, never the physically horrible of Poe. It arose from weird psychological situations like that of Ethan Brand in his search for the unpardonable sin. Hawthorne was true to the inherited instinct of Puritanism; he took the conscience for his theme, and in these early tales he was already absorbed in the problem of evil, the subtle ways in which sin works out its retribution, and the species of fate or necessity that the wrong-doer makes for himself in the inevitable sequences of his crime. Hawthorne was strongly drawn toward symbols and types, and never quite followed Poe's advice to abandon allegory. The *Scarlet Letter* and his other romances are not, indeed, strictly allegories, since the characters are men and women and not mere personifications of abstract qualities. Still they all have a certain allegorical tinge. In the *Marble Faun*, for example, Hilda, Kenyon, Miriam and Donatello have been ingeniously explained as personifications respectively of the conscience, the reason, the imagination and the senses. Without going so far as this, it is possible to see in these and in Hawthorne's other creations something typical and representative. He uses his characters like algebraic

symbols to work out certain problems with: they are rather more and yet rather less than flesh and blood individuals. The stories in *Twice Told Tales* and in the second collection, *Mosses from an Old Manse*, 1846, are more openly allegorical than his later work. Thus the *Minister's Black Veil* is a sort of anticipation of Arthur Dimmesdale in the *Scarlet Letter*. From 1846 to 1849 Hawthorne held the position of Surveyor of the Custom House of Salem. In the preface to the *Scarlet Letter* he sketched some of the government officials with whom this office had brought him into contact in a way that gave some offense to the friends of the victims and a great deal of amusement to the public. Hawthorne's humor was quiet and fine, like Irving's, but less genial and with a more satiric edge to it. The book last named was written at Salem and published in 1850, just before its author's removal to Lenox, now a sort of inland Newport, but then an unfashionable resort among the Berkshire hills. Whatever obscurity may have hung over Hawthorne hitherto was effectually dissolved by this powerful tale, which was as vivid in coloring as the implication of its title. Hawthorne chose for his background the somber life of the early settlers in New England. He had always been drawn toward this part of American history, and in *Twice Told Tales* had given some illustrations of it in *Endicott's Red Cross* and *Legends of the Province House*. Against this dark foil moved in strong relief the figures of Hester Prynne, the woman taken in adultery, her paramour, the Rev. Arthur Dimmesdale, her husband, old Roger Chillingworth, and her illegitimate child. In tragic power, in its grasp of the elementary passions of human nature and its deep and subtle insight into the inmost secrets of the heart, this is Hawthorne's greatest book. He never crowded his canvas with figures. In the *Blithedale Romance* and the *Marble Faun* there is the same *parti carré* or group of four characters. In the *House of the Seven Gables* there are five. The last mentioned of these, published in 1852, was of a more subdued intensity than the *Scarlet Letter*, but equally original and, upon the whole, perhaps equally good. The *Blithedale Romance*, published in the same year, though not strikingly inferior to the others, adhered more to conventional patterns in its plot and in the sensational nature of its ending. The suicide of the heroine by drowning, and the terrible scene of the recovery of her body, were suggested to the author by an experience of his own on Concord River, the account of which, in his own words, may be read in Julian Hawthorne's *Nathaniel Hawthorne and His Wife*. In 1852 Hawthorne returned to Concord and bought the "Wayside" property, which he retained until his death. But in the following year his old college friend Pierce, now become President, appointed him Consul to Liverpool, and he went abroad for seven years. The most valuable fruit of his foreign residence was the romance of the *Marble Faun*, 1860; the longest of his fictions and the richest in descriptive beauty. The theme of this was the development of the soul through the experience of sin. There is a haunting mystery thrown about the story, like a soft veil of mist, veiling the beginning and the end. There is even a delicate teasing suggestion of the preternatural in *Donatello*, the *Faun*, a creation as original as Shakspeare's *Caliban*, or Fouqué's *Undine*, and yet quite on this side the border-line of the human. Our *Old Home*, a book of charming papers on England, was published in 1863. Manifold experience of life and contact with men, affording scope for his always keen observation, had added range, fullness, warmth to the imaginative subtlety which had manifested itself even in his earliest tales. Two admirable books for children, the *Wonder Book* and *Tanglewood Tales*, in which the classical mythologies were retold; should also be mentioned in the list of Hawthorne's writings, as well as the *American, English, and Italian Note Books*, the first of which contains the seed thoughts of some of his finished works, together with hundreds of hints for plots, episodes, descriptions, etc., which he never found time to work out. Hawthorne's style, in his first sketches and stories a little stilted and "bookish," gradually acquired an exquisite perfection, and is as well worth study as that of any prose classic in the English tongue. Hawthorne was no transcendentalist. He dwelt much in a world of ideas, and he sometimes doubted whether the tree on the bank or its image in the stream were the more real. But this had little in common with the philosophical idealism of his neighbors. He revered Emerson, and he held kindly intercourse--albeit a silent man and easily bored--with Thoreau and Ellery Channing, and even with Margaret Fuller. But his sharp eyes saw whatever was whimsical or weak in the apostles of the new faith. He had little enthusiasm for causes or reforms, and among so many Abolitionists he remained a Democrat, and even wrote a campaign life of his friend Pierce. The village of Concord has perhaps done more for American literature than the city of New York. Certainly there are few places where associations, both patriotic and poetic, cluster so thickly. At one side of the grounds of the Old Manse--which has the river at its back--runs down a shaded lane to the Concord monument and the figure of the Minute Man and the successor of "the rude bridge that arched the flood." Scarce two miles away, among the woods, is little Walden--"God's drop." The men who made Concord famous are asleep in Sleepy Hollow, yet still their memory prevails to draw seekers after truth to the Concord Summer School of Philosophy, which meets every year, to reason

high of "God, Freedom, and Immortality," next-door to the "Wayside," and under the hill on whose ridge Hawthorne wore a path, as he paced up and down beneath the hemlocks.

## CHAPTER V.

### THE CAMBRIDGE SCHOLARS.

#### 1837-1861.

With few exceptions, the men who have made American literature what it is have been college graduates. And yet our colleges have not commonly been, in themselves, literary centers. Most of them have been small and poor, and situated in little towns or provincial cities. Their alumni scatter far and wide immediately after graduation, and even those of them who may feel drawn to a life of scholarship or letters find little to attract them at the home of their alma mater, and seek, by preference, the large cities where periodicals and publishing houses offer some hope of support in a literary career. Even in the older and better equipped universities the faculty is usually a corps of working scholars, each man intent upon his specialty and rather inclined to undervalue merely "literary" performance. In many cases the fastidious and hypercritical turn of mind which besets the scholar, the timid conservatism which naturally characterizes an ancient seat of learning and the spirit of theological conformity which suppresses free discussion have exerted their benumbing influence upon the originality and creative impulse of their inmates. Hence it happens that, while the contributions of American college teachers to the exact sciences, to theology and philology, metaphysics, political philosophy and the severer branches of learning have been honorable and important, they have as a class made little mark upon the general literature of the country. The professors of literature in our colleges are usually persons who have made no additions to literature, and the professors of rhetoric seem ordinarily to have been selected to teach students how to write, for the reason that they themselves have never written any thing that any one has ever read. To these remarks the Harvard College of some fifty years ago offers a striking exception. It was not the large and fashionable university that it has lately grown to be, with its multiplied elective courses, its numerous faculty and its somewhat motley collection of undergraduates; but a small school of the classics and mathematics, with something of ethics, natural science and the modern languages added to its old-fashioned, scholastic curriculum, and with a very homogeneous clientèle, drawn mainly from the Unitarian families of Eastern Massachusetts. Nevertheless a finer intellectual life, in many respects, was lived at old Cambridge within the years covered by this chapter than nowadays at the same place, or at any date in any other American university town. The {474} neighborhood of Boston, where the commercial life has never so entirely overlain the intellectual as in New York and Philadelphia, has been a standing advantage to Harvard College. The recent upheaval in religious thought had secured toleration, and made possible that free and even audacious interchange of ideas without which a literary atmosphere is impossible. From these, or from whatever causes, it happened that the old Harvard scholarship had an elegant and tasteful side to it, so that the dry erudition of the schools blossomed into a generous culture, and there were men in the professors' chairs who were no less efficient as teachers because they were also poets, orators, wits and men of the world. In the seventeen years from 1821 to 1839 there were graduated from Harvard College Emerson, Holmes, Sumner, Phillips, Motley, Thoreau, Lowell, and Edward Everett Hale, some of whom took up their residence at Cambridge, others at Boston and others at Concord, which was quite as much a spiritual suburb of Boston as Cambridge was. In 1836, when Longfellow became Professor of Modern Languages at Harvard, Sumner was lecturing in the Law School. The following year--in which Thoreau took his bachelor's degree--witnessed the delivery of Emerson's Phi Beta Kappa lecture on the American Scholar in the college chapel and Wendell Phillips's speech on the Murder of Lovejoy in Faneuil Hall. Lowell, whose description of the impression produced by the former of these famous addresses has been quoted in a previous chapter, was an undergraduate at the time. He took his degree in 1838 and in 1855 succeeded Longfellow in the chair of Modern Languages. Holmes had been chosen in 1847 Professor of Anatomy and Physiology in the Medical School--a position which he held until 1882. The historians, Prescott and Bancroft, had been graduated in 1814 and 1817 respectively. The former's first important publication, *Ferdinand and Isabella*, appeared in 1837. Bancroft had been a tutor in the college in 1822-23 and the initial volume of his *History of the United States* was issued in 1835. Another of the Massachusetts school of historical writers, Francis Parkman, took his first degree at Harvard in 1844. Cambridge was still hardly more than a village, a rural outskirts of Boston, such as Lowell described it in his article, *Cambridge Thirty Years Ago*, originally contributed to *Putnam's Monthly* in 1853, and afterward reprinted in his *Fireside Travels*, 1864. The situation of a university scholar in old Cambridge was thus an almost ideal one. Within easy reach of a great city, with its literary and social clubs, its theaters, lecture courses, public meetings, dinner parties, etc., he yet lived withdrawn in an



academic retirement among elm-shaded avenues and leafy gardens, the dome of the Boston State-house looming distantly across the meadows where the Charles laid its "steel blue sickle" upon the variegated, plush-like ground of the wide marsh. There was thus, at all times during the quarter of a century embraced between 1837 and 1861, a group of brilliant men resident in or about Cambridge and Boston, meeting frequently and intimately, and exerting upon one another a most stimulating influence. Some of the closer circles--all concentric to the university--of which this group was loosely composed were laughed at by outsiders as "Mutual Admiration Societies." Such was, for instance, the "Five of Clubs," whose members were Longfellow, Sumner, C. C. Tilton, Professor of Greek at Harvard, and afterward president of the college; G. S. Hillard, a graceful lecturer, essayist and poet, of a somewhat amateurish kind; and Henry R. Cleveland, of Jamaica Plain, a lover of books and a writer of them. Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (1807-1882) the most widely read and loved of American poets--or indeed, of all contemporary poets in England and America--though identified with Cambridge for nearly fifty years was a native of Portland, Maine, and a graduate of Bowdoin College, in the same class with Hawthorne. Since leaving college, in 1825, he had studied and traveled for some years in Europe, and had held the professorship of modern languages at Bowdoin. He had published several text books, a number of articles on the Romance languages and literatures in the *North American Review*, a thin volume of metrical translations from the Spanish, a few original poems in various periodicals, and the pleasant sketches of European {477} travel entitled *Outre Mer*. But Longfellow's fame began with the appearance in 1839 of his *Voices of the Night*. Excepting an earlier collection by Bryant this was the first volume of real poetry published in New England, and it had more warmth and sweetness, a greater richness and variety than Bryant's work ever possessed. Longfellow's genius was almost feminine in its flexibility and its sympathetic quality. It readily took the color of its surroundings and opened itself eagerly to impressions of the beautiful from every quarter, but especially from books. This first volume contained a few things written during his student days at Bowdoin, one of which, a blank verse piece on Autumn, clearly shows the influence of Bryant's *Thanatopsis*. Most of these juvenilia had nature for their theme, but they were not so sternly true to the New England landscape as Thoreau or Bryant. The skylark and the ivy appear among their scenic properties, and in the best of them, *Woods in Winter*, it is the English "hawthorn" and not any American tree, through which the gale is made to blow, just as later Longfellow uses "rooks" instead of crows. The young poet's fancy was instinctively putting out feelers toward the storied lands of the Old World, and in his *Hymn of the Moravian Nuns of Bethlehem* he transformed the rude church of the Moravian sisters to a cathedral with "glimmering tapers," swinging censers, chancel, altar, cowls and "dim mysterious aisle." After his visit to Europe, Longfellow returned deeply imbued with the spirit of romance. It was his mission to refine our national taste by opening to American readers, in their own vernacular, new springs of beauty in the literatures of foreign tongues. The fact that this mission was interpretative, rather than creative, hardly detracts from Longfellow's true originality. It merely indicates that his inspiration came to him in the first instance from other sources than the common life about him. He naturally began as a translator, and this first volume contained, among other things, exquisite renderings from the German of Uhland, Salis, and Müller, from the Danish, French, Spanish and Anglo-Saxon, and a few passages from Dante. Longfellow remained all his life a translator, and in subtler ways than by direct translation he infused the fine essence of European poetry into his own. He loved--

"Tales that have the rime of age  
And chronicles of eld."

The golden light of romance is shed upon his page, and it is his habit to borrow mediaeval and Catholic imagery from his favorite middle ages, even when writing of American subjects. To him the clouds are hooded friars, that "tell their beads in drops of rain;" the midnight winds blowing through woods and mountain passes are chanting solemn masses for the repose of the dying year, and the strain ends with the prayer--

"Kyrie, eleyson,  
Christe, eleyson."

In his journal he wrote characteristically: "The black shadows lie upon the grass like engravings in a book. Autumn has written his rubric on the illuminated leaves, the wind turns them over and chants like a friar." This in Cambridge, of a moonshiny night, on the first day of the American October. But several of the pieces in *Voices of the Night* sprang more immediately from the poet's own inner experience. The *Hymn to*

the Night, the Psalm of Life, the Reaper and the Flowers, Footsteps of Angels, the Light of Stars, and the Beleaguered City spoke of love, bereavement, comfort, patience and faith. In these lovely songs and in many others of the same kind which he afterward wrote, Longfellow touched the hearts of all his countrymen. America is a country of homes, and Longfellow, as the poet of sentiment and of the domestic affections, became and remains far more general in his appeal than such a "cosmic" singer as Whitman, who is still practically unknown to the "fierce democracy" to which he has addressed himself. It would be hard to over-estimate the influence for good exerted by the tender feeling and the pure and sweet morality which the hundreds of thousands of copies of Longfellow's writings, that have been circulated among readers of all classes in America and England, have brought with them.

Three later collections, *Ballads and Other Poems*, 1842; *the Belfry of Bruges*, 1846; and *the Seaside and the Fireside*, 1850, comprise most of what is noteworthy in Longfellow's minor poetry. The first of these embraced, together with some renderings from the German and the Scandinavian languages, specimens of stronger original work than the author had yet put forth; namely, the two powerful ballads of *the Skeleton in Armor* and *the Wreck of the Hesperus*. The former of these, written in the swift leaping meter of Drayton's Ode to the Cambro Britons on their Harp, was suggested by the digging up of a mail-clad skeleton at Fall River--a circumstance which the poet linked with the traditions about the Round Tower at Newport and gave to the whole the spirit of a Norse viking song of war and of the sea. *The Wreck of the Hesperus* was occasioned by the news of shipwrecks on the coast near Gloucester and by the name of a reef--"Norman's Woe"—where many of them took place. It was written one night between twelve and three, and cost the poet, he said, "hardly an effort." Indeed, it is the spontaneous ease and grace, the unflinching taste of Longfellow's lines, which are their best technical quality. There is nothing obscure or esoteric about his poetry. If there is little passion or intellectual depth, there is always genuine poetic feeling, often a very high order of imagination and almost invariably the choice of the right word. In this volume were also included *the Village Blacksmith* and *Excelsior*. The latter, and *the Psalm of Life*, have had a "damnable iteration" which causes them to figure as Longfellow's most popular pieces. They are by no means, however, among his best. They are vigorously expressed commonplaces of that hortatory kind which passes for poetry, but is, in reality, a vague species of preaching.

In *the Belfry of Bruges* and *the Seaside and the Fireside*, the translations were still kept up, and among the original pieces were *the Occultation of Orion*--the most imaginative of all Longfellow's poems; *Seaweed*, which has very noble stanzas, the favorite *Old Clock on the Stairs*, *the Building of the Ship*, with its magnificent closing apostrophe to the Union, and *the Fire of Driftwood*, the subtlest in feeling of any thing that the poet ever wrote. With these were verses of a more familiar quality, such as *the Bridge*, *Resignation*, and *the Day Is Done*, and many others, all reflecting moods of gentle and pensive sentiment, and drawing from analogies in nature or in legend lessons which, if somewhat obvious, were expressed with perfect art. Like Keats, he apprehended every thing on its beautiful side. Longfellow was all poet. Like Ophelia in *Hamlet*,

"Thought and affection, passion, hell itself,  
He turns to favor and to prettiness."

He cared very little about the intellectual movement of the age. The transcendental ideas of Emerson passed over his head and left him undisturbed. For politics he had that gentlemanly distaste which the cultivated class in America had already begun to entertain. In 1842 he printed a small volume of *Poems on Slavery*, which drew commendation from his friend Sumner, but had nothing of the fervor of Whittier's or Lowell's utterances on the same subject. It is interesting to compare his journals with Hawthorne's *American Note Books* and to observe in what very different ways the two writers made prey of their daily experiences for literary material. A favorite haunt of Longfellow's was the bridge between Boston and Cambridgeport, the same which he put into verse in his poem, *the Bridge*. "I always stop on the bridge," he writes in his journal; "tide waters are beautiful. From the ocean up into the land they go, like messengers, to ask why the tribute has not been paid. The brooks and rivers answer that there has been little harvest of snow and rain this year. Floating sea-weed and kelp is carried up into the meadows, as returning sailors bring oranges in bandanna handkerchiefs to friends in the country." And again: "We leaned for awhile on the wooden rail and enjoyed the silvery reflection on the sea, making sundry comparisons. Among other thoughts we had this cheering one, that the whole sea was flashing with this heavenly light, though we saw it only in a single

track; the dark waves are the dark providences of God; luminous, though not to us; and even to ourselves in another position." "Walk on the bridge, both ends of which are lost in the fog, like human life midway between two eternities; beginning and ending in mist." In Hawthorne an allegoric meaning is usually something deeper and subtler than this, and seldom so openly expressed. Many of Longfellow's poems--the *Beleaguered City*, for example--may be definitely divided into two parts; in the first, a story is told or a natural phenomenon described; in the second, the spiritual application of the parable is formally set forth. This method became with him almost a trick of style, and his readers learned to look for the *haec fabula docet* at the end as a matter of course. As for the prevailing optimism in Longfellow's view of life--of which the above passage is an instance--it seemed to be in him an affair of temperament, and not, as in Emerson, the result of philosophic insight. Perhaps, however, in the last analysis optimism and pessimism are subjective--the expression of temperament or individual experience, since the facts of life are the same, whether seen through Schopenhauer's eyes or through Emerson's. If there is any particular in which Longfellow's inspiration came to him at first hand and not through books, it is in respect to the aspects of the sea. On this theme no American poet has written more beautifully and with a keener sympathy than the author of the *Wreck of the Hesperus* and of *Seaweed*. In 1847 was published the long poem of *Evangeline*. The story of the Acadian peasant girl, who was separated from her lover in the dispersion of her people by the English troops, and after weary wanderings and a life-long search found him at last, an old man dying in a Philadelphia hospital, was told to Longfellow by the Rev. H. L. Conolly, who had previously suggested it to Hawthorne as a subject for a story. Longfellow, characteristically enough, "got up" the local color for his poem from Haliburton's account of the dispersion of the Grand-Pré Acadians, from Darby's *Geographical Description of Louisiana* and Watson's *Annals of Philadelphia*. He never needed to go much outside of his library for literary impulse and material. Whatever may be held as to Longfellow's inventive powers as a creator of characters or an interpreter of American life, his originality as an artist is manifested by his successful domestication in *Evangeline* of the dactylic hexameter, which no English poet had yet used with effect. The English poet, Arthur Hugh Clough, who lived for a time in Cambridge, followed Longfellow's example in the use of hexameter in his *Bothie of Tober-na-Vuolich*, so that we have now arrived at the time--a proud moment for American letters--when the works of our writers began to react upon the literature of Europe. But the beauty of the descriptions in *Evangeline* and the pathos--somewhat too drawn out--of the story made it dear to a multitude of readers who cared nothing about the technical disputes of Poe and other critics as to whether or not Longfellow's lines were sufficiently "spondaic" to truthfully represent the quantitative hexameters of Homer and Vergil. In 1855 appeared *Hiawatha*, Longfellow's most {485} aboriginal and "American" book. The tripping trochaic measure he borrowed from the Finnish epic *Kalevala*. The vague, childlike mythology of the Indian tribes, with its anthropomorphic sense of the brotherhood between men, animals, and the forms of inanimate nature, he took from Schoolcraft's *Algic Researches*, 1839. He fixed forever, in a skillfully chosen poetic form, the more inward and imaginative part of Indian character, as Cooper had given permanence to its external and active side. Of Longfellow's dramatic experiments the *Golden Legend*, 1851, alone deserves mention here. This was in his chosen realm; a tale taken from the ecclesiastical annals of the middle ages, precious with martyrs' blood and bathed in the rich twilight of the cloister. It contains some of his best work, but its merit is rather poetic than dramatic; although Ruskin praised it for the closeness with which it entered into the temper of the monk. Longfellow has pleased the people more than the critics. He gave freely what he had, and the gift was beautiful. Those who have looked in his poetry for something else than poetry, or for poetry of some other kind, have not been slow to assert that he was a lady's poet; one who satisfied callow youths and school-girls by uttering commonplaces in graceful and musical shape, but who offered no strong meat for men. Miss Fuller called his poetry thin and the poet himself a "dandy Pindar." This is not true of his poetry, or of the best of it. But he had a singing and not a talking voice, and in his prose one becomes sensible of a certain weakness. *Hyperion*, for example, published in 1839, a loitering fiction, interspersed with descriptions of European travel, is, upon the whole, a weak book, over flowery in diction and sentimental in tone. The crown of Longfellow's achievements as a translator was his great version of Dante's *Divina Commedia*, published between 1867 and 1870. It is a severely literal, almost a line for line, rendering. The meter is preserved, but the rhyme sacrificed. If not the best English poem constructed from Dante, it is at all events the most faithful and scholarly paraphrase. The sonnets which accompanied it are among Longfellow's best work. He seems to have been raised by daily communion with the great Tuscan into a habit of deeper and more subtle thought than is elsewhere common in his poetry. Oliver Wendell Holmes (1809- ) is a native of Cambridge and a graduate of Harvard in the class of '29; a class whose anniversary reunions he has celebrated in something like forty distinct poems and songs. For sheer

cleverness and versatility Dr. Holmes is, perhaps, unrivaled among American men of letters. He has been poet, wit, humorist, novelist, essayist and a college lecturer and writer on medical topics. In all of these departments he has produced work which ranks high, if not with the highest. His father, {487} Dr. Abiel Holmes, was a graduate of Yale and an orthodox minister of liberal temper, but the son early threw in his lot with the Unitarians; and, as was natural to a man of a satiric turn and with a very human enjoyment of a fight, whose youth was cast in an age of theological controversy, he has always had his fling at Calvinism and has prolonged the slogans of old battles into a later generation; sometimes, perhaps, insisting upon them rather wearisomely and beyond the limits of good taste. He had, even as an undergraduate, a reputation for cleverness at writing comic verses, and many of his good things in this kind, such as the *Dorchester Giant* and the *Height of the Ridiculous*, were contributed to the *Collegian*, a students' paper. But he first drew the attention of a wider public by his spirited ballad of *Old Ironsides*-- "Ay! Tear her tattered ensign down!"--

composed about 1830, when it was proposed by the government to take to pieces the unseaworthy hulk of the famous old man-of-war, "Constitution." Holmes's indignant protest--which has been a favorite subject for school-boy declamation--had the effect of postponing the vessel's fate for a great many years. From 1830-35 the young poet was pursuing his medical studies in Boston and Paris, contributing now and then some verses to the magazines. Of his life as a medical student in Paris there are many pleasant reminiscences in his *Autocrat* and other writings, as where he tells, for instance, of a dinner party of Americans in the French capital, where one of the company brought tears of home-sickness into the eyes of his sodales by saying that the tinkle of the ice in the champagne-glasses reminded him of the cowbells in the rocky old pastures of New England. In 1836 he printed his first collection of poems. The volume contained among a number of pieces broadly comic, like the *September Gale*, the *Music Grinders*, and the *Ballad of the Oysterman*--which at once became widely popular--a few poems of a finer and quieter temper, in which there was a quaint blending of the humorous and the pathetic. Such were *My Aunt* and the *Last Leaf*--which Abraham Lincoln found "inexpressibly touching," and which it is difficult to read without the double tribute of a smile and a tear. The volume contained also *Poetry: A Metrical Essay*, read before the Harvard Chapter of the Phi Beta Kappa Society, which was the first of that long line of capital occasional poems which Holmes has been spinning for half a century with no sign of fatigue and with scarcely any falling off in freshness; poems read or spoken or sung at all manner of gatherings, public and private; at Harvard commencements, class days, and other academic anniversaries; at inaugurations, centennials, dedications of cemeteries, meetings of medical associations, mercantile libraries, Burns clubs and New England societies; at rural festivals and city fairs; openings of theaters, layings of corner stones, birthday celebrations, jubilees, funerals, commemoration services, dinners of welcome or farewell to Dickens, Bryant, Everett, Whittier, Longfellow, Grant, Farragut, the Grand Duke Alexis, the Chinese Embassy and what not. Probably no poet of any age or clime has written so much and so well to order. He has been particularly happy in verses of a convivial kind, toasts for big civic feasts, or post-prandial rhymes for the petit comité--the snug little dinners of the chosen few. His

"The quaint trick to cram the pithy line  
That cracks so crisply over bubbling wine."

And although he could write on occasion a *Song for a Temperance Dinner*, he has preferred to chant the praise of the punch bowl and to

"feel the old convivial glow (unaided) o'er me stealing,  
The warm, champagny, old-particular-brandy-punchy feeling."

It would be impossible to enumerate the many good things of this sort which Holmes has written, full of wit and wisdom, and of humor lightly dashed with sentiment and sparkling with droll analogies, sudden puns, and unexpected turns of rhyme and phrase. Among the best of them are *Nux Postcoenatica*, *A Modest Request*, *Ode for a Social Meeting*, *The Boys*, and *Rip Van Winkle, M.D.* Holmes's favorite measure, in his longer poems, is the heroic couplet which Pope's example seems to have consecrated forever to satiric and didactic verse. He writes as easily in this meter as if it were prose, and with much of Pope's epigrammatic neatness. He also manages with facility the anapaestics of Moore and the ballad stanza which Hood had made the vehicle for his drolleries. It cannot be expected that verses manufactured to pop with the corks

and fizz with the champagne at academic banquets should much outlive the occasion; or that the habit of producing such verses on demand should foster in the producer that "high seriousness" which Matthew Arnold asserts to be one mark of all great poetry. Holmes's poetry is mostly on the colloquial level, excellent society-verse, but even in its serious moments too smart and too pretty to be taken very gravely; with a certain glitter, knowingness and flippancy about it and an absence of that self-forgetfulness and intense absorption in its theme which characterize the work of the higher imagination. This is rather the product of fancy and wit. Wit, indeed, in the old sense of quickness in the perception of analogies is the staple of his mind. His resources in the way of figure, illustration, allusion and anecdote are wonderful. Age cannot wither him nor custom stale his infinite variety, and there is as much powder in his latest pyrotechnics as in the rockets which he sent up half a century ago. Yet, though the humorist in him rather outweighs the poet, he has written a few things, like the Chambered Nautilus and Homesick in Heaven, which are as purely and deeply poetic as the One-Hoss Shay and the Prologue are funny. Dr. Holmes is not of the stuff of which idealists and enthusiasts are made. As a physician and a student of science, the facts of the material universe have counted for much with him. His clear, positive, alert intellect was always impatient of mysticism. He had the sharp eye of the satirist and the man of the world for oddities of dress, dialect and manners. Naturally the transcendental movement struck him on its ludicrous side, and in his After-Dinner Poem, read at the Phi Beta Kappa dinner at Cambridge in 1843, he had his laugh at the "Orphic odes" and "runes" of the bedlamite seer and bard of mystery

"Who rides a beetle which he calls a 'sphinx,'  
And O what questions asked in club-foot rhyme  
Of Earth the tongueless, and the deaf-mute Time!  
Here babbling 'Insight' shouts in Nature's ears  
His last conundrum on the orbs and spheres;  
There Self-inspection sucks its little thumb,  
With 'Whence am I?' and 'Wherefore did I come?'"

Curiously enough, the author of these lines lived to write an appreciative life of the poet who wrote the Sphinx. There was a good deal of toryism or social conservatism in Holmes. He acknowledged a preference for the man with a pedigree, the man who owned family portraits, had been brought up in familiarity with books, and could pronounce "view" correctly. Readers unhappily not of the "Brahmin caste of New England" have sometimes resented as snobbishness Holmes's harping on "family," and his perpetual application of certain favorite shibboleths to other people's ways of speech. "The woman who calc'lates is lost."

"Learning condemns beyond the reach of hope  
The careless lips that speak of soap for soap. . . .  
Do put your accents in the proper spot;  
Don't, let me beg you, don't say 'How?' for 'What?'  
The things named 'pants' in certain documents,  
A word not made for gentlemen, but 'gents.'"

With the rest of "society" he was disposed to ridicule the abolition movement as a crotchet of the eccentric and the long-haired. But when the civil war broke out he lent his pen, his tongue, and his own flesh and blood to the cause of the Union. The individuality of Holmes's writings comes in part from their local and provincial bias. He has been the laureate of Harvard College and the bard of Boston city, an urban poet, with a cockneyish fondness for old Boston ways and things--the Common and the Frog Pond, Faneuil Hall and King's Chapel and the Old South, Bunker Hill, Long Wharf, the Tea Party, and the town crier. It was Holmes who invented the playful saying that "Boston State House is the hub of the solar system."

In 1857 was started the Atlantic Monthly, a magazine which has published a good share of the best work done by American writers within the past thirty years. Its immediate success was assured by Dr. Holmes's brilliant series of papers, the Autocrat of the Breakfast Table, 1858, followed at once by the Professor at the Breakfast Table, 1859, and later by the Poet at the Breakfast Table, 1873. The Autocrat is its author's masterpiece, and holds the fine quintessence of his humor, his scholarship, his satire, genial observation, and ripe experience of men and cities. The form is as unique and original as the contents, being something

between an essay and a drama; a succession of monologues or table-talks at a typical American boarding-house, with a thread of story running through the whole. The variety of mood and thought is so great that these conversations never tire, and the prose is interspersed with some of the author's choicest verse. The Professor at the Breakfast Table followed too closely on the heels of the Autocrat, and had less freshness. The third number of the series was better, and was pleasantly reminiscent and slightly garrulous, Dr. Holmes being now (1873) sixty-four years old, and entitled to the gossiping privilege of age. The personnel of the Breakfast Table series, such as the landlady and the landlady's daughter and her son, Benjamin Franklin; the schoolmistress, the young man named John, the Divinity Student, the Kohinoor, the Sculpin, the Scarabaeus and the Old Gentleman who sits opposite, are not fully drawn characters, but outlined figures, lightly sketched--as is the Autocrat's wont--by means of some trick of speech, or dress, or feature, but they are quite life-like enough for their purpose, which is mainly to furnish listeners and foils to the eloquence and wit of the chief talker. In 1860 and 1867 Holmes entered the field of fiction with two "medicated novels," *Elsie Venner* and *the Guardian Angel*. The first of these was a singular tale, whose heroine united with her very fascinating human attributes something of the nature of a serpent; her mother having been bitten by a rattlesnake a few months before the birth of the girl, and kept alive meanwhile by the use of powerful antidotes. The heroine of the *Guardian Angel* inherited lawless instincts from a vein of Indian blood in her ancestry. These two books were studies of certain medico-psychological problems. They preached Dr. Holmes's favorite doctrines of heredity and of the modified nature of moral responsibility by reason of transmitted tendencies which limit the freedom of the will. In *Elsie Venner*, in particular, the weirdly imaginative and speculative character of the leading motive suggests Hawthorne's method in fiction, but the background and the subsidiary figures have a realism that is in abrupt contrast with this, and gives a kind of doubleness and want of keeping to the whole. The Yankee characters, in particular, and the satirical pictures of New England country life are open to the charge of caricature. In the *Guardian Angel* the figure of Byles Gridley, the old scholar, is drawn with thorough sympathy, and though some of his acts are improbable he is, on the whole, Holmes's most vital conception in the region of dramatic creation. James Russell Lowell (1819- ), the foremost of American critics and of living American poets is, like Holmes, a native of Cambridge, and, like Emerson and Holmes, a clergyman's son. In 1855 he succeeded Longfellow as Professor of Modern Languages in Harvard College. Of late years he has held important diplomatic posts, like Everett, Irving, Bancroft, Motley, and other Americans distinguished in letters, having been United States Minister to Spain, and, under two administrations, to the Court of St. James. Lowell is not so spontaneously and exclusively a poet as Longfellow. His fame has been of slower growth, and his popularity with the average reader has never been so great. His appeal has been to the few rather than the many, to an audience of scholars and of the judicious rather than to the "groundlings" of the general public. Nevertheless his verse, though without the evenness, instinctive grace, and unerring good taste of Longfellow's, has more energy and a stronger intellectual fiber; while in prose he is very greatly the superior. His first volume, *A Year's Life*, 1841, gave little promise. In 1843 he started a magazine, the *Pioneer*, which only reached its third number, though it counted among its contributors Hawthorne, Poe, Whittier, and Miss Barrett (afterward Mrs. Browning). A second volume of poems, printed in 1844, showed a distinct advance, in such pieces as the *Shepherd of King Admetus*, *Rhoecus*, a classical myth, told in excellent blank verse, and the same in subject with one of Landor's polished intaglios; and the *Legend of Britanny*, a narrative poem, which had fine passages, but no firmness in the management of the story. As yet, it was evident, the young poet had not found his theme. This came with the outbreak of the Mexican War, which was unpopular in New England, and which the Free Soil party regarded as a slaveholders' war waged without provocation against a sister republic, and simply for the purpose of extending the area of slavery. In 1846, accordingly, the *Biglow Papers* began to appear in the *Boston Courier*, and were collected and published in book form in 1848. These were a series of rhymed satires upon the government and the war party, written in the Yankee dialect, and supposed to be the work of Hosea Biglow, a home-spun genius in a down-east country town, whose letters to the editor were indorsed and accompanied by the comments of the Rev. Homer Wilbur, A.M., pastor of the First Church in Jaalam, and (prospective) member of many learned societies. The first paper was a derisive address to a recruiting sergeant, with a denunciation of the "nigger-drivin' States" and the "northern dough-faces," a plain hint that the North would do better to secede than to continue doing dirty work for the South, and an expression of those universal peace doctrines which were then in the air, and to which Longfellow gave serious utterance in his *Occultation of Orion*.

"Ez for war, I call it murder--

There you hev it plain an' flat:  
I don't want to go no further  
Than my Testyment for that;  
God hez said so plump an' fairly,  
It's ez long as it is broad,  
An' you've gut to git up airly  
Ef you want to take in God."

The second number was a versified paraphrase of a letter received from Mr. Birdofredom Sawin, "a yung feller of our town that wuz cussed fool enuff to goe atrottin inter Miss Chiff arter a drum and fife," and who finds when he gets to Mexico that

"This kind o' sogerin' aint a mite like our October trainin'."

Of the subsequent papers the best was, perhaps, What Mr. Robinson Thinks, an election ballad, which caused universal laughter, and was on every body's tongue.

The Biglow Papers remain Lowell's most original contribution to American literature. They are, all in all, the best political satires in the language, and unequaled as portraitures of the Yankee character, with its 'cuteness, its homely wit, and its latent poetry. Under the racy humor of the dialect--which became in Lowell's hands a medium of literary expression almost as effective as Burns's Ayrshire Scotch--burned that moral enthusiasm and that hatred of wrong and deification of duty--"Stern daughter of the voice of God"--which, in the tough New England stock, stands instead of the passion in the blood of southern races. Lowell's serious poems on political questions, such as the Present Crisis, Ode to Freedom, and the Capture of Fugitive Slaves, have the old Puritan fervor, and such lines as

"They are slaves who dare not be  
In the right with two or three,"

and the passage beginning

"Truth forever on the scaffold, Wrong forever on the throne,"

became watchwords in the conflict against slavery and disunion. Some of these were published in his volume of 1848 and the collected edition of his poems, in two volumes, issued in 1850. These also included his most ambitious narrative poem, the Vision of Sir Launfal, an allegorical and spiritual treatment of one of the legends of the Holy Grail. Lowell's genius was not epic, but lyric and didactic. The merit of Sir Launfal is not in the telling of the story, but in the beautiful descriptive episodes, one of which, commencing,

"And what is so rare as a day in June?  
Then if ever come perfect days;"

is as current as any thing that he has written. It is significant of the lack of a natural impulse toward narrative invention in Lowell, that, unlike Longfellow and Holmes, he never tried his hand at a novel. One of the most important parts of a novelist's equipment he certainly possesses; namely, an insight into character, and an ability to delineate it. This gift is seen especially in his sketch of Parson Wilbur, who edited the Biglow Papers with a delightfully pedantic introduction, glossary, and notes; in the prose essay On a Certain Condescension in Foreigners, and in the uncompleted poem, Fitz-Adam's Story. See also the sketch of Captain Underhill in the essay on New England Two Centuries Ago. The Biglow Papers when brought out in a volume were prefaced by imaginary notices of the press, including a capital parody of Carlyle, and a reprint from the "Jaalam Independent Blunderbuss," of the first sketch--afterward amplified and enriched--of that perfect Yankee idyl, the Courtin'. Between 1862 and 1865 a second series of Biglow Papers appeared, called out by the events of the civil war. Some of these, as, for instance, Jonathan to John, a remonstrance with England for her unfriendly attitude toward the North, were not inferior to any thing in the earlier series; and others were even superior as poems, equal indeed, in pathos and intensity to any thing

that Lowell has written in his professedly serious verse. In such passages the dialect wears rather thin, and there is a certain incongruity between the rustic spelling and the vivid beauty and power and the figurative cast of the phrase in stanzas like the following: "Wut's words to them whose faith an' truth On war's red techstone rang true metal, Who ventered life an' love an' youth For the gret prize o' death in battle? To him who, deadly hurt, agen Flashed on afore the charge's thunder, Tippin' with fire the bolt of men That rived the rebel line asunder?" Charles Sumner, a somewhat heavy person, with little sense of humor, wished that the author of the Biglow Papers "could have used good English." In the lines just quoted, indeed, the bad English adds nothing to the effect. In 1848 Lowell wrote *A Fable for Critics*, something after the style of Sir John Suckling's *Session of the Poets*; a piece of rollicking doggerel in which he surveyed the American Parnassus, scattering about headlong fun, sharp satire and sound criticism in equal proportion. Never an industrious workman, like Longfellow, at the poetic craft, but preferring to wait for the mood to seize him, he allowed eighteen years to go by, from 1850 to 1868, before publishing another volume of verse. In the latter year appeared *Under the Willows*, which contains some of his ripest and most perfect work; notably *A Winter Evening Hymn to my Fire*, with its noble and touching close--suggested by, perhaps, at any rate recalling, the dedication of Goethe's *Faust*, "Ihr naht euch wieder, schwankende Gestalten;" the subtle *Footpath* and *In the Twilight*, the lovely little poems *Auf Wiedersehen* and *After the Funeral*, and a number of spirited political pieces, such as *Villa Franca*, and the *Washers of the Shroud*. This volume contained also his *Ode Recited at the Harvard Commemoration* in 1865. This, although uneven, is one of the finest occasional poems in the language, and the most important contribution which our civil war has made to song. It was charged with

the grave emotion of one who not only shared the patriotic grief and exultation of his alma mater in the sacrifice of her sons, but who felt a more personal sorrow in the loss of kindred of his own, fallen in the front of battle. Particularly noteworthy in this memorial ode are the tribute to Abraham Lincoln, the third strophe, beginning, "Many loved Truth:" the exordium--"O Beautiful! my Country! ours once more!" and the close of the eighth strophe, where the poet chants of the youthful heroes who

"Come transfigured back,  
Secure from change in their high-hearted ways,  
Beautiful evermore and with the rays  
Of morn on their white Shields of Expectation."

From 1857 to 1862 Lowell edited the *Atlantic Monthly*, and from 1863 to 1872 the *North American Review*. His prose, beginning with an early volume of *Conversations on Some of the Old Poets*, 1844, has consisted mainly of critical essays on individual writers, such as Dante, Chaucer, Spenser, Emerson, Shakespere, Thoreau, Pope, Carlyle, etc., together with papers of a more miscellaneous kind, like *Witchcraft*, *New England Two Centuries Ago*, *My Garden Acquaintance*, *A Good Word for Winter*, *Abraham Lincoln*, etc., etc. Two volumes of these were published in 1870 and 1876, under the title *Among My Books*, and another, *My Study Windows*, in 1871. As a literary critic Lowell ranks easily among the first of living writers. His scholarship is thorough, his judgment sure, and he pours out upon his page an unwithholding wealth of knowledge, humor, wit and imagination from the fullness of an overflowing mind. His prose has not the chastened correctness and "low tone" of Matthew Arnold's. It is rich, exuberant, and sometimes over fanciful, running away into excesses of allusion or following the lead of a chance pun so as sometimes to lay itself open to the charge of pedantry and bad taste. Lowell's resources in the way of illustration and comparison are endless, and the readiness of his wit and his delight in using it put many temptations in his way. Purists in style accordingly take offense at his saying that "Milton is the only man who ever got much poetry out of a cataract, and that was a cataract in his eye;" or of his speaking of "a gentleman for whom the bottle before him reversed the wonder of the stereoscope and substituted the Gaston v for the b in binocular," which is certainly a puzzling and roundabout fashion of telling us that he had drunk so much that he saw double. The critics also find fault with his coining such words as "undisprivacied" and with his writing such lines as the famous one--from the *Cathedral*, 1870-- "Spume-sliding down the baffled decuman."

It must be acknowledged that his style lacks the crowning grace of simplicity, but it is precisely by reason of its allusive quality that scholarly readers take pleasure in it. They like a diction that has stuff in it and is woven thick, and where a thing is said in such a way as to recall many other things. Mention should be made, in connection with this Cambridge circle, of one writer who touched its circumference briefly. This



was Sylvester Judd, a graduate of Yale, who entered the Harvard Divinity School in 1837 and in 1840 became minister of a Unitarian church in Augusta, Maine. Judd published several books, but the only one of them at all rememberable was *Margaret*, 1845, a novel of which Lowell said in *A Fable for Critics* that it was "the first Yankee book with the soul of Down East in it." It was very imperfect in point of art, and its second part--a rhapsodical description of a sort of Unitarian Utopia--is quite unreadable. But in the delineation of the few chief characters and of the rude, wild life of an outlying New England township just after the close of the revolutionary war, as well as in the tragic power of the catastrophe, there was genius of a high order.

As the country has grown older and more populous, and works in all departments of thought have multiplied, it becomes necessary to draw more strictly the line between the literature of knowledge and the literature of power. Political history, in and of itself, scarcely falls within the limits of this sketch, and yet it cannot be altogether dismissed; for the historian's art at its highest demands imagination, narrative skill, and a sense of unity and proportion in the selection and arrangement of his facts, all of which are literary qualities. It is significant that many of our best historians have begun authorship in the domain of imaginative literature: Bancroft with an early volume of poems; Motley with his historical romances *Merry Mount* and *Morton's Hope*; and Parkman with a novel, *Vassall Morton*. The oldest of that modern group of writers that have given America an honorable position in the historical literature of the world was William Hickling Prescott (1796-1859.) Prescott chose for his theme the history of the Spanish conquests in the New World, a subject full of romantic incident and susceptible of that glowing and perhaps slightly over gorgeous coloring which he laid on with a liberal hand. His completed histories, in their order, are the *Reign of Ferdinand and Isabella*, 1837; the *Conquest of Mexico*, 1843--a topic which Irving had relinquished to him; and the *Conquest of Peru*, 1847. Prescott was fortunate in being born to leisure and fortune, but he had difficulties of another kind to overcome. He was nearly blind, and had to teach himself Spanish and look up authorities through the help of others and to write with a noctograph or by amanuenses. George Bancroft (1800- ) issued the first volume of his great *History of the United States* in 1834, and exactly half a century later the final volume of the work, bringing the subject down to 1789. Bancroft had studied at Göttingen and imbibed from the German historian Heeren the scientific method of historical study. He had access to original sources, in the nature of collections and state papers in the governmental archives of Europe, of which no American had hitherto been able to avail himself. His history in thoroughness of treatment leaves nothing to be desired, and has become the standard authority on the subject. As a literary performance merely, it is somewhat wanting in flavor, Bancroft's manner being heavy and stiff when compared with Motley's or Parkman's. The historian's services to his country have been publicly recognized by his successive appointments as Secretary of the Navy, Minister to England, and Minister to Germany. The greatest, on the whole, of American historians was John Lothrop Motley (1814-1877), who, like Bancroft, was a student at Göttingen and United States Minister to England. His *Rise of the Dutch Republic*, 1856, and *History of the United Netherlands*, published in installments from 1861 to 1868, equaled Bancroft's work in scientific thoroughness and philosophic grasp, and Prescott's in the picturesque brilliancy of the narrative, while it excelled them both in its masterly analysis of great historic characters, reminding the reader, in this particular, of Macaulay's figure painting. The episodes of the siege of Antwerp and the sack of the cathedral, and of the defeat and wreck of the Spanish Armada, are as graphic as Prescott's famous description of Cortez's capture of the city of Mexico; while the elder historian has nothing to compare with Motley's vivid personal sketches of Queen Elizabeth, Philip the Second, Henry of Navarre, and William the Silent. The *Life of John of Barneveld*, 1874, completed this series of studies upon the history of the Netherlands, a theme to which Motley was attracted because the heroic struggle of the Dutch for liberty offered, in some respects, a parallel to the growth of political independence in Anglo-Saxon communities, and especially in his own America. The last of these Massachusetts historical writers whom we shall mention is Francis Parkman (1823- ), whose subject has the advantage of being thoroughly American. His *Oregon Trail*, 1847, a series of sketches of prairie and Rocky Mountain life, originally contributed to the *Knickerbocker Magazine*, displays his early interest in the American Indians. In 1851 appeared his first historical work, the *Conspiracy of Pontiac*. This has been followed by the series entitled *France and England in North America*, the six successive parts of which are as follows: the *Pioneers of France in the New World*; the *Jesuits in North America*; *La Salle and the Discovery of the Great West*; the *Old Régime in Canada*; *Count Frontenac and New France*; and *Montcalm and Wolfe*. These narratives have a wonderful vividness, and a romantic interest not inferior to Cooper's novels. Parkman made himself personally familiar with the scenes which he described, and some of the

best descriptions of American woods and waters are to be found in his histories. If any fault is to be found with his books, indeed, it is that their picturesqueness and "fine writing" are a little in excess. The political literature of the years from 1837 to 1861 hinged upon the antislavery struggle. In this "irrepressible conflict" Massachusetts led the van. Garrison had written in his *Liberator*, in 1830, "I will be as harsh as truth and as uncompromising as justice. I am in earnest; I will not equivocate; I will not excuse; I will not retreat a single inch; and I will be heard." But the Garrisonian abolitionists remained for a long time, even in the North, a small and despised faction. It was a great point gained when men of education and social standing like Wendell Phillips (1811-1884), and Charles Sumner (1811-1874), joined themselves to the cause. Both of these were graduates of Harvard and men of scholarly pursuits. They became the representative orators of the antislavery party, Phillips on the platform and Sumner in the Senate. The former first came before the public in his fiery speech, delivered in Faneuil Hall December 8, 1837, before a meeting called to denounce the murder of Lovejoy, who had been killed at Alton, Ill., while defending his press against a pro-slavery mob. Thenceforth Phillips's voice was never idle in behalf of the slave. His eloquence was impassioned and direct, and his English singularly pure, simple, and nervous. He is perhaps nearer to Demosthenes than any other American orator. He was a most fascinating platform speaker on themes outside of politics, and his lecture on the *Lost Arts* was a favorite with audiences of all sorts. Sumner was a man of intellectual tastes, who entered politics reluctantly, and only in obedience to the resistless leading of his conscience. He was a student of literature and art; a connoisseur of engravings, for example, of which he made a valuable collection. He was fond of books, conversation, and foreign travel, and in Europe, while still a young man, had made a remarkable impression in society. But he left all this for public life, and in 1851 was elected, as Webster's successor, to the Senate of the United States. Thereafter he remained the leader of the Abolitionists in Congress until slavery was abolished. His influence throughout the North was greatly increased by the brutal attack upon him in the Senate chamber in 1856 by "Bully Brooks" of South Carolina. Sumner's oratory was stately and somewhat labored. While speaking he always seemed, as has been wittily said, to be surveying a "broad landscape of his own convictions." His most impressive qualities as a speaker were his intense moral earnestness and his thorough knowledge of his subject. The most telling of his parliamentary speeches are perhaps his speech On the Kansas-Nebraska Bill, of February 3, 1854, and On the Crime against Kansas, May 19 and 20, 1856; of his platform addresses, the oration on the True Grandeur of Nations.

## CHAPTER VI.

### LITERATURE IN THE CITIES.

#### 1837-1861.

Literature as a profession has hardly existed in the United States until very recently. Even now the number of those who support themselves by purely literary work is small, although the growth of the reading public and the establishment of great magazines, such as Harper's, the Century, and the Atlantic, have made a market for intellectual wares which forty years ago would have seemed a godsend to poorly paid Bohemians like Poe or obscure men of genius like Hawthorne. About 1840 two Philadelphia magazines--Godey's Lady's Book and Graham's Monthly--began to pay their contributors twelve dollars a page, a price then thought wildly munificent. But the first magazine of the modern type was Harper's Monthly, founded in 1850. American books have always suffered, and still continue to suffer, from the want of an international copyright, which has flooded the country with cheap reprints and translations of foreign works, with which the domestic product has been unable to contend on such uneven terms. With the first ocean steamers there started up a class of large-paged weeklies in New York and elsewhere, such as Brother Jonathan, the New World, and the Corsair, which furnished their readers with the freshest writings of Dickens and Bulwer and other British celebrities within a fortnight after their appearance in London. This still further restricted the profits of native authors and nearly drove them from the field of periodical literature. By special arrangement the novels of Thackeray and other English writers were printed in Harper's in installments simultaneously with their issue in English periodicals. The Atlantic was the first of our magazines which was founded expressly for the encouragement of home talent, and which had a purely Yankee flavor. Journalism was the profession which naturally attracted men of letters, as having most in common with their chosen work and as giving them a medium, under their own control, through which they could address the public. A few favored scholars, like Prescott, were made independent by the possession of private fortunes. Others, like Holmes, Longfellow, and Lowell, gave to literature such leisure as they could get in the intervals of an active profession or of college work. Still others, like Emerson and Thoreau, by living in the country and making their modest competence--eked out in Emerson's case by lecturing here and there--suffice for their simple needs, secured themselves freedom from the restraints of any regular calling. But in default of some such pou sto our men of letters have usually sought the cities and allied themselves with the press. It will be remembered that Lowell started a short-lived magazine on his own account, and that he afterward edited the Atlantic and the North American. Also that Ripley and Charles A. Dana betook themselves to journalism after the break up of the Brook Farm Community. In the same way William Cullen Bryant (1794-1878), the earliest American poet of importance, whose impulses drew him to the solitudes of nature, was compelled to gain a livelihood by conducting a daily newspaper; or, as he himself puts it, was "Forced to drudge for the dregs of men, And scrawl strange words with the barbarous pen." Bryant was born at Cummington, in Berkshire, the westernmost county of Massachusetts. After two years in Williams College he studied law, and practiced for nine years as a country lawyer in Plainfield and Great Barrington. Following the line of the Housatonic Valley, the social and theological affiliations of Berkshire have always been closer with Connecticut and New York than with Boston and Eastern Massachusetts. Accordingly, when, in 1825, Bryant yielded to the attractions of a literary career, he betook himself to New York city, where, after a brief experiment in conducting a monthly magazine, the New York Review and Athenaeum, he assumed the editorship of the Evening Post, a Democratic and Free-trade journal, with which he remained connected till his death. He already had a reputation as a poet when he entered the ranks of metropolitan journalism. In 1816 his *Thanatopsis* had been published in the North American Review, and had attracted immediate and general admiration. It had been finished, indeed, two years before, when the poet was only in his nineteenth year, and was a wonderful instance of precocity. The thought in this stately hymn was not that of a young man, but of a sage who has reflected long upon the universality, the necessity, and the majesty of death. Bryant's blank verse when at its best, as in *Thanatopsis* and the *Forest Hymn*, is extremely noble. In gravity and dignity it is surpassed by no English blank verse of this century, though in rich and various modulation it falls below Tennyson's *Ulysses* and *Morte d'Arthur*. It was characteristic of Bryant's limitations that he came thus early into possession of his faculty. His range was always a narrow one, and about his poetry, as a whole, there is a certain coldness, rigidity, and solemnity. His fixed position among American poets is described in his own Hymn to the North Star:

"And thou dost see them rise,

Star of the pole! and thou dost see them set.  
Alone, in thy cold skies,  
Thou keep'st thy old, unmoving station yet,  
Nor join'st the dances of that glittering train,  
Nor dipp'st thy virgin orb in the blue western main."

In 1821 he read the *Ages*, a didactic poem in thirty-five stanzas, before the Phi Beta Kappa Society at Cambridge, and in the same year brought out his first volume of poems. A second collection appeared in 1832, which was printed in London under the auspices of Washington Irving. Bryant was the first American poet who had much of an audience in England, and Wordsworth is said to have learned *Thanatopsis* by heart. Bryant was, indeed, in a measure, a scholar of Wordsworth's school, and his place among American poets corresponds roughly, though not precisely, to Wordsworth's among English poets. With no humor, with somewhat restricted sympathies, with little flexibility or openness to new impressions, but gifted with a high, austere imagination, Bryant became the meditative poet of nature. His best poems are those in which he draws lessons from nature, or sings of its calming, purifying, and bracing influences upon the human soul. His office, in other words, is the same which Matthew Arnold asserts to be the peculiar office of modern poetry, "the moral interpretation of nature." Poems of this class are *Green River*, *To a Waterfowl*, *June*, *the Death of the Flowers*, and *the Evening Wind*. The song, "O fairest of the Rural Maids," which has more fancy than is common in Bryant, and which Poe pronounced his best poem, has an obvious resemblance to Wordsworth's "Three years she grew in sun and shade," and both of these nameless pieces might fitly be entitled--as Wordsworth's is in Mr. Palgrave's *Golden Treasury*--"The Education of Nature." Although Bryant's career is identified with New York, his poetry is all of New England. His heart was always turning back fondly to the woods and streams of the Berkshire hills. There was nothing of that urban strain in him which appears in Holmes and Willis. He was, in especial, the poet of autumn, of the American October and the New England Indian Summer, that season of "dropping nuts" and "smoky light," to whose subtle analogy with the decay of the young by the New England disease, consumption, he gave such tender expression in the *Death of the Flowers*; and amid whose "bright, late quiet," he wished himself to pass away. Bryant is our poet of "the melancholy days," as Lowell is of June. If, by chance, he touches upon June, it is not with the exultant gladness of Lowell in meadows full of bobolinks, and in the summer day that is

"--simply perfect from its own resource  
As to the bee the new campanula's  
Illuminate seclusion swung in air."

Rather, the stir of new life in the clod suggests to Bryant by contrast the thought of death; and there is nowhere in his poetry a passage of deeper feeling than the closing stanzas of *June*, in which he speaks of himself, by anticipation, as of one

"Whose part in all the pomp that fills  
The circuit of the summer hills  
Is--that his grave is green."

Bryant is, par excellence, the poet of New England wild flowers, the yellow violet, the fringed gentian--to each of which he dedicated an entire poem--the orchis and the golden rod, "the aster in the wood and the yellow sunflower by the brook." With these his name will be associated as Wordsworth's with the daffodil and the lesser celandine, and Emerson's with the rhodora.

Except when writing of nature he was apt to be commonplace, and there are not many such energetic lines in his purely reflective verse as these famous ones from the *Battle Field*:

"Truth crushed to earth shall rise again;  
The eternal years of God are hers;  
But Error, wounded, writhes in pain,  
And dies among his worshippers."

He added but slowly to the number of his poems, publishing a new collection in 1840, another in 1844, and *Thirty Poems* in 1864. His work at all ages was remarkably even. *Thanatopsis* was as mature as any thing that he wrote afterward, and among his later pieces, the *Planting of the Apple Tree* and the *Flood of Years* were as fresh as any thing that he had written in the first flush of youth. Bryant's poetic style was always pure and correct, without any tincture of affectation or extravagance. His prose writings are not important, consisting mainly of papers of the *Salmagundi* variety contributed to the *Talisman*, an annual published in 1827-30; some rather sketchy stories, *Tales of the Glauber Spa*, 1832; and impressions of Europe, entitled, *Letters of a Traveler*, issued in two series, in 1849 and 1858. In 1869 and 1871 appeared his blank-verse translations of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, a remarkable achievement for a man of his age, and not excelled, upon the whole, by any recent metrical version of Homer in the English tongue. Bryant's half century of service as the editor of a daily paper should not be overlooked. The *Evening Post*, under his management, was always honest, gentlemanly, and courageous, and did much to raise the tone of journalism in New York. Another Massachusetts poet, who was outside the Boston coterie, like Bryant, and, like him, tried his hand at journalism, was John Greenleaf Whittier (1807- ). He was born in a solitary farmhouse near Haverhill, in the valley of the Merrimack, and his life has been passed mostly at his native place and at the neighboring town of Amesbury. The local color, which is very pronounced in his poetry, is that of the Merrimack from the vicinity of Haverhill to its mouth at Newburyport, a region of hillside farms, opening out below into wide marshes--"the low, green prairies of the sea," and the beaches of Hampton and Salisbury. The scenery of the Merrimack is familiar to all readers of Whittier: the cotton-spinning towns along its banks, with their factories and dams, the sloping pastures and orchards of the back country, the sands of Plum Island and the level reaches of water meadow between which glide the broad-sailed "gundalows"--a local corruption of gondola--laden with hay. Whittier was a farmer lad, and had only such education as the district school could supply, supplemented by two years at the Haverhill Academy. In his *School Days* he gives a picture of the little old country school-house as it used to be, the only alma mater of so many distinguished Americans, and to which many others who have afterward trodden the pavements of great universities look back so fondly as to their first wicket gate into the land of knowledge.

"Still sits the school-house by the road,  
A ragged beggar sunning;  
Around it still the sumachs grow  
And blackberry vines are running.

"Within, the master's desk is seen,  
Deep-scarred by raps official;  
The warping floor, the battered seats,  
The jack-knife's carved initial."

A copy of Burns awoke the slumbering instinct in the young poet, and he began to contribute verses to Garrison's *Free Press*, published at Newburyport, and to the *Haverhill Gazette*. Then he went to Boston, and became editor for a short time of the *Manufacturer*. Next he edited the *Essex Gazette*, at Haverhill, and in 1830 he took charge of George D. Prentice's paper, the *New England Weekly Review*, at Hartford, Conn. Here he fell in with a young Connecticut poet of much promise, J. G. C. Brainard, editor of the *Connecticut Mirror*, whose "Remains" Whittier edited in 1832. At Hartford, too, he published his first book, a volume of prose and verse, entitled *Legends of New England*, 1831, which is not otherwise remarkable than as showing his early interest in Indian colonial traditions—especially those which had a touch of the supernatural--a mine which he afterward worked to good purpose in the *Bridal of Pennacook*, the *Witch's Daughter*, and similar poems. Some of the *Legends* testify to Brainard's influence and to the influence of Whittier's temporary residence at Hartford. One of the prose pieces, for example, deals with the famous "Moodus Noises" at Haddam, on the Connecticut River, and one of the poems is the same in subject with Brainard's *Black Fox of Salmon River*. After a year and a half at Hartford, Whittier returned to Haverhill and to farming.

The antislavery agitation was now beginning, and into this he threw himself with all the ardor of his nature. He became the poet of the reform as Garrison was its apostle, and Sumner and Phillips its speakers. In 1833 he published *Justice and Expediency*, a prose tract against slavery, and in the same year he took part in the formation of the American Antislavery Society at Philadelphia, sitting in the convention as a delegate of the

Boston Abolitionists. Whittier was a Quaker, and that denomination, influenced by the preaching of John Woolman and others, had long since quietly abolished slavery within its own communion. The Quakers of Philadelphia and elsewhere took an earnest though peaceful part in the Garrisonian movement. But it was a strange irony of fate that had made the fiery-hearted Whittier a Friend. His poems against slavery and disunion have the martial ring of a Tyrtæus or a Körner, added to the stern religious zeal of Cromwell's Ironsides. They are like the sound of the trumpet blown before the walls of Jericho, or the Psalms of David denouncing woe upon the enemies of God's chosen people. If there is any purely Puritan strain in American poetry it is in the war-hymns of the Quaker "Hermit of Amesbury." Of these patriotic poems there were three principal collections: *Voices of Freedom*, 1849; *the Panorama and Other Poems*, 1856; and *In War Time*, 1863; Whittier's work as the poet of freedom was done when, on hearing the bells ring for the passage of the constitutional amendment abolishing slavery, he wrote his splendid *Laus Deo*, thrilling with the ancient Hebrew spirit:

"Loud and long  
Lift the old exulting song,  
Sing with Miriam by the sea--  
He has cast the mighty down,  
Horse and rider sink and drown,  
He hath triumphed gloriously."

Of his poems distinctly relating to the events of the civil war, the best, or at all events the most popular, is *Barbara Frietchie*. *Ichabod*, expressing the indignation of the Free Soilers at Daniel Webster's seventh of March speech in defense of the Fugitive Slave Law, is one of Whittier's best political poems, and not altogether unworthy of comparison with Browning's *Lost Leader*. The language of Whittier's warlike lyrics is biblical, and many of his purely devotional pieces are religious poetry of a high order and have been included in numerous collections of hymns. Of his songs of faith and doubt, the best are perhaps *Our Master*, *Chapel of the Hermits*, and *Eternal Goodness*; one stanza from the last of which is familiar:

"I know not where His islands lift  
Their fronded palms in air,  
I only know I cannot drift  
Beyond His love and care."

But from politics and war Whittier turned gladly to sing the homely life of the New England country side. His rural ballads and idyls are as genuinely American as any thing that our poets have written, and have been recommended, as such, to English working-men by Whittier's co-religionist, John Bright. The most popular of these is probably *Maud Muller*, whose closing couplet has passed into proverb. *Skipper Ireson's Ride* is also very current. Better than either of them, as poetry, is *Telling the Bees*. But Whittier's masterpiece in work of a descriptive and reminiscent kind is *Snow Bound*, 1866, a New England fireside idyl which in its truthfulness recalls the *Winter Evening of Cowper's Task* and *Burns's Cotter's Saturday Night*, but in sweetness and animation is superior to either of them. Although in {523} some things a Puritan of the Puritans, Whittier has never forgotten that he is also a Friend, and several of his ballads and songs have been upon the subject of the early Quaker persecutions in Massachusetts. The most impressive of these is *Cassandra Southwick*. The latest of them, the *King's Missive*, originally contributed to the *Memorial History of Boston* in 1880, and reprinted the next year in a volume with other poems, has been the occasion of a rather lively controversy. *The Bridal of Pennacook*, 1848, and *the Tent on the Beach*, 1867, which contain some of his best work, were series of ballads told by different narrators, after the fashion of *Longfellow's Tales of a Wayside Inn*. As an artist in verse Whittier is strong and fervid, rather than delicate or rich. He uses only a few metrical forms--by preference the eight-syllabled rhyming couplet--"*Maud Muller on a summer's day Raked the meadow sweet with hay*," etc.-- and the emphatic tramp of this measure becomes very monotonous, as do some of Whittier's mannerisms; which proceed, however, never from affectation, but from a lack of study and variety, and so, no doubt, in part from the want of that academic culture and thorough technical equipment which Lowell and Longfellow enjoyed. Though his poems are not in dialect, like Lowell's *Biglow Papers*, he knows how to make an artistic use of homely provincial words, such as "chore," {524} which give his idyls of the hearth and the barnyard a genuine Doric cast. Whittier's prose is inferior to his verse. The fluency which was a besetting sin of his poetry when released from the fetters of rhyme and meter ran into wordiness. His prose writings were partly

contributions to the slavery controversy, partly biographical sketches of English and American reformers, and partly studies of the scenery and folk-lore of the Merrimack Valley. Those of most literary interest were the *Supernaturalism of New England*, 1847, and some of the papers in *Literary Recreations and Miscellanies*, 1854. While Massachusetts was creating an American literature, other sections of the Union were by no means idle. The West, indeed, was as yet too raw to add any thing of importance to the artistic product of the country. The South was hampered by circumstances which will presently be described. But in and about the seaboard cities of New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore and Richmond, many pens were busy filling the columns of literary weeklies and monthlies; and there was a considerable output, such as it was, of books of poetry, fiction, travel, and miscellaneous light literature. Time has already relegated most of these to the dusty top-shelves. To rehearse the names of the numerous contributors to the old *Knickerbocker Magazine*, to *Godey's*, and *Graham's*, and the *New Mirror*, and the *Southern Literary Messenger*, or to run over the list of authorlings and poetasters in Poe's papers on {525} the *Literati of New York*, would be very much like reading the inscriptions on the head-stones of an old grave-yard. In the columns of these prehistoric magazines and in the book notices and reviews away back in the thirties and forties, one encounters the handiwork and the names of Emerson, Holmes, Longfellow, Hawthorne, and Lowell, embodied in this mass of forgotten literature. It would have required a good deal of critical acumen, at the time, to predict that these and a few others would soon be thrown out into bold relief, as the significant and permanent names in the literature of their generation, while Paulding, Hirst, Fay, Dawes, Mrs. Osgood, and scores of others who figured beside them in the fashionable periodicals, and filled quite as large a space in the public eye, would sink into oblivion in less than thirty years. Some of these latter were clever enough people; they entertained their contemporary public sufficiently, but their work had no vitality or "power of continuance." The great majority of the writings of any period are necessarily ephemeral, and time by a slow process of natural selection is constantly sifting out the few representative books which shall carry on the memory of the period to posterity. Now and then it may be predicted of some undoubted work of genius, even at the moment that it sees the light, that it is destined to endure. But tastes and fashions change, and few things are better calculated to inspire the literary critic with humility than to read {526} the prophecies in old reviews and see how the future, now become the present, has quietly given them the lie. From among the professional *littérateurs* of his day emerges, with ever sharper distinctness as time goes on, the name of Edgar Allan Poe (1809-1849). By the irony of fate Poe was born at Boston, and his first volume, *Tamerlane and Other Poems*, 1827, was printed in that city and bore upon its title page the words, "By a Bostonian." But his parentage, so far as it was any thing, was southern. His father was a Marylander who had gone upon the stage and married an actress, herself the daughter of an actress and a native of England. Left an orphan by the early death of both parents, Poe was adopted by a Mr. Allan, a wealthy merchant of Richmond, Va. He was educated partly at an English school, was student for a time in the University of Virginia and afterward a cadet in the Military Academy at West Point. His youth was wild and irregular: he gambled and drank, was proud, bitter and perverse; finally quarreled with his guardian and adopted father--by whom he was disowned--and then betook himself to the life of a literary hack. His brilliant but underpaid work for various periodicals soon brought him into notice, and he was given the editorship of the *Southern Literary Messenger*, published at Richmond, and subsequently of the *Gentlemen's--afterward Graham's--Magazine* in Philadelphia. These and all other positions Poe forfeited through his {527} dissipated habits and wayward temper, and finally, in 1844, he drifted to New York, where he found employment on the *Evening Mirror* and then on the *Broadway Journal*. He died of delirium tremens at the Marine Hospital in Baltimore. His life was one of the most wretched in literary history. He was an extreme instance of what used to be called the "eccentricity of genius." He had the irritable vanity which is popularly supposed to accompany the poetic temperament, and was so insanely egotistic as to imagine that Longfellow and others were constantly plagiarizing from him. The best side of Poe's character came out in his domestic relations, in which he displayed great tenderness, patience and fidelity. His instincts were gentlemanly, and his manner and conversation were often winning. In the place of moral feeling he had the artistic conscience. In his critical papers, except where warped by passion or prejudice, he showed neither fear nor favor, denouncing bad work by the most illustrious hands and commending obscure merit. The "impudent literary cliques" who puffed each other's books; the feeble chirrupings of the bardlings who manufactured verses for the "Annuals;" and the twaddle of the "genial" incapables who praised them in flabby reviews--all these Poe exposed with ferocious honesty. Nor, though his writings are unmoral, can they be called in any sense immoral. His poetry is as pure in its unearthliness as Bryant's in its austerity. {528} By 1831 Poe had published three thin books of verse, none of which had attracted notice, although the latest contained the drafts of a few of his most perfect poems, such as *Israfel*,

the Valley of Unrest, the City in the Sea, and one of the two pieces inscribed To Helen. It was his habit to touch and retouch his work until it grew under his more practiced hand into a shape that satisfied his fastidious taste. Hence the same poem frequently reappears in different stages of development in successive editions. Poe was a subtle artist in the realm of the weird and the fantastic. In his intellectual nature there was a strange conjunction; an imagination as spiritual as Shelley's, though, unlike Shelley's, haunted perpetually with shapes of fear and the imagery of ruin; with this, an analytic power, a scientific exactness, and a mechanical ingenuity more usual in a chemist or a mathematician than in a poet. He studied carefully the mechanism of his verse and experimented endlessly with verbal and musical effects, such as repetition, and monotone, and the selection of words in which the consonants alliterated and the vowels varied. In his Philosophy of Composition he described how his best known poem, the Raven, was systematically built up on a preconceived plan in which the number of lines was first determined and the word "nevermore" selected as a starting point. No one who knows the mood in which poetry is composed will believe that this ingenious piece of dissection really describes the way in which the Raven was conceived and written, or that any such deliberate and self-conscious process could originate the associations from which a true poem springs. But it flattered Poe's pride of intellect to assert that his cooler reason had control not only over the execution of his poetry, but over the very well-head of thought and emotion. Some of his most successful stories, like the Gold Bug, the Mystery of Marie Roget, the Purloined Letter, and the Murders in the Rue Morgue, were applications of this analytic faculty to the solution of puzzles, such as the finding of buried treasure or of a lost document, or the ferreting out of a mysterious crime. After the publication of the Gold Bug he received from all parts of the country specimens of cipher writing, which he delighted to work out. Others of his tales were clever pieces of mystification, like Hans Pfaall, the story of a journey to the moon, or experiments at giving verisimilitude to wild improbabilities by the skillful introduction of scientific details, as in the Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar and Von Kempelen's Discovery. In his narratives of this kind Poe anticipated the detective novels of Gaboriau and Wilkie Collins, the scientific hoaxes of Jules Verne, and, though in a less degree, the artfully worked up likeness to fact in Edward Everett Hale's Man Without a Country, and similar fictions. While Dickens's Barnaby Rudge was publishing in parts, Poe showed his skill as a plot hunter by publishing a paper in Graham's Magazine in which the very tangled intrigue of the novel was correctly unraveled and the finale predicted in advance. In his union of imagination and analytic power Poe resembled Coleridge, who, if any one, was his teacher in poetry and criticism. Poe's verse often reminds one of Christabel and the Ancient Mariner, still oftener of Kubla Khan. Like Coleridge, too, he indulged at times in the opium habit. But in Poe the artist predominated over every thing else. He began not with sentiment or thought, but with technique, with melody and color, tricks of language, and effects of verse. It is curious to study the growth of his style in his successive volumes of poetry. At first these are metrical experiments and vague images, original, and with a fascinating suggestiveness, but with so little meaning that some of his earlier pieces are hardly removed from nonsense. Gradually, like distant music drawing nearer and nearer, his poetry becomes fuller of imagination and of an inward significance, without ever losing, however, its mysterious aloofness from the real world of the senses. It was a part of Poe's literary creed--formed upon his own practice and his own limitations, but set forth with a great display of a priori reasoning in his essay on the Poetic Principle and elsewhere--that pleasure and not instruction or moral exhortation was the end of poetry; that beauty and not truth or goodness was its means; and, furthermore, that the pleasure which it gave should be indefinite. About his own poetry there was always this indefiniteness. His imagination dwelt in a strange country of dream--a "ghoul-haunted region of Weir," "out of space, out of time"--filled with unsubstantial landscapes, and peopled by spectral shapes. And yet there is a wonderful, hidden significance in this uncanny scenery. The reader feels that the wild, fantasmal imagery is in itself a kind of language, and that it in some way expresses a brooding thought or passion, the terror and despair of a lost soul. Sometimes there is an obvious allegory, as in the Haunted Palace, which is the parable of a ruined mind, or in the Raven, the most popular of all Poe's poems, originally published in the American Whig Review for February, 1845. Sometimes the meaning is more obscure, as in Ulalume, which, to most people, is quite incomprehensible, and yet to all readers of poetic feeling is among the most characteristic, and, therefore, the most fascinating, of its author's creations. Now and then, as in the beautiful ballad, Annabel Lee, and To One in Paradise, the poet emerges into the light of common human feeling and speaks a more intelligible language. But in general his poetry is not the poetry of the heart, and its passion is not the passion of flesh and blood. In Poe the thought of death is always near, and of the shadowy borderland between death and life. "The play is the tragedy 'Man,' And its hero the Conqueror Worm," The prose tale, Ligeia, in which these verses are inserted, is one of the most powerful of all Poe's writings, and its theme is the power of the will to overcome death. In that



singularly impressive poem, the Sleeper, the morbid horror which invests the tomb springs from the same source, the materiality of Poe's imagination, which refuses to let the soul go free from the body. This quality explains why Poe's Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque, 1840, are on a lower plane than Hawthorne's romances, to which a few of them, like William Wilson and the Man of the Crowd, have some resemblance. The former of these, in particular, is in Hawthorne's peculiar province, the allegory of the conscience. But in general the tragedy in Hawthorne is a spiritual one, while Poe calls in the aid of material forces. The passion of physical fear or of superstitious horror is that which his writings most frequently excite. These tales represent various grades of the frightful and the ghastly, from the mere bug-a-boo story like the Black Cat, which makes children afraid to go in the dark, up to the breathless terror of the Cask of Amontillado, or the Red Death. Poe's masterpiece in this kind is the fateful tale of the Fall of the House of Usher, with its solemn and magnificent close. His prose, at its best, often recalls, in its richly imaginative cast, the manner of De Quincey in such passages as his Dream Fugue, or Our Ladies of Sorrow. In descriptive pieces like the Domain of Arnheim, and stories of adventure like the Descent into the Maelstrom, and his long sea tale, The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym, 1838, he displayed a realistic inventiveness almost equal to Swift's or De Foe's. He was not without a mocking irony, but he had no constructive humor, and his attempts at the facetious were mostly failures. Poe's magical creations were rootless flowers. He took no hold upon the life about him, and cared nothing for the public concerns of his country. His poems and tales might have been written in vacuo for any thing American in them. Perhaps for this reason, in part, his fame has been so cosmopolitan. In France especially his writings have been favorites. Charles Baudelaire, the author of the *Fleurs du Mal*, translated them into French, and his own impressive but unhealthy poetry shows evidence of Poe's influence. The defect in Poe was in character, a defect which will make itself felt in art as in life. If he had had the sweet home feeling of Longfellow or the moral fervor of Whittier he might have been a greater poet than either.

"If I could dwell  
Where Israfil  
Hath dwelt, and he where I,  
He might not sing so wildly well  
A mortal melody,  
While a bolder note than this might swell  
From my lyre within the sky!"

Though Poe was a southerner, if not by birth, at least by race and breeding, there was nothing distinctly southern about his peculiar genius, and in his wandering life he was associated as much with Philadelphia and New York as with Baltimore and Richmond. The conditions which had made the southern colonies unfruitful in literary and educational works before the Revolution continued to act down to the time of the civil war. Eli Whitney's invention of the cotton gin in the closing years of the last century gave extension to slavery, making it profitable to cultivate the new staple by enormous gangs of field hands working under the whip of the overseer in large plantations. Slavery became henceforth a business speculation in the States furthest south, and not, as in Old Virginia and Kentucky, a comparatively mild domestic system. The necessity of defending its peculiar institution against the attacks of a growing faction in the North compelled the South to throw all its intellectual strength into politics, which, for that matter, is the natural occupation and excitement of a social aristocracy. Meanwhile immigration sought the free States, and there was no middle class at the South. The "poor whites" were ignorant and degraded. There were people of education in the cities and on some of the plantations, but there was no great educated class from which a literature could proceed. And the culture of the South, such as it was, was becoming old-fashioned and local, as the section was isolated more and more from the rest of the Union and from the enlightened public opinion of Europe by its reactionary prejudices and its sensitiveness on the subject of slavery. Nothing can be imagined more ridiculously provincial than the sophomorical editorials in the southern press just before the outbreak of the war, or than the backward and ill-informed articles which passed for reviews in the poorly supported periodicals of the South. In the general dearth of work of high and permanent value, one or two southern authors may be mentioned whose writings have at least done something to illustrate the life and scenery of their section. When in 1833 the Baltimore Saturday Visitor offered a prize of a hundred dollars for the best prose tale, one of the committee who awarded the prize to Poe's first story, the *MS. Found in a Bottle*, was John P. Kennedy, a Whig gentleman of Baltimore, who afterward became Secretary of the Navy in Fillmore's administration. The year before he had published *Swallow Barn*, a series of

agreeable sketches of country life in Virginia. In 1835 and 1838 he published his two novels, *Horse-Shoe Robinson* and *Rob of the Bowl*, the former a story of the Revolutionary War in South Carolina; the latter an historical tale of colonial Maryland. These had sufficient success to warrant reprinting as late as 1852. But the most popular and voluminous of all Southern writers of fiction was William Gilmore Simms, a South Carolinian, who died in 1870. He wrote over thirty novels, mostly romances of Revolutionary history, southern life and wild adventure, among the best of which were the *Partisan*, 1835, and the *Yemassee*. Simms was an inferior Cooper, with a difference. His novels are good boys' books, but are crude and hasty in composition. He was strongly southern in his sympathies, though his newspaper, the *Charleston City Gazette*, took part against the Nullifiers. His miscellaneous writings include several histories and biographies, political tracts, addresses and critical papers contributed to southern magazines. He also wrote numerous poems, the most ambitious of which was *Atlantis, a Story of the Sea*, 1832. His poems have little value except as here and there illustrating local scenery and manners, as in *Southern Passages and Pictures*, 1839. Mr. John Esten Cooke's pleasant but not very strong *Virginia Comedians* was, perhaps, in literary quality the best southern novel produced before the civil war. When Poe came to New York, the most conspicuous literary figure of the metropolis, with the possible exception of Bryant and Halleck, was N. P. Willis, one of the editors of the *Evening Mirror*, upon which journal Poe was for a time engaged. Willis had made a literary reputation, when a student at Yale, by his *Scripture Poems*, written in smooth blank verse. Afterward he had edited the *American Monthly* in his native city of Boston, and more recently he had published *Pencillings by the Way*, 1835, a pleasant record of European saunterings; *Inklings of Adventure*, 1836, a collection of dashing stories and sketches of American and foreign life; and *Letters from Under a Bridge*, 1839, a series of charming rural letters from his country place at Owego, on the Susquehanna. Willis's work, always graceful and sparkling, sometimes even brilliant, though light in substance and jaunty in style, had quickly raised him to the summit of popularity. During the years from 1835 to 1850 he was the most successful American magazinist, and even down to the day of his death, in 1867, he retained his hold upon the attention of the fashionable public by his easy paragraphing and correspondence in the *Mirror* and its successor, the *Home Journal*, which catered to the literary wants of the beau monde. Much of Willis's work was ephemeral, though clever of its kind, but a few of his best tales and sketches, such as *F. Smith*, *The Ghost Ball at Congress Hall*, *Edith Linsey*, and the *Lunatic's Skate*, together with some of the *Letters from Under a Bridge*, are worthy of preservation, not only as readable stories, but as society studies of life at American watering places like Nahant and Saratoga and Ballston Spa half a century ago. A number of his simpler poems, like *Unseen Spirits*, *Spring*, *To M--- from Abroad*, and *Lines on Leaving Europe*, still retain a deserved place in collections and anthologies. The senior editor of the *Mirror*, George P. Morris, was once a very popular song writer, and {538} his *Woodman*, *Spare that Tree*, still survives. Other residents of New York City who have written single famous pieces were Clement C. Moore, a professor in the General Theological Seminary, whose *Visit from St. Nicholas*--"*'Twas the Night Before Christmas*," etc.--is a favorite ballad in every nursery in the land; Charles Fenno Hoffman, a novelist of reputation in his time, but now remembered only as the author of the song, *Sparkling and Bright*, and the patriotic ballad of *Monterey*; Robert H. Messinger, a native of Boston, but long resident in New York, where he was a familiar figure in fashionable society, who wrote *Give Me the Old*, a fine ode with a choice Horatian flavor; and William Allen Butler, a lawyer and occasional writer, whose capital satire of *Nothing to Wear* was published anonymously and had a great run. Of younger poets, like Stoddard and Aldrich, who formerly wrote for the *Mirror* and who are still living and working in the maturity of their powers, it is not within the limits and design of this sketch to speak. But one of their contemporaries, Bayard Taylor, who died, American Minister at Berlin, in 1878, though a Pennsylvanian by birth and rearing, may be reckoned among the "literati of New York." A farmer lad from Chester County, who had learned the printer's trade and printed a little volume of his juvenile verses in 1844, he came to New York shortly after with credentials from Dr. Griswold, the editor of *Graham's*, and obtaining encouragement and aid from Willis, Horace Greeley and others, he set out to make the tour of Europe, walking from town to town in Germany and getting employment now and then at his trade to help pay the expenses of the trip. The story of these *Wanderjahre* he told in his *Views Afoot*, 1846. This was the first of eleven books of travel written during the course of his life. He was an inveterate nomad, and his journeyings carried him to the remotest regions--to California, India, China, Japan and the isles of the sea, to Central Africa and the Soudan, Palestine, Egypt, Iceland and the "by-ways of Europe." His head-quarters at home were in New York, where he did literary work for the *Tribune*. He was a rapid and incessant worker, throwing off many volumes of verse and prose, fiction, essays, sketches, translations and criticism, mainly contributed in the first instance to the magazines. His versatility was very marked, and his poetry ranged from *Rhymes of Travel*, 1848, and

Poems of the Orient, 1854, to idyls and home ballads of Pennsylvania life, like the Quaker Widow and the Old Pennsylvania Farmer, and, on the other side, to ambitious and somewhat mystical poems, like the Masque of the Gods, 1872--written in four days--and dramatic experiments like the Prophet, 1874, and Prince Deukalion, 1878. He was a man of buoyant and eager nature, with a great appetite for new experience, a remarkable memory, a talent for learning languages, and a too great readiness to take the hue of his favorite books. From his facility, his openness to external impressions of scenery and costume and his habit of turning these at once into the service of his pen, it results that there is something "newspapery" and superficial about most of his prose. It is reporter's work, though reporting of a high order. His poetry, too, though full of glow and picturesqueness, is largely imitative, suggesting Tennyson not unfrequently, but more often Shelley. His spirited Bedouin Song, for example, has an echo of Shelley's Lines to an Indian Air:

"From the desert I come to thee  
On a stallion shod with fire;  
And the winds are left behind  
In the speed of my desire.  
Under thy window I stand  
And the midnight hears my cry;  
I love thee, I love but thee  
With a love that shall not die."

The dangerous quickness with which he caught the manner of other poets made him an admirable parodist and translator. His Echo Club, 1876, contains some of the best travesties in the tongue, and his great translation of Goethe's Faust, 1870-71--with its wonderfully close reproduction of the original meters--is one of the glories of American literature. All in all, Taylor may unhesitatingly be put first among our poets of the second generation--the generation succeeding that of Longfellow and Lowell--although the lack in him of original genius self-determined to a peculiar sphere, or the want of an inward fixity and concentration to resist the rich tumult of outward impressions, has made him less significant in the history of our literary thought than some other writers less generously endowed. Taylor's novels had the qualities of his verse. They were profuse, eloquent and faulty. John Godfrey's Fortune, 1864, gave a picture of bohemian life in New York. Hannah Thurston, 1863, and the Story of Kennett, 1866, introduced many incidents and persons from the old Quaker life of rural Pennsylvania, as Taylor remembered it in his boyhood. The former was like Hawthorne's Blithedale Romance, a satire on fanatics and reformers, and its heroine is a nobly conceived character, though drawn with some exaggeration. The Story of Kennett, which is largely autobiographic, has a greater freshness and reality than the others and is full of personal recollections. In these novels, as in his short stories, Taylor's pictorial skill is greater on the whole than his power of creating characters or inventing plots. Literature in the West now began to have an existence. Another young poet from Chester County, Pa., namely, Thomas Buchanan Read, went to Cincinnati, and not to New York, to study sculpture and painting, about 1837, and one of his best-known poems, Pons Maximus, was written on the occasion of the opening of the suspension bridge across the Ohio. Read came East, to be sure, in 1841, and spent many years in our seaboard cities and in Italy. He was distinctly a minor poet, but some of his Pennsylvania pastorals, like the Deserted Road, have a natural sweetness; and his luxurious Drifting, which combines the methods of painting and poetry, is justly popular. Sheridan's Ride--perhaps his most current piece--is a rather forced production and has been over-praised. The two Ohio sister poets, Alice and Phoebe Cary, were attracted to New York in 1850, as soon as their literary success seemed assured. They made that city their home for the remainder of their lives. Poe praised Alice Cary's Pictures of Memory, and Phoebe's Nearer Home has become a favorite hymn. There is nothing peculiarly Western about the verse of the Cary sisters. It is the poetry of sentiment, memory, and domestic affection, entirely feminine, rather tame and diffuse as a whole, but tender and sweet, cherished by many good women and dear to simple hearts. A stronger smack of the soil is in the negro melodies like Uncle Ned, O Susanna, Old Folks at Home, Way Down South, Nelly was a Lady, My Old Kentucky Home, etc., which were the work not of any southern poet, but of Stephen C. Foster, a native of Allegheny, Pa., and a resident of Cincinnati and Pittsburg. He composed the words and music of these, and many others of a similar kind, during the years 1847 to 1861. Taken together they form the most original and vital addition which this country has made to the psalmody of the world, and entitle Foster to the first rank among American song writers. As Foster's plaintive melodies carried the pathos and humor of the plantation all over the land, so

Mrs. Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, 1852, brought home to millions of readers the sufferings of the negroes in the "black belt" of the cotton-growing States. This is the most popular novel ever written in America. Hundreds of thousands of copies were sold in this country and in England, and some forty translations were made into foreign tongues. In its dramatized form it still keeps the stage, and the statistics of circulating libraries show that even now it is in greater demand than any other single book. It did more than any other literary agency to rouse the public conscience to a sense of the shame and horror of slavery; more even than Garrison's *Liberator*; more than the indignant poems of Whittier and Lowell or the orations of Sumner and Phillips. It presented the thing concretely and dramatically, and in particular it made the odious Fugitive Slave Law forever impossible to enforce. It was useless for the defenders of slavery to protest that the picture was exaggerated and that overseers like Legree were the exception. The system under which such brutalities could happen, and did sometimes happen, was doomed. It is easy now to point out defects of taste and art in this masterpiece, to show that the tone is occasionally melodramatic, that some of the characters are conventional, and that the literary execution is in parts feeble and in others coarse. In spite of all it remains true that *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is a great book, the work of genius seizing instinctively upon its opportunity and uttering the thought of the time with a power that thrilled the heart of the nation and of the world. Mrs. Stowe never repeated her first success. Some of her novels of New England life, such as the *Minister's Wooing*, 1859, and the *Pearl of Orr's Island*, 1862, have a mild kind of interest, and contain truthful portraiture of provincial ways and traits; while later fictions of a domestic type, like *Pink and White Tyranny*, and *My Wife and I*, are really beneath criticism. There were other Connecticut writers contemporary with Mrs. Stowe: Mrs. L. H. Sigourney, for example, a Hartford poetess, formerly known as "the Hemans of America," but now quite obsolete; and J. G. Percival of New Haven, a shy and eccentric scholar, whose geological work was of value, and whose memory is preserved by one or two of his simpler poems, still in circulation, such as *To Seneca Lake* and *the Coral Grove*. Another Hartford poet, Brainard--already spoken of as an early friend of Whittier--died young, leaving a few pieces which show that his lyrical gift was spontaneous and genuine but had received little cultivation. A much younger writer than either of these, Donald G. Mitchell, of New Haven, has a more lasting place in our literature, by virtue of his charmingly written *Reveries of a Bachelor*, 1850, and *Dream Life*, 1852, stories which sketch themselves out in a series of reminiscences and lightly connected scenes, and which always appeal freshly to young men because they have that dreamy outlook upon life which is characteristic of youth. But, upon the whole, the most important contribution made by Connecticut in that generation to the literary stock of America was the Beecher family. Lyman Beecher had been an influential preacher and theologian, and a sturdy defender of orthodoxy against Boston Unitarianism. Of his numerous sons and daughters, all more or less noted for intellectual vigor and independence, the most eminent were Mrs. Stowe and Henry Ward Beecher, the great pulpit orator of Brooklyn. Mr. Beecher was too busy a man to give more than his spare moments to general literature. His sermons, lectures, and addresses were reported for the daily papers and printed in part in book form; but these lose greatly when divorced from the large, warm, and benignant personality of the man. His volumes made up of articles in the *Independent* and the *Ledger*, such as *Star Papers*, 1855, and *Eyes and Ears*, 1862, contain many delightful morceaux upon country life and similar topics, though they are hardly wrought with sufficient closeness and care to take a permanent place in letters. Like Willis's *Ephemeræ*, they are excellent literary journalism, but hardly literature. We may close our retrospect of American literature before 1861 with a brief notice of one of the most striking literary phenomena of the time--the *Leaves of Grass* of Walt Whitman, published at Brooklyn in 1855. The author, born at West Hills, Long Island, in 1819, had been printer, school-teacher, editor, and builder. He had scribbled a good deal of poetry of the ordinary kind, which attracted little attention, but finding conventional rhymes and meters too cramping a vehicle for his need of expression, he discarded them for a kind of rhythmic chant, of which the following is a fair specimen: "Press close, bare bosom'd night! Press close, magnetic,

nourishing night!  
 Night of south winds! night of the few large stars!  
 Still, nodding night! mad, naked, summer night!"

The invention was not altogether a new one. The English translation of the Psalms of David and of some of the Prophets, the Poems of Ossian, and some of Matthew Arnold's unrhymed pieces, especially the *Strayed Reveller*, have an irregular rhythm of this kind, to say nothing of the old Anglo-Saxon poems, like *Beowulf*, and the Scripture paraphrases attributed to Caedmon. But this species of *oratio soluta*, carried to

the lengths to which Whitman carried it, had an air of novelty which was displeasing to some, while to others, weary of familiar measures and jingling rhymes, it was refreshing in its boldness and freedom. There is no consenting estimate of this poet. Many think that his so-called poems are not poems at all, but simply a bad variety of prose; that there is nothing to him beyond a combination of affectation and indecency; and that the Whitman culte is a passing "fad" of a few literary men, and especially of a number of English critics like Rossetti, Swinburne, Buchanan, etc., who, being determined to have something unmistakably American--that is, different from any thing else--in writings from this side of the water before they will acknowledge any originality in them, have been misled into discovering in Whitman "the poet of Democracy." Others maintain that he is the greatest of American poets, or, indeed, of all modern poets; that he is "cosmic," or universal, and that he has put an end forever to puling rhymes and lines chopped up into metrical feet. Whether Whitman's poetry is formally poetry at all or merely the raw material of poetry, the chaotic and amorphous impression which it makes on readers of conservative tastes results from his effort to take up into his verse elements which poetry has usually left out--the ugly, the earthy, and even the disgusting; the "under side of things," which he holds not to be prosaic when apprehended with a strong, masculine joy in life and nature seen in all their aspects. The lack of these elements in the conventional poets seems to him and his disciples like leaving out the salt from the ocean, making poetry merely pretty and blinking whole classes of facts. Hence the naturalism and animalism of some of the divisions in *Leaves of Grass*, particularly that entitled *Children of Adam*, which gave great offense by its immodesty, or its outspokenness. Whitman holds that nakedness is chaste; that all the functions of the body in healthy exercise are equally clean; that all, in fact, are divine; and that matter is as divine as spirit. The effort to get every thing into his poetry, to speak out his thought just as it comes to him, accounts, too, for his way of cataloguing objects without selection. His single expressions are often unsurpassed for descriptive beauty and truth. He speaks of "the vitreous pour of the full moon, just tinged with blue," of the "lisp" of the plane, of the prairies, "where herds of buffalo make a crawling spread of the square miles." But if there is any eternal distinction between poetry and prose the most liberal canons of the poetic art will never agree to accept lines like these:

"And [I] remember putting plasters on the galls of his neck  
and ankles;  
He stayed with me a week before he was recuperated, and  
passed north."

Whitman is the spokesman of Democracy and of the future; full of brotherliness and hope, loving the warm, gregarious pressure of the crowd and the touch of his comrade's elbow in the ranks. He liked the people--multitudes of people; the swarm of life beheld from a Broadway omnibus or a Brooklyn ferry-boat. The rowdy and the Negro truck-driver were closer to his sympathy than the gentleman and the scholar. "I loafe and invite my soul," he writes: "I sound my barbaric yawp over the roofs of the world." His poem *Walt Whitman, frankly egotistic*, simply describes himself as a typical, average man--the same as any other man, and therefore not individual but universal. He has great tenderness and heartiness--"the good gray poet;" and during the civil war he devoted himself unreservedly to the wounded soldiers in the Washington hospitals--an experience which he has related in the *Dresser* and elsewhere. It is characteristic of his rough and ready camaraderie to use slang and newspaper English in his poetry, to call himself Walt instead of Walter, and to have his picture taken in a slouch hat and with a flannel shirt open at the throat. His decriers allege that he poses for effect; that he is simply a backward eddy in the tide, and significant only as a temporary reaction against ultra civilization--like Thoreau, though in a different way. But with all his mistakes in art there is a healthy, virile, tumultuous pulse of life in his lyric utterance and a great sweep of imagination in his panoramic view of times and countries. One likes to read him because he feels so good, enjoys so fully the play of his senses, and has such a lusty confidence in his own immortality and in the prospects of the human race. Stripped of verbiage and repetition, his ideas are not many. His indebtedness to Emerson--who wrote an introduction to the *Leaves of Grass*--is manifest. He sings of man and not men, and the individual differences of character, sentiment, and passion, the dramatic elements of life, find small place in his system. It is too early to say what will be his final position in literary history. But it is noteworthy that the democratic masses have not accepted him yet as their poet. Whittier and Longfellow, the poets of conscience and feeling, are the darlings of the American people. The admiration, and even the knowledge of Whitman, are mostly esoteric, confined to the literary class. It is also not without significance as to the ultimate reception of his innovations in verse that he has numerous parodists, but no imitators. The

tendency among our younger poets is not toward the abandonment of rhyme and meter, but toward the introduction of new stanza forms and an increasing carefulness and finish in the technique of their art. It is observable, too, that in his most inspired passages Whitman reverts to the old forms of verse; to blank verse, for example, in the Man-o'-War-Bird:

"Thou who hast slept all night upon the storm,  
Waking renewed on thy prodigious pinions," etc.,

and elsewhere not infrequently to dactylic hexameters and pentameters:

"Earth of shine and dark, mottling the tide of the river! . . .  
Far-swooping, elbowed earth! rich, apple-blossomed earth."

Indeed, Whitman's most popular poem, *My Captain*, written after the assassination of Abraham Lincoln, differs little in form from ordinary verse, as a stanza of it will show:

"My captain does not answer, his lips are pale and still;  
My father does not feel my arm, he has no pulse nor will;  
The ship is anchored safe and sound, its voyage closed and done;  
From fearful trip the victor ship comes in with object won.  
Exult, O shores, and ring, O bells!  
But I, with mournful tread,  
Walk the deck, my captain lies  
Fallen, cold and dead."

This is from *Drum Taps*, a volume of poems of the civil war. Whitman has also written prose having much the same quality as his poetry: *Democratic Vistas*, *Memoranda of the Civil War*, and more recently, *Specimen Days*. His residence of late years has been at Camden, New Jersey, where a centennial edition of his writings was published in 1876.

## CHAPTER VII.

### LITERATURE SINCE 1861.

A generation has nearly passed since the outbreak of the civil war, and although public affairs are still mainly in the hands of men who had reached manhood before the conflict opened, or who were old enough at that time to remember clearly its stirring events, the younger men who are daily coming forward to take their places know it only by tradition. It makes a definite break in the history of our literature, and a number of new literary schools and tendencies have appeared since its close. As to the literature of the war itself, it was largely the work of writers who had already reached or passed middle age. All of the more important authors described in the last three chapters survived the Rebellion, except Poe, who died in 1849, Prescott, who died in 1859, and Thoreau and Hawthorne, who died in the second and fourth years of the war, respectively. The final and authoritative history of the struggle has not yet been written, and cannot be written for many years to come. Many partial and tentative accounts have, however, appeared, among which may be mentioned, on the northern side, Horace Greeley's *American Conflict*, 1864-66; Vice-president Wilson's *Rise and Fall of the Slave Power in America*, and J. W. Draper's *American Civil War*, 1868-70; on the southern side Alexander H. Stephens's *Confederate States of America*, Jefferson Davis's *Rise and Fall of the Confederate States of America*, and E. A. Pollard's *Lost Cause*. These, with the exception of Dr. Draper's philosophical narrative, have the advantage of being the work of actors in the political or military events which they describe, and the disadvantage of being, therefore, partisan--in some instances passionately partisan. A storehouse of materials for the coming historian is also at hand in Frank Moore's great collection, the *Rebellion Record*; in numerous regimental histories and histories of special armies, departments, and battles, like W. Swinton's *Army of the Potomac*; in the autobiographies and recollections of Grant and Sherman and other military leaders; in the "war papers," now publishing in the *Century* magazine, and in innumerable sketches and reminiscences by officers and privates on both sides.

The war had its poetry, its humors and its general literature, some of which have been mentioned in connection with Whittier, Lowell, Holmes, Whitman, and others; and some of which remain to be mentioned, as the work of new writers, or of writers who had previously made little mark. There were war songs on both sides, few of which had much literary value excepting, perhaps, James R. Randall's southern ballad, *Maryland, My Maryland*, sung to the old college air of Lauriger Horatius, and the grand martial chorus of *John Brown's Body*, an old Methodist hymn, to which the northern armies beat time as they went "marching on." Randall's song, though spirited, was marred by its fire-eating absurdities about "vandals" and "minions" and "northern scum," the cheap insults of the southern newspaper press. To furnish the *John Brown* chorus with words worthy of the music, Mrs. Julia Ward Howe wrote her *Battle Hymn of the Republic*, a noble poem, but rather too fine and literary for a song, and so never fully accepted by the soldiers. Among the many verses which voiced the anguish and the patriotism of that stern time, which told of partings and homecomings, of women waiting by desolate hearths, in country homes, for tidings of husbands and sons who had gone to the war, or which celebrated individual deeds of heroism or sang the thousand private tragedies and heart-breaks of the great conflict, by far the greater number were of too humble a grade to survive the feeling of the hour. Among the best or the most popular of them were Kate Putnam Osgood's *Driving Home the Cows*, Mrs. Ethel Lynn Beers's *All Quiet Along the Potomac*, Forceythe Willson's *Old Sergeant*, and John James Piatt's *Riding to Vote*. Of the poets whom the war brought out, or developed, the most noteworthy were Henry Timrod, of South Carolina, and Henry Howard Brownell, of Connecticut. During the war Timrod was with the Confederate Army of the West, as correspondent for the *Charleston Mercury*, and in 1864 he became assistant editor of the *South Carolinian*, at Columbia. Sherman's "march to the sea" broke up his business, and he returned to Charleston. A complete edition of his poems was published in 1873, six years after his death. The prettiest of all Timrod's poems is *Katie*, but more to our present purpose are *Charleston*--written in the time of blockade--and the *Unknown Dead*, which tells

"Of nameless graves on battle plains,  
Wash'd by a single winter's rains,  
Where, some beneath Virginian hills,  
And some by green Atlantic rills,  
Some by the waters of the West,

A myriad unknown heroes rest."

When the war was over a poet of New York State, F. M. Finch, sang of these and of other graves in his beautiful Decoration Day lyric, *The Blue and the Gray*, which spoke the word of reconciliation and consecration for North and South alike.

Brownell, whose *Lyrics of a Day* and *War Lyrics* were published respectively in 1864 and 1866, was private secretary to Farragut, on whose flag-ship, the *Hartford*, he was present at several great naval engagements, such as the "Passage of the Forts" below New Orleans, and the action off Mobile, described in his poem, *the Bay Fight*. With some roughness and unevenness of execution, Brownell's poetry had a fire which places him next to Whittier as the Körner of the civil war. In him, especially, as in Whittier, is that Puritan sense of the righteousness of his cause which made the battle for the Union a holy war to the crusaders against slavery:

"Full red the furnace fires must glow  
That melt the ore of mortal kind:  
The mills of God are grinding slow,  
But ah, how close they grind!

"To-day the Dahlgren and the drum  
Are dread apostles of his name;  
His kingdom here can only come  
By chrisms of blood and flame."

One of the earliest martyrs of the war was Theodore Winthrop, hardly known as a writer until the publication in the *Atlantic Monthly* of his vivid sketches of Washington as a Camp, describing the march of his regiment, the famous New York Seventh, and its first quarters in the Capitol at Washington. A tragic interest was given to these papers by Winthrop's gallant death in the action of Big Bethel, June 10, 1861. While this was still fresh in public recollection his manuscript novels were published, together with a collection of his stories and sketches reprinted from the magazines. His novels, though in parts crude and immature, have a dash and buoyancy--an out-door air about them--which give the reader a winning impression of Winthrop's personality. The best of them is, perhaps, *Cecil Dreeme*, a romance that reminds one a little of Hawthorne, and the scene of which is the New York University building on Washington Square, a locality that has been further celebrated in Henry James's novel of *Washington Square*. Another member of this same Seventh Regiment, Fitz James O'Brien, an Irishman by birth, who died at Baltimore, in 1862, from the effects of a wound received in a cavalry skirmish, had contributed to the magazines a number of poems and of brilliant though fantastic tales, among which the *Diamond Lens* and *What Was It?* had something of Edgar A. Poe's quality. Another Irish-American, Charles G. Halpine, under the pen-name of "Miles O'Reilly," wrote a good many clever ballads of the war, partly serious and partly in comic brogue. Prose writers of note furnished the magazines with narratives of their experience at the seat of war, among papers of which kind may be mentioned Dr. Holmes's *My Search for the Captain*, in the *Atlantic Monthly*, and Colonel T. W. Higginson's *Army Life in a Black Regiment*, collected into a volume in 1870. Of the public oratory of the war the foremost example is the ever-memorable address of Abraham Lincoln at the dedication of the National Cemetery at Gettysburg. The war had brought the nation to its intellectual majority. In the stress of that terrible fight there was no room for buncombe and verbiage, such as the newspapers and stump-speakers used to dole out in ante bellum days. Lincoln's speech is short--a few grave words which he turned aside for a moment to speak in the midst of his task of saving the country. The speech is simple, naked of figures, every sentence impressed with a sense of responsibility for the work yet to be done and with a stern determination to do it. "In a larger sense," it says, "we cannot dedicate, we cannot consecrate, we cannot hallow this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here have consecrated it far above our poor power to add or detract. The world will little note nor long remember what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here. It is for us, the living, rather to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced. It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us; that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion; that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain: that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom;



and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth." Here was eloquence of a different sort from the sonorous perorations of Webster or the polished climaxes of Everett. As we read the plain, strong language of this brief classic, with its solemnity, its restraint, its "brave old wisdom of sincerity," we seem to see the president's homely features irradiated with the light of coming martyrdom--

"The kindly-earnest, brave, foreseeing man,  
Sagacious, patient, dreading praise, not blame,  
New birth of our new soil, the first American."

Within the past quarter of a century the popular school of American humor has reached its culmination. Every man of genius who is a humorist at all is so in a way peculiar to himself. There is no lack of individuality in the humor of Irving and Hawthorne and the wit of Holmes and Lowell, but although they are new in subject and application they are not new in kind. Irving, as we have seen, was the literary descendant of Addison. The character sketches in Bracebridge Hall are of the same family with Sir Roger de Coverley and the other figures of the Spectator Club. Knickerbocker's History of New York, though purely American in its matter, is not distinctly American in its method, which is akin to the mock heroic of Fielding and the irony of Swift in the Voyage to Lilliput. Irving's humor, like that of all the great English humorists, had its root in the perception of character--of the characteristic traits of men and classes of men, as ground of amusement. It depended for its effect, therefore, upon its truthfulness, its dramatic insight and sympathy, as did the humor of Shakspeare, of Sterne, Lamb, and Thackeray. This perception of the characteristic, when pushed to excess, issues in grotesque and caricature, as in some of Dickens's inferior creations, which are little more than personified single tricks of manner, speech, feature, or dress. Hawthorne's rare humor differed from Irving's in temper but not in substance, and belonged, like Irving's, to the English variety. Dr. Holmes's more pronouncedly comic verse does not differ specifically from the facetiae of Thomas Hood, but his prominent trait is wit, which is the laughter of the head as humor is of the heart. The same is true, with qualifications, of Lowell, whose Biglow Papers, though humor of an original sort in their revelation of Yankee character, are essentially satirical. It is the cleverness, the shrewdness of the hits in the Biglow Papers, their logical, that is, witty character, as distinguished from their drollery, that arrests the attention. They are funny, but they are not so funny as they are smart. In all these writers humor was blent with more serious qualities, which gave fineness and literary value to their humorous writings. Their view of life was not exclusively comic. But there has been a class of jesters, of professional humorists in America, whose product is so indigenous, so different, if not in essence, yet at least in form and expression, from any European humor, that it may be regarded as a unique addition to the comic literature of the world. It has been accepted as such in England, where Artemus Ward and Mark Twain are familiar to multitudes who have never read the One-Hoss-Shay or the Courtin'. And though it would be ridiculous to maintain that either of these writers takes rank with Lowell and Holmes, or to deny that there is an amount of flatness and coarseness in many of their labored fooleries which puts large portions of their writings below the line where real literature begins, still it will not do to ignore them as mere buffoons, or even to predict that their humors will soon be forgotten. It is true that no literary fashion is more subject to change than the fashion of a jest, and that jokes that make one generation laugh seem insipid to the next. But there is something perennial in the fun of Rabelais, whom Bacon called "the great jester of France;" and though the puns of Shakspeare's clowns are detestable the clowns themselves have not lost their power to amuse. The Americans are not a gay people, but they are fond of a joke. Lincoln's "little stories" were characteristically Western, and it is doubtful whether he was more endeared to the masses by his solid virtues than by the humorous perception which made him one of them. The humor of which we are speaking now is a strictly popular and national possession. Though America has never, or not until lately, had a comic paper ranking with Punch or Charivari or the Fliegende Blätter, every newspaper has had its funny column. Our humorists have been graduated from the journalist's desk and sometimes from the printing-press, and now and then a local or country newspaper has risen into sudden prosperity from the possession of a new humorist, as in the case of G. D. Prentice's Courier-Journal, or more recently of the Cleveland Plain Dealer, the Danbury News, the Burlington Hawkeye, the Arkansaw Traveller, the Texas Siftings and numerous others. Nowadays there are even syndicates of humorists, who co-operate to supply fun for certain groups of periodicals. Of course the great majority of these manufacturers of jests for newspapers and comic almanacs are doomed to swift oblivion. But it is not so certain that the best of the class, like Clemens and Browne, will not long continue to be read as illustrative of one side of the

American mind, or that their best things will not survive as long as the mots of Sydney Smith, which are still as current as ever. One of the earliest of them was Seba Smith, who, under the name of Major Jack Downing, did his best to make Jackson's administration ridiculous. B. P. Shillaber's "Mrs. Partington"--a sort of American Mrs. Malaprop--enjoyed great vogue before the war. Of a somewhat higher kind were the Phoenixiana, 1855, and Squibob Papers, 1856, of Lieutenant George H. Derby, "John Phoenix," one of the pioneers of literature on the Pacific coast at the time of the California gold fever of '49. Derby's proposal for A New System of English Grammar, his satirical account of the topographical survey of the two miles of road between San Francisco and the Mission Dolores, and his picture gallery made out of the conventional houses, steam-boats, rail-cars, runaway negroes and other designs which used to figure in the advertising columns of the newspapers, were all very ingenious and clever. But all these pale before Artemus Ward--"Artemus the delicious," as Charles Reade called him--who first secured for this peculiarly American type of humor a hearing and reception abroad. Ever since the invention of Hosea Biglow, an imaginary personage of some sort, under cover of whom the author might conceal his own identity, has seemed a necessity to our humorists. Artemus Ward was a traveling showman who went about the country exhibiting a collection of wax "figgers" and whose experiences and reflections were reported in grammar and spelling of a most ingeniously eccentric kind. His inventor was Charles F. Browne, originally of Maine, a printer by trade and afterward a newspaper writer and editor at Boston, Toledo and Cleveland, where his comicalities in the Plaindealer first began to attract notice. In 1860 he came to New York and joined the staff of Vanity Fair, a comic weekly of much brightness, which ran a short career and perished for want of capital. When Browne began to appear as a public lecturer people who had formed an idea of him from his impersonation of the shrewd and vulgar old showman were surprised to find him a gentlemanly-looking young man, who came upon the platform in correct evening dress, and "spoke his piece" in a quiet and somewhat mournful manner, stopping in apparent surprise when any one in the audience laughed at any uncommonly outrageous absurdity. In London, where he delivered his Lecture on the Mormons, in 1866, the gravity of his bearing at first imposed upon his hearers, who had come to the hall in search of instructive information and were disappointed at the inadequate nature of the panorama which Browne had had made to illustrate his lecture. Occasionally some hitch would occur in the machinery of this and the lecturer would leave the rostrum for a few moments to "work the moon" that shone upon the Great Salt Lake, apologizing on his return on the ground that he was "a man short" and offering "to pay a good salary to any respectable boy of good parentage and education who is a good moonist." When it gradually dawned upon the British intellect that these and similar devices of the lecturer--such as the soft music which he had the pianist play at pathetic passages--nay, that the panorama and even the lecture itself were of a humorous intention, the joke began to take, and Artemus's success in England became assured. He was employed as one of the editors of Punch, but died at Southampton in the year following. Some of Artemus Ward's effects were produced by cacography or bad spelling, but there was genius in the wildly erratic way in which he handled even this rather low order of humor. It is a curious commentary on the wretchedness of our English orthography that the phonetic spelling of a word, as for example, wuz for was, should be in itself an occasion of mirth. Other verbal effects of a different kind were among his devices, as in the passage where the seventeen widows of a deceased Mormon offered themselves to Artemus.

"And I said, 'Why is this thus? What is the reason of this thusness?'  
They hove a sigh--seventeen sighs of different size. They said--

"'O, soon thou will be gonested away.'

"I told them that when I got ready to leave a place I wentested.'

"They said, 'Doth not like us?'

"I said, 'I doth--I doth.'

"I also said, 'I hope your intentions are honorable, as I am a lone child--my parents being far--far away.'

"They then said, 'Wilt not marry us?'

"I said, 'O no, it cannot was.'

"When they cried, 'O cruel man! this is too much!--O! too much,' I told them that it was on account of the muchness that I declined."

It is hard to define the difference between the humor of one writer and another, or of one nation and another. It can be felt and can be illustrated by quoting examples, but scarcely described in general terms. It has been said of that class of American humorists of which Artemus Ward is a representative that their peculiarity consists in extravagance, surprise, audacity and irreverence. But all these qualities have characterized other schools of humor. There is the same element of surprise in De Quincey's {568} anticlimax, "Many a man has dated his ruin from some murder or other which, perhaps, at the time he thought little of," as in Artemus's truism that "a comic paper ought to publish a joke now and then." The violation of logic which makes us laugh at an Irish bull is likewise the source of the humor in Artemus's saying of Jeff Davis, that "it would have been better than ten dollars in his pocket if he had never been born." Or in his advice, "Always live within your income, even if you have to borrow money to do so;" or, again, in his announcement that, "Mr. Ward will pay no debts of his own contracting." A kind of ludicrous confusion, caused by an unusual collocation of words, is also one of his favorite tricks, as when he says of Brigham Young, "He's the most married man I ever saw in my life;" or when, having been drafted at several hundred different places where he had been exhibiting his wax figures, he says that if he went on he should soon become a regiment, and adds, "I never knew that there was so many of me." With this a whimsical under-statement and an affectation of simplicity, as where he expresses his willingness to sacrifice "even his wife's relations" on the altar of patriotism; or, where, in delightful unconsciousness of his own sins against orthography, he pronounces that "Chaucer was a great poet, but he couldn't spell," or where he says of the feast of raw dog, tendered him by the Indian chief, Wocky-bocky, "It don't agree with me. I prefer simple food." On the whole, it may be said of original humor of this kind, as of other forms of originality in literature, that the elements of it are old, but the combinations are novel. Other humorists, like Henry W. Shaw ("Josh Billings"), and David R. Locke, ("Petroleum V. Nasby"), have used bad spelling as a part of their machinery; while Robert H. Newell, ("Orpheus C. Kerr"), Samuel L. Clemens, ("Mark Twain"), and more recently "Bill Nye," though belonging to the same school of low or broad comedy, have discarded cacography. Of these the most eminent, by all odds, is Mark Twain, who has probably made more people laugh than any other living writer. A Missourian by birth (1835), he served the usual apprenticeship at type-setting and editing country newspapers; spent seven years as a pilot on a Mississippi steam-boat, and seven years more mining and journalizing in Nevada, where he conducted the Virginia City Enterprise, finally drifted to San Francisco, and was associated with Bret Harte on the Californian, and in 1867 published his first book, the *Jumping Frog*. This was succeeded by the *Innocents Abroad*, 1869; *Roughing It*, 1872; *A Tramp Abroad*, 1880, and by others not so good. Mark Twain's drolleries have frequently the same air of innocence and surprise as Artemus Ward's, and there is a like suddenness in his turns of expression, as where he speaks of "the calm confidence of a Christian with four aces." If he did not originate, he at any rate employed very effectively that now familiar device of the newspaper "funny man," of putting a painful situation euphemistically, as when he says of a man who was hanged that he "received injuries which terminated in his death." He uses to the full extent the American humorist's favorite resources of exaggeration and irreverence. An instance of the former quality may be seen in his famous description of a dog chasing a coyote, in *Roughing It*, or in his interview with the lightning-rod agent in Mark Twain's *Sketches*, 1875. He is a shrewd observer, and his humor has a more satirical side than Artemus Ward's, sometimes passing into downright denunciation. He delights particularly in ridiculing sentimental humbug and moralizing cant. He runs a tilt, as has been said, at "copy-book texts," at the temperance reformer, the tract distributor, the Good Boy of Sunday-school literature, and the women who send bouquets and sympathetic letters to interesting criminals. He gives a ludicrous turn to famous historical anecdotes, such as the story of George Washington and his little hatchet; burlesques the time-honored adventure, in nautical romances, of the starving crew casting lots in the long boat, and spoils the dignity of antiquity by modern trivialities, saying of a discontented sailor on Columbus's ship, "He wanted fresh shad." The fun of *Innocents Abroad* consists in this irreverent application of modern, common sense, utilitarian, democratic standards to the memorable places and historic associations of Europe. Tried by this test the Old Masters in the picture galleries become laughable. Abelard was a precious scoundrel, and the raptures of the guide books are parodied without mercy. The tourist weeps at the grave of Adam. At Genoa

he drives the cicerone to despair by pretending never to have heard of Christopher Columbus, and inquiring innocently, "Is he dead?" It is Europe vulgarized and stripped of its illusions--Europe seen by a Western newspaper reporter without any "historic imagination." The method of this whole class of humorists is the opposite of Addison's or Irving's or Thackeray's. It does not amuse by the perception of the characteristic. It is not founded upon truth, but upon incongruity, distortion, unexpectedness. Everything in life is reversed, as in opera bouffe, and turned topsy turvy, so that paradox takes the place of the natural order of things. Nevertheless they have supplied a wholesome criticism upon sentimental excesses, and the world is in their debt for many a hearty laugh. In the *Atlantic Monthly* for December, 1863, appeared a tale entitled the *Man Without a Country*, which made a great sensation, and did much to strengthen patriotic feeling in one of the darkest hours of the nation's history. It was the story of one Philip Nolan, an army officer, whose head had been turned by Aaron Burr, and who, having been censured by a court-martial for some minor offense, exclaimed, petulantly, upon mention being made of the United States Government, "Damn the United States! I wish that I might never hear the United States mentioned again." Thereupon he was sentenced to have his wish, and was kept all his life aboard the vessels of the navy, being sent off on long voyages and transferred from ship to ship, with orders to those in charge that his country and its concerns should never be spoken of in his presence. Such an air of reality, was given to the narrative by incidental references to actual persons and occurrences that many believed it true, and some were found who remembered Philip Nolan, but had heard different versions of his career. The author of this clever hoax--if hoax it may be called--was Edward Everett Hale, a Unitarian clergyman of Boston, who published a collection of stories in 1868, under the fantastic title, *If, Yes, and Perhaps*, indicating thereby that some of the tales were possible, some of them probable, and others might even be regarded as essentially true. A similar collection, *His Level Best and Other Stories* was published in 1873, and in the interval three volumes of a somewhat different kind, the *Ingham Papers and Sybaris and Other Homes*, both in 1869, and *Ten Times One Is Ten*, in 1871. The author shelters himself behind the imaginary figure of Captain Frederic Ingham, pastor of the Sandemanian Church at Naguadavick, and the same characters have a way of re-appearing in his successive volumes as old friends of the reader, which is pleasant at first, but in the end a little tiresome. Mr. Hale is one of the most original and ingenious of American story writers. The old device of making wildly improbable inventions appear like fact by a realistic treatment of details--a device employed by Swift and Edgar Poe, and more lately by Jules Verne--became quite fresh and novel in his hands, and was managed with a humor all his own. Some of his best stories are *My Double* and *How He Undid Me*, describing how a busy clergyman found an Irishman who looked so much like himself that he trained him to pass as his duplicate, and sent him to do duty in his stead at public meetings, dinners, etc., thereby escaping bores and getting time for real work; the *Brick Moon*, a story of a projectile built and launched into space, to revolve in a fixed meridian about the earth and serve mariners as a mark of longitude; the *Rag Man and Rag Woman*, a tale of an impoverished couple who made a competence by saving the pamphlets, advertisements, wedding cards, etc., that came to them through the mail, and developing a paper business on that basis; and the *Skeleton in the Closet*, which shows how the fate of the Southern Confederacy was involved in the adventures of a certain hoop-skirt, "built in the eclipse and rigged with curses dark." Mr. Hale's historical scholarship and his exact habit of mind have aided him in the art of giving vraisemblance to absurdities. He is known in philanthropy as well as in letters, and his tales have a cheerful, busy, practical way with them in consonance with his motto, "Look up and not down, look forward and not back, look out and not in, and lend a hand." It is too soon to sum up the literary history of the last quarter of a century. The writers who have given it shape are still writing, and their work is therefore incomplete. But on the slightest review of it two facts become manifest: first, that New England has lost its long monopoly; and, secondly, that a marked feature of the period is the growth of realistic fiction. The electric tension of the atmosphere for thirty years preceding the civil war, the storm and stress of great public contests, and the intellectual stir produced by transcendentalism seem to have been more favorable to poetry and literary idealism than present conditions are. At all events there are no new poets who rank with Whittier, Longfellow, Lowell, and others of the elder generation, although George H. Boker, in Philadelphia, R. H. Stoddard and E. C. Stedman, in New York, and T. B. Aldrich, first in New York and afterward in Boston, have written creditable verse; not to speak of younger writers, whose work, however, for the most part, has been more distinguished by delicacy of execution than by native impulse. Mention has been made of the establishment of *Harper's Monthly Magazine*, which, under the conduct of its accomplished editor, George W. Curtis, has provided the public with an abundance of good reading. The {575} old *Putnam's Monthly*, which ran from 1853 to 1858, and had a strong corps of contributors, was revived in 1868, and continued by that name till 1870, when it was succeeded by *Scribner's Monthly*, under the editorship of Dr. J. G.

Holland, and this in 1881 by the Century, an efficient rival of Harper's in circulation, in literary excellence, and in the beauty of its wood engraving, the American school of which art these two great periodicals have done much to develop and encourage. Another New York monthly, the Galaxy, ran from 1866 to 1878, and was edited by Richard Grant White. During the present year a new Scribner's Magazine has also taken the field. The Atlantic, in Boston, and Lippincott's, in Philadelphia, are no unworthy competitors with these for public favor. During the forties began a new era of national expansion, somewhat resembling that described in a former chapter, and, like that, bearing fruit eventually in literature. The cession of Florida to the United States in 1845, and the annexation of Texas in the same year, were followed by the purchase of California in 1847, and its admission as a State in 1850. In 1849 came the great rush to the California gold fields. San Francisco, at first a mere collection of tents and board shanties, with a few adobe huts, grew with incredible rapidity into a great city; the wicked and wonderful city apostrophized by Bret Harte in his poem, San Francisco:

"Serene, indifferent of Fate,  
Thou sittest at the Western Gate;  
Upon thy heights so lately won  
Still slant the banners of the sun. . . .  
I know thy cunning and thy greed,  
Thy hard, high lust and willful deed."

The adventurers of all lands and races who flocked to the Pacific coast found there a motley state of society between civilization and savagery. There were the relics of the old Mexican occupation, the Spanish missions, with their Christianized Indians; the wild tribes of the plains--Apaches, Utes, and Navajoes; the Chinese coolies and washermen, all elements strange to the Atlantic seaboard and the States of the interior. The gold-hunters crossed, in stages or caravans, enormous prairies, alkaline deserts dotted with sage brush and seamed by deep cañons, and passes through gigantic mountain ranges. On the coast itself nature was unfamiliar: the climate was sub-tropical; fruits and vegetables grew to a mammoth size, corresponding to the enormous redwoods in the Mariposa groves and the prodigious scale of the scenery in the valley of the Yo Semite and the snow-capped peaks of the Sierras. At first there were few women, and the men led a wild, lawless existence in the mining camps. Hard upon the heels of the prospector followed the dram-shop, the gambling-hell, and the dance-hall. Every man carried his "Colt," and looked out for his own life and his "claim." Crime went unpunished or was taken in hand, when it got too rampant, by vigilance committees. In the diggings, shaggy frontiersmen and "pikes" from Missouri mingled with the scum of eastern cities and with broken-down business men and young college graduates seeking their fortune. Surveyors and geologists came of necessity, speculators in mining stock and city lots set up their offices in the towns; later came a sprinkling of school-teachers and ministers. Fortunes were made in one day and lost the next at poker or loo. To-day the lucky miner who had struck a good "lead" was drinking champagne out of pails and treating the town; to-morrow he was "busted," and shouldered the pick for a new onslaught upon his luck. This strange, reckless life, was not without fascination, and highly picturesque and dramatic elements were present in it. It was, as Bret Harte says, "an era replete with a certain heroic Greek poetry," and sooner or later it was sure to find its poet. During the war California remained loyal to the Union, but was too far from the seat of conflict to experience any serious disturbance, and went on independently developing its own resources and becoming daily more civilized. By 1868 San Francisco had a literary magazine, the Overland Monthly, which ran until 1875. It had a decided local flavor, and the vignette on its title-page was a happily chosen emblem, representing a grizzly bear crossing a railway track. In an early number of the Overland was a story entitled the Luck of Roaring Camp, by Francis Bret Harte, a {578} native of Albany, N. Y., 1835, who had come to California at the age of seventeen, in time to catch the unique aspects of the life of the Forty-niners, before their vagabond communities had settled down into the law-abiding society of the present day. His first contribution was followed by other stories and sketches of a similar kind, such as the Outcasts of Poker Flat, Miggles, and Tennessee's Partner, and by verses, serious and humorous, of which last, Plain Language from Truthful James, better known as the Heathen Chinees, made an immediate hit, and carried its author's name into every corner of the English-speaking world. In 1871 he published a collection of his tales, another of his poems, and a volume of very clever parodies, Condensed Novels, which rank with Thackeray's Novels by Eminent Hands. Bret Harte's California stories were vivid, highly-colored pictures of life in the mining camps and raw towns of the Pacific coast. The pathetic and the grotesque went hand in hand in them, and the author aimed to show how even in the desperate characters

gathered together there--the fortune hunters, gamblers, thieves, murderers, drunkards, and prostitutes--the latent nobility of human nature asserted itself in acts of heroism, magnanimity, self-sacrifice, and touching fidelity. The same men who cheated at cards and shot each another down with tipsy curses were capable on occasion of the most romantic generosity and the most delicate chivalry. Critics were not wanting who held that, in the matter of dialect and manners and other details, the narrator was not true to the facts. This was a comparatively unimportant charge; but a more serious question was the doubt whether his characters were essentially true to human nature, whether the wild soil of revenge and greed and dissolute living ever yields such flowers of devotion as blossom in Tennessee's Partner and the Outcasts of Poker Flat. However this may be, there is no question as to Harte's power as a narrator. His short stories are skillfully constructed and effectively told. They never drag, and are never overladen with description, reflection, or other lumber. In his poems in dialect we find the same variety of types and nationalities characteristic of the Pacific coast: the little Mexican maiden, Pachita, in the old mission garden; the wicked Bill Nye, who tries to cheat the Heathen Chinee at euchre and to rob Injin Dick of his winning lottery ticket; the geological society on the Stanislaw who settle their scientific debates with chunks of old red sandstone and the skulls of mammoths; the unlucky Mr. Dow, who finally strikes gold while digging a well, and builds a house with a "coopilow;" and Flynn, of Virginia, who saves his "pard's" life, at the sacrifice of his own, by holding up the timbers in the caving tunnel. These poems are mostly in monologue, like Browning's dramatic lyrics, exclamatory and abrupt in style, and with a good deal of indicated action, as in Jim, where a miner comes into a bar-room, looking for his old chum, learns that he is dead, and is just turning away to hide his emotion, when he recognizes Jim in his informant:

"Well, thar--Good-by--  
 No more, sir--I--  
 Eh?  
 What's that you say?--  
 Why, dern it!--sho!--  
 No? Yes! By Jo!  
 Sold!  
 Sold! Why, you limb;  
 You ornery,  
 Derved old  
 Long-legged Jim!"

Bret Harte had many imitators, and not only did our newspaper poetry for a number of years abound in the properties of Californian life, such as gulches, placers, divides, etc., but writers further east applied his method to other conditions. Of these by far the most successful was John Hay, a native of Indiana and private secretary to President Lincoln, whose Little Breeches, Jim Bludso, and Mystery of Gilgal have rivaled Bret Harte's own verses in popularity. In the last-named piece the reader is given to feel that there is something rather cheerful and humorous in a bar-room fight which results in "the gals that winter, as a rule," going "alone to the singing school." In the two former we have heroes of the Bret Harte type, the same combination of superficial wickedness with inherent loyalty and tenderness. The profane farmer of the South-west, who "doesn't pan out on the prophets," and who had taught his little son "to chaw terbacker, just to keep his milk-teeth white," but who believes in God and the angels ever since the miraculous recovery of the same little son when lost on the prairie in a blizzard; and the unsaintly and bigamistic captain of the Prairie Belle, who died like a hero, holding the nozzle of his burning boat against the bank

"Till the last galoot's ashore."

The manners and dialect of other classes and sections of the country have received abundant illustration of late years. Edward Eggleston's Hoosier Schoolmaster, 1871, and his other novels are pictures of rural life in the early days of Indiana. Western Windows, a volume of poems by John James Piatt, another native of Indiana, had an unmistakable local coloring. Charles G. Leland, of Philadelphia, in his Hans Breitmann ballads, in dialect, gave a humorous presentation of the German-American element in the cities. By the death, in 1881, of Sidney Lanier, a Georgian by birth, the South lost a poet of rare promise, whose original genius was somewhat hampered by his hesitation between two arts of expression, music and verse, and by his effort to co-ordinate them. His Science of English Verse, 1880, was a most suggestive, though hardly

convincing, statement of that theory of their relation which he was working out in his practice. Some of his pieces, like the *Mocking Bird* and the *Song of the Chattahoochie*, are the most characteristically Southern poetry that has been written in America. Joel Chandler Harris's *Uncle Remus* stories, in Negro dialect, are transcripts from the folk-lore of the plantations, while his collection of stories, *At Teague Poteet's*, together with Miss Murfree's *In the Tennessee Mountains* and her other books have made the Northern public familiar with the wild life of the "moonshiners," who distill illicit whiskey in the mountains of Georgia, North Carolina, and Tennessee. These tales are not only exciting in incident, but strong and fresh in their delineations of character. Their descriptions of mountain scenery are also impressive, though, in the case of the last named writer, frequently too prolonged. George W. Cable's sketches of French Creole life in New Orleans attracted attention by their freshness and quaintness when published in the magazines and re-issued in book form as *Old Creole Days*, in 1879. His first regular novel, the *Grandissimes*, 1880, was likewise a story of Creole life. It had the same winning qualities as his short stories and sketches, but was an advance upon them in dramatic force, especially in the intensely tragic and powerfully told episode of "Bras Coupe." Mr. Cable has continued his studies of Louisiana types and ways in his later books, but the *Grandissimes* still remains his master-piece. All in all, he is, thus far, the most important literary figure of the New South, and the justness and delicacy of his representations of life speak volumes for the sobering and refining agency of the civil war in the States whose "cause" was "lost," but whose true interests gained even more by the loss than did the interests of the victorious North. The four writers last mentioned have all come to the front within the past eight or ten years, and, in accordance with the plan of this sketch, receive here a mere passing notice. It remains to close our review of the literary history of the period since the war with a somewhat more extended account of the two favorite novelists whose work has done more than any thing else to shape the movement of recent fiction. These are Henry James, Jr., and William Dean Howells. Their writings, though dissimilar in some respects, are alike in this, that they are analytic in method and realistic in spirit. Cooper was a romancer pure and simple; he wrote the romance of adventure and of external incident. Hawthorne went much deeper, and with a finer spiritual insight dealt with the real passions of the heart and with men's inner experiences. This he did with truth and power; but, although himself a keen observer of whatever passed before his eyes, he was not careful to secure a photographic fidelity to the surface facts of speech, dress, manners, etc. Thus the talk of his characters is book talk, and not the actual language of the parlor or the street, with its slang, its colloquial ease and the intonations and shadings of phrase {584} and pronunciation which mark different sections of the country and different grades of society. His attempts at dialect, for example, were of the slenderest kind. His art is ideal, and his romances certainly do not rank as novels of real life. But with the growth of a richer and more complicated society in America fiction has grown more social and more minute in its observation. It would not be fair to classify the novels of James and Howells as the fiction of manners merely; they are also the fiction of character, but they aim to describe people not only as they are, in their inmost natures, but also as they look and talk and dress. They try to express character through manners, which is the way in which it is most often expressed in the daily existence of a conventional society. It is a principle of realism not to select exceptional persons or occurrences, but to take average men and women and their average experiences. The realists protest that the moving incident is not their trade, and that the stories have all been told. They want no plot and no hero. They will tell no rounded tale with a dénouement, in which all the parts are distributed, as in the fifth act of an old-fashioned comedy; but they will take a transcript from life and end when they get through, without informing the reader what becomes of the characters. And they will try to interest this reader in "poor real life" with its "foolish face." Their acknowledged masters are Balzac, George Eliot, Turgéniéff, and Anthony Trollope, and they regard novels as studies in sociology, honest reports of the writer's impressions, which may not be without a certain scientific value even. Mr. James's peculiar province is the international novel; a field which he created for himself, but which he has occupied in company with Howells, Mrs. Burnett, and many others. He was born into the best traditions of New England culture, his father being a resident of Cambridge, and a forcible writer on philosophical subjects, and his brother, William James, a professor in Harvard University. The novelist received most of his schooling in Europe, and has lived much abroad, with the result that he has become half denationalized and has engrafted a cosmopolitan indifference upon his Yankee inheritance. This, indeed, has constituted his opportunity. A close observer and a conscientious student of the literary art, he has added to his intellectual equipment the advantage of a curious doubleness in his point of view. He looks at America with the eyes of a foreigner and at Europe with the eyes of an American. He has so far thrown himself out of relation with American life that he describes a Boston horsecar or a New York hotel table with a sort of amused wonder. His starting-point was in criticism, and he has always maintained the critical attitude. He took up story-

writing in order to help himself, by practical experiment, in his chosen art of literary criticism, and his volume on French Poets and Novelists, 1878, is by no means the least valuable of his books. His short stories in the magazines were collected into a volume in 1875, with the title, *A Passionate Pilgrim and Other Stories*. One or two of these, as the *Last of the Valerii* and the *Madonna of the Future*, suggest Hawthorne, a very unsympathetic study of whom James afterward contributed to the "English Men of Letters" series. But in the name-story of the collection he was already in the line of his future development. This is the story of a middle-aged invalid American, who comes to England in search of health, and finds, too late, in the mellow atmosphere of the mother country, the repose and the congenial surroundings which he has all his life been longing for in his raw America. The pathos of his self-analysis and his confession of failure is subtly imagined. The impressions which he and his far-away English kinsfolk make on one another, their mutual attraction and repulsion, are described with that delicate perception of national differences which makes the humor and sometimes the tragedy of James's later books, like the *American*, *Daisy Miller*, the *Europeans*, and *An International Episode*. His first novel was *Roderick Hudson*, 1876, not the most characteristic of his fictions, but perhaps the most powerful in its grasp of elementary passion. The analytic method and the critical attitude have their dangers in imaginative literature. In proportion as this writer's faculty of minute observation and his realistic objectivity have increased upon him, the uncomfortable coldness which is felt in his youthful work has become actually disagreeable, and his art--growing constantly finer and surer in matters of detail--has seemed to dwell more and more in the region of mere manners and less in the higher realm of character and passion. In most of his writings the heart, somehow, is left out. We have seen that Irving, from his knowledge of England and America, and his long residence in both countries, became the mediator between the two great branches of the Anglo-Saxon race. This he did by the power of his sympathy with each. Henry James has likewise interpreted the two nations to one another in a subtler but less genial fashion than Irving, and not through sympathy, but through contrast, by bringing into relief the opposing ideals of life and society which have developed under different institutions. In his novel, the *American*, 1877, he has shown the actual misery which may result from the clashing of opposed social systems. In such clever sketches as *Daisy Miller*, 1879, the *Pension Beaurepas*, and *A Bundle of Letters*, he has exhibited types of the American girl, the American business man, the aesthetic feebling from Boston, and the Europeanized or would-be denationalized American campaigners in the Old World, and has set forth the ludicrous incongruities, perplexities, and misunderstandings which result from contradictory standards of conventional morality and behavior. In the *Europeans*, 1879, and an *International Episode*, 1878, he has reversed the process, bringing Old World [Transcriber's note: World?] standards to the test of American ideas by transferring his dramatis personae to republican soil. The last-named of these illustrates how slender a plot realism requires for its purposes. It is nothing more than the history of an English girl of good family who marries an American gentleman and undertakes to live in America, but finds herself so uncomfortable in strange social conditions that she returns to England for life, while, contrariwise, the heroine's sister is so taken with the freedom of these very conditions that she elopes with another American and "goes West." James is a keen observer of the physiognomy of cities as well as of men, and his *Portraits of Places*, 1884, is among the most delightful contributions to the literature of foreign travel. Mr. Howells's writings are not without "international" touches. In *A Foregone Conclusion* and the *Lady of the Aroostook*, and others of his novels, the contrasted points of view in American and European life are introduced, and especially those variations in feeling, custom, dialect, etc., which make the modern Englishman and the modern American such objects of curiosity to each other, and which have been dwelt upon of late even unto satiety. But in general he finds his subjects at home, and if he does not know his own countrymen and countrywomen more intimately than Mr. James, at least he loves them better. There is a warmer sentiment in his fictions, too; his men are better fellows and his women are more lovable. Howells was born in Ohio. His early life was that of a western country editor. In 1860 he published, jointly with his friend Piatt, a book of verse--*Poems of Two Friends*. In 1861 he was sent as consul to Venice, and the literary results of his sojourn there appeared in his sketches *Venetian Life*, 1865, and *Italian Journeys*, 1867. In 1871 he became editor of the *Atlantic Monthly*, and in the same year published his *Suburban Sketches*. All of these early volumes showed a quick eye for the picturesque, an unusual power of description, and humor of the most delicate quality; but as yet there was little approach to narrative. Their *Wedding Journey* was a revelation to the public of the interest that may lie in an ordinary bridal trip across the State of New York, when a close and sympathetic observation is brought to bear upon the characteristics of American life as it appears at railway stations and hotels, on steam-boats and in the streets of very commonplace towns. *A Chance Acquaintance*, 1873, was Howells's first novel, though even yet the story was set against a background of travel--pictures, a holiday



trip on the St. Lawrence and the Saguenay; and descriptions of Quebec and the Falls of Montmorenci, etc., rather predominated over the narrative. Thus, gradually and by a natural process, complete characters and realistic novels, such as *A Modern Instance*, 1882, and *Indian Summer*, evolved themselves from truthful sketches of places and persons seen by the way. The incompatibility existing between European and American views of life, which makes the comedy or the tragedy of Henry James's international fictions, is replaced in Howells's novels by the repulsion between differing social grades in the same country. The adjustment of these subtle distinctions forms a part of the problem of life in all complicated societies. Thus in *A Chance Acquaintance* the heroine is a bright and pretty Western girl, who becomes engaged during a pleasure tour to an irreproachable but offensively priggish young gentleman from Boston, and the engagement is broken by her in consequence of an unintended slight--the betrayal on the hero's part of a shade of mortification when he and his betrothed are suddenly brought into the presence of some fashionable ladies belonging to his own monde. The little comedy, *Out of the Question*, deals with this same adjustment of social scales; and in many of Howells's other novels, such as *Silas Lapham* and *The Lady of the Aroostook*, one of the main motives may be described to be the contact of the man who eats with his fork with the man who eats with his knife, and the shock thereby ensuing. In *Indian Summer* the complications arise from the difference in age between the hero and heroine, and not from a difference in station or social antecedents. In all of these fictions the misunderstandings come from an incompatibility of manner rather than of character, and, if any thing were to be objected to the probability of the story, it is that the climax hinges on delicacies and subtleties which, in real life, when there is opportunity for explanations, are readily brushed aside. But in *A Modern Instance* Howells touched the deeper springs of action. In this, his strongest work, the catastrophe is brought about, as in George Eliot's great novels, by the reaction of characters upon one another, and the story is realistic in a higher sense than any mere study of manners can be. His nearest approach to romance is in *Undiscovered Country*, 1880, which deals with the Spiritualists and the Shakers, and in its study of problems that hover on the borders of the supernatural, in its out-of-the-way personages and adventures, and in a certain ideal poetic flavor about the whole book, has a strong resemblance to Hawthorne, especially to Hawthorne in the *Blithedale Romance*, where he comes closer to common ground with other romancers. It is interesting to compare *Undiscovered Country* with Henry James's *Bostonians*, the latest and one of the cleverest of his fictions, which is likewise a study of the clairvoyants, mediums, woman's rights' advocates, and all varieties of cranks, reformers, and patrons of "causes," for whom Boston has long been notorious. A most unlovely race of people they become under the cold scrutiny of Mr. James's cosmopolitan eyes, which see more clearly the charlatanism, narrow-mindedness, mistaken fanaticism, morbid self-consciousness, disagreeable nervous intensity, and vulgar or ridiculous outside peculiarities of the humanitarians, than the nobility and moral enthusiasm which underlie the surface. Howells is almost the only successful American dramatist, and this in the field of parlor comedy. His little farces, *The Elevator*, *The Register*, *The Parlor Car*, etc., have a lightness and grace, with an exquisitely absurd situation, which remind us more of the *Comedies et Proverbes* of Alfred de Musset, or the many agreeable dialogues and monologues of the French domestic stage, than of any work of English or American hands. His softly ironical yet affectionate treatment of feminine ways is especially admirable. In his numerous types of sweetly illogical, inconsistent, and inconsequent womanhood he has perpetuated with a nicer art than Dickens what Thackeray calls "that great discovery," Mrs. Nickleby.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### THEOLOGICAL AND RELIGIOUS LITERATURE IN AMERICA.

BY JOHN FLETCHER HURST.

The important field of theology and religion in America has yielded many and rich additions to the storehouse of letters.

The Bay Psalm Book, published in Cambridge, Mass., in 1640, was the first book printed in the English colonies in America. Its leading authors were Richard Mather (1596-1669), of Dorchester, father of Increase and grandfather of the still more famous Cotton Mather, Thomas Welde and John Eliot, both of Roxbury. The book was a few years later revised by Henry Dunster and passed through as many as twenty-seven editions. While it was both printed and used in England and Scotland by dissenting churches, it was a constant companion in private and public worship in the Calvinistic churches of the Colonies. The early colonial writers on theology include Charles Chauncy (1589-1672), the second president of Harvard College, who wrote a treatise on Justification, Samuel Willard (1640-1707), whose Complete Body of Divinity was the first folio {595} publication in America; Solomon Stoddard (1643-1729), whose most celebrated work was The Doctrine of Instituted Churches, in which he advocated the converting power of the Lord's Supper; Charles Chauncy (1705-1787), a great-grandson of President Chauncy, celebrated as a stickler for great plainness in writing and speech, and one of the founders of Universalism in New England, whose Seasonable Thoughts was in opposition to the preaching of Whitefield; and Aaron Burr (1716-1757), father of the political opponent and slayer of Alexander Hamilton, and author of The Supreme Deity of Our Lord Jesus Christ. James Blair (1656-1743), of Virginia, the virtual founder and first president of William and Mary College, wrote Our Saviour's Sermon on the Mount, containing one hundred and seventeen sermons. The two Tennents, Gilbert (1703-1764) and William (1705-1777), Samuel Finley (1717-1764), and Samuel Davies (1723-1761) were pulpit orators whose sermons still hold high rank in the homiletic world. Others of the colonial period distinguished for their ability are: John Davenport (1597-1670), of New Haven, author of The Saint's Anchor Hold; Edward Johnson (died 1682), of Woburn, author of The Wonder Working Providence of Sion's Saviour in New England; Jonathan Dickinson (1688-1747), the first president of the College of New Jersey (Princeton University), who published Familiar Letters upon Important Subjects in Religion, Samuel Johnson (1696-1772), a {596} distinguished advocate of Episcopacy in Connecticut; Thomas Clap (1703-1767), president of Yale College, who was the author of the Religious Condition of Colleges; Samuel Mather (1706-1785), a son of Cotton Mather, among whose works was An Attempt to Show that America was Known to the Ancients; and Thomas Chalkley (1675-1749), and John Woolman (1720-1772), both belonging to the Friends, and whose Journals are admirable specimens of the Quaker spirit and simplicity. Some of the leading writers on theology whose activity was greatest about the time of the American Revolution are worthy of study. They are John Witherspoon (1722-1794) who, while he is better known as the sixth president of the College of New Jersey and a political writer of the Revolution, was also the author of Ecclesiastical Characteristics, a satirical work aimed at the Moderate party of the Church of Scotland, and written before he left that country for America; Charles Thomson (1729-1824), who was for fifteen years the secretary of the Continental Congress and published a Translation of the Bible; Elias Boudinot (1740-1821), the first president of the American Bible Society and a leading philanthropist of his time, who wrote The Age of Revelation, a reply to Paine's Age of Reason; Nathan Strong (1748-1816), the editor of The Connecticut Evangelical Magazine and pastor of First Church, Hartford; Isaac Backus (1724-1806), the author of the well-known History of New England with Particular {597} Reference to the Baptists; Ezra Stiles (1727-1795), president of Yale College, who published many discourses and wrote An Ecclesiastical History of New England, which was not completed and never published; William White (1748-1836), Bishop of Pennsylvania for fifty years, who wrote several works on Episcopacy, one of which was Memoir of the Episcopal Church in the United States; and William Linn (1752-1808), who published sermons on the Leading Personages of Scripture History. Belonging also to the Revolutionary period these should be noted: Mather Byles (1706-1788), a wit and punster of loyalist leanings, some of whose sermons have been many times printed, and who was a kinsman of the Mathers; Jonathan Mayhew (1720-1766), whose Sermon on the Repeal of the Stamp Act was the most famous of his stirring addresses on the political issues already prominent at the time of his death; William Smith (1727-1803), provost of the University of Pennsylvania, who was, not to speak of his other

works, the author of several meritorious sermons; Samuel Seabury (1729-1796), the first Protestant Episcopal bishop and author of two volumes of sermons; and Jacob Duché (1739-1798), rector of Christ Church, Philadelphia, who abandoned the American cause, but whose sermons were highly prized. A quartet of those who gained distinction as writers on doctrine are: Joseph Bellamy (1719-1790), an influential divine of the Edwardean school, and author of *The True Religion* {598} *Delineated*; Samuel Hopkins (1721-1803), the advocate of disinterested benevolence as a cardinal principle of theology and author of *The System of Doctrines Contained in Divine Revelation*; Jonathan Edwards the Younger (1745-1801), president of Union College and author of several discourses, the most celebrated of which are the three on the "Necessity of the Atonement and its Consistency with Free Grace in Forgiveness" (these sermons are the basis of what has since been named the Edwardean theory); and Elhanan Winchester (1751-1797), the Universalist preacher, one of whose chief works was *The Universal Restoration*. In the earlier group of theological authorship of the present century, or the national period, taking conspicuous place as doctrinal writers, are: Nathaniel Emmons (1745-1840), one of the foremost of the New School of Calvinistic theology, whose works on the important discussion lasting through a half century are marked by a peculiar force and point; Samuel Stanhope Smith (1750-1819), president of the College of New Jersey and author of *Evidences of the Christian Religion*; his successor in office, Ashbel Green (1762-1848), whose chief literary labor was bestowed on *The Christian Advocate*, a religious monthly which he edited for twelve years, and who wrote *Lectures on the Shorter Catechism*; Henry Ware (1764-1845), the acknowledged head of the Unitarians prior to the appearance of Channing, professor of divinity in Harvard, and author of *Letters to Trinitarians and* {599} *Calvinists*; Leonard Woods (1774-1854), professor in Andover for thirty-eight years, author of several able books on the Unitarian controversy; and Wilbur Fisk (1792-1839), the distinguished preacher and educator, and author of *The Calvinistic Controversy*. Other theological lights of the early years of the republic are also: John Mitchell Mason (1770-1829), provost of Columbia College, later president of Dickinson College, a prime mover in the founding of Union Theological Seminary, and author of many sermons of a high order; Edward Payson (1783-1827), whose sermons are noted for the same ardent spirituality and beauty that marked his life and pastorate at Portland, Me.; John Summerfield (1798-1825), a volume of whose strangely eloquent sermons was published after his early death; Ebenezer Porter (1772-1834), professor in Andover, whose *Lectures on Revivals of Religion* are still worthy of consultation; Eliphalet Nott (1773-1866), president of Union College for sixty-two years, whose *Lectures on Temperance* are accounted among the best literature on that great reform; John Henry Hobart (1775-1830), bishop of the diocese of New York, who was the author of *Festivals and Fasts*, and one of the founders of the General Theological Seminary in New York; Nathan Bangs (1778-1862), a leading Methodist divine, who wrote a *History of the Methodist Episcopal Church and Errors of Hofkinsianism*; and Leonard {600} Withington (1789-1885), author of *Solomon's Song Translated and Explained*, a valuable exegetical work. In a second group of leading writers on religion, coming nearer the middle of the nineteenth century we find as doctrinal authors: Archibald Alexander (1772-1851), author of *Evidences of Christianity*; Hosea Ballou (1771-1852), the Universalist preacher and author of *An Examination of the Doctrine of Future Retribution*; Nathaniel W. Taylor (1786-1859), the author of *Lectures on the Moral Government of God*, in which there is a marked divergence from the strict school of Calvinistic theologians; Gardiner Spring (1785-1873), a tower of strength in the pulpit of New York for over fifty years, and author of *The Bible Not of Man*; Alexander Campbell (1788-1865), whose *Public Debates* contain the record of his distinguished career as a controversialist and mark the formation of the religious society called *Disciples of Christ*; Robert J. Breckenridge (1800-1871), whose work on *The Knowledge of God Objectively and Subjectively Considered* gave him great distinction; George W. Bethune (1805-1862), who, besides several hymns, wrote *Lectures on the Heidelberg Catechism*; and James H. Thornwell (1811-1862), of the Southern Presbyterians, who left an able *Systematic Theology*. Those whose works were of a more practical nature are: Samuel Miller (1769-1850), whose most telling book was *Letters on Clerical Habits and Manners*; Lyman Beecher (1775-1863), the celebrated father of his more celebrated son, and author of *Sermons on Temperance*; Thomas H. Skinner (1791-1871), professor in Andover and later in Union Theological Seminary, who wrote *Aids to Preaching and Hearing*, and translated and edited *Vinet's Homiletics and Pastoral Theology*; Charles G. Finney (1792-1875), of Oberlin, whose *Lectures on Revivals* embody the principles on which he himself conducted his celebrated evangelistic labors; Francis Wayland (1796-1865), the Baptist divine and author of a text-book on *Moral Science*, who also wrote *The Moral Dignity of the Missionary Enterprise*; Ichabod S. Spencer (1798-1854), whose *Pastor's Sketches* have a perennial interest; Theodore Dwight Woolsey (1801-1889), who, besides other books on the classics and law, published *The Religion of the Present and the Future*; Bela Bates

Edwards (1802-1852), of Andover, whose chief work was that bestowed upon the Quarterly Observer, later the Biblical Repository, and still later as editor of *Bibliotheca Sacra*; James Waddell Alexander (1804-1859), author of *Consolation; or, Discourses to the Suffering Children of God*; and George B. Cheever (1807-1890), who wrote several popular books on temperance, one being *Deacon Giles's Distillery*. A group of noted writers whose books have special bearing on the Bible are: Moses Stuart (1780-1852), the distinguished Hebraist and author of several commentaries and of a Hebrew {602} Grammar, whose scholarship was one of the chief attractions at Andover; Samuel H. Turner (1790-1861), the distinguished commentator on Romans, Hebrews, Ephesians, and Galatians; Edward Robinson (1794-1863), whose *Biblical Researches* and *New Testament Lexicon* mark him as one of the foremost scholars of the century; George Bush (1796-1860), known chiefly as the author of *Commentaries on the earlier parts of the Old Testament*; Albert Barnes (1798-1870), whose *Notes on the Scriptures* still have a large place among the more popular works of exegesis; Stephen Olin (1797-1851) and John Price Durbin (1800-1876), both distinguished as educators and pulpit orators of the Methodist Episcopal Church, who each wrote on travels in Palestine and adjoining countries; William M. Thomson (1806-1894), the missionary and author of *The Land and the Book*, a work of perpetual value; Joseph Addison Alexander (1809-1860), the famous philologist and author of valuable commentaries and a work on *New Testament Literature*; and George Burgess (1809-1866), who wrote *The Book of Psalms in English Verse*. Those who employed their pens in the field of history are; William Meade (1789-1862), author of *Old Churches, Ministers, and Families of Virginia*; George Junkin (1790-1868), who wrote *The Vindication*, which gives an account of the trial of Albert Barnes, from the Old School point of view; William B. Sprague (1795-1876), whose *Annals* {603} of the American Pulpit form a lasting monument to his literary ability; Robert Baird (1798-1863), author of *A View of Religion in America*; Francis L. Hawks (1798-1866), who published the *History of the Protestant Episcopal Church in Maryland and Virginia*; Morris J. Raphall (1798-1868), a prolific Jewish writer, whose *Post-Biblical History of the Jews* is a valuable book; Thomas C. Upham (1799-1871), professor in Bowdoin College and author of *Mental Philosophy*, who also wrote the *Life and Religious Experience of Madame Guyon*; William H. Furness (1802-1896), long the leader of Unitarians in Philadelphia, from whose imaginative pen came a peculiar book, *A History of Jesus*; J. Daniel Rupp (born 1803), who wrote a *History of the Religious Denominations in the United States*; and Abel Stevens (1815-1897), author of *The History of Methodism* and also of a *History of the Methodist Episcopal Church*. Asahel Nettleton (1784-1844), best known as an evangelist, published a popular collection of *Village Hymns*. Henry U. Onderdonk (1789-1858) and John Henry Hopkins (1792-1868) each wrote on the Episcopacy. Samuel Hanson Cox (1793-1880), a vigorous and original preacher of the New School Presbyterians, was the author of *Interviews Memorable and Useful*. Henry B. Bascom (1796-1850), whose *Sermons and Lectures* were of vigorous thought but florid style, was very popular for many years; Nicholas Murray (1802-1861) under the nom-de-plume of "Kirwan" {604} wrote the celebrated *Letters to Archbishop Hughes on the Catholic Question*; and Edward Thomson (1810-1870), bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church, was author of *Moral and Religious Essays*, and other works. Among the American singers of sacred lyrics are Samuel Davies (1724-1761), Timothy Dwight. (1752-1817), Mrs. Phoebe H. Brown (1783-1861), Thomas Hastings (1784-1872), John Pierpont (1785-1866), Mrs. Lydia H. Sigourney (1791-1865), William B. Tappan (1794-1849), William A. Muhlenberg (1796-1877), George W. Doane (1799-1859), Ray Palmer (1808-1887), Samuel F. Smith (1808-1895), Edmund H. Sears (1810-1876), William Hunter (1811-1877), George Duffield (1818-1888), Arthur Cleveland Coxe (1818-1896), Samuel Longfellow (1819-1892), and Alice (1820-1871) and Phoebe Cary (1824-1871). From the large number of writers of the latter half of this century whose productions have been added to the treasures of thought for coming generations and are worthy of generous attention we name: Charles Hodge (1797-1878), known best by his *Systematic Theology*; and his son, Archibald Alexander Hodge (1823-1886), author of *Outlines of Theology*; Charles P. McIlvaine (1798-1873), whose *Evidences of Christianity* are widely known and read; Mark Hopkins (1802-1887), who gave the world *The Law of Love and Love as a Law*; Edwards A. Park (born 1808), whose leading work was on the Atonement; Albert Taylor Bledsoe (1809-1877), whose *Theodicy* was his chief work; James McCosh (1811-1894), whose later years were given to America, and whose *Christianity and Positivism* and *Religious Aspects of Evolution* were written in this country; Davis W. Clark (1812-1871), author of *Man All Immortal*; John Miley (1813-1896), who was the author of a clear and able *Systematic Theology of the Arminian type*; Thomas O. Summers (1812-1882), who was a prolific author and whose *Systematic Theology* has been published since his death; and Lorenzo D. McCabe (1815-1897), who wrote on the *Foreknowledge of God*. Those who have devoted their talent to the exposition of the Scriptures are: Thomas J. Conant (1802-1891), a biblical scholar and author of *Historical*

Books of the Old Testament; Daniel D. Whedon (1808-1885), who wrote *Freedom of the Will* and was the author of a valuable Commentary on the New Testament; Horatio B. Hackett (1808-1875), whose exegetical works on Acts, Philemon, and Philippians have great merit; Tayler Lewis (1809-1877), the Nestor of classic linguistics, whose *Six Days of Creation and the Divine-Human in the Scriptures* are among his best books; Melancthon W. Jacobus (1816-1876), whose Commentaries on the Gospels, Acts, and Genesis unite critical ability and popular style; Ezra Abbot (1818-1884), author of a critical work on the Authorship of the Fourth Gospel; Howard Crosby (1826-1891), the vigorous preacher and {606} author of *The Seven Churches of Asia*; William M. Taylor (1829-1895), whose works include excellent studies on several prominent Bible characters--Moses, David, Daniel, and Joseph; Henry Martyn Harman (1822-1897), the author of *An Introduction to the Study of the Holy Scriptures*; and Henry B. Ridgaway (1830-1895), who wrote *The Lord's Land*, a work based on his personal observations during an Oriental tour. Those who have treated historical themes include: Charles Elliot (1792-1869), whose ablest work was *The Delineation of Roman Catholicism*; Francis P. Kenrick (1797-1863), who, besides being the author of a *Version of the Scriptures with Commentary*, also wrote a work on *The Supremacy of the Pope*; Matthew Simpson (1810-1884), the eloquent bishop, who wrote *A Cyclopaedia of Methodism* and *A Hundred Years of Methodism*; James Freeman Clarke (1810-1888), author of *The Ten Great Religions of the World*; Henry B. Smith (1815-1877), whose *History of the Church of Christ in Chronological Tables* is much admired for its conciseness, accuracy, and thoroughness; William H. Odenheimer (1817-1879), author of *The Origin and Compilation of the Prayer Book*; Philip Schaff (1819-1893), the author of a learned *History of the Christian Church and Creeds of Christendom*, and editor of the English translation of Lange's Commentary; William G. T. Shedd (1820-1894), who, besides other works, wrote *A History of Christian Doctrine*; Charles Force Deems (1820-1893), who {607} wrote a work on *The Life of Christ*; Henry Martyn Dexter (1821-1890), author of *The Congregationalism of the Last Three Hundred Years*; George R. Crooks (1822-1897), who, besides other labors in the field of the classics, wrote *The Life of Bishop Matthew Simpson*; Charles Porterfield Krauth (1823-1883), author of *The Conservative Reformation and its Theology*; Holland N. McTyeire (1824-1889), whose chief literary work was *The History of Methodism*; and John Gilmary Shea (1824-1892), who wrote many books on early American history connected with the Indians, one being a *History of the French and Spanish Missions among the Indian Tribes of the United States*. John McClintock (1814-1870), the scholarly Methodist divine and first president of Drew Theological Seminary, left a monument to his name in the great Cyclopaedia of Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Literature projected by him and his colaborer, James Strong (1822-1894), who completed the herculean task and added yet other works, notably his *Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*. Daniel Curry (1809-1887), the keen editor and debater, has gathered sheaf of his various addresses in *Platform Papers*. Austin Phelps (1820-1890) wrote *The Still Hour* and *The Theory of Preaching*, which are fine specimens of his thoughtful work; and Phillips Brooks (1835-1893), the renowned preacher, left *Sermons and Addresses*, which still breathe the earnest and catholic spirit of their cultured author.

George Herbert Mair

*English Literature: Modern*

## PREFACE

The intention of this book is to lay stress on ideas and tendencies that have to be understood and appreciated, rather than on facts that have to be learned by heart. Many authors are not mentioned and others receive scanty treatment, because of the necessities of this method of approach. The book aims at dealing with the matter of authors more than with their lives; consequently it contains few dates. All that the reader need require to help him have been included in a short chronological table at the end. To have attempted a severely ordered and analytic treatment of the subject would have been, for the author at least, impossible within the limits imposed, and, in any case, would have been foreign to the purpose indicated by the editors of the Home University Library. The book pretends no more than to be a general introduction to a very great subject, and it will have fulfilled all that is intended for it if it stimulates those who read it to set about reading for themselves the books of which it treats.

Its debts are many, its chief creditors two teachers, Professor Grierson at Aberdeen University and Sir Walter Raleigh at Oxford, to the stimulation of whose books and teaching my pleasure in English literature and any understanding I have of it are due. To them and to the other writers (chief of them Professor Herford) whose ideas I have wittingly or unwittingly incorporated in it, as well as to the kindness and patience of Professor Gilbert Murray, I wish here to express my indebtedness.

G.H.M.  
MANCHESTER,  
August, 1911.

## ENGLISH LITERATURE: MODERN

### CHAPTER I

#### THE RENAISSANCE

There are times in every man's experience when some sudden widening of the boundaries of his knowledge, some vision of hitherto untried and unrealized possibilities, has come and seemed to bring with it new life and the inspiration of fresh and splendid endeavour. It may be some great book read for the first time not as a book, but as a revelation; it may be the first realization of the extent and moment of what physical science has to teach us; it may be, like Carlyle's "Everlasting Yea," an ethical illumination, or spiritual like Augustine's or John Wesley's. But whatever it is, it brings with it new eyes, new powers of comprehension, and seems to reveal a treasury of latent and unsuspected talents in the mind and heart. The history of mankind has its parallels to these moments of illumination in the life of the individual. There are times when the boundaries of human experience, always narrow, and fluctuating but little between age and age, suddenly widen themselves, and the spirit of man leaps forward to possess and explore its new domain. These are the great ages of the world. They could be counted, perhaps, on one hand. The age of Pericles in Athens; the less defined age, when Europe passed, spiritually and artistically, from what we call the Dark, to what we call the Middle Ages; the Renaissance; the period of the French Revolution. Two of them, so far as English literature is concerned, fall within the compass of this book, and it is with one of them—the Renaissance—that it begins.

It is as difficult to find a comprehensive formula for what the Renaissance meant as to tie it down to a date. The year 1453 A.D., when the Eastern Empire—the last relic of the continuous spirit of Rome—fell before

the Turks, used to be given as the date, and perhaps the word "Renaissance" itself—"a new birth"—is as much as can be accomplished shortly by way of definition. Michelet's resonant "discovery by mankind of himself and of the world" rather expresses what a man of the Renaissance himself must have thought it, than what we in this age can declare it to be. But both endeavours to date and to define are alike impossible. One cannot fix a term to day or night, and the theory of the Renaissance as a kind of tropical dawn—a sudden passage to light from darkness—is not to be considered. The Renaissance was, and was the result of, a numerous and various series of events which followed and accompanied one another from the fourteenth to the beginning of the sixteenth centuries. First and most immediate in its influence on art and literature and thought, was the rediscovery of the ancient literatures. In the Middle Ages knowledge of Greek and Latin literatures had withdrawn itself into monasteries, and there narrowed till of secular Latin writing scarcely any knowledge remained save of Vergil (because of his supposed Messianic prophecy) and Statius, and of Greek, except Aristotle, none at all. What had been lost in the Western Empire, however, subsisted in the East, and the continual advance of the Turk on the territories of the Emperors of Constantinople drove westward to the shelter of Italy and the Church, and to the patronage of the Medicis, a crowd of scholars who brought with them their manuscripts of Homer and the dramatists, of Thucydides and Herodotus, and most momentous perhaps for the age to come, of Plato and Demosthenes and of the New Testament in its original Greek. The quick and vivid intellect of Italy, which had been torpid in the decadence of mediaevalism and its mysticism and piety, seized with avidity the revelation of the classical world which the scholars and their manuscripts brought. Human life, which the mediaeval Church had taught them to regard but as a threshold and stepping-stone to eternity, acquired suddenly a new momentousness and value; the promises of the Church paled like its lamps at sunrise; and a new paganism, which had Plato for its high priest, and Demosthenes and Pericles for its archetypes and examples, ran like wild-fire through Italy. The Greek spirit seized on art, and produced Raphael, Leonardo, and Michel Angelo; on literature and philosophy and gave us Pico della Mirandola, on life and gave us the Medicis and Castiglione and Machiavelli. Then—the invention not of Italy but of Germany—came the art of printing, and made this revival of Greek literature quickly portable into other lands.

Even more momentous was the new knowledge the age brought of the physical world. The brilliant conjectures of Copernicus paved the way for Galileo, and the warped and narrow cosmology which conceived the earth as the centre of the universe, suffered a blow that in shaking it shook also religion. And while the conjectures of the men of science were adding regions undreamt of to the physical universe, the discoverers were enlarging the territories of the earth itself. The Portuguese, with the aid of sailors trained in the great Mediterranean ports of Genoa and Venice, pushed the track of exploration down the western coast of Africa; the Cape was circumnavigated by Vasco da Gama, and India reached for the first time by Western men by way of the sea. Columbus reached Trinidad and discovered the "New" World; his successors pushed past him and touched the Continent. Spanish colonies grew up along the coasts of North and Central America and in Peru, and the Portuguese reached Brazil. Cabot and the English voyagers reached Newfoundland and Labrador; the French made their way up the St. Lawrence. The discovery of the gold mines brought new and unimagined possibilities of wealth to the Old World, while the imagination of Europe, bounded since the beginning of recorded time by the Western ocean, and with the Mediterranean as its centre, shot out to the romance and mystery of untried seas.

It is difficult for us in these later days to conceive the profound and stirring influence of such an alteration on thought and literature. To the men at the end of the fifteenth century scarcely a year but brought another bit of received and recognized thinking to the scrap-heap; scarcely a year but some new discovery found itself surpassed and in its turn discarded, or lessened in significance by something still more new. Columbus sailed westward to find a new sea route, and as he imagined, a more expeditious one to "the Indies"; the name West Indies still survives to show the theory on which the early discoverers worked. The rapidity with which knowledge widened can be gathered by a comparison of the maps of the day. In the earlier of them the mythical Brazil, a relic perhaps of the lost Atlantis, lay a regularly and mystically blue island off the west coast of Ireland; then the Azores were discovered and the name fastened on to one of the islands of that archipelago. Then Amerigo reached South America and the name became finally fixed to the country that we know. There is nothing nowadays that can give us a parallel to the stirring and exaltation of the imagination which intoxicated the men of the Renaissance, and gave a new birth to thought and art. The great scientific discoveries of the nineteenth century came to men more prepared for the shock of new surprises, and they carried evidence less tangible and indisputable to the senses. Perhaps if the strivings of science should succeed in proving as evident and comprehensible the existences which spiritualist and

psychical research is striving to establish, we should know the thrill that the great twin discoverers, Copernicus and Columbus, brought to Europe.

This rough sketch of the Renaissance has been set down because it is only by realizing the period in its largest and broadest sense that we can understand the beginnings of our own modern literature. The Renaissance reached England late. By the time that the impulse was at its height with Spenser and Shakespeare, it had died out in Italy, and in France to which in its turn Italy had passed the torch, it was already a waning fire. When it came to England it came in a special form shaped by political and social conditions, and by the accidents of temperament and inclination in the men who began the movement. But the essence of the inspiration remained the same as it had been on the Continent, and the twin threads of its two main impulses, the impulse from the study of the classics, and the impulse given to men's minds by the voyages of discovery, runs through all the texture of our Renaissance literature.

Literature as it developed in the reign of Elizabeth ran counter to the hopes and desires of the men who began the movement; the common usage which extends the term Elizabethan backwards outside the limits of the reign itself, has nothing but its carelessness to recommend it. The men of the early renaissance in the reigns of Edward VI. and Mary, belonged to a graver school than their successors. They were no splendid courtiers, nor daring and hardy adventurers, still less swashbucklers, exquisites, or literary dandies. Their names—Sir John Cheke, Roger Ascham, Nicholas Udall, Thomas Wilson, Walter Haddon, belong rather to the universities and to the coteries of learning, than to the court. To the nobility, from whose essays and belles lettres Elizabethan poetry was to develop, they stood in the relation of tutors rather than of companions, suspecting the extravagances of their pupils rather than sympathising with their ideals. They were a band of serious and dignified scholars, men preoccupied with morality and good-citizenship, and holding those as worth more than the lighter interests of learning and style. It is perhaps characteristic of the English temper that the revival of the classical tongues, which in Italy made for paganism, and the pursuit of pleasure in life and art, in England brought with it in the first place a new seriousness and gravity of life, and in religion the Reformation. But in a way the scholars fought against tendencies in their age, which were both too fast and too strong for them. At a time when young men were writing poetry modelled on the delicate and extravagant verse of Italy, were reading Italian novels, and affecting Italian fashions in speech and dress, they were fighting for sound education, for good classical scholarship, for the purity of native English, and behind all these for the native strength and worth of the English character, which they felt to be endangered by orgies of reckless assimilation from abroad. The revival of the classics at Oxford and Cambridge could not produce an Erasmus or a Scaliger; we have no fine critical scholarship of this age to put beside that of Holland or France. Sir John Cheke and his followers felt they had a public and national duty to perform, and their knowledge of the classics only served them for examples of high living and morality, on which education, in its sense of the formation of character, could be based. The literary influence of the revival of letters in England, apart from its moral influence, took two contradictory and opposing forms. In the curricula of schools, logic, which in the Middle Ages had been the groundwork of thought and letters, gave place to rhetoric. The reading of the ancients awakened new delight in the melody and beauty of language: men became intoxicated with words. The practice of rhetoric was universal and it quickly coloured all literature. It was the habit of the rhetoricians to choose some subject for declamation and round it to encourage their pupils to set embellishments and decorations, which commonly proceeded rather from a delight in language for language's sake, than from any effect in enforcing an argument. Their models for these exercises can be traced in their influence on later writers. One of the most popular of them, Erasmus's "Discourse Persuading a Young Man to Marriage," which was translated in an English text-book of rhetoric, reminds one of the first part of Shakespeare's sonnets. The literary affectation called euphuism was directly based on the precepts of the handbooks on rhetoric; its author, John Lyly, only elaborated and made more precise tricks of phrase and writing, which had been used as exercises in the schools of his youth. The prose of his school, with its fantastic delight in exuberance of figure and sound, owed its inspiration, in its form ultimately to Cicero, and in the decorations with which it was embellished, to the elder Pliny and later writers of his kind. The long declamatory speeches and the sententiousness of the early drama were directly modelled on Seneca, through whom was faintly reflected the tragedy of Greece, unknown directly or almost unknown to English readers. Latinism, like every new craze, became a passion, and ran through the less intelligent kinds of writing in a wild excess. Not much of the literature of this time remains in common knowledge, and for examples of these affectations one must turn over the black letter pages of forgotten books. There high-sounding and familiar words are handled and banded



about with delight, and you can see in volume after volume these minor and forgotten authors gloating over the new found treasure which placed them in their time in the van of literary success. That they are obsolete now, and indeed were obsolete before they were dead, is a warning to authors who intend similar extravagances. Strangeness and exoticism are not lasting wares. By the time of "Love's Labour Lost" they had become nothing more than matter for laughter, and it is only through their reflection and distortion in Shakespeare's pages that we know them now.

Had not a restraining influence, anxiously and even acrimoniously urged, broken in on their endeavours the English language to-day might have been almost as completely latinized as Spanish or Italian. That the essential Saxon purity of our tongue has been preserved is to the credit not of sensible unlettered people eschewing new fashions they could not comprehend, but to the scholars themselves. The chief service that Cheke and Ascham and their fellows rendered to English literature was their crusade against the exaggerated latinity that they had themselves helped to make possible, the crusade against what they called "inkhorn terms." "I am of this opinion," said Cheke in a prefatory letter to a book translated by a friend of his, "that our own tongue should be written clean and pure, unmixed and unmangled with the borrowing of other tongues, wherein if we take not heed by time, ever borrowing and never paying, she shall be fain to keep her house as bankrupt." Writings in the Saxon vernacular like the sermons of Latimer, who was careful to use nothing not familiar to the common people, did much to help the scholars to save our prose from the extravagances which they dreaded. Their attack was directed no less against the revival of really obsolete words. It is a paradox worth noting for its strangeness that the first revival of mediaevalism in modern English literature was in the Renaissance itself. Talking in studious archaism seems to have been a fashionable practice in society and court circles. "The fine courtier," says Thomas Wilson in his *Art of Rhetoric*, "will talk nothing but Chaucer." The scholars of the English Renaissance fought not only against the ignorant adoption of their importations, but against the renewal of forgotten habits of speech. Their efforts failed, and their ideals had to wait for their acceptance till the age of Dryden, when Shakespeare and Spenser and Milton, all of them authors who consistently violated the standards of Cheke, had done their work. The fine courtier who would talk nothing but Chaucer was in Elizabeth's reign the saving of English verse. The beauty and richness of Spenser is based directly on words he got from *Troilus and Cressida* and the *Canterbury Tales*. Some of the most sonorous and beautiful lines in Shakespeare break every canon laid down by the humanists.

"Th' extravagant and erring spirit hies  
To his confine"

is a line, three of the chief words of which are Latin importations that come unfamiliarly, bearing their original interpretation with them. Milton is packed with similar things: he will talk of a crowded meeting as "frequent" and use constructions which are unintelligible to anyone who does not possess a knowledge—and a good knowledge—of Latin syntax. Yet the effect is a good poetic effect. In attacking latinisms in the language borrowed from older poets Cheke and his companions were attacking the two chief sources of Elizabethan poetic vocabulary. All the sonorousness, beauty and dignity of the poetry and the drama which followed them would have been lost had they succeeded in their object, and their verse would have been constrained into the warped and ugly forms of Sternhold and Hopkins, and those with them who composed the first and worst metrical version of the Psalms. When their idea reappeared for its fulfilment phantasy and imagery had temporarily worn themselves out, and the richer language made simplicity possible and adequate for poetry.

There are other directions in which the classical revival influenced writing that need not detain us here. The attempt to transplant classical metres into English verse which was the concern of a little group of authors who called themselves the *Areopagus* came to no more success than a similar and contemporary attempt did in France. An earlier and more lasting result of the influence of the classics on new ways of thinking is the *Utopia* of Sir Thomas More, based on Plato's *Republic*, and followed by similar attempts on the part of other authors, of which the most notable are Harrington's *Oceana* and Bacon's *New Atlantis*. In one way or another the rediscovery of Plato proved the most valuable part of the Renaissance's gift from Greece. The doctrines of the *Symposium* coloured in Italy the writings of Castiglione and Mirandula. In England they gave us Spenser's "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty," and they affected, each in his own way, Sir Philip Sidney, and others of the circle of court writers of his time. More's book was written in Latin, though there is an English translation almost contemporary. He combines in himself the two strains that we found working in the Renaissance, for besides its origin in Plato, *Utopia* owes not a little to the influence of the voyages of discovery. In 1507 there was published a little book called an *Introduction to Cosmography*, which gave an

account of the four voyages of Amerigo. In the story of the fourth voyage it is narrated that twenty-four men were left in a fort near Cape Bahia. More used this detail as a starting-point, and one of the men whom Amerigo left tells the story of this "Nowhere," a republic partly resembling England but most of all the ideal world of Plato. Partly resembling England, because no man can escape from the influences of his own time, whatever road he takes, whether the road of imagination or any other. His imagination can only build out of the materials afforded him by his own experience: he can alter, he can rearrange, but he cannot in the strictest sense of the word create, and every city of dreams is only the scheme of things as they are remoulded nearer to the desire of a man's heart. In a way More has less invention than some of his subtler followers, but his book is interesting because it is the first example of a kind of writing which has been attractive to many men since his time, and particularly to writers of our own day. There remains one circumstance in the revival of the classics which had a marked and continuous influence on the literary age that followed. To get the classics English scholars had as we have seen to go to Italy. Cheke went there and so did Wilson, and the path of travel across France and through Lombardy to Florence and Rome was worn hard by the feet of their followers for over a hundred years after. On the heels of the men of learning went the men of fashion, eager to learn and copy the new manners of a society whose moral teacher was Machiavelli, and whose patterns of splendour were the courts of Florence and Ferrara, and to learn the trick of verse that in the hands of Petrarch and his followers had fashioned the sonnet and other new lyric forms. This could not be without its influence on the manners of the nation, and the scholars who had been the first to show the way were the first to deplore the pell-mell assimilation of Italian manners and vices, which was the unintended result of the inroad on insularity which had already begun. They saw the danger ahead, and they laboured to meet it as it came. Ascham in his *Schoolmaster* railed against the translation of Italian books, and the corrupt manners of living and false ideas which they seemed to him to breed. The Italianate Englishman became the chief part of the stock-in-trade of the satirists and moralists of the day. Stubbs, a Puritan chronicler, whose book *The Anatomy of Abuses* is a valuable aid to the study of Tudor social history, and Harrison, whose description of England prefaces Holinshed's *Chronicles*, both deal in detail with the Italian menace, and condemn in good set terms the costliness in dress and the looseness in morals which they laid to its charge. Indeed, the effect on England was profound, and it lasted for more than two generations. The romantic traveller, Coryat, writing well within the seventeenth century in praise of the luxuries of Italy (among which he numbers forks for table use), is as enthusiastic as the authors who began the imitation of Italian metres in Tottel's *Miscellany*, and Donne and Hall in their satires written under James wield the rod of censure as sternly as had Ascham a good half century before. No doubt there was something in the danger they dreaded, but the evil was not unmixed with good, for insularity will always be an enemy of good literature. The Elizabethans learned much more than their plots from Italian models, and the worst effects dreaded by the patriots never reached our shores. Italian vice stopped short of real life; poisoning and hired ruffianism flourished only on the stage.

The influence of the spirit of discovery and adventure, though it is less quickly marked, more pervasive, and less easy to define, is perhaps more universal than that of the classics or of the Italian fashions which came in their train. It runs right through the literature of Elizabeth's age and after it, affecting, each in their special way, all the dramatists, authors who were also adventurers like Raleigh, scholars like Milton, and philosophers like Hobbes and Locke. It reappears in the Romantic revival with Coleridge, whose "Ancient Mariner" owes much to reminiscences of his favourite reading—Purchas, his *Pilgrimes*, and other old books of voyages. The matter of this too-little noticed strain in English literature would suffice to fill a whole book; only a few of the main lines of its influence can be noted here. For the English Renaissance—for Elizabeth's England, action and imagination went hand in hand; the dramatists and poets held up the mirror to the voyagers. In a sense, the cult of the sea is the oldest note in English literature. There is not a poem in Anglo-Saxon but breathes the saltness and the bitterness of the sea-air. To the old English the sea was something inexpressibly melancholy and desolate, mist-shrouded, and lonely, terrible in its grey and shivering spaces; and their tone about it is always elegiac and plaintive, as a place of dreary spiritless wandering and unmarked graves. When the English settled they lost the sense of the sea; they became a little parochial people, tilling fields and tending cattle, wool-gathering and wool-bartering, their shipping confined to cross-Channel merchandise, and coastwise sailing from port to port. Chaucer's shipman, almost the sole representative of the sea in mediaeval English literature, plied a coastwise trade. But with the Cabots and their followers, Frobisher and Gilbert and Drake and Hawkins, all this was changed; once more the ocean became the highway of our national progress and adventure, and by virtue of our shipping we became competitors for the dominion of the earth. The rising tide of national enthusiasm and exaltation that

this occasioned flooded popular literature. The voyagers themselves wrote down the stories of their adventures; and collections of these—Hakluyt's and Purchas's—were among the most popular books of the age. To them, indeed, we must look for the first beginnings of our modern English prose, and some of its noblest passages. The writers, as often as not, were otherwise utterly unknown—ship's pursers, super-cargoes, and the like—men without much literary craft or training, whose style is great because of the greatness of their subject, because they had no literary artifices to stand between them and the plain and direct telling of a stirring tale. But the ferment worked outside the actual doings of the voyagers themselves, and it can be traced beyond definite allusions to them. Allusions, indeed, are surprisingly few; Drake is scarcely as much as mentioned among the greater writers of the age. None the less there is not one of them that is not deeply touched by his spirit and that of the movement which he led. New lands had been discovered, new territories opened up, wonders exposed which were perhaps only the first fruits of greater wonders to come. Spenser makes the voyagers his warrant for his excursion into fairyland. Some, he says, have condemned his fairy world as an idle fiction,

"But let that man with better sense advise;  
That of the world least part to us is red;  
And daily how through hardy enterprise  
Many great regions are discovered,  
Which to late age were never mentioned.  
Who ever heard of the 'Indian Peru'?  
Or who in venturous vessel measured  
The Amazon, huge river, now found true?  
Or fruitfulest Virginia who did ever view?"

"Yet all these were, when no man did them know,  
Yet have from wiser ages hidden been;  
And later times things more unknown shall show."

It is in the drama that this spirit of adventure caught from the voyagers gets its full play. "Without the voyagers," says Professor Walter Raleigh,[1] "Marlowe is inconceivable." His imagination in every one of his plays is preoccupied with the lust of adventure, and the wealth and power adventure brings. Tamburlaine, Eastern conqueror though he is, is at heart an Englishman of the school of Hawkins and Drake. Indeed the comparison must have occurred to his own age, for a historian of the day, the antiquary Stow, declares Drake to have been "as famous in Europe and America as Tamburlaine was in Asia and Africa." The high-sounding names and quests which seem to us to give the play an air of unreality and romance were to the Elizabethans real and actual; things as strange and foreign were to be heard any day amongst the motley crowd in the Bankside outside the theatre door. Tamburlaine's last speech, when he calls for a map and points the way to unrealised conquests, is the very epitome of the age of discovery.

"Lo, here my sons, are all the golden mines,  
Inestimable wares and precious stones,  
More worth than Asia and all the world beside;  
And from the Antarctic Pole eastward behold  
As much more land, which never was descried.  
Wherein are rocks of pearl that shine as bright  
As all the lamps that beautify the sky."

It is the same in his other plays. Dr. Faustus assigns to his serviceable spirits tasks that might have been studied from the books of Hakluyt

"I'll have them fly to India for gold,  
Ransack the ocean for orient pearl,  
And search all corners of the new round world  
For pleasant fruits and princely delicates."

When there is no actual expression of the spirit of adventure, the air of the sea which it carried with it still blows. Shakespeare, save for his scenes in *The Tempest* and in *Pericles*, which seize in all its dramatic

poignancy the terror of storm and shipwreck, has nothing dealing directly with the sea or with travel; but it comes out, none the less, in figure and metaphor, and plays like the Merchant of Venice and Othello testify to his accessibility to its spirit. Milton, a scholar whose mind was occupied by other and more ultimate matters, is full of allusions to it. Satan's journey through Chaos in Paradise Lost is the occasion for a whole series of metaphors drawn from seafaring. In Samson Agonistes Dalila comes in,

"Like a stately ship ...  
With all her bravery on and tackle trim  
Sails frilled and streamers waving  
Courtied by all the winds that hold them play."

and Samson speaks of himself as one who,  
"Like a foolish pilot have shipwrecked  
My vessel trusted to me from above  
Gloriously rigged."

The influence of the voyages of discovery persisted long after the first bloom of the Renaissance had flowered and withered. On the reports brought home by the voyagers were founded in part those conceptions of the condition of the "natural" man which form such a large part of the philosophic discussions of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Hobbes's description of the life of nature as "nasty, solitary, brutish, and short," Locke's theories of civil government, and eighteenth century speculators like Monboddo all took as the basis of their theory the observations of the men of travel. Abroad this connection of travellers and philosophers was no less intimate. Both Montesquieu and Rousseau owed much to the tales of the Iroquois, the North American Indian allies of France. Locke himself is the best example of the closeness of this alliance. He was a diligent student of the texts of the voyagers, and himself edited out of Hakluyt and Purchas the best collection of them current in his day. The purely literary influence of the age of discovery persisted down to Robinson Crusoe; in that book by a refinement of satire a return to travel itself (it must be remembered Defoe posed not as a novelist but as an actual traveller) is used to make play with the deductions founded on it. Crusoe's conversation with the man Friday will be found to be a satire of Locke's famous controversy with the Bishop of Worcester. With Robinson Crusoe the influence of the age of discovery finally perishes. An inspiration hardens into the mere subject matter of books of adventure. We need not follow it further.

## CHAPTER II

### ELIZABETHAN POETRY AND PROSE

To understand Elizabethan literature it is necessary to remember that the social status it enjoyed was far different from that of literature in our own day. The splendours of the Medicis in Italy had set up an ideal of courtliness, in which letters formed an integral and indispensable part. For the Renaissance, the man of letters was only one aspect of the gentleman, and the true gentleman, as books so early and late respectively as Castiglione's *Courtier* and Peacham's *Complete Gentleman* show, numbered poetry as a necessary part of his accomplishments. In England special circumstances intensified this tendency of the time. The queen was unmarried: she was the first single woman to wear the English crown, and her vanity made her value the devotion of the men about her as something more intimate than mere loyalty or patriotism. She loved personal homage, particularly the homage of half-amatory eulogy in prose and verse. It followed that the ambition of every courtier was to be an author, and of every author to be a courtier; in fact, outside the drama, which was almost the only popular writing at the time, every author was in a greater or less degree attached to the court. If they were not enjoying its favours they were pleading for them, mingling high and fantastic compliment with bitter reproaches and a tale of misery. And consequently both the poetry and the prose of the time are restricted in their scope and temper to the artificial and romantic, to high-flown eloquence, to the celebration of love and devotion, or to the inculcation of those courtly virtues and accomplishments which composed the perfect pattern of a gentleman. Not that there was not both poetry and prose written outside this charmed circle. The pamphleteers and chroniclers, Dekker and Nash, Holinshed and Harrison and Stow, were setting down their histories and descriptions, and penning those detailed and realistic indictments of the follies and extravagances of fashion, which together with the comedies have enabled us to picture accurately the England and especially the London of Elizabeth's reign. There was fine poetry written by Marlowe and Chapman as well as by Sidney and Spenser, but the court was still the main centre of literary endeavour, and the main incitement to literary fame and success.

But whether an author was a courtier or a Londoner living by his wits, writing was never the main business of his life: all the writers of the time were in one way or another men of action and affairs. As late as Milton it is probably true to say that writing was in the case even of the greatest an avocation, something indulged in at leisure outside a man's main business. All the Elizabethan authors had crowded and various careers. Of Sir Philip Sidney his earliest biographer says, "The truth is his end was not writing, even while he wrote, but both his wit and understanding bent upon his heart to make himself and others not in words or opinion but in life and action good and great." Ben Jonson was in turn a soldier, a poet, a bricklayer, an actor, and ultimately the first poet laureate. Lodge, after leaving Oxford, passed through the various professions of soldiering, medicine, playwriting, and fiction, and he wrote his novel *Rosalind*, on which Shakespeare based *As You Like It* while he was sailing on a piratical venture on the Spanish Main. This connection between life and action affected as we have seen the tone and quality of Elizabethan writing. "All the distinguished writers of the period," says Thoreau, "possess a greater vigour and naturalness than the more modern ... you have constantly the warrant of life and experience in what you read. The little that is said is eked out by implication of the much that was done." In another passage the same writer explains the strength and fineness of the writings of Sir Walter Raleigh by this very test of action, "The word which is best said came nearest to not being spoken at all, for it is cousin to a deed which the speaker could have better done. Nay almost it must have taken the place of a deed by some urgent necessity, even by some misfortune, so that the truest writer will be some captive knight after all." This bond between literature and action explains more than the writings of the voyagers or the pamphlets of men who lived in London by what they could make of their fellows. Literature has always a two-fold relation to life as it is lived. It is both a mirror and an escape: in our own day the stirring romances of Stevenson, the full-blooded and vigorous life which beats through the pages of Mr. Kipling, the conscious brutalism of such writers as Mr. Conrad and Mr. Hewlett, the plays of J.M. Synge, occupied with the vigorous and coarse-grained life of tinkers and peasants, are all in their separate ways a reaction against an age in which the overwhelming majority of men and women have sedentary pursuits. Just in the same way the Elizabethan who passed his commonly short and crowded life in an atmosphere of throat-cutting and powder and shot, and in a time when affairs of state were more momentous for the future of the nation than they have ever been since,

needed his escape from the things which pressed in upon him every day. So grew the vogue and popularity of pastoral poetry and of pastoral romance.

It is with two courtiers that modern English poetry begins. The lives of Sir Thomas Wyatt and the Earl of Surrey both ended early and unhappily, and it was not until ten years after the death of the second of them that their poems appeared in print. The book that contained them, Tottel's Miscellany of Songs and Sonnets, is one of the landmarks of English literature. It begins lyrical love poetry in our language. It begins, too, the imitation and adaptation of foreign and chiefly Italian metrical forms, many of which have since become characteristic forms of English verse: so characteristic, that we scarcely think of them as other than native in origin. To Wyatt belongs the honour of introducing the sonnet, and to Surrey the more momentous credit of writing, for the first time in English, blank verse. Wyatt fills the most important place in the Miscellany, and his work, experimental in tone and quality, formed the example which Surrey and minor writers in the same volume and all the later poets of the age copied. He tries his hand at everything—songs, madrigals, elegies, complaints, and sonnets—and he takes his models from both ancient Rome and modern Italy. Indeed there is scarcely anything in the volume for which with some trouble and research one might not find an original in Petrarch, or in the poets of Italy who followed him. But imitation, universal though it is in his work, does not altogether crowd out originality of feeling and poetic temper. At times, he sounds a personal note, his joy on leaving Spain for England, his feelings in the Tower, his life at the Court amongst his books, and as a country gentleman enjoying hunting and other outdoor sports.

"This maketh me at home to hunt and hawk,  
And in foul weather at my book to sit,  
In frost and snow, then with my bow to stalk,  
No man does mark whereas I ride or go:  
In lusty leas at liberty I walk."

It is easy to see that poetry as a melodious and enriched expression of a man's own feelings is in its infancy here. The new poets had to find their own language, to enrich with borrowings from other tongues the stock of words suitable for poetry which the dropping of inflection had left to English. Wyatt was at the beginning of the process, and apart from a gracious and courtly temper, his work has, it must be confessed, hardly more than an antiquarian interest. Surrey, it is possible to say on reading his work, went one step further. He allows himself oftener the luxury of a reference to personal feelings, and his poetry contains from place to place a fairly full record of the vicissitudes of his life. A prisoner at Windsor, he recalls his childhood there

"The large green courts where we were wont to hove,  
The palme-play, where, despoiled for the game.  
With dazzled eyes oft we by gleams of love  
Have missed the ball, and got sight of our dame."

Like Wyatt's, his verses are poor stuff, but a sympathetic ear can catch in them something of the accent that distinguishes the verse of Sidney and Spenser. He is greater than Wyatt, not so much for greater skill as for more boldness in experiment. Wyatt in his sonnets had used the Petrarchan or Italian form, the form used later in England by Milton and in the nineteenth century by Rossetti. He built up each poem, that is, in two parts, the octave, a two-rhymed section of eight lines at the beginning, followed by the sestet, a six line close with three rhymes. The form fits itself very well to the double mood which commonly inspires a poet using the sonnet form; the second section as it were both echoing and answering the first, following doubt with hope, or sadness with resignation, or resolving a problem set itself by the heart. Surrey tried another manner, the manner which by its use in Shakespeare's sonnets has come to be regarded as the English form of this kind of lyric. His sonnets are virtually three-stanza poems with a couplet for close, and he allows himself as many rhymes as he chooses. The structure is obviously easier, and it gives a better chance to an inferior workman, but in the hands of a master its harmonies are no less delicate, and its capacity to represent changing modes of thought no less complete than those of the true form of Petrarch. Blank verse, which was Surrey's other gift to English poetry, was in a way a compromise between the two sources from which the English Renaissance drew its inspiration. Latin and Greek verse is quantitative and rhymeless; Italian verse, built up on the metres of the troubadours and the degeneration of Latin which gave the world

the Romance languages, used many elaborate forms of rhyme. Blank verse took from Latin its rhymelessness, but it retained accent instead of quantity as the basis of its line. The line Surrey used is the five-foot or ten-syllable line of what is called "heroic verse"—the line used by Chaucer in his Prologue and most of his tales. Like Milton he deplored rhyme as the invention of a barbarous age, and no doubt he would have rejoiced to go further and banish accent as well as rhymed endings. That, however, was not to be, though in the best blank verse of later time accent and quantity both have their share in the effect. The instrument he forged passed into the hands of the dramatists: Marlowe perfected its rhythm, Shakespeare broke its monotony and varied its cadences by altering the spacing of the accents, and occasionally by adding an extra unaccented syllable. It came back from the drama to poetry with Milton. His blindness and the necessity under which it laid him of keeping in his head long stretches of verse at one time, because he could not look back to see what he had written, probably helped his naturally quick and delicate sense of cadence to vary the pauses, so that a variety of accent and interval might replace the valuable aid to memory which he put aside in putting aside rhyme. Perhaps it is to two accidents, the accident by which blank verse as the medium of the actor had to be retained easily in the memory, and the accident of Milton's blindness, that must be laid the credit of more than a little of the richness of rhythm of this, the chief and greatest instrument of English verse.

The imitation of Italian and French forms which Wyatt and Surrey began, was continued by a host of younger amateurs of poetry. Laborious research has indeed found a Continental original for almost every great poem of the time, and for very many forgotten ones as well. It is easy for the student engaged in this kind of literary exploration to exaggerate the importance of what he finds, and of late years criticism, written mainly by these explorers, has tended to assume that since it can be found that Sidney, and Daniel, and Watson, and all the other writers of mythological poetry and sonnet sequences took their ideas and their phrases from foreign poetry, their work is therefore to be classed merely as imitative literary exercise, that it is frigid, that it contains or conveys no real feeling, and that except in the secondary and derived sense, it is not really lyrical at all. Petrarch, they will tell you, may have felt deeply and sincerely about Laura, but when Sidney uses Petrarch's imagery and even translates his words in order to express his feelings for Stella, he is only a plagiarist and not a lover, and the passion for Lady Rich which is supposed to have inspired his sonnets, nothing more than a not too seriously intended trick to add the excitement of a transcript of real emotion to what was really an academic exercise. If that were indeed so, then Elizabethan poetry is a very much lesser and meaner thing than later ages have thought it. But is it so? Let us look into the matter a little more closely. The unit of all ordinary kinds of writing is the word, and one is not commonly quarrelled with for using words that have belonged to other people. But the unit of the lyric, like the unit of spoken conversation, is not the word but the phrase. Now in daily human intercourse the use, which is universal and habitual, of set forms and phrases of talk is not commonly supposed to detract from, or destroy sincerity. In the crises indeed of emotion it must be most people's experience that the natural speech that rises unbidden and easiest to the lips is something quite familiar and commonplace, some form which the accumulated experience of many generations of separate people has found best for such circumstances or such an occasion. The lyric is just in the position of conversation, at such a heightened and emotional moment. It is the speech of deep feeling, that must be articulate or choke, and it falls naturally and inevitably into some form which accumulated passionate moments have created and fixed. The course of emotional experiences differs very little from age to age, and from individual to individual, and so the same phrases may be used quite sincerely and naturally as the direct expression of feeling at its highest point by men apart in country, circumstances, or time. This is not to say that there is no such thing as originality; a poet is a poet first and most of all because he discovers truths that have been known for ages, as things that are fresh and new and vital for himself. He must speak of them in language that has been used by other men just because they are known truths, but he will use that language in a new way, and with a new significance, and it is just in proportion to the freshness, and the air of personal conviction and sincerity which he imparts to it, that he is great.

The point at issue bears very directly on the work of Sir Philip Sidney. In the course of the history of English letters certain authors disengage themselves who have more than a merely literary position: they are symbolic of the whole age in which they live, its life and action, its thoughts and ideals, as well as its mere modes of writing. There are not many of them and they could be easily numbered; Addison, perhaps, certainly Dr. Johnson, certainly Byron, and in the later age probably Tennyson. But the greatest of them all is Sir Philip Sidney: his symbolical relation to the time in which he lived was realized by his

contemporaries, and it has been a commonplace of history and criticism ever since. Elizabeth called him one of the jewels of her crown, and at the age of twenty-three, so fast did genius ripen in that summer time of the Renaissance, William the Silent could speak of him as "one of the ripest statesmen of the age." He travelled widely in Europe, knew many languages, and dreamed of adventure in America and on the high seas. In a court of brilliant figures, his was the most dazzling, and his death at Zutphen only served to intensify the halo of romance which had gathered round his name. His literary exercises were various: in prose he wrote the *Arcadia* and the *Apology for Poetry*, the one the beginning of a new kind of imaginative writing, and the other the first of the series of those rare and precious commentaries on their own art which some of our English poets have left us. To the *Arcadia* we shall have to return later in this chapter. It is his other great work, the sequence of sonnets entitled *Astrophel and Stella*, which concerns us here. They celebrate the history of his love for Penelope Devereux, sister of the Earl of Essex, a love brought to disaster by the intervention of Queen Elizabeth with whom he had quarrelled. As poetry they mark an epoch. They are the first direct expression of an intimate and personal experience in English literature, struck off in the white heat of passion, and though they are coloured at times with that over-fantastic imagery which is at once a characteristic fault and excellence of the writing of the time, they never lose the one merit above all others of lyric poetry, the merit of sincerity. The note is struck with certainty and power in the first sonnet of the series:—

"Loving in truth, and fain in verse my love to show,  
 That she, dear she, might take some pleasure of my pain,—  
 Pleasure might cause her read, reading might make her know,—  
 Knowledge might pity win, and pity grace obtain,—  
 I sought fit words to paint the blackest face of woe,  
 Studying inventions fine her wits to entertain;  
 Oft turning others' leaves to see if thence would flow  
 Some fresh and fruitful flower upon my sunburned brain.  
 But words came halting forth ...  
 Biting my truant pen, beating myself for spite,  
 'Fool,' said my muse to me, 'look in thy heart and write.'"

And though he turned others' leaves it was quite literally looking in his heart that he wrote. He analyses the sequence of his feelings with a vividness and minuteness which assure us of their truth. All that he tells is the fruit of experience, dearly bought:

"Desire! desire! I have too dearly bought  
 With price of mangled mind thy worthless ware.  
 Too long, too long! asleep thou hast me brought,  
 Who shouldst my mind to higher things prepare."

and earlier in the sequence—

"I now have learned love right and learned even so  
 As those that being poisoned poison know."

In the last two sonnets, with crowning truth and pathos he renounces earthly love which reaches but to dust, and which because it fades brings but fading pleasure:

"Then farewell, world! Thy uttermost I see.  
 Eternal love, maintain thy life in me."

The sonnets were published after Sidney's death, and it is certain that like Shakespeare's they were never intended for publication at all. The point is important because it helps to vindicate Sidney's sincerity, but were any vindication needed another more certain might be found. The *Arcadia* is strewn with love songs and sonnets, the exercises solely of the literary imagination. Let any one who wishes to gauge the sincerity of the impulse of the *Stella* sequence compare any of the poems in it with those in the romance.

With Sir Philip Sidney literature was an avocation, constantly indulged in, but outside the main business of his life; with Edmund Spenser public life and affairs were subservient to an overmastering poetic impulse. He did his best to carve out a career for himself like other young men of his time, followed the fortunes of the Earl of Leicester, sought desperately and unavailingly the favour of the Queen, and ultimately accepted



a place in her service in Ireland, which meant banishment as virtually as a place in India would to-day. Henceforward his visits to London and the Court were few; sometimes a lover of travel would visit him in his house in Ireland as Raleigh did, but for the most he was left alone. It was in this atmosphere of loneliness and separation, hostile tribes pinning him in on every side, murder lurking in the woods and marshes round him, that he composed his greatest work. In it at last he died, on the heels of a sudden rising in which his house was burnt and his lands over-run by the wild Irish whom the tyranny of the English planters had driven to vengeance. Spenser was not without interest in his public duties; his *View of the State of Ireland* shows that. But it shows, too, that he brought to them singularly little sympathy or imagination. Throughout his tone is that of the worst kind of English officialdom; rigid subjection and in the last resort massacre are the remedies he would apply to Irish discontent. He would be a fine text—which might be enforced by modern examples—for a discourse on the evil effects of immersion in the government of a subject race upon men of letters. No man of action can be so consistently and cynically an advocate of brutalism as your man of letters, Spenser, of course, had his excuses; the problem of Ireland was new and it was something remote and difficult; in all but the mere distance for travel, Dublin was as far from London as Bombay is to-day. But to him and his like we must lay down partly the fact that to-day we have still an Irish problem.

But though fate and the necessity of a livelihood drove him to Ireland and the life of a colonist, poetry was his main business. He had been the centre of a brilliant set at Cambridge, one of those coteries whose fame, if they are brilliant and vivacious enough and have enough self-confidence, penetrates to the outer world before they leave the University. The thing happens in our own day, as the case of Oscar Wilde is witness; it happened in the case of Spenser; and when he and his friends Gabriel Harvey and Edward Kirke came "down" it was to immediate fame amongst amateurs of the arts. They corresponded with each other about literary matters, and Harvey published his part of the correspondence; they played like Du Bellay in France, with the idea of writing English verse in the quantitative measures of classical poetry; Spenser had a love affair in Yorkshire and wrote poetry about it, letting just enough be known to stimulate the imagination of the public. They tried their hands at everything, imitated everything, and in all were brilliant, sparkling, and decorative; they got a kind of entrance to the circle of the Court. Then Spenser published his *Shepherd's Calendar*, a series of pastoral eclogues for every month of the year, after a manner taken from French and Italian pastoral writers, but coming ultimately from Vergil, and Edward Kirke furnished it with an elaborate prose commentary. Spenser took the same liberties with the pastoral form as did Vergil himself; that is to say he used it as a vehicle for satire and allegory, made it carry political and social allusions, and planted in it references to his friends. By its publication Spenser became the first poet of the day. It was followed by some of his finest and most beautiful things—by the Platonic hymns, by the *Amoretti*, a series of sonnets inspired by his love for his wife; by the *Epithalamium*, on the occasion of his marriage to her; by *Mother Hubbard's Tale*, a satire written when despair at the coldness of the Queen and the enmity of Burleigh was beginning to take hold on the poet and endowed with a plainness and vigour foreign to most of his other work—and then by *The Fairy Queen*.

The poets of the Renaissance were not afraid of big things; every one of them had in his mind as the goal of poetic endeavour the idea of the heroic poem, aimed at doing for his own country what Vergil had intended to do for Rome in the *Aeneid*, to celebrate it—its origin, its prowess, its greatness, and the causes of it, in epic verse. Milton, three-quarters of a century later, turned over in his mind the plan of an English epic on the wars of Arthur, and when he left it was only to forsake the singing of English origins for the more ultimate theme of the origins of mankind. Spenser designed to celebrate the character, the qualities and the training of the English gentleman. And because poetry, unlike philosophy, cannot deal with abstractions but must be vivid and concrete, he was forced to embody his virtues and foes to virtue and to use the way of allegory. His outward plan, with its knights and dragons and desperate adventures, he procured from Ariosto. As for the use of allegory, it was one of the discoveries of the Middle Ages which the Renaissance condescended to retain. Spenser elaborated it beyond the wildest dreams of those students of Holy Writ who had first conceived it. His stories were to be interesting in themselves as tales of adventure, but within them they were to conceal an intricate treatment of the conflict of truth and falsehood in morals and religion. A character might typify at once Protestantism and England and Elizabeth and chastity and half the cardinal virtues, and it would have all the while the objective interest attaching to it as part of a story of adventure. All this must have made the poem difficult enough. Spenser's manner of writing it made it worse still. One is familiar with the type of novel which only explains itself when the last chapter is reached—

Stevenson's *Wrecker* is an example. The *Fairy Queen* was designed on somewhat the same plan. The last section was to relate and explain the unrelated and unexplained books which made up the poem, and at the court to which the separate knights of the separate books—the Red Cross Knight and the rest—were to bring the fruit of their adventures, everything was to be made clear. Spenser did not live to finish his work; *The Fairy Queen*, like the *Aeneid*, is an uncompleted poem, and it is only from a prefatory letter to Sir Walter Raleigh issued with the second published section that we know what the poem was intended to be. Had Spenser not published this explanation, it is impossible that anybody, even the acutest minded German professor, could have guessed.

The poem, as we have seen, was composed in Ireland, in the solitude of a colonists' plantation, and the author was shut off from his fellows while he wrote. The influence of his surroundings is visible in the writing. The elaboration of the theme would have been impossible or at least very unlikely if its author had not been thrown in on himself during its composition. Its intricacy and involution is the product of an over-concentration born of empty surroundings. It lacks vigour and rapidity; it winds itself into itself. The influence of Ireland, too, is visible in its landscapes, in its description of bogs and desolation, of dark forests in which lurk savages ready to spring out on those who are rash enough to wander within their confines. All the scenery in it which is not imaginary is Irish and not English scenery. Its reception in England and at the Court was enthusiastic. Men and women read it eagerly and longed for the next section as our grandfathers longed for the next section of *Pickwick*. They really liked it, really loved the intricacy and luxuriousness of it, the heavy exotic language, the thickly painted descriptions, the languorous melody of the verse. Mainly, perhaps, that was so because they were all either in wish or in deed poets themselves. Spenser has always been "the poets' poet." Milton loved him; so did Dryden, who said that Milton confessed to him that Spenser was "his original," a statement which has been pronounced incredible, but is, in truth, perfectly comprehensible, and most likely true. Pope admired him; Keats learned from him the best part of his music. You can trace echoes of him in Mr. Yeats. What is it that gives him this hold on his peers? Well, in the first place his defects do not detract from his purely poetic qualities. The story is impossibly told, but that will only worry those who are looking for a story. The allegory is hopelessly difficult; but as Hazlitt said "the allegory will not bite you"; you can let it alone. The crudeness and bigotry of Spenser's dealings with Catholicism, which are ridiculous when he pictures the monster Error vomiting books and pamphlets, and disgusting when he draws Mary Queen of Scots, do not hinder the pleasure of those who read him for his language and his art. He is great for other reasons than these. First because of the extraordinary smoothness and melody of his verse and the richness of his language—a golden diction that he drew from every source—new words, old words, obsolete words—such a mixture that the purist Ben Jonson remarked acidly that he wrote no language at all. Secondly because of the profusion of his imagery, and the extraordinarily keen sense for beauty and sweetness that went to its making. In an age of golden language and gallant imagery his was the most golden and the most gallant. And the language of poetry in England is richer and more varied than that in any other country in Europe to-day, because of what he did.

Elizabethan prose brings us face to face with a difficulty which has to be met by every student of literature. Does the word "literature" cover every kind of writing? Ought we to include in it writing that aims merely at instruction or is merely journey-work, as well as writing that has an artistic intention, or writing that, whether its author knew it or no, is artistic in its result? Of course such a question causes us no sort of difficulty when it concerns itself only with what is being published to-day. We know very well that some things are literature and some merely journalism; that of novels, for instance, some deliberately intend to be works of art and others only to meet a passing desire for amusement or mental occupation. We know that most books serve or attempt to serve only a useful and not a literary purpose. But in reading the books of three centuries ago, unconsciously one's point of view shifts. Antiquity gilds journey-work; remoteness and quaintness of phrasing lend a kind of distinction to what are simply pamphlets or text-books that have been preserved by accident from the ephemerality which was the common lot of hundreds of their fellows. One comes to regard as literature things that had no kind of literary value for their first audiences; to apply the same seriousness of judgment and the same tests to the pamphlets of Nash and Dekker as to the prose of Sidney and Bacon. One loses, in fact, that power to distinguish the important from the trivial which is one of the functions of a sound literary taste. Now, a study of the minor writing of the past is, of course, well worth a reader's pains. Pamphlets, chronicle histories, text-books and the like have an historical importance; they give us glimpses of the manners and habits and modes of thought of the day. They tell us more about

the outward show of life than do the greater books. If you are interested in social history, they are the very thing. But the student of literature ought to beware of them, nor ought he to touch them till he is familiar with the big and lasting things. A man does not possess English literature if he knows what Dekker tells of the seven deadly sins of London and does not know the Fairy Queen. Though the wide and curious interest of the Romantic critics of the nineteenth century found and illumined the byways of Elizabethan writing, the safest method of approach is the method of their predecessors—to keep hold on common sense, to look at literature, not historically as through the wrong end of a telescope, but closely and without a sense of intervening time, to know the best—the "classic"—and study it before the minor things.

In Elizabeth's reign, prose became for the first time, with cheapened printing, the common vehicle of amusement and information, and the books that remain to us cover many departments of writing. There are the historians who set down for us for the first time what they knew of the earlier history of England. There are the writers, like Harrison and Stubbs, who described the England of their own day, and there are many authors, mainly anonymous, who wrote down the accounts of the voyages of the discoverers in the Western Seas. There are the novelists who translated stories mainly from Italian sources. But of authors as conscious of a literary intention as the poets were, there are only two, Sidney and Lyly, and of authors who, though their first aim was hardly an artistic one, achieved an artistic result, only Hooker and the translators of the Bible. The Authorized Version of the Bible belongs strictly not to the reign of Elizabeth but to that of James, and we shall have to look at it when we come to discuss the seventeenth century. Hooker, in his book on Ecclesiastical Polity (an endeavour to set forth the grounds of orthodox Anglicanism) employed a generous, flowing, melodious style which has influenced many writers since and is familiar to us to-day in the copy of it used by Ruskin in his earlier works. Lyly and Sidney are worth looking at more closely.

The age was intoxicated with language. It went mad of a mere delight in words. Its writers were using a new tongue, for English was enriched beyond all recognition with borrowings from the ancient authors; and like all artists who become possessed of a new medium, they used it to excess. The early Elizabethans' use of the new prose was very like the use that educated Indians make of English to-day. It is not that these write it incorrectly, but only that they write too richly. And just as fuller use and knowledge teaches them spareness and economy and gives their writing simplicity and vigour, so seventeenth century practice taught Englishmen to write a more direct and undecorated style and gave us the smooth, simple, and vigorous writing of Dryden—the first really modern English prose. But the Elizabethans loved gaudier methods; they liked highly decorative modes of expression, in prose no less than in verse. The first author to give them these things was John Lyly, whose book *Euphues* was for the five or six years following its publication a fashionable craze that infected all society and gave its name to a peculiar and highly artificial style of writing that coloured the work of hosts of obscure and forgotten followers. Lyly wrote other things; his comedies may have taught Shakespeare the trick of *Love's Labour Lost*; he attempted a sequel of his most famous work with better success than commonly attends sequels, but for us and for his own generation he is the author of one book. Everybody read it, everybody copied it. The maxims and sentences of advice to gentlemen which it contained were quoted and admired in the Court, where the author, though he never attained the lucrative position he hoped for, did what flattery could do to make a name for himself. The name "Euphuism" became a current description of an artificial way of using words that overflowed out of writing into speech and was in the mouths, while the vogue lasted, of everybody who was anybody in the circle that fluttered round the Queen.

The style of *Euphues* was parodied by Shakespeare and many attempts have been made to imitate it since. Most of them are inaccurate—Sir Walter Scott's wild attempt the most inaccurate of all. They fail because their authors have imagined that "Euphuism" is simply a highly artificial and "flowery" way of talking. As a matter of fact it is made up of a very exact and very definite series of parts. The writing is done on a plan which has three main characteristics as follows. First, the structure of the sentence is based on antithesis and alliteration; that is to say, it falls into equal parts similar in sound but with a different sense; for example, *Euphues* is described as a young gallant "of more wit than wealth, yet of more wealth than wisdom." All the characters in the book, which is roughly in the form of a novel, speak in this way, sometimes in sentences long drawn out which are oppressively monotonous and tedious, and sometimes shortly with a certain approach to epigram. The second characteristic of the style is the reference of every stated fact to some classical authority, that is to say, the author cannot mention friendship without quoting David and Jonathan, nor can lovers in his book accuse each other of faithlessness without quoting the instance of Cressida or Aeneas. This appeal to classical authority and wealth of classical allusion is used to decorate pages which deal with matters of every-day experience. Seneca, for instance, is quoted as

reporting "that too much bending breaketh the bow," a fact which might reasonably have been supposed to be known to the author himself. This particular form of writing perhaps influenced those who copied Lyly more than anything else in his book. It is a fashion of the more artificial kind of Elizabethan writing in all schools to employ a wealth of classical allusion. Even the simple narratives in Hakluyt's *Voyages* are not free from it, and one may hardly hope to read an account of a voyage to the Indies without stumbling on a preliminary reference to the opinions of Aristotle and Plato. Lastly, *Euphues* is characterised by an extraordinary wealth of allusion to natural history, mostly of a fabulous kind. "I have read that the bull being tied to the fig tree loseth his tail; that the whole herd of deer stand at gaze if they smell a sweet apple; that the dolphin after the sound of music is brought to the shore," and so on. His book is full of these things, and the style weakens and loses its force because of them. Of course there is much more in his book than this outward decoration. He wrote with the avowed purpose of instructing courtiers and gentlemen how to live. *Euphues* is full of grave reflections and weighty morals, and is indeed a collection of essays on education, on friendship, on religion and philosophy, and on the favourite occupation and curriculum of Elizabethan youth—foreign travel. The fashions and customs of his countrymen which he condemns in the course of his teaching are the same as those inveighed against by Stubbs and other contemporaries. He disliked manners and fashions copied from Italy; particularly he disliked the extravagant fashions of women. One woman only escapes his censure, and she, of course, is the Queen, whom *Euphues* and his companion in the book come to England to see. In the main the teaching of *Euphues* inculcates a humane and liberal, if not very profound creed, and the book shares with *The Fairy Queen* the honour of the earlier Puritanism—the Puritanism that besides the New Testament had the Republic. But *Euphues*, though he was in his time the popular idol, was not long in finding a successful rival. Seven years before his death Sir Philip Sidney, in a period of retirement from the Court wrote "*The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia*"; it was published ten years after it had been composed. *The Arcadia* is the first English example of the prose pastoral romance, as the *Shepherd's Calendar* is of our pastoral verse. Imitative essays in its style kept appearing for two hundred years after it, till Wordsworth and other poets who knew the country drove its unrealities out of literature. The aim of it and of the school to which it belonged abroad was to find a setting for a story which should leave the author perfectly free to plant in it any improbability he liked, and to do what he liked with the relations of his characters. In the shade of beech trees, the coils of elaborated and intricate love-making wind and unravel themselves through an endless afternoon. In that art nothing is too far-fetched, nothing too sentimental, no sorrow too unreal. The pastoral romance was used, too, to cover other things besides a sentimental and decorative treatment of love. Authors wrapped up as shepherds their political friends and enemies, and the pastoral eclogues in verse which Spenser and others composed are full of personal and political allusion. Sidney's story carries no politics and he depends for its interest solely on the wealth of differing episodes and the stories and arguments of love which it contains. The story would furnish plot enough for twenty ordinary novels, but probably those who read it when it was published were attracted by other things than the march of its incidents. Certainly no one could read it for the plot now. Its attraction is mainly one of style. It goes, you feel, one degree beyond *Euphues* in the direction of freedom and poetry. And just because of this greater freedom, its characteristics are much less easy to fix than those of *Euphues*. Perhaps its chief quality is best described as that of exhaustiveness. Sidney will take a word and toss it to and fro in a page till its meaning is sucked dry and more than sucked dry. On page after page the same trick is employed, often in some new and charming way, but with the inevitable effect of wearying the reader, who tries to do the unwise of all things with a book of this kind—to read on. This trick of bandying words is, of course, common in Shakespeare. Other marks of Sidney's style belong similarly to poetry rather than to prose. Chief of them is what Ruskin christened the "pathetic fallacy"—the assumption (not common in his day) which connects the appearance of nature with the moods of the artist who looks at it, or demands such a connection. In its day the *Arcadia* was hailed as a reformation by men nauseated by the rhythmical patterns of Lyly. A modern reader finds himself confronting it in something of the spirit that he would confront the prose romances, say, of William Morris, finding it charming as a poet's essay in prose but no more: not to be ranked with the highest.

### CHAPTER III THE DRAMA

Biologists tell us that the hybrid—the product of a variety of ancestral stocks—is more fertile than an organism with a direct and unmixed ancestry; perhaps the analogy is not too fanciful as the starting-point of a study of Elizabethan drama, which owed its strength and vitality, more than to anything else, to the variety of the discordant and contradictory elements of which it was made up. The drama was the form into which were moulded the thoughts and desires of the best spirits of the time. It was the flower of the age. To appreciate its many-sided significances and achievements it is necessary to disentangle carefully its roots, in religion, in the revival of the classics, in popular entertainments, in imports from abroad, in the air of enterprise and adventure which belonged to the time.

As in Greece, drama in England was in its beginning a religious thing. Its oldest continuous tradition was from the mediaeval Church. Early in the Middle Ages the clergy and their parishioners began the habit, at Christmas, Easter and other holy days, of playing some part of the story of Christ's life suitable to the festival of the day. These plays were liturgical, and originally, no doubt, overshadowed by a choral element. But gradually the inherent human capacity for mimicry and drama took the upper hand; from ceremonies they developed into performances; they passed from the stage in the church porch to the stage in the street. A waggon, the natural human platform for mimicry or oratory, became in England as it was in Greece, the cradle of the drama. This momentous change in the history of the miracle play, which made it in all but its occasion and its subject a secular thing, took place about the end of the twelfth century. The rise of the town guilds gave the plays a new character; the friendly rivalry of leagued craftsmen elaborated their production; and at length elaborate cycles were founded which were performed at Whitsuntide, beginning at sunrise and lasting all through the day right on to dusk. Each town had its own cycle, and of these the cycles of York, Wakefield, Chester and Coventry still remain. So too, does an eye-witness's account of a Chester performance where the plays took place yearly on three days, beginning with Whit Monday. "The manner of these plays were, every company had his pageant or part, a high scaffold with two rooms, a higher and a lower, upon four wheels. In the lower they apparelled themselves and in the higher room they played, being all open on the top that all beholders might hear and see them. They began first at the abbey gates, and when the first pageant was played, it was wheeled to the high cross before the mayor and so to every street. So every street had a pageant playing upon it at one time, till all the pageants for the day appointed were played." The "companies" were the town guilds and the several "pageants" different scenes in Old or New Testament story. As far as was possible each company took for its pageant some Bible story fitting to its trade; in York the goldsmiths played the three Kings of the East bringing precious gifts, the fishmongers the flood, and the shipwrights the building of Noah's ark. The tone of these plays was not reverent; reverence after all implies near at hand its opposite in unbelief. But they were realistic and they contained within them the seeds of later drama in the aptitude with which they grafted into the sacred story pastoral and city manners taken straight from life. The shepherds who watched by night at Bethlehem were real English shepherds furnished with boisterous and realistic comic relief. Noah was a real shipwright.

"It shall be clinched each ilk and deal.  
With nails that are both noble and new  
Thus shall I fix it to the keel,  
Take here a rivet and there a screw,  
With there bow there now, work I well,  
This work, I warrant, both good and true."

Cain and Abel were English farmers just as truly as Bottom and his fellows were English craftsmen. But then Julius Caesar has a doublet and in Dutch pictures the apostles wear broad-brimmed hats. Squeamishness about historical accuracy is of a later date, and when it came we gained in correctness less than we lost in art. The miracle plays, then, are the oldest antecedent of Elizabethan drama, but it must not be supposed they were over and done with before the great age began. The description of the Chester performances, part of which has been quoted, was written in 1594. Shakespeare must, one would think, have seen the Coventry cycle; at any rate he was familiar, as every one of the time must have been, with the performances; "Out-heroding Herod" bears witness to that. One must conceive the development of the

Elizabethan age as something so rapid in its accessibility to new impressions and new manners and learning and modes of thought that for years the old and new subsisted side by side. Think of modern Japan, a welter of old faiths and crafts and ideals and inrushing Western civilization all mixed up and side by side in the strangest contrasts and you will understand what it was. The miracle plays stayed on beside Marlowe and Shakespeare till Puritanism frowned upon them. But when the end came it came quickly. The last recorded performance took place in London when King James entertained Gondomar, the Spanish ambassador. And perhaps we should regard that as a "command" performance, reviving as command performances commonly do, something dead for a generation—in this case, purely out of compliment to the faith and inclination of a distinguished guest. Next in order of development after the miracle or mystery plays, though contemporary in their popularity, came what we called "moralities" or "moral interludes"—pieces designed to enforce a religious or ethical lesson and perhaps to get back into drama something of the edification which realism had ousted from the miracles. They dealt in allegorical and figurative personages, expounded wise saws and moral lessons, and squared rather with the careful self-concern of the newly established Protestantism than with the frank and joyous jest in life which was more characteristic of the time. Everyman, the oftenest revived and best known of them, if not the best, is very typical of the class. They had their influences, less profound than that of the miracles, on the full drama. It is said the "Vice"—unregeneracy commonly degenerated into comic relief—is the ancestor of the fool in Shakespeare, but more likely both are successive creations of a dynasty of actors who practised the unchanging and immemorial art of the clown. The general structure of Everyman and some of its fellows, heightened and made more dramatic, gave us Marlowe's Faustus. There perhaps the influence ends.

The rise of a professional class of actors brought one step nearer the full growth of drama. Companies of strolling players formed themselves and passed from town to town, seeking like the industrious amateurs of the guilds, civic patronage, and performing in town-halls, market-place booths, or inn yards, whichever served them best. The structure of the Elizabethan inn yard (you may see some survivals still, and there are the pictures in Pickwick) was very favourable for their purpose. The galleries round it made seats like our boxes and circle for the more privileged spectators; in the centre on the floor of the yard stood the crowd or sat, if they had stools with them. The stage was a platform set on this floor space with its back against one side of the yard, where perhaps one of the inn-rooms served as a dressing room. So suitable was this "fit-up" as actors call it, that when theatres came to be built in London they were built on the inn-yard pattern. All the playhouses of the Bankside from the "Curtain" to the "Globe" were square or circular places with galleries rising above one another three parts round, a floor space of beaten earth open to the sky in the middle, and jutting out on to it a platform stage with a tiring room capped by a gallery behind it. The entertainment given by these companies of players (who usually got the patronage and took the title of some lord) was various. They played moralities and interludes, they played formless chronicle history plays like the Troublesome Reign of King John, on which Shakespeare worked for his King John; but above and before all they were each a company of specialists, every one of whom had his own talent and performance for which he was admired. The Elizabethan stage was the ancestor of our music-hall, and to the modern music-hall rather than to the theatre it bears its affinity. If you wish to realize the aspect of the Globe or the Blackfriars it is to a lower class music-hall you must go. The quality of the audience is a point of agreement. The Globe was frequented by young "bloods" and by the more disreputable portions of the community, racing men (or their equivalents of that day) "coney catchers" and the like; commonly the only women present were women of the town. The similarity extends from the auditorium to the stage. The Elizabethan playgoer delighted in virtuosity; in exhibitions of strength or skill from his actors; the broad sword combat in Macbeth, and the wrestling in As You Like It, were real trials of skill. The bear in the Winter's Tale was no doubt a real bear got from a bear pit, near by in the Bankside. The comic actors especially were the very grandfathers of our music-hall stars; Tarleton and Kemp and Cowley, the chief of them, were as much popular favourites and esteemed as separate from the plays they played in as is Harry Lauder. Their songs and tunes were printed and sold in hundreds as broadsheets, just as pirated music-hall songs are sold to-day. This is to be noted because it explains a great deal in the subsequent evolution of the drama. It explains the delight in having everything represented actually on the stage, all murders, battles, duels. It explains the magnificent largesse given by Shakespeare to the professional fool. Work had to be found for him, and Shakespeare, whose difficulties were stepping-stones to his triumphs, gave him Touchstone and Feste, the Porter in Macbeth and the Fool in Lear. Others met the problem in an attitude of frank despair. Not all great tragic writers can easily or gracefully wield the pen of comedy, and Marlowe in Dr. Faustus took the course of leaving the low comedy which the audience loved and a high salaried actor

demanded, to an inferior collaborator. Alongside this drama of street platforms and inn-yards and public theatres, there grew another which, blending with it, produced the Elizabethan drama which we know. The public theatres were not the only places at which plays were produced. At the University, at the Inns of Court (which then more than now, were besides centres of study rather exclusive and expensive clubs), and at the Court they were an important part of almost every festival. At these places were produced academic compositions, either allegorical like the masques, copies of which we find in Shakespeare and by Ben Jonson, or comedies modelled on Plautus or Terence, or tragedies modelled on Seneca. The last were incomparably the most important. The Elizabethan age, which always thought of literature as a guide or handmaid to life, was naturally attracted to a poet who dealt in maxims and "sentences"; his rhetoric appealed to men for whom words and great passages of verse were an intoxication that only a few to-day can understand or sympathize with; his bloodthirstiness and gloom to an age so full-blooded as not to shrink from horrors. Tragedies early began to be written on the strictly Senecan model, and generally, like Seneca's, with some ulterior intention. Sackville's *Gorboduc*, the first tragedy in English, produced at a great festival at the Inner Temple, aimed at inducing Elizabeth to marry and save the miseries of a disputed succession. To be put to such a use argues the importance and dignity of this classical tragedy of the learned societies and the court. None of the pieces composed in this style were written for the popular theatre, and indeed they could not have been a success on it. The Elizabethan audience, as we have seen, loved action, and in these Senecan tragedies the action took place "off." But they had a strong and abiding influence on the popular stage; they gave it its ghosts, its supernatural warnings, its conception of nemesis and revenge, they gave it its love of introspection and the long passages in which introspection, description or reflection, either in soliloquy or dialogue, holds up the action; contradictorily enough they gave it something at least of its melodrama. Perhaps they helped to enforce the lesson of the miracle plays that a dramatist's proper business was elaboration rather than invention. None of the Elizabethan dramatists except Ben Jonson habitually constructed their own plots. Their method was to take something ready at their hands and overlay it with realism or poetry or romance. The stories of their plays, like that of Hamlet's *Mousetrap*, were "extant and writ in choice Italian," and very often their methods of preparation were very like his. Something of the way in which the spirit of adventure of the time affected and finished the drama we have already seen. It is time now to turn to the dramatists themselves.

Of Marlowe, Kyd, Greene, and Peele, the "University Wits" who fused the academic and the popular drama, and by giving the latter a sense of literature and learning to mould it to finer issues, gave us Shakespeare, only Marlowe can be treated here. Greene and Peele, the former by his comedies, the latter by his historical plays, and Kyd by his tragedies, have their places in the text-books, but they belong to a secondary order of dramatic talent. Marlowe ranks amongst the greatest. It is not merely that historically he is the head and fount of the whole movement, that he changed blank verse, which had been a lumbering instrument before him, into something rich and ringing and rapid and made it the vehicle for the greatest English poetry after him. Historical relations apart, he is great in himself. More than any other English writer of any age, except Byron, he symbolizes the youth of his time; its hot-bloodedness, its lust after knowledge and power and life inspires all his pages. The teaching of Machiavelli, misunderstood for their own purposes by would-be imitators, furnished the reign of Elizabeth with the only political ideals it possessed. The simple brutalism of the creed, with means justified by ends and the unbridled self-regarding pursuit of power, attracted men for whom the Spanish monarchy and the struggle to overthrow it were the main factors and politics. Marlowe took it and turned it to his own uses. There is in his writings a lust of power, "a hunger and thirst after unrighteousness," a glow of the imagination unhallowed by anything but its own energy which is in the spirit of the time. In *Tamburlaine* it is the power of conquest, stirred by and reflecting, as we have seen, the great deeds of his day. In *Dr. Faustus* it is the pride of will and eagerness of curiosity. *Faustus* is devoured by a tormenting desire to enlarge his knowledge to the utmost bounds of nature and art and to extend his power with his knowledge. His is the spirit of Renaissance scholarship heightened to a passionate excess. The play gleams with the pride of learning and a knowledge which learning brings, and with the nemesis that comes after it.

"Oh! gentlemen! hear me with patience and tremble not at my speeches. Though my heart pant and quiver to remember that I have been a student here these thirty years; oh! I would I had never seen Wittemberg, never read book!" And after the agonizing struggle in which *Faustus's* soul is torn from him to hell, learning comes in at the quiet close.

"Yet, for he was a scholar once admired,

For wondrous knowledge in our German Schools;  
We'll give his mangled limbs due burial;  
And all the students, clothed in mourning black  
Shall wait upon his heavy funeral."

Some one character is a centre of over-mastering pride and ambition in every play. In the Jew of Malta it is the hero Barabbas. In Edward II. it is Piers Gaveston. In Edward II. indeed, two elements are mixed—the element of Machiavelli and Tamburlaine in Gaveston, and the purely tragic element which evolves from within itself the style in which it shall be treated, in the King. "The reluctant pangs of abdicating Royalty," wrote Charles Lamb in a famous passage, "furnished hints which Shakespeare scarcely improved in his Richard II; and the death scene of Marlowe's King moves pity and terror beyond any scene, ancient or modern, with which I am acquainted." Perhaps the play gives the hint of what Marlowe might have become had not the dagger of a groom in a tavern cut short at thirty his burning career. Even in that time of romance and daring speculation he went further than his fellows. He was said to have been tainted with atheism, to have denied God and the Trinity; had he lived he might have had trouble with the Star Chamber. The free-voyaging intellect of the age found this one way of outlet, but if literary evidences are to be trusted sixteenth and seventeenth century atheism was a very crude business. The Atheist's Tragedy of Tourneur (a dramatist who need not otherwise detain us) gives some measure of its intelligence and depth. Says the villain to the heroine,

"No? Then invoke  
Your great supposed Protector. I will do't."

to which she:

"Supposed Protector! Are you an atheist, then  
I know my fears and prayers are spent in vain."

Marlowe's very faults and extravagances, and they are many, are only the obverse of his greatness. Magnitude and splendour of language when the thought is too shrunken to fill it out, becomes mere inflation. He was a butt of the parodists of the day. And Shakespeare, though he honoured him "on this side idolatry," did his share of ridicule. Ancient Pistol is fed and stuffed with relic and rags of Marlowesque affectation—

"Holla! ye pampered jades of Asia,  
Can ye not draw but twenty miles a day."

is a quotation taken straight from Tamburlaine.

A study of Shakespeare, who refuses to be crushed within the limits of a general essay is no part of the plan of this book. We must take up the story of the drama with the reign of James and with the contemporaries of his later period, though of course, a treatment which is conditioned by the order of development is not strictly chronological, and some of the plays we shall have to refer to belong to the close of the sixteenth century. We are apt to forget that alongside Shakespeare and at his heels other dramatists were supplying material for the theatre. The influence of Marlowe and particularly of Kyd, whose Spanish Tragedy with its crude mechanism of ghosts and madness and revenge caught the popular taste, worked itself out in a score of journeymen dramatists, mere hack writers, who turned their hand to plays as the hacks of to-day turn their hand to novels, and with no more literary merit than that caught as an echo from better men than themselves. One of the worst of these—he is also one of the most typical—was John Marston, a purveyor of tragic gloom and sardonic satire, and an impostor in both, whose tragedy Antonio and Mellida was published in the same year as Shakespeare's Hamlet. Both plays owed their style and plot to the same tradition—the tradition created by Kyd's Spanish Tragedy—in which ghostly promptings to revenge, terrible crime, and a feigned madman waiting his opportunity are the elements of tragedy. Nothing could be more fruitful in an understanding of the relations of Shakespeare to his age than a comparison of the two. The style of Antonio and Mellida is the style of The Murder of Gonzago. There is no subtlety nor introspection, the pale cast of thought falls with no shadow over its scenes. And it is typical of a score of plays of the kind we have and beyond doubt of hundreds that have perished. Shakespeare stands alone.

Beside this journey-work tragedy of revenge and murder which had its root through Kyd and Marlowe in Seneca and in Italian romance, there was a journey-work comedy of low life made up of loosely



constructed strings of incidents, buffoonery and romance, that had its roots in a joyous and fantastic study of the common people. These plays are happy and high-spirited and, compared with the ordinary run of the tragedies, of better workmanship. They deal in the familiar situations of low comedy—the clown, the thrifty citizen and his frivolous wife, the gallant, the bawd, the good apprentice and the bad portrayed vigorously and tersely and with a careless kindly gaiety that still charms in the reading. The best writers in this kind were Middleton and Dekker—and the best play to read as a sample of it *Eastward Ho!* in which Marston put off his affectation of sardonical melancholy and joined with Jonson and Dekker to produce what is the masterpiece of the non-Shakespearean comedy of the time. For all our habit of grouping their works together it is a far cry in spirit and temperament from the dramatists whose heyday was under Elizabeth and those who reached their prime under her successor. Quickly though insensibly the temper of the nation suffered eclipse. The high hopes and the ardency of the reign of Elizabeth saddened into a profound pessimism and gloom in that of James. This apparition of unsought melancholy has been widely noted and generally assumed to be inexplicable. In broad outline its causes are clear enough, "To travel hopefully is a better thing than to arrive." The Elizabethans were, if ever any were, hopeful travellers. The winds blew them to the four quarters of the world; they navigated all seas; they sacked rich cities. They beat off the great Armada, and harried the very coasts of Spain. They pushed discovery to the ends of the world and amassed great wealth. Under James all these things were over. Peace was made with Spain: national pride was wounded by the solicitous anxiety of the King for a Spanish marriage for the heir to the throne. Sir Walter Raleigh, a romantic adventurer lingering beyond his time, was beheaded out of hand by the ungenerous timidity of the monarch to whom had been transferred devotion and loyalty he was unfitted to receive. The Court which had been a centre of flashing and gleaming brilliance degenerated into a knot of sycophants humouring the pragmatic and self-important folly of a king in whom had implanted themselves all the vices of the Scots and none of their virtues. Nothing seemed left remarkable beneath the visiting moon. The bright day was done and they were for the dark. The uprising of Puritanism and the shadow of impending religious strife darkened the temper of the time. The change affected all literature and particularly the drama, which because it appeals to what all men have in common, commonly reflects soonest a change in the outlook or spirits of a people. The onslaughts of the dramatists on the Puritans, always implacable enemies of the theatre, became more virulent and envenomed. What a difference between the sunny satire of Sir Andrew Aguecheek and the dark animosity of *The Atheists' Tragedy* with its *Languebeau Snuffe* ready to carry out any villainy proposed to him! "I speak sir," says a lady in the same play to a courtier who played with her in an attempt to carry on a quick-witted, "conceited" love passage in the vein of *Much Ado*, "I speak, sir, as the fashion now: is, in earnest." The quick-witted, light-hearted age was gone. It is natural that tragedy reflected this melancholy in its deepest form. Gloom deepened and had no light to relieve it, men supped full of horrors—there was no slackening of the tension, no concession to overwrought nerves, no resting-place for the overwrought soul. It is in the dramatist John Webster that this new spirit has its most powerful exponent.

The influence of Machiavelli, which had given Marlowe tragic figures that were bright and splendid and burning, smouldered in Webster into a duskier and intenser heat. His fame rests on two tragedies, *The White Devil* and *The Duchess of Malfi*. Both are stories of lust and crime, full of hate and hideous vengeance, and through each runs a vein of bitter and ironical comment on men and women. In them chance plays the part of fate. "Blind accident and blundering mishap—'such a mistake,' says one of the criminals, 'as I have often seen in a play' are the steersmen of their fortunes and the doomsmen of their deeds." His characters are gloomy; meditative and philosophic murderers, cynical informers, sad and loving women, and they are all themselves in every phrase that they utter. But they are studied in earnestness and sincerity. Unquestionably he is the greatest of Shakespeare's successors in the romantic drama, perhaps his only direct imitator. He has single lines worthy to set beside those in *Othello* or *King Lear*. His dirge in the *Duchess of Malfi*, Charles Lamb thought worthy to be set beside the ditty in *The Tempest*, which reminds Ferdinand of his drowned father. "As that is of the water, watery, so this is of the earth, earthy." He has earned his place among the greatest of our dramatists by his two plays, the theme of which matched his sombre genius and the sombreness of the season in which it flowered. But the drama could not survive long the altered times, and the voluminous plays of Beaumont and Fletcher mark the beginning of the end. They are the decadence of Elizabethan drama. Decadence is a term often used loosely and therefore hard to define, but we may say broadly that an art is decadent when any particular one of the elements which go to its making occurs in excess and disturbs the balance of forces which keeps the work a coherent and intact whole. Poetry is decadent when the sound is allowed to outrun the sense or when the suggestions, say, of

colour, which it contains are allowed to crowd out its deeper implications. Thus we can call such a poem as this one well-known of O'Shaughnessy's

"We are the music-makers,  
We are the dreamers of dreams,"

decadent because it conveys nothing but the mere delight in an obvious rhythm of words, or such a poem as Morris's "Two red roses across the moon;" because a meaningless refrain, merely pleasing in its word texture, breaks in at intervals on the reader. The drama of Beaumont and Fletcher is decadent in two ways. In the first place those variations and licences with which Shakespeare in his later plays diversified the blank verse handed on to him by Marlowe, they use without any restraint or measure. "Weak" endings and "double" endings, i.e. lines which end either on a conjunction or proposition or some other unstressed word, or lines in which there is a syllable too many—abound in their plays. They destroyed blank verse as a musical and resonant poetic instrument by letting this element of variety outrun the sparing and skilful use which alone could justify it. But they were decadent in other and deeper ways than that. Sentiment in their plays usurps the place of character. Eloquent and moving speeches and fine figures are no longer subservient to the presentation of character in action, but are set down for their own sake, "What strange self-trumpeters and tongue-bullies all the brave soldiers of Beaumont and Fletcher are," said Coleridge. When they die they die to the music of their own virtue. When dreadful deeds are done they are described not with that authentic and lurid vividness which throws light on the working of the human heart in Shakespeare or Webster but in tedious rhetoric. Resignation, not fortitude, is the authors' forte and they play upon it amazingly. The sterner tones of their predecessors melt into the long drawn broken accent of pathos and woe. This delight not in action or in emotion arising from action but in passivity of suffering is only one aspect of a certain mental flaccidity in grain. Shakespeare may be free and even coarse. Beaumont and Fletcher cultivate indecency. They made their subject not their master but their plaything, or an occasion for the convenient exercise of their own powers of figure and rhetoric.

Of their followers, Massinger, Ford and Shirley, no more need be said than they carried one step further the faults of their masters. Emotion and tragic passion give way to wire-drawn sentiment. Tragedy takes on the air of a masquerade. With them romantic drama died a natural death and the Puritans' closing of the theatre only gave it a coup de grace. In England it has had no second birth.

Outside the direct romantic succession there worked another author whose lack of sympathy with it, as well as his close connection with the age which followed, justifies his separate treatment. Ben Jonson shows a marked contrast to Shakespeare in his character, his accomplishments, and his attitude to letters, while his career was more varied than Shakespeare's own. The first "classic" in English writing, he was a "romantic" in action. In his adventurous youth he was by turns scholar, soldier, bricklayer, actor. He trailed a pike with Leicester in the Low Countries; on his return to England fought a duel and killed his man, only escaping hanging by benefit of clergy; at the end of his life he was Poet Laureate. Such a career is sufficiently diversified, and it forms a striking contrast to the plainness and severity of his work. But it must not lead us to forget or under-estimate his learning and knowledge. Not Gray nor Tennyson, nor Swinburne—perhaps not even Milton—was a better scholar. He is one of the earliest of English writers to hold and express different theories about literature. He consciously appointed himself a teacher; was a missionary of literature with a definite creed. But though in a general way his dramatic principles are opposed to the romantic tendencies of his age, he is by no means blindly classical. He never consented to be bound by the "Unities"—that conception of dramatic construction evolved out of Aristotle and Horace and elaborated in the Renaissance till, in its strictest form, it laid down that the whole scene of a play should be in one place, its whole action deal with one single series of events, and the time it represented as elapsing be no greater than the time it took in playing. He was always pre-eminently an Englishman of his own day with a scholar's rather than a poet's temper, hating extravagance, hating bombast and cant, and only limited because in ruling out these things he ruled out much else that was essential to the spirit of the time. As a craftsman he was uncompromising; he never bowed to the tastes of the public and never veiled his scorn of those—Shakespeare among them—whom he conceived to do so; but he knew and valued his own work, as his famous last word to an audience who might be unsympathetic stands to witness, "By God 'tis good, and if you like it you may."

Compare the temper it reveals with the titles of the two contemporary comedies of his gentler and greater brother, the one *As You Like It*, the other *What You Will*. Of the two attitudes towards the public, and they might stand as typical of two kinds of artists, neither perhaps can claim complete sincerity. A truculent and noisy disclaimer of their favours is not a bad tone to assume towards an audience; in the end it is apt to succeed as well as the sub-ironical compliance which is its opposite. Jonson's theory of comedy and the consciousness with which he set it against the practice of his contemporaries and particularly of Shakespeare receive explicit statement in the prologue to *Every Man Out of His Humour*—one of his earlier plays. "I travail with another objection, Signor, which I fear will be enforced against the author ere I can be delivered of it," says Mitis. "What's that, sir?" replies Cordatus. Mitis:—"That the argument of his comedy might have been of some other nature, as of a duke to be in love with a countess, and that countess to be in love with the duke's son, and the son to love the lady's waiting maid; some such cross-wooing, better than to be thus near and familiarly allied to the times." Cordatus: "You say well, but I would fain hear one of these autumn-judgments define *Quin sit comoedia*? If he cannot, let him concern himself with Cicero's definition, till he have strength to propose to himself a better, who would have a comedy to be *invitatio vitae, speculum consuetudinis, imago veritatis*; a thing throughout pleasant and ridiculous and accommodated to the correction of manners." That was what he meant his comedy to be, and so he conceived the popular comedy of the day, *Twelfth Night* and *Much Ado*. Shakespeare might play with dukes and countesses, serving-women and pages, clowns and disguises; he would come down more near and ally himself familiarly with the times. So comedy was to be medicinal, to purge contemporary London of its follies and its sins; and it was to be constructed with regularity and elaboration, respectful to the Unities if not ruled by them, and built up of characters each the embodiment of some "humour" or eccentricity, and each when his eccentricity is displaying itself at its fullest, outwitted and exposed. This conception of "humours," based on a physiology which was already obsolescent, takes heavily from the realism of Jonson's methods, nor does his use of a careful vocabulary of contemporary colloquialism and slang save him from a certain dryness and tediousness to modern readers. The truth is he was less a satirist of contemporary manners than a satirist in the abstract who followed the models of classical writers in this style, and he found the vices and follies of his own day hardly adequate to the intricacy and elaborateness of the plots which he constructed for their exposure. At the first glance his people are contemporary types, at the second they betray themselves for what they are really—cock-shies set up by the new comedy of Greece that every "classical" satirist in Rome or France or England has had his shot at since. One wonders whether Ben Jonson, for all his satirical intention, had as much observation—as much of an eye for contemporary types—as Shakespeare's rustics and roysterers prove him to have had. It follows that all but one or two of his plays, when they are put on the stage to-day are apt to come to one with a sense of remoteness and other-worldliness which we hardly feel with Shakespeare or Molière. His muse moves along the high-road of comedy which is the Roman road, and she carries in her train types that have done service to many since the ancients fashioned them years ago. Jealous husbands, foolish pragmatic fathers, a dissolute son, a boastful soldier, a cunning slave—they all are merely counters by which the game of comedy used to be played. In England, since Shakespeare took his hold on the stage, that road has been stopped for us, that game has ceased to amuse. Ben Jonson, then, in a certain degree failed in his intention. Had he kept closer to contemporary life, instead of merely grafting on to it types he had learned from books, he might have made himself an English Molière—without Molière's breadth and clarity—but with a corresponding vigour and strength which would have kept his work sweet. And he might have founded a school of comedy that would have got its roots deeper into our national life than the trivial and licentious Restoration comedy ever succeeded in doing. As it is, his importance is mostly historical. One must credit him with being the first of the English classics—of the age which gave us Dryden and Swift and Pope. Perhaps that is enough in his praise.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

With the seventeenth century the great school of imaginative writers that made glorious the last years of Elizabeth's reign, had passed away. Spenser was dead before 1600, Sir Philip Sidney a dozen years earlier, and though Shakespeare and Drayton and many other men whom we class roughly as Elizabethan lived on to work under James, their temper and their ideals belong to the earlier day. The seventeenth century, not in England only but in Europe, brought a new way of thinking with it, and gave a new direction to human interest and to human affairs. It is not perhaps easy to define nor is it visible in the greater writers of the time. Milton, for instance, and Sir Thomas Browne are both of them too big, and in their genius too far separated from their fellows to give us much clue to altered conditions. It is commonly in the work of lesser and forgotten writers that the spirit of an age has its fullest expression. Genius is a law to itself; it moves in another dimension; it is out of time. To define this seventeenth century spirit, then, one must look at the literature of the age as a whole. What is there that one finds in it which marks a change in temperament and outlook from the Renaissance, and the time which immediately followed it?

Putting it very broadly one may say that literature in the seventeenth century becomes for the first time essentially modern in spirit. We began our survey of modern English literature at the Renaissance because the discovery of the New World, and the widening of human experience and knowledge, which that and the revival of classical learning implied, mark a definite break from a way of thought which had been continuous since the break up of the Roman Empire. The men of the Renaissance felt themselves to be modern. They started afresh, owing nothing to their immediate forbears, and when they talked, say, of Chaucer, they did so in very much the same accent as we do to-day. He was mediaeval and obsolete; the interest which he possessed was a purely literary interest; his readers did not meet him easily on the same plane of thought, or forget the lapse of time which separated him from them. And in another way too, the Renaissance began modern writing. Inflections had been dropped. The revival of the classics had enriched our vocabulary, and the English language, after a gradual impoverishment which followed the obsolescence one after another of the local dialects, attained a fairly fixed form. There is more difference between the language of the English writings of Sir Thomas More and that of the prose of Chaucer than there is between that of More and of Ruskin. But it is not till the seventeenth century that the modern spirit, in the fullest sense of the word, comes into being. Defined it means a spirit of observation, of preoccupation with detail, of stress laid on matter of fact, of analysis of feelings and mental processes, of free argument upon institutions and government. In relation to knowledge, it is the spirit of science, and the study of science, which is the essential intellectual fact in modern history, dates from just this time, from Bacon and Newton and Descartes. In relation to literature, it is the spirit of criticism, and criticism in England is the creation of the seventeenth century. The positive temper, the attitude of realism, is everywhere in the ascendant. The sixteenth century made voyages of discovery; the seventeenth sat down to take stock of the riches it had gathered. For the first time in English literature writing becomes a vehicle for storing and conveying facts. It would be easy to give instances: one must suffice here. Biography, which is one of the most characteristic kinds of English writing, was unknown to the moderns as late as the sixteenth century. Partly the awakened interest in the careers of the ancient statesmen and soldiers which the study of Plutarch had excited, and partly the general interest in, and craving for, facts set men writing down the lives of their fellows. The earliest English biographies date from this time. In the beginning they were concerned, like Plutarch, with men of action, and when Sir Fulke Greville wrote a brief account of his friend Sir Philip Sidney it was the courtier and the soldier, and not the author, that he designed to celebrate. But soon men of letters came within their scope, and though the interest in the lives of authors came too late to give us the contemporary life of Shakespeare we so much long for, it was early enough to make possible those masterpieces of condensed biography in which Isaak Walton celebrates Herbert and Donne. Fuller and Aubrey, to name only two authors, spent lives of laborious industry in hunting down and chronicling the smallest facts about the worthies of their day and the time immediately before them. Autobiography followed where biography led. Lord Herbert of Cherbury and Margaret Duchess of Newcastle, as well as less reputable persons, followed the new mode. By the time of the Restoration Pepys and Evelyn were keeping their diaries, and Fox his journal. Just as in poetry the lyric, that is the expression of personal feeling, became more widely practised, more subtle and more sincere, in prose the letter, the journal, and the autobiography formed themselves to meet the new and growing demand for analysis of the feelings and

the intimate thoughts and sensations of real men and women. A minor form of literature which had a brief but popular vogue ministered less directly to the same need. The "Character," a brief descriptive essay on a contemporary type—a tobacco seller, an old college butler or the like—was popular because in its own way it matched the newly awakened taste for realism and fact. The drama which in the hands of Ben Jonson had attacked folly and wickedness proper to no place or time, descended to the drawing-rooms of the day, and Congreve occupied himself with the portrayal of the social frauds and foolishnesses perpetrated by actual living men and women of fashion in contemporary London. Satire ceased to be a mere expression of a vague discontent, and became a weapon against opposing men and policies. The new generation of readers were nothing if not critical. They were for testing directly institutions whether they were literary, social, or political. They wanted facts, and they wanted to take a side.

In the distinct and separate realm of poetry a revolution no less remarkable took place. Spenser had been both a poet and a Puritan: he had designed to show by his great poem the training and fashioning of a Puritan English gentleman. But the alliance between poetry and Puritanism which he typified failed to survive his death. The essentially pagan spirit of the Renaissance which caused him no doubts nor difficulties proved too strong for his readers and his followers, and the emancipated artistic enthusiasm in which it worked alienated from secular poetry men with deep and strong religious convictions. Religion and morality and poetry, which in Sidney and Spenser had gone hand in hand, separated from each other. Poems like *Venus and Adonis* or like Shakespeare's sonnets could hardly be squared with the sterner temper which persecution began to breed. Even within orthodox Anglicanism poetry and religion began to be deemed no fit company for each other. When George Herbert left off courtier and took orders he burnt his earlier love poetry, and only the persuasion of his friends prevented Donne from following the same course. Pure poetry became more and more an exotic. All Milton's belongs to his earlier youth; his middle age was occupied with controversy and propaganda in prose; when he returned to poetry in blindness and old age it was "to justify the ways of God to man"—to use poetry, that is, for a spiritual and moral rather than an artistic end. Though the age was curious and inquiring, though poetry and prose tended more and more to be enlisted in the service of non-artistic enthusiasms and to be made the vehicle of deeper emotions and interests than perhaps a northern people could ever find in art, pure and simple, it was not like the time that followed it, a "prosaic" age. Enthusiasm burned fierce and clear, displaying itself in the passionate polemic of Milton, in the fanaticism of Bunyan and Fox, hardly more than in the gentle, steadfast search for knowledge in Burton, and the wide and vigilant curiousness of Bacon. Its eager experimentalism tried the impossible; wrote poems and then gave them a weight of meaning they could not carry, as when Fletcher in *The Purple Island* designed to allegorize all that the physiology of his day knew of the human body, or Donne sought to convey abstruse scientific fact in a lyric. It gave men a passion for pure learning, set Jonson to turn himself from a bricklayer into the best equipped scholar of his day, and Fuller and Camden grubbing among English records and gathering for the first time materials of scientific value for English history. Enthusiasm gave us poetry that was at once full of learning and of imagination, poetry that was harsh and brutal in its roughness and at the same time impassioned. And it set up a school of prose that combined colloquial readiness and fluency, pregnancy and high sentiment with a cumbrous pedantry of learning which was the fruit of its own excess. The form in which enthusiasm manifested itself most fiercely was as we have seen not favourable to literature. Puritanism drove itself like a wedge into the art of the time, broadening as it went. Had there been no more in it than the moral earnestness and religiousness of Sidney and Spenser, Cavalier would not have differed from Roundhead, and there might have been no civil war; each party was endowed deeply with the religious sense and Charles I. was a sincerely pious man. But while Spenser and Sidney held that life as a preparation for eternity must be ordered and strenuous and devout but that care for the hereafter was not incompatible with a frank and full enjoyment of life as it is lived, Puritanism as it developed in the middle classes became a sterner and darker creed. The doctrine of original sin, face to face with the fact that art, like other pleasures, was naturally and readily entered into and enjoyed, forced them to the plain conclusion that art was an evil thing. As early as Shakespeare's youth they had been strong enough to keep the theatres outside London walls; at the time of the Civil War they closed them altogether, and the feud which had lasted for over a generation between them and the dramatists ended in the destruction of the literary drama. In the brief years of their ascendancy they produced no literature, for Milton is much too large to be tied down to their negative creed, and, indeed, in many of his qualities, his love of music and his sensuousness for instance, he is antagonistic to the temper of his day. With the Restoration their earnest and strenuous spirit fled to America. It is

noteworthy that it had no literary manifestation there till two centuries after the time of its passage. Hawthorne's novels are the fruit—the one ripe fruit in art—of the Puritan imagination.

If the reader adopts the seventeenth century habit himself and takes stock of what the Elizabethans accomplished in poetry, he will recognize speedily that their work reached various stages of completeness. They perfected the poetic drama and its instrument, blank verse; they perfected, though not in the severer Italian form, the sonnet; they wrote with extraordinary delicacy and finish short lyrics in which a simple and freer manner drawn from the classics took the place of the mediaeval intricacies of the ballad and the rondeau. And in the forms which they failed to bring to perfection they did beautiful and noble work. The splendour of *The Fairy Queen* is in separate passages; as a whole it is over tortuous and slow; its affectations, its sensuousness, the mere difficulty of reading it, makes us feel it a collection of great passages, strung it is true on a large conception, rather than a great work. The Elizabethans, that is, had not discovered the secret of the long poem; the abstract idea of the "heroic" epic which was in all their minds had to wait for embodiment till *Paradise Lost*. In a way their treatment of the pastoral or eclogue form was imperfect too. They used it well but not so well as their models, Vergil and Theocritus; they had not quite mastered the convention on which it is built. The seventeenth century, taking stock in some such fashion of its artistic possessions, found some things it were vain to try to do. It could add nothing to the accomplishment of the English sonnet, so it hardly tried; with the exception of a few sonnets in the Italian form of Milton, the century can show us nothing in this mode of verse. The literary drama was brought to perfection in the early years of it by the surviving Elizabethans; later decades could add nothing to it but licence, and as we saw, the licences they added hastened its destruction. But in other forms the poets of the new time experimented eagerly, and in the stress of experiment, poetry which under Elizabeth had been integral and coherent split into different schools. As the period of the Renaissance was also that of the Reformation it was only natural a determined effort should sooner or later be made to use poetry for religious purposes. The earliest English hymn writing, our first devotional verse in the vernacular, belongs to this time, and a Catholic and religious school of lyricism grew and flourished beside the pagan neo-classical writers. From the tumult of experiment three schools disengage themselves, the school of Spenser, the school of Jonson, and the school of Donne. At the outset of the century Spenser's influence was triumphant and predominant; his was the main stream with which the other poetic influences of the time merely mingled. His popularity is referable to qualities other than those which belonged peculiarly to his talent as a poet. Puritans loved his religious ardour, and in those Puritan households where the stricter conception of the diabolical nature of all poetry had not penetrated, his works were read—standing on a shelf, may be, between the new translation of the Bible and Sylvester's translation of the French poet Du Bartas' work on the creation, that had a large popularity at that time as family reading. Probably the Puritans were as blind to the sensuousness of Spenser's language and imagery as they were (and are) to the same qualities in the Bible itself. *The Fairy Queen* would easily achieve innocuousness amongst those who can find nothing but an allegory of the Church in the "Song of Songs." His followers made their allegory a great deal plainer than he had done his. In his poem called *The Purple Island*, Phineas Fletcher, a Puritan imitator of Spenser in Cambridge, essayed to set forth the struggle of the soul at grip with evil, a battle in which the body—the "Purple Island"—is the field. To a modern reader it is a desolating and at times a mildly amusing book, in which everything from the liver to the seven deadly sins is personified; in which after four books of allegorized contemporary anatomy and physiology, the will (Voletta) engages in a struggle with Satan and conquers by the help of Christ and King James! The allegory is clever—too clever—and the author can paint a pleasant picture, but on the whole he was happier in his pastoral work. His brother Giles made a better attempt at the Spenserian manner. His long poem, *Christ's Victory and Death*, shows for all its carefully Protestant tone high qualities of mysticism; across it Spenser and Milton join hands.

It was, however, in pastoral poetry that Spenser's influence found its pleasantest outlet. One might hesitate to advise a reader to embark on either of the Fletchers. There is no reason why any modern should not read and enjoy Browne or Wither, in whose softly flowing verse the sweetness and contentment of the countryside, that "merry England" which was the background of all sectarian and intellectual strife and labour, finds as in a placid stream a calm reflection and picture of itself. The seventeenth century gave birth to many things that only came to maturity in the nineteenth; if you care for that kind of literary study which searches out origins and digs for hints and models of accented styles, you will find in Browne that which influenced more than any other single thing the early work of Keats. Browne has another claim to

immortality; if it be true as is now thought that he was the author of the epitaph on the Countess of Pembroke:

"Underneath this sable hearse  
Lies the subject of all verse,  
Sidney's sister, Pembroke's mother.  
Death, ere thou hast slain another  
Fair and learned and good as she,  
Time shall throw a dart at thee."

then he achieved the miracle of a quintessential statement of the spirit of the English Renaissance. For the breath of it stirs in these slow quiet moving lines, and its few and simple words implicate the soul of a period. By the end of the first quarter of the century the influence of Spenser and the school which worked under it had died out. Its place was taken by the twin schools of Jonson and Donne. Jonson's poetic method is something like his dramatic; he formed himself as exactly as possible on classical models. Horace had written satires and elegies, and epistles and complimentary verses, and Jonson quite consciously and deliberately followed where Horace led. He wrote elegies on the great, letters and courtly compliments and love-lyrics to his friends, satires with an air of general censure. But though he was classical, his style was never latinized. In all of them he strove to pour into an ancient form language that was as intense and vigorous and as purely English as the earliest trumpeters of the Renaissance in England could have wished. The result is not entirely successful. He seldom fails to reproduce classic dignity and good sense; on the other hand he seldom succeeds in achieving classic grace and ease. Occasionally, as in his best known lyric, he is perfect and achieves an air of spontaneity little short of marvellous, when we know that his images and even his words in the song are all plagiarized from other men. His expression is always clear and vigorous and his sense good and noble. The native earnestness and sincerity of the man shines through as it does in his dramas and his prose. In an age of fantastic and meaningless eulogy—eulogy so amazing in its unexpectedness and abstruseness that the wonder is not so much that it should have been written as that it could have been thought of—Jonson maintains his personal dignity and his good sense. You feel his compliments are such as the best should be, not necessarily understood and properly valued by the public, but of a discriminating sort that by their very comprehending sincerity would be most warmly appreciated by the people to whom they were addressed. His verses to Shakespeare and his prose commentaries on him too, are models of what self-respecting admiration should be, generous in its praise of excellence, candid in its statement of defects. They are the kind of compliments that Shakespeare himself, if he had grace enough, must have loved to receive.

Very different from his direct and dignified manner is the closely packed style of Donne, who, Milton apart, is the greatest English writer of the century, though his obscurity has kept him out of general reading. No poetry in English, not even Browning, is more difficult to understand. The obscurity of Donne and Browning proceed from such similar causes that they are worth examining together. In both, as in the obscure passages in Shakespeare's later plays, obscurity arises not because the poet says too little but because he attempts to say too much. He huddles a new thought on the one before it, before the first has had time to express itself; he sees things or analyses emotions so swiftly and subtly himself that he forgets the slower comprehensions of his readers; he is for analysing things far deeper than the ordinary mind commonly can. His wide and curious knowledge finds terms and likenesses to express his meaning unknown to us; he sees things from a dozen points of view at once and tumbles a hint of each separate vision in a heap out on to the page; his restless intellect finds new and subtler shades of emotion and thought invisible to other pairs of eyes, and cannot, because speech is modelled on the average of our intelligences, find words to express them; he is always trembling on the brink of the inarticulate. All this applies to both Donne and Browning, and the comparison could be pushed further still. Both draw the knowledge which is the main cause of their obscurity from the same source, the bypaths of mediaevalism. Browning's *Sordello* is obscure because he knows too much about mediaeval Italian history; Donne's *Anniversary* because he is too deeply read in mediaeval scholasticism and speculation. Both make themselves more difficult to the reader who is familiar with the poetry of their contemporaries by the disconcerting freshness of their point of view. Seventeenth century love poetry was idyllic and idealist; Donne's is passionate and realistic to the point of cynicism. To read him after reading Browne or Jonson is to have the same shock as reading Browning after Tennyson. Both poets are salutary in the strong and

biting antidote they bring to sentimentalism in thought and melodious facility in writing. They are the corrective of lazy thinking and lazy composition. Elizabethan love poetry was written on a convention which though it was used with manliness and entire sincerity by Sidney did not escape the fate of its kind. Dante's love for Beatrice, Petrarch's for Laura, the gallant and passionate adoration of Sidney for his Stella became the models for a dismal succession of imaginary woes. They were all figments of the mind, perhaps hardly that; they all use the same terms and write in fixed strains, epicurean and sensuous like Ronsard, ideal and intellectualized like Dante, sentimental and adoring like Petrarch. Into this enclosed garden of sentiment and illusion Donne burst passionately and rudely, pulling up the gay-coloured tangled weeds that choked thoughts, planting, as one of his followers said, the seeds of fresh invention. Where his forerunners had been idealist, epicurean, or adoring, he was brutal, cynical and immitigably realist. He could begin a poem,

"For God's sake hold your tongue and let me live"; he could be as resolutely free from illusion as Shakespeare when he addressed his Dark Lady—  
"Hope not for mind in women; at their best,  
Sweetness and wit they're but mummy possesset."

And where the sonneteers pretended to a sincerity which was none of theirs, he was, like Browning, unaffectedly a dramatic lyricist. "I did best," he said, "when I had least truth for my subject." His love poetry was written in his turbulent and brilliant youth, and the poetic talent which made it turned in his later years to express itself in hymns and religious poetry. But there is no essential distinction between the two halves of his work. It is all of a piece. The same swift and subtle spirit which analyses experiences of passion, analyses, in his later poetry, those of religion. His devotional poems, though they probe and question, are none the less never sermons, but rather confessions or prayers. His intense individuality, eager always, as his best critic has said, "to find a North-West passage of his own," pressed its curious and sceptical questioning into every corner of love and life and religion, explored unsuspected depths, exploited new discovered paradoxes, and turned its discoveries always into poetry of the closely-packed artificial style which was all its own. Simplicity indeed would have been for him an affectation; his elaborateness is not like that of his followers, constructed painfully in a vicious desire to compass the unexpected, but the natural overflow of an amazingly fertile and ingenious mind. The curiosity, the desire for truth, the search after minute and detailed knowledge of his age is all in his verse. He bears the spirit of his time not less markedly than Bacon does, or Newton, or Descartes. The work of the followers of Donne and Jonson leads straight to the new school, Jonson's by giving that school a model on which to work, Donne's by producing an era of extravagance and absurdity which made a literary revolution imperative. The school of Donne—the "fantastics" as they have been called (Dr. Johnson called them the metaphysical poets), produced in Herbert and Vaughan, our two noblest writers of religious verse, the flower of a mode of writing which ended in the somewhat exotic religiousness of Crashaw. In the hands of Cowley the use of far-sought and intricate imagery became a trick, and the fantastic school, the soul of sincerity gone out of it, died when he died. To the followers of Jonson we owe that delightful and simple lyric poetry which fills our anthologies, their courtly lyricism receiving a new impulse in the intenser loyalty of troubled times. The most finished of them is perhaps Carew; the best, because of the freshness and variety of his subject-matter and his easy grace, Herrick. At the end of them came Waller and gave to the five-accented rhymed verse (the heroic couplet) that trick of regularity and balance which gave us the classical school.

The prose literature of the seventeenth century is extraordinarily rich and varied, and a study of it would cover a wide field of human knowledge. The new and unsuspected harmonies discovered by the Elizabethans were applied indeed to all the tasks of which prose is capable, from telling stories to setting down the results of speculation which was revolutionizing science and philosophy. For the first time the vernacular and not Latin became the language of scientific research, and though Bacon in his *Novum Organum* adhered to the older mode its disappearance was rapid. English was proving itself too flexible an instrument for conveying ideas to be longer neglected. It was applied too to preaching of a more formal and grandiose kind than the plain and homely Latimer ever dreamed of. The preachers, though their golden-mouthed oratory, which blended in its combination of vigour and cadence the euphuistic and colloquial styles of the Elizabethans, is in itself a glory of English literature, belong by their matter too exclusively to the province of Church history to be dealt with here. The men of science and philosophy, Newton, Hobbes, and Locke, are in a like way outside our province. For the purpose of the literary student the achievement



of the seventeenth century can be judged in four separate men or books—in the Bible, in Francis Bacon, and in Burton and Browne. In a way the Bible, like the preachers, lies outside the domain of literary study in the narrow sense; but its sheer literary magnitude, the abiding significance of it in our subsequent history, social, political, and artistic as well as religious, compel us to turn aside to examine the causes that have produced such great results. The Authorized Version is not, of course, a purely seventeenth century work. Though the scholars who wrote and compiled it had before them all the previous vernacular texts and chose the best readings where they found them or devised new ones in accordance with the original, the basis is undoubtedly the Tudor version of Tindall. It has, none the less, the qualities of the time of its publication. It could hardly have been done earlier; had it been so, it would not have been done half so well. In it English has lost both its roughness and its affectation and retained its strength; the Bible is the supreme example of early English prose style. The reason is not far to seek. Of all recipes for good or noble writing that which enjoins the writer to be careful about the matter and never mind the manner, is the most sure. The translators had the handling of matter of the gravest dignity and momentousness, and their sense of reverence kept them right in their treatment of it. They cared passionately for the truth; they were virtually anonymous and not ambitious of originality or literary fame; they had no desire to stand between the book and its readers. It followed that they cultivated that naked plainness and spareness which makes their work supreme. The Authorized Version is the last and greatest of those English translations which were the fruit of Renaissance scholarship and pioneering. It is the first and greatest piece of English prose.

Its influence is one of those things on which it is profitless to comment or enlarge simply because they are an understood part of every man's experience. In its own time it helped to weld England, for where before one Bible was read at home and another in churches, all now read the new version. Its supremacy was instantaneous and unchallenged, and it quickly coloured speech and literature; it could produce a Bunyan in the century of its birth. To it belongs the native dignity and eloquence of peasant speech. It runs like a golden thread through all our writing subsequent to its coming; men so diverse as Huxley and Carlyle have paid their tribute to its power; Ruskin counted it the one essential part of its education. It will be a bad day for the mere quality of our language when it ceases to be read. At the time the translators were sitting, Francis Bacon was at the height of his fame. By profession a lawyer—time-serving and over-compliant to wealth and influence—he gives singularly little evidence of it in the style of his books. Lawyers, from the necessity they are under of exerting persuasion, of planting an unfamiliar argument in the minds of hearers of whose favour they are doubtful, but whose sympathy they must gain, are usually of purpose diffuse. They cultivate the gift, possessed by Edmund Burke above all other English authors, of putting the same thing freshly and in different forms a great many times in succession. They value copiousness and fertility of illustration. Nothing could be more unlike this normal legal manner than the style of Bacon. "No man," says Ben Jonson, speaking in one of those vivid little notes of his, of his oratorical method, "no man ever coughed or turned aside from him without loss." He is a master of the aphoristic style. He compresses his wisdom into the quintessential form of an epigram; so complete and concentrated is his form of statement, so shortly is everything put, that the mere transition from one thought to another gives his prose a curious air of disjointedness as if he flitted arbitrarily from one thing to another, and jotted down anything that came into his head. His writing has clarity and lucidity, it abounds in terseness of expression and in exact and discriminating phraseology, and in the minor arts of composition—in the use of quotations for instance—it can be extraordinarily felicitous. But it lacks spaciousness and ease and rhythm; it makes too inexorable a demand on the attention, and the harassed reader soon finds himself longing for those breathing spaces which consideration or perhaps looseness of thought has implanted in the prose of other writers.

His Essays, the work by which he is best known, were in their origin merely jottings gradually cohered and enlarged into the series we know. In them he had the advantage of a subject which he had studied closely through life. He counted himself a master in the art of managing men, and "Human Nature and how to manage it" would be a good title for his book. Men are studied in the spirit of Machiavelli, whose philosophy of government appealed so powerfully to the Elizabethan mind. Taken together the essays which deal with public matters are in effect a kind of manual for statesmen and princes, instructing them how to acquire power and how to keep it, deliberating how far they may go safely in the direction of self-interest, and to what degree the principle of self-interest must be subordinated to the wider interests of the people who are ruled. Democracy, which in England was to make its splendid beginnings in the seventeenth century, finds little to foretell it in the works of Bacon. Though he never advocates cruelty or

oppression and is wise enough to see that no statesman can entirely set aside moral considerations, his ethical tone is hardly elevating; the moral obliquity of his public life is to a certain extent explained, in all but its grosser elements, in his published writings. The essays, of course, contain much more than this; the spirit of curious and restless enquiry which animated Bacon finds expression in those on "Health," or "Gardens" and "Plantations" and others of the kind; and a deeper vein of earnestness runs through some of them—those for instance on "Friendship," or "Truth" and on "Death."

The Essays sum up in a condensed form the intellectual interests which find larger treatment in his other works. His *Henry VII.*, the first piece of scientific history in the English language (indeed in the modern world) is concerned with a king whose practice was the outcome of a political theory identical with Bacon's own. The *Advancement of Learning* is a brilliant popular exposition of the cause of scientific enquiry and of the inductive or investigatory method of research. The *New Atlantis* is the picture of an ideal community whose common purpose is scientific investigation. Bacon's name is not upon the roll of those who have enlarged by brilliant conjectures or discoveries the store of human knowledge; his own investigations so far as they are recorded are all of a trivial nature. The truth about him is that he was a brilliantly clever populariser of science, a kind of seventeenth century Huxley, concerned rather to lay down large general principles for the guidance of the work of others, than to be a serious worker himself. The superstition of later times, acting on and refracting his amazing intellectual gifts, has raised him to a godlike eminence which is by right none of his; it has even credited him with the authorship of Shakespeare, and in its wilder moments with the composition of all that is of supreme worth in Elizabethan literature. It is not necessary to take these delusions seriously. The ignorance of mediaevalism was in the habit of crediting Vergil with the construction of the Roman aqueducts and temples whose ruins are scattered over Europe. The modern Baconians reach much the same intellectual level.

A similar enthusiasm for knowledge and at any rate a pretence to science belong to the author of the *Anatomy of Melancholy*, Robert Burton. His one book is surely the most amazing in English prose. Its professed object was simple and comprehensive; it was to analyze human melancholy, to describe its effects, and prescribe for its removal. But as his task grew, melancholy came to mean to Burton all the ills that flesh is heir to. He tracked it in obscure and unsuspected forms; drew illustrations from a range of authors so much wider than the compass of the reading of even the most learned since, that he is generally credited with the invention of a large part of his quotations. Ancients and moderns, poets and prose writers, schoolmen and dramatists are all drawn upon for the copious store of his examples; they are always cited with an air of quietly humorous shrewdness in the comments and enclosed in a prose that is straightforward, simple and vigorous, and can on occasion command both rhythm and beauty of phrase. It is a mistake to regard Burton from the point of view (due largely to Charles Lamb) of tolerant or loving delight in quaintness for quaintness' sake. His book is anything but scientific in form, but it is far from being the work of a recluse or a fool. Behind his lack of system, he takes a broad and psychologically an essentially just view of human ills, and modern medicine has gone far in its admiration of what is at bottom a most comprehensive and subtle treatise in diagnosis. A writer of a very different quality is Sir Thomas Browne. Of all the men of his time, he is the only one of whom one can say for certain that he held the manner of saying a thing more important than the thing said. He is our first deliberate and conscious stylist, the forerunner of Charles Lamb, of Stevenson (whose *Virginibus Puerisque* is modelled on his method of treatment) and of the stylistic school of our own day. His eloquence is too studied to rise to the greatest heights, and his speculation, though curious and discursive, never really results in deep thinking. He is content to embroider his pattern out of the stray fancies of an imaginative nature. His best known work, the *Religio Medici*, is a random confession of belief and thoughts, full of the inconsequent speculations of a man with some knowledge of science but not deeply or earnestly interested about it, content rather to follow the wayward imaginations of a mind naturally gifted with a certain poetic quality, than to engage in serious intellectual exercise. Such work could never maintain its hold on taste if it were not carefully finished and constructed with elaborate care. Browne, if he was not a great writer, was a literary artist of a high quality. He exploits a quaint and lovable egoism with extraordinary skill; and though his delicately figured and latinized sentences commonly sound platitudinous and trivial when they are translated into rough Saxon prose, as they stand they are rich and melodious enough.

In a century of surpassing richness in prose and poetry, one author stands by himself. John Milton refuses to be classed with any of the schools. Though Dryden tells us Milton confessed to him that Spenser was his

"original," he has no connection—other than a general similarity of purpose, moral and religious—with Spenser's followers. To the fantastics he paid in his youth the doubtful compliment of one or two half-contemptuous imitations and never touched them again. He had no turn for the love lyrics or the courtliness of the school of Jonson. In everything he did he was himself and his own master; he devised his own subjects and wrote his own style. He stands alone and must be judged alone. No author, however, can ever escape from the influences of his time, and, just as much as his lesser contemporaries, Milton has his place in literary history and derives from the great original impulse which set in motion all the enterprises of the century. He is the last and greatest figure in the English Renaissance. The new passion for art and letters which in its earnest fumbling beginnings gave us the prose of Cheke and Ascham and the poetry of Surrey and Sackville, comes to a full and splendid and perfect end in his work. In it the Renaissance and the Reformation, imperfectly fused by Sidney and Spenser, blend in their just proportions. The transplantation into English of classical forms which had been the aim of Sidney and the endeavour of Jonson he finally accomplished; in his work the dream of all the poets of the Renaissance—the heroic poem—finds its fulfilment. There was no poet of the time but wanted to do for his country what Vergil had planned to do for Rome, to sing its origins, and to celebrate its morality and its citizenship in the epic form. Spenser had tried it in *The Fairy Queen* and failed splendidly. Where he failed, Milton succeeded, though his poem is not on the origins of England but on the ultimate subject of the origins of mankind. We know from his notebooks that he turned over in his mind a national subject and that the Arthurian legend for a while appealed to him. But to Milton's earnest temper nothing that was not true was a fit subject for poetry. It was inevitable he should lay it aside. The Arthurian story he knew to be a myth and a myth was a lie; the story of the Fall, on the other hand, he accepted in common with his time for literal fact. It is to be noted as characteristic of his confident and assured egotism that he accepted no less sincerely and literally the imaginative structure which he himself reared on it. However that may be, the solid fact about him is that in this "adventurous song" with its pursuit of "Things unattempted yet in prose or rhyme,"

he succeeded in his attempt, that alone among the moderns he contrived to write an epic which stands on the same eminence as the ancient writings of the kind, and that he found time in a life, which hardly extended to old age as we know it, to write, besides noble lyrics and a series of fiercely argumentative prose treatises, two other masterpieces in the grand style, a tragedy modelled on the Greeks and a second epic on the "compact" style of the book of Job. No English poet can compare with him in majesty or completeness. An adequate study of his achievement is impossible within the limits of the few pages that are all a book like this can spare to a single author. Readers who desire it will find it in the work of his two best critics, Mark Pattison and Sir Walter Raleigh.[4] All that can be done here is to call attention to some of his most striking qualities. Foremost, of course, is the temper of the man. From the beginning he was sure of himself and sure of his mission; he had his purpose plain and clear. There is no mental development, hardly, visible in his work, only training, undertaken anxiously and prayerfully and with a clearly conceived end. He designed to write a masterpiece and he would not start till he was ready. The first twenty years of his life were spent in assiduous reading; for twenty more he was immersed in the dust and toil of political conflict, using his pen and his extraordinary equipment of learning and eloquence to defend the cause of liberty, civil and religious, and to attack its enemies; not till he was past middle age had he reached the leisure and the preparedness necessary to accomplish his self-imposed work. But all the time, as we know, he had it in his mind. In *Lycidas*, written in his Cambridge days, he apologizes to his readers for plucking the fruit of his poetry before it is ripe. In passage after passage in his prose works he begs for his reader's patience for a little while longer till his preparation be complete. When the time came at last for beginning he was in no doubt; in his very opening lines he intends, he says, to soar no "middle flight." This self-assured unrelenting certainty of his, carried into his prose essays in argument, produces sometimes strange results. One is peculiarly interesting to us now in view of current controversy. He was unhappily married, and because he was unhappy the law of divorce must be changed. A modern—George Eliot for instance—would have pleaded the artistic temperament and been content to remain outside the law. Milton always argued from himself to mankind at large. In everything he did, he put forth all his strength. Each of his poems, long or short, is by itself a perfect whole, wrought complete. The reader always must feel that the planning of each is the work of conscious, deliberate, and selecting art. Milton never digresses; he never violates harmony of sound or sense; his poems have all their regular movement from quiet beginning through a rising and breaking wave of passion and splendour to quiet close. His art is nowhere better seen than in his endings.

Is it Lycidas? After the thunder of approaching vengeance on the hireling shepherds of the Church, comes sunset and quiet:

"And now the sun had stretch'd out all the hills,  
And now was dropt into the western bay;  
At last he rose, and twitched his mantle blue:  
To-morrow to fresh woods and pastures new."  
Is it Paradise Lost? After the agonies of expulsion and the flaming sword—  
"Some natural tears they drop'd, but wip'd them soon;  
The world was all before them where to choose  
Their place of rest, and Providence their guide;  
They hand in hand with wandering steps and slow,  
Through Eden took their solitary way."  
Is it finally Samson Agonistes?  
"His servants he with new acquist,  
Of true experience from this great event,  
With peace and consolation hath dismiss,  
And calm of mind all passion spent."  
"Calm of mind, all passion spent," it is the essence of Milton's art.

He worked in large ideas and painted splendid canvases; it was necessary for him to invent a style which should be capable of sustained and lofty dignity, which should be ornate enough to maintain the interest of the reader and charm him and at the same time not so ornate as to give an air of meretricious decoration to what was largely and simply conceived. Particularly it was necessary for him to avoid those incursions of vulgar associations which words carelessly used will bring in their train. He succeeded brilliantly in this difficult task. The unit of the Miltonic style is not the phrase but the word, each word fastidiously chosen, commonly with some air of an original and lost meaning about it, and all set in a verse in which he contrived by an artful variation of pause and stress to give the variety which other writers had from rhyme. In this as in his structure he accomplished what the Renaissance had only dreamed. Though he had imitators (the poetic diction of the age following is modelled on him) he had no followers. No one has been

## CHAPTER V

### THE AGE OF GOOD SENSE

The student of literature, when he passes in his reading from the age of Shakespeare and Milton to that of Dryden and Pope, will be conscious of certain sharply defined differences between the temper and styles of the writers of the two periods. If besides being a student of literature he is also (for this is a different thing) a student of literary criticism he will find that these differences have led to the affixing of certain labels—that the school to which writers of the former period belong is called "Romantic" and that of the latter "Classic," this "Classic" school being again overthrown towards the end of the eighteenth century by a set of writers who unlike the Elizabethans gave the name "Romantic" to themselves. What is he to understand by these two labels; what are the characteristics of "Classicism" and how far is it opposite to and conflicting with "Romanticism"? The question is difficult because the names are used vaguely and they do not adequately cover everything that is commonly put under them. It would be difficult, for instance, to find anything in Ben Jonson which proclaims him as belonging to a different school from Dryden, and perhaps the same could be said in the second and self-styled period of Romanticism of the work of Crabbe. But in the main the differences are real and easily visible, even though they hardly convince us that the names chosen are the happiest that could be found by way of description.

This period of Dryden and Pope on which we are now entering sometimes styled itself the Augustan Age of English poetry. It grounded its claim to classicism on a fancied resemblance to the Roman poets of the golden age of Latin poetry, the reign of the Emperor Augustus. Its authors saw themselves each as a second Vergil, a second Ovid, most of all a second Horace, and they believed that their relation to the big world, their assured position in society, heightened the resemblances. They endeavoured to form their poetry on the lines laid down in the critical writing of the original Augustan age as elaborated and interpreted in Renaissance criticism. It was tacitly assumed—some of them openly asserted it—that the kinds, modes of treatment and all the minor details of literature, figures of speech, use of epithets and the rest, had been settled by the ancients once and for all. What the Greeks began the critics and authors of the time of Augustus had settled in its completed form, and the scholars of the Renaissance had only interpreted their findings for modern use. There was the tragedy, which had certain proper parts and a certain fixed order of treatment laid down for it; there was the heroic poem, which had a story or "fable," which must be treated in a certain fixed manner, and so on. The authors of the "Classic" period so christened themselves because they observed these rules. And they fancied that they had the temper of the Augustan time—the temper displayed in the works of Horace more than in those of any one else—its urbanity, its love of good sense and moderation, its instinctive distrust of emotion, and its invincible good breeding. If you had asked them to state as simply and broadly as possible their purpose they would have said it was to follow nature, and if you had enquired what they meant by nature it would turn out that they thought of it mainly as the opposite of art and the negation of what was fantastic, tortured, or far sought in thinking or writing. The later "Romantic" Revival, when it called itself a return to nature, was only claiming the intention which the classical school itself had proclaimed as its main endeavour. The explanation of that paradox we shall see presently; in the meantime it is worth looking at some of the characteristics of classicism as they appear in the work of the "Classic" authors.

In the first place the "Classic" writers aimed at simplicity of style, at a normal standard of writing. They were intolerant of individual eccentricities; they endeavoured, and with success, to infuse into English letters something of the academic spirit that was already controlling their fellow-craftsmen in France. For this end amongst others they and the men of science founded the Royal Society, an academic committee which has been restricted since to the physical and natural sciences and been supplemented by similar bodies representing literature and learning only in our own day. Clearness, plainness, conversational ease and directness were the aims the society set before its members where their writing was concerned. "The Royal Society," wrote the Bishop of Rochester, its first historian, "have exacted from all their members a close, naked, natural way of speaking; positive expressions, clear sense, a native easiness, bringing all things as near the mathematical plainness as they can; and preferring the language of artisans, countrymen, and merchants before that of wits and scholars." Artisans, countrymen, and merchants—the ideal had been already accepted in France, Malesherbes striving to use no word that was not in the vocabulary of the day labourers of Paris, Molière making his washerwoman first critic of his comedies. It meant for England the

disuse of the turgidities and involutions which had marked the prose of the preachers and moralists of the times of James and Charles I.; scholars and men of letters were arising who would have taken John Bunyan, the unlettered tinker of Bedford, for their model rather than the learned physician Sir Thomas Browne.

But genius like Bunyan's apart, there is nothing in the world more difficult than to write with the easy and forthright simplicity of talk, as any one may see who tries for himself—or even compares the letter-writing with the conversation of his friends. So that this desire of simplicity, of clarity, of lucidity led at once to a more deliberate art. Dryden and Swift and Addison were assiduous in their labour with the file; they excel all their predecessors in polish as much as the writers of the first Augustan age excelled theirs in the same quality. Not that it was all the result of deliberate art; in a way it was in the air, and quite unlearned people—journalists and pamphleteers and the like who wrote unconsciously and hurriedly to buy their supper—partook of it as well as leisured people and conscious artists. Defoe is as plain and easy and polished as Swift, yet it is certain his amazing activity and productiveness never permitted him to look back over a sentence he had written. Something had happened, that is, to the English language. The assimilation of latinisms and the revival of obsolete terms of speech had ceased; it had become finally a more or less fixed form, shedding so much of its imports as it had failed to make part of itself and acquiring a grammatical and syntactical fixity which it had not possessed in Elizabethan times. When Shakespeare wrote

"What cares these roarers for the name of king,"

he was using, as students of his language never tire of pointing out to us, a perfectly correct local grammatical form. Fifty years after that line was written, at the Restoration, local forms had dropped out of written English. We had acquired a normal standard of language, and either genius or labour was polishing it for literary uses. What they did for prose these "Classic" writers did even more exactly—and less happily—for verse. Fashions often become exaggerated before their disappearance, and the decadence of Elizabethan romanticism had produced poetry the wildness and extravagance of whose images was well-nigh unbounded. The passion for intricate and far-sought metaphor which had possessed Donne was accompanied in his work and even more in that of his followers with a passion for what was elusive and recondite in thought and emotion and with an increasing habit of rudeness and wilful difficultness in language and versification. Against these ultimate licences of a great artistic period, the classical writers invoked the qualities of smoothness and lucidity, in the same way, so they fancied, as Vergil might have invoked them against Lucretius. In the treatment of thought and feeling they wanted clearness, they wanted ideas which the mass of men would readily apprehend and assent to, and they wanted not hints or half-spoken suggestions but complete statement. In the place of the logical subtleties which Donne and his school had sought in the scholastic writers of the Middle Ages, they brought back the typically Renaissance study of rhetoric; the characteristic of all the poetry of the period is that it has a rhetorical quality. It is never intimate and never profound, but it has point and wit, and it appeals with confidence to the balanced judgment which men who distrust emotion and have no patience with subtleties intellectual, emotional, or merely verbal, have in common. Alongside of this lucidity, this air of complete statement in substance they strove for and achieved smoothness in form. To the poet Waller, the immediate predecessor of Dryden, the classical writers themselves ascribed the honour of the innovation. In fact Waller was only carrying out the ideals counselled and followed by Ben Jonson. It was in the school of Waller and Dryden and not in that of the minor writers who called themselves his followers that he came to his own.

What then are the main differences between classicism of the best period—the classicism whose characteristics we have been describing—and the Romanticism which came before and after? In the first place we must put the quality we have described as that of complete statement. Classical poetry is, so to speak, "all there." Its meaning is all of it on the surface; it conveys nothing but what it says, and what it says, it says completely. It is always vigorous and direct, often pointed and aphoristic, never merely suggestive, never given to half statement, and never obscure. You feel that as an instrument of expression it is sharp and polished and shining; it is always bright and defined in detail. The Great Romantics go to work in other ways. Their poetry is a thing of half lights and half spoken suggestions, of hints that imagination will piece together, of words that are charged with an added meaning of sound over sense, a thing that stirs the vague and impalpable restlessness of memory or terror or desire that lies down beneath in the minds of men. It rouses what a philosopher has called the "Transcendental feeling," the solemn sense of the

immediate presence of "that which was and is and ever shall be," to induce which is the property of the highest poetry. You will find nothing in classical poetry so poignant or highly wrought as Webster's "Cover her face; mine eyes dazzle; she died young,"

and the answer,  
"I think not so: her infelicity  
Seemed to have years too many,"

or so subtle in its suggestion, sense echoing back to primeval terrors and despairs, as this from Macbeth:  
"Stones have been known to move and trees to speak;  
Augurs and understood relations have  
By magot-pies, and choughs, and rooks brought forth  
The secret'st man of blood."

or so intoxicating to the imagination and the senses as an ode of Keats or a sonnet by Rossetti. But you will find eloquent and pointed statements of thoughts and feelings that are common to most of us—the expression of ordinary human nature—

"What oft was thought but ne'er so well exprest,"

"Wit and fine writing" consisting, as Addison put it in a review of Pope's first published poem, not so much "in advancing things that are new, as in giving things that are known an agreeable turn."

Though in this largest sense the "classic" writers eschewed the vagueness of romanticism, in another and more restricted way they cultivated it. They were not realists as all good romanticists have to be. They had no love for oddities or idiosyncrasies or exceptions. They loved uniformity, they had no use for truth in detail. They liked the broad generalised, descriptive style of Milton, for instance, better than the closely packed style of Shakespeare, which gets its effects from a series of minute observations huddled one after the other and giving the reader, so to speak, the materials for his own impression, rather than rendering, as does Milton, the expression itself.

Every literary discovery hardens ultimately into a convention; it has its day and then its work is done, and it has to be destroyed so that the ascending spirit of humanity can find a better means of self-expression. Out of the writing which aimed at simplicity and truth to nature grew "Poetic Diction," a special treasury of words and phrases deemed suitable for poetry, providing poets with a common stock of imagery, removing from them the necessity of seeing life and nature each one for himself. The poetry which Dryden and Pope wrought out of their mental vigour, their followers wrote to pattern. Poetry became reduced, as it never was before and has never been since, to a formula. The Elizabethan sonneteers, as we saw, used a vocabulary and phraseology in common with their fellows in Italy and France, and none the less produced fine poetry. But they used it to express things they really felt. The truth is it is not the fact of a poetic diction which matters so much as its quality—whether it squares with sincerity, whether it is capable of expressing powerfully and directly one's deepest feelings. The history of literature can show poetic dictions—special vocabularies and forms for poetry—that have these qualities; the diction, for instance, of the Greek choruses, or of the Scottish poets who followed Chaucer, or of the troubadours. That of the classic writers of an Augustan age was not of such a kind. Words clothe thought; poetic diction had the artifice of the crinoline; it would stand by itself. The Romantics in their return to nature had necessarily to abolish it.

But when all is said in criticism the poetry of the earlier half of the eighteenth century excels all other English poetry in two respects. Two qualities belong to it by virtue of the metre in which it is most of it written—rapidity and antithesis. Its antithesis made it an incomparable vehicle for satire, its rapidity for narrative. Outside its limits we have hardly any even passable satirical verse; within them there are half-a-dozen works of the highest excellence in this kind. And if we except Chaucer, there is no one else in the whole range of English poetry who have the narrative gift so completely as the classic poets. Bentleys will always exist who will assure us with civility that Pope's Homer, though "very pretty," bears little relation to the Greek, and that Dryden's Vergil, though vigorous and virile, is a poor representation of its original. The truth remains that for a reader who knows no ancient languages either of those translations will probably give a better idea of their originals than any other rendering in English that we possess. The foundation of their method has been vindicated in the best modern translations from the Greek.

The term "eighteenth century" in the vocabulary of the literary historian is commonly as vaguely used as the term Elizabethan. It borrows as much as forty years from the seventeenth and gives away ten to the

nineteenth. The whole of the work of Dryden, whom we must count as the first of the "classic" school, was accomplished before chronologically it had begun. As a man and as an author he was very intimately related to his changing times; he adapted himself to them with a versatility as remarkable as that of the Vicar of Bray, and, it may be added, as simple-minded. He mourned in verse the death of Cromwell and the death of his successor, successively defended the theological positions of the Church of England and the Church of Rome, changed his religion and became Poet Laureate to James II., and acquiesced with perfect equanimity in the Revolution which brought in his successor. This instability of conviction, though it gave a handle to his opponents in controversy, does not appear to have caused any serious scandal or disgust among his contemporaries, and it has certainly had little effect on the judgment of later times. It has raised none of the reproaches which have been cast at the suspected apostasy of Wordsworth. Dryden had little interest in political or religious questions; his instinct, one must conceive, was to conform to the prevailing mode and to trouble himself no further about the matter. Defoe told the truth about him when he wrote that "Dryden might have been told his fate that, having his extraordinary genius slung and pitched upon a swivel, it would certainly turn round as fast as the times, and instruct him how to write elegies to Oliver Cromwell and King Charles the Second with all the coherence imaginable; how to write *Religio Laici* and the *Hind* and the *Panther* and yet be the same man, every day to change his principle, change his religion, change his coat, change his master, and yet never change his nature." He never changed his nature, he was as free from cynicism as a barrister who represents successively opposing parties in suits or politics; and when he wrote polemics in prose or verse he lent his talents as a barrister lends his for a fee. His one intellectual interest was in his art, and it is in his comments on his art—the essays and prefaces in the composition of which he amused the leisure left in the busy life of a dramatist and a poet of officialdom—that his most charming and delicate work is to be found. In a way they begin modern English prose; earlier writing furnishes no equal to their colloquial ease and the grace of their expression. And they contain some of the most acute criticism in our language—"classical" in its tone (i.e., with a preference for conformity) but with its respect for order and tradition always tempered by good sense and wit, and informed and guided throughout by a taste whose catholicity and sureness was unmatched in the England of his time. The preface to his *Fables* contains some excellent notes on Chaucer. They may be read as a sample of the breadth and perspicuity of his critical perceptions.

His chief poetical works were most of them occasional—designed either to celebrate some remarkable event or to take a side and interpret a policy in the conflict, political or religious, of the time. *Absalom* and *Achitophel* and *The Medal* were levelled at the Shaftesbury-Monmouth intrigues in the closing years of Charles II. *Religio Laici* celebrated the excellence of the Church of England in its character of *via media* between the opposite extravagances of Papacy and Presbyterianism. *The Hind* and the *Panther* found this perfection spotted. The Church of England has become the *Panther*, whose coat is a varied pattern of heresy and truth beside the spotless purity of the *Hind*, the Church of Rome. *Astrea Reddix* welcomed the returning Charles; *Annus Mirabilis* commemorated a year of fire and victories. Besides these he wrote many dramas in verse, a number of translations, and some shorter poems, of which the odes are the most remarkable. His qualities as a poet fitted very exactly the work he set himself to do. His work is always plain and easily understood; he had a fine faculty for narration, and the vigorous rapidity and point of his style enabled him to sketch a character or sum up a dialectical position very surely and effectively. His writing has a kind of spare and masculine force about it. It is this vigour and the impression which he gives of intellectual strength and of a logical grasp of his subject, that beyond question has kept alive work which, if ever poetry was, was ephemeral in its origin. The careers of the unscrupulous Caroline peers would have been closed for us were they not visible in the reflected light of his denunciation of them. Though Buckingham is forgotten and Shaftesbury's name swallowed up in that of his more philanthropic descendant, we can read of *Achitophel* and *Zimri* still, and feel something of the strength and heat which he caught from a fiercely fought conflict and transmitted with his own gravity and purposefulness into verse. The Thirty-nine Articles are not a proper subject for poetry, but the sustained and serious allegory which Dryden weaves round theological discussion preserves his treatment of them from the fate of the controversialists who opposed him. His work has wit and vitality enough to keep it sweet. Strength and wit enter in different proportions into the work of his successor, Alexander Pope—a poet whom admirers in his own age held to be the greatest in our language. No one would think of making such a claim now, but the detraction which he suffered at the hands of Wordsworth and the Romantics, ought not to make us forget that Pope, though not our greatest, not even perhaps a great, poet is incomparably our most brilliant versifier. Dryden's strength turns in his work into something more fragile and delicate, polished with



infinite care like lacquer, and wrought like filigree work to the last point of conscious and perfected art. He was not a great thinker; the thoughts which he embodies in his philosophical poems—the *Essay on Man* and the rest, are almost ludicrously out of proportion to the solemnity of the titles which introduce them, nor does he except very rarely get beyond the conceptions common to the average man when he attempts introspection or meditates on his own destiny. The reader in search of philosophy will find little to stimulate him and in the facile Deism of the time probably something to smile at. Pope has no message to us now. But he will find views current in his time or borrowed from other authors put with perfect felicity and wit, and he will recognize the justice of Addison's comment that Pope's wit and fine writing consist "not so much in advancing things that are new, as in giving things that are known an agreeable turn." And he will not fall into the error of dubbing the author a minor poet because he is neither subtle nor imaginative nor profound. A great poet would not have written like Pope—one must grant it; but a minor poet could not.

It is characteristic of Pope's type of mind and kind of art that there is no development visible in his work. Other poets, Shakespeare, for instance, and Keats, have written work of the highest quality when they were young, but they have had crudenesses to shed—things to get rid of as their strength and perceptions grew. But Pope, like Minerva, was full grown and full armed from the beginning. If we did not know that his *Essay on Criticism* was his first poem it would be impossible to place it in the canon of his work; it might come in anywhere and so might everything else that he wrote. From the beginning his craftsmanship was perfect; from the beginning he took his subject-matter from others as he found it and worked it up into aphorism and epigram till each line shone like a cut jewel and the essential commonplaceness and poverty of his material was obscured by the glitter the craftsmanship lent to it. Subject apart, however, he was quite sure of his medium from the beginning; it was not long before he found the way to use it to most brilliant purpose. The *Rape of the Lock* and the satirical poems come later in his career. As a satirist Pope, though he did not hit so hard as Dryden, struck more deftly and probed deeper. He wielded a rapier where the other used a broadsword, and though both used their weapons with the highest skill and the metaphor must not be imagined to impute clumsiness to Dryden, the rapier made the cleaner cut. Both employed a method in satire which their successors (a poor set) in England have not been intelligent enough to use. They allow every possible good point to the object of their attack. They appear to deal him an even and regretful justice. His good points, they put it in effect, being so many, how much blacker and more deplorable his meannesses and faults! They do not do this out of charity; there was very little of the milk of human kindness in Pope. Deformity in his case, as in so many in truth and fiction, seemed to bring envy, hatred, malice and all uncharitableness in its train. The method is employed simply because it gives the maximum satirical effect. That is why Pope's epistle to Arbuthnot, with its characterisation of Addison, is the most damning piece of invective in our language. The *Rape of the Lock* is an exquisite piece of workmanship, breathing the very spirit of the time. You can fancy it like some clock made by one of the Louis XIV. craftsmen, encrusted with a heap of ormolu mock-heroics and impertinences and set perfectly to the time of day. From no other poem could you gather so fully and perfectly the temper of the society in which our "classic" poetry was brought to perfection, its elegant assiduity in trifles, its brilliant artifice, its paint and powder and patches and high-heeled shoes, its measured strutting walk in life as well as in verse. The *Rape of the Lock* is a mock-heroic poem; that is to say it applies the form and treatment which the "classic" critics of the seventeenth century had laid down as belonging to the "heroic" or "epic" style to a trifling circumstance—the loss by a young lady of fashion of a lock of hair. And it is the one instance in which this "recipe" for a heroic poem which the French critics handed on to Dryden, and Dryden left to his descendants, has been used well-enough to keep the work done with it in memory. In a way it condemns the poetical theory of the time; when forms are fixed, new writing is less likely to be creative and more likely to exhaust itself in the ingenious but trifling exercises of parody and burlesque. The *Rape of the Lock* is brilliant but it is only play.

The accepted theory which assumed that the forms of poetry had been settled in the past and existed to be applied, though it concerned itself mainly with the ancient writers, included also two moderns in its scope. You were orthodox if you wrote tragedy and epic as Horace told you and satire as he had shown you; you were also orthodox if you wrote in the styles of Spenser or Milton. Spenser, though his predecessors were counted barbaric and his followers tortured and obscure, never fell out of admiration; indeed in every age of English poetry after him the greatest poet in it is always to be found copying him or expressing their love for him—Milton declaring to Dryden that Spenser was his "original," Pope reading and praising him, Keats

writing his earliest work in close imitation. His characteristic style and stanza were recognised by the classic school as a distinct "kind" of poetry which might be used where the theme fitted instead of the heroic manner, and Spenserian imitations abound. Sometimes they are serious; sometimes, like Shenstone's *Schoolmistress*, they are mocking and another illustration of the dangerous ease with which a conscious and sustained effort to write in a fixed and acquired style runs to seed in burlesque. Milton's fame never passed through the period of obscurity that sometimes has been imagined for him. He had the discerning admiration of Dryden and others before his death. But to Addison belongs the credit of introducing him to the writers of this time; his papers in the *Spectator* on *Paradise Lost*, with their eulogy of its author's sublimity, spurred the interest of the poets among his readers. From Milton the eighteenth century got the chief and most ponderous part of its poetic diction, high-sounding periphrases and borrowings from Latin used without the gravity and sincerity and fullness of thought of the master who brought them in. When they wrote blank verse, the classic poets wrote it in the Milton manner. The use of these two styles may be studied in the writings of one man, James Thomson. For besides acquiring a kind of anonymous immortality with patriots as the author of "*Rule, Britannia*," Thomson wrote two poems respectively in the Spenserian and the Miltonic manner, the former *The Castle of Indolence*, the latter *The Seasons*. The Spenserian manner is caught very effectively, but the adoption of the style of *Paradise Lost*, with its allusiveness, circumlocution and weight, removes any freshness the *Seasons* might have had, had the circumstances in them been put down as they were observed. As it is, hardly anything is directly named; birds are always the "feathered tribe" and everything else has a similar polite generality for its title. Thomson was a simple-minded man, with a faculty for watching and enjoying nature which belonged to few in his sophisticated age; it is unfortunate he should have spent his working hours in rendering the fruit of country rambles freshly observed into a cold and stilted diction. It suited the eighteenth century reader well, for not understanding nature herself he was naturally obliged to read her in translations.

The chief merits of "classic" poetry—its clearness, its vigour, its direct statement—are such as belong theoretically rather to prose than to poetry. In fact, it was in prose that the most vigorous intellect of the time found itself. We have seen how Dryden, reversing the habit of other poets, succeeded in expressing his personality not in poetry which was his vocation, but in prose which was the amusement of his leisure hours. Spenser had put his politics into prose and his ideals into verse; Dryden wrote his politics—to order—in verse, and in prose set down the thoughts and fancies which were the deepest part of him because they were about his art. The metaphor of parentage, though honoured by use, fits badly on to literary history; none the less the tradition which describes him as the father of modern English prose is very near the truth. He puts into practice for the first time the ideals, described in the first chapter of this book, which were set up by the scholars who let into English the light of the Renaissance. With the exception of the dialogue on *Dramatic Poesy*, his work is almost all of it occasional, the fruit of the mood of a moment, and written rather in the form of a causerie, a kind of informal talk, than of a considered essay. And it is all couched in clear, flowing, rather loosely jointed English, carefully avoiding rhetoric and eloquence and striving always to reproduce the ease and flow of cultured conversation, rather than the tighter, more closely knit style of consciously "literary" prose. His methods were the methods of the four great prose-writers who followed him—Defoe, Addison, Steele, and Swift. Of these Defoe was the eldest and in some ways the most remarkable. He has been called the earliest professional author in our language, and if that is not strictly true, he is at any rate the earliest literary journalist. His output of work was enormous; he wrote on any and every subject; there was no event whether in politics or letters or discovery but he was not ready with something pat on it before the public interest faded. It followed that at a time when imprisonment, mutilation, and the pillory took the place of our modern libel actions he had an adventurous career. In politics he followed the Whig cause and served the Government with his pen, notably by his writings in support of the union with Scotland, in which he won over the Scots by his description of the commercial advantage which would follow the abolition of the border. This line of argument, taken at a time when the governing of political tendencies by commercial interests was by no means the accepted commonplace it is now, proves him a man of an active and original mind. His originality, indeed, sometimes over-reached the comprehension both of the public and his superiors; he was imprisoned for an attack on the Hanoverian succession, which was intended ironically; apparently he was ignorant of what every journalist ought to know that irony is at once the most dangerous and the most ineffectual weapon in the whole armoury of the press. The fertility and ingenuity of his intellect may be best gauged by the number of modern enterprises and contrivances that are foreshadowed in his work. Here are a few, all utterly unknown in his own day, collected by a student of his works; a Board of Trade register for seamen; factories for goods; agricultural

credit banks; a commission of enquiry into bankruptcy; and a system of national poor relief. They show him to have been an independent and courageous thinker where social questions were concerned.

He was nearly sixty before he had published his first novel, *Robinson Crusoe*, the book by which he is universally known, and on which with the seven other novels which followed it the foundation of his literary fame rests. But his earlier works—they are reputed to number over two hundred—possess no less remarkable literary qualities. It is not too much to say that all the gifts which are habitually recommended for cultivation by those who aspire to journalistic success are to be found in his prose. He has in the first place the gift of perfect lucidity no matter how complicated the subject he is expounding; such a book as his *Complete English Tradesman* is full of passages in which complex and difficult subject-matter is set forth so plainly and clearly that the least literate of his readers could have no doubt of his understanding it. He has also an amazingly exact acquaintance with the technicalities of all kinds of trades and professions; none of our writers, not even Shakespeare, shows half such a knowledge of the circumstances of life among different ranks and conditions of men; none of them has realized with such fidelity how so many different persons lived and moved. His gift of narrative and description is masterly, as readers of his novels know (we shall have to come back to it in discussing the growth of the English novel); several of his works show him to have been endowed with a fine faculty of psychological observation. Without the least consciousness of the value of what he was writing, nor indeed with any deliberate artistic intention, he made himself one of the masters of English prose. Defoe had been the champion of the Whigs; on the Tory side the ablest pen was that of Jonathan Swift. His works proclaim him to have had an intellect less wide in its range than that of his antagonist but more vigorous and powerful. He wrote, too, more carefully. In his youth he had been private secretary to Sir William Temple, a writer now as good as forgotten because of the triviality of his matter, but in his day esteemed because of the easy urbanity and polish of his prose. From him Swift learned the labour of the file, and he declared in later life that it was "generally believed that this author has advanced our English tongue to as great a perfection as it can well bear." In fact he added to the ease and cadences he had learned from Temple qualities of vigour and directness of his own which put his work far above his master's. And he dealt with more important subject-matter than the academic exercises on which Temple exercised his fastidious and meticulous powers of revision.

In temperament he is opposed to all the writers of his time. There is no doubt but there was some radical disorder in his system; brain disease clouded his intellect in his old age, and his last years were death in life; right through his life he was a savagely irritable, sardonic, dark and violent man, impatient of the slightest contradiction or thwarting, and given to explosive and instantaneous rage. He delighted in flouting convention, gloried in outraging decency. The rage, which, as he said himself, tore his heart out, carried him to strange excesses. There is something ironical (he would himself have appreciated it) in the popularity of *Gulliver's Travels* as a children's book—that ascending wave of savagery and satire which overwhelms policy and learning to break against the ultimate citadel of humanity itself. In none of his contemporaries (except perhaps in the sentimentalities of Steele) can one detect the traces of emotion; to read Swift is to be conscious of intense feeling on almost every page. The surface of his style may be smooth and equable but the central fires of passion are never far beneath, and through cracks and fissures come intermittent bursts of flame. Defoe's irony is so measured and studiously commonplace that perhaps those who imprisoned him because they believed him to be serious are hardly to be blamed; Swift's quivers and reddens with anger in every line. But his pen seldom slips from the strong grasp of his controlling art. The extraordinary skill and closeness of his allegorical writings—unmatched in their kind—is witness to the care and sustained labour which went to their making. He is content with no general correspondences; his allegory does not fade away into a story in which only the main characters have a secondary significance; the minutest circumstances have a bearing in the satire and the moral. In *The Tale of a Tub* and in *Gulliver's Travels*—particularly in the former—the multitude as well as the aptness of the parallels between the imaginary narrative and the facts it is meant to represent is unrivalled in works of the kind. Only the highest mental powers, working with intense fervour and concentration, could have achieved the sustained brilliancy of the result. "What a genius I had when I wrote that book!" Swift is said to have exclaimed in his old age when he re-read *The Tale of a Tub*, and certainly the book is a marvel of constructive skill, all the more striking because it makes allegory out of history and consequently is denied that freedom of narrative so brilliantly employed in the *Travels*.

Informing all his writings too, besides intense feeling and an omnipresent and controlling art, is strong common sense. His aphorisms, both those collected under the heading of *Thoughts on Various Subjects*,

and countless others scattered up and down his pages, are a treasury of sound, if a little sardonic, practical wisdom. His most insistent prejudices foreshadow in their essential sanity and justness those of that great master of life, Dr. Johnson. He could not endure over-politeness, a vice which must have been very oppressive in society of his day. He savagely resented and condemned a display of affection—particularly marital affection—in public. In an age when it was the normal social system of settling quarrels, he condemned duelling; and he said some very wise things—things that might still be said—on modern education. In economics he was as right-hearted as Ruskin and as wrong-headed. Carlyle, who was in so many respects an echo of him, found in a passage in his works a "dim anticipation" of his philosophy of clothes.

The leading literary invention of the period—after that of the heroic couplet for verse—was the prose periodical essay. Defoe, it is hardly necessary to say, began it; it was his nature to be first with any new thing; but its establishment as a prevailing literary mode is due to two authors, Joseph Addison and Richard Steele. Of the two famous series—the *Tatler* and the *Spectator*—for which they were both responsible, Steele must take the first credit; he began them, and though Addison came in and by the deftness and lightness of his writing took the lion's share of their popularity, both the plan and the characters round whom the bulk of the essays in the *Spectator* came to revolve was the creation of his collaborator. Steele we know very intimately from his own writings and from Thackeray's portrait of him. He was an emotional, full-blooded kind of man, reckless and dissipated but fundamentally honest and good-hearted—a type very common in his day as the novels show, but not otherwise to be found in the ranks of its writers. What there is of pathos and sentiment, and most of what there is of humour in the *Tatler* and the *Spectator* are his. And he created the *dramatis personae* out of whose adventures the slender thread of continuity which binds the essays together is woven. Addison, though less open to the onslaughts of the conventional moralist, was a less lovable personality. Constitutionally endowed with little vitality, he suffered mentally as well as bodily from languor and lassitude. His lack of enthusiasm, his cold-blooded formalism, caused comment even in an age which prided itself in self-command and decorum. His very malevolence proceeded from a flaccidity which meanly envied the activities and enthusiasms of other men. As a writer he was superficial; he had not the requisite energy for forming a clear or profound judgment on any question of difficulty; Johnson's comment, "He thinks justly but he thinks faintly" sums up the truth about him. His good qualities were of a slighter kind than Swift's; he was a quiet and accurate observer of manners and fashions in life and conversation, and he had the gift of a style—what Johnson calls "The Middle Style"—very exactly suited to the kind of work on which he was habitually engaged, "always equable, always easy, without glowing words or pointed sentences" but polished, lucid, and urbane. Steele and Addison were conscious moralists as well as literary men. They desired to purge society from Restoration licences; to their efforts we must credit the alteration in morality which *The School for Scandal* shows over *The Way of the World*. Their professed object as they stated themselves was "to banish vice and ignorance out of the territories of Great Britain, (nothing less!) and to bring philosophy out of closets and libraries, schools and colleges, to dwell in clubs and assemblies, at tea-tables and coffee-houses." In fact their satires were politically nearer home, and the chief objects of their aversion were the Tory squires whom it was their business as Whigs to deride. On the Coverley papers in the *Spectator* rests the chief part of their literary fame; these belong rather to the special history of the novel than to that of the periodical essay.

## CHAPTER VI

### DR. JOHNSON AND HIS TIME

By 1730 the authors whose work made the "classic" school in England were dead or had ceased writing; by the same date Samuel Johnson had begun his career as a man of letters. The difference between the period of his maturity and the period we have been examining is not perhaps easy to define; but it exists and it can be felt unmistakably in reading. For one thing "Classicism" had become completely naturalized; it had ceased to regard the French as arbiters of elegance and literary taste; indeed Johnson himself never spoke of them without disdain and hated them as much as he hated Scotsmen. Writing, like dress and the common way of life, became plainer and graver and thought stronger and deeper. In manners and speech something of the brutalism which was at the root of the English character at the time began to colour the refinement of the preceding age. Dilettantism gave way to learning and speculation; in the place of Bolingbroke came Adam Smith; in the place of Addison, Johnson. In a way it is the solidest and sanest time in English letters. Yet in the midst of its urbanity and order forces were gathering for its destruction. The ballad-mongers were busy; Blake was drawing and rhyming; Burns was giving songs and lays to his country-side. In the distance—Johnson could not hear them—sounded, like the horns of elf-land faintly blowing, the trumpet calls of romance.

If the whole story of Dr. Johnson's life were the story of his published books it would be very difficult to understand his pre-eminent and symbolic position in literary history. His best known work—it still remains so—was his dictionary, and dictionaries, for all the licence they give and Johnson took for the expression of a personality, are the business of purely mechanical talents. A lesser man than he might have cheated us of such delights as the definitions of "oats," or "net" or "pension," but his book would certainly have been no worse as a book. In his early years he wrote two satires in verse in imitation of Juvenal; they were followed later by two series of periodical essays on the model of the Spectator; neither of them—the Rambler nor the Idler—were at all successful. *Rasselas*, a tale with a purpose, is melancholy reading; the *Journey to the Western Hebrides* has been utterly eclipsed by Boswell's livelier and more human chronicle of the same events. The *Lives of the Poets*, his greatest work, was composed with pain and difficulty when he was seventy years old; even it is but a quarry from which a reader may dig the ore of a sound critical judgment summing up a life's reflection, out of the grit and dust of perfunctory biographical compilations. There was hardly one of the literary coterie over which he presided that was not doing better and more lasting work. Nothing that Johnson wrote is to be compared, for excellence in its own manner, with *Tom Jones* or the *Vicar of Wakefield* or the *Citizen of the World*. He produced nothing in writing approaching the magnitude of Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, or the profundity of Burke's philosophy of politics. Even Sir Joshua Reynolds, whose main business was painting and not the pen, was almost as good an author as he; his *Discourses* have little to fear when they are set beside Johnson's essays. Yet all these men recognised him as their guide and leader; the spontaneous selection of such a democratic assembly as men of genius in a tavern fixed upon him as chairman, and we in these later days, who are safe from the overpowering force of personality and presence—or at least can only know of it reflected in books—instinctively recognize him as the greatest man of his age. What is the reason?

Johnson's pre-eminence is the pre-eminence of character. He was a great moralist; he summed up in himself the tendencies of thought and literature of his time and excelled all others in his grasp of them; and he was perhaps more completely than any one else in the whole history of English literature, the typical Englishman. He was one of those to whom is applicable the commonplace that he was greater than his books. It is the fashion nowadays among some critics to speak of his biographer Boswell as if he were a novelist or a playwright and to classify the Johnson we know with Hamlet and Don Quixote as the product of creative or imaginative art, working on a "lost original." No exercise of critical ingenuity could be more futile or impertinent. The impression of the solidity and magnitude of Johnson's character which is to be gathered from Boswell is enforced from other sources; from his essays and his prayers and meditations, from the half-dozen or so lives and reminiscences which were published in the years following his death (their very number establishing the reverence with which he was regarded), from the homage of other men whose genius their books leave indisputable. Indeed the Johnson we know from Boswell, though it is the broadest and most masterly portrait in the whole range of biography, gives less than the whole magnitude of the man. When Boswell first met him at the age of twenty-two, Johnson was fifty-four. His long period

of poverty and struggle was past. His Dictionary and all his works except the Lives of the Poets were behind him; a pension from the Crown had established him in security for his remaining years; his position was universally acknowledged. So that though the portrait in the Life is a full-length study of Johnson the conversationalist and literary dictator, the proportion it preserves is faulty and its study of the early years—the years of poverty, of the Vanity of Human Wishes and London, of Rasselas, which he wrote to pay the expenses of his mother's funeral, is slight.

It was, however, out of the bitterness and struggle of these early years that the strength and sincerity of character which carried Johnson surely and tranquilly through the time of his triumph were derived. From the beginning he made no compromise with the world and no concession to fashion. The world had to take him at his own valuation or not at all. He never deviated one hair's breadth from the way he had chosen. Judged by the standards of journalistic success, the Rambler could not well be worse than he made it. Compared with the lightness and gaiety and the mere lip-service to morality of Addison its edification is ponderous. Both authors state the commonplaces of conduct, but Addison achieves lightness in the doing of it, and his manner by means of which platitudes are stated lightly and pointedly and with an air of novelty, is the classic manner of journalism. Johnson goes heavily and directly to the point, handling well worn moral themes in general and dogmatic language without any attempt to enliven them with an air of discovery or surprise. Yet they were, in a sense, discoveries to him; not one of them but was deeply and sincerely felt; not one but is not a direct and to us a pathetically dispassionate statement of the reflection of thirty years of grinding poverty and a soul's anguish. Viewed in the light of his life, the Rambler is one of the most moving of books. If its literary value is slight it is a document in character. So that when he came to his own, when gradually the public whom he despised and neglected raised him into a pontifical position matched by none before him in England and none since save Carlyle, he was sure of himself; success did not spoil him. His judgment was unwarped by flattery. The almost passionate tenderness and humanity which lay beneath his gruffness was undimmed. His personality triumphed in all the fullness and richness which had carried it in integrity through his years of struggle. For over twenty years from his chair in taverns in the Strand and Fleet Street he ruled literary London, imposed his critical principles on the great body of English letters, and by his talk and his friendships became the embodiment of the literary temperament of his age.

His talk as it is set down by Boswell is his best monument. It was the happiest possible fate that threw those two men together, for Boswell besides being an admirer and reporter sedulously chronicling all his master said and did, fortunately influenced both the saying and the doing. Most of us have some one in whose company we best shine, who puts our wits on their mettle and spurs us to our greatest readiness and vivacity. There is no doubt that Boswell, for all his assumed humility and for all Johnson's affected disdain, was just such a companion for Johnson. Johnson was at his best when Boswell was present, and Boswell not only drew Johnson out on subjects in which his robust common sense and readiness of judgment were fitted to shine but actually suggested and conducted that tour in Scotland which gave Johnson an opportunity for displaying himself at his best. The recorded talk is extraordinarily varied and entertaining. It is a mistake to conceive Johnson as a monster of bear-like rudeness, shouting down opposition, hectoring his companions, and habitually a blustering verbal bully. We are too easily hypnotized by Macaulay's flashy caricature. He could be merciless in argument and often wrongheaded and he was always acute, uncomfortably acute, in his perception of a fallacy, and a little disconcerting in his unmasking of pretence. But he could be gay and tender too and in his heart he was a shrinking and sensitive man. As a critic (his criticism is the only side of his literary work that need be considered), Johnson must be allowed a high place. His natural indolence in production had prevented him from exhausting his faculties in the more exacting labours of creative work, and it had left him time for omnivorous if desultory reading, the fruits of which he stored in a wonderfully retentive memory against an occasion for their use. To a very fully equipped mind he brought the service of a robust and acute judgment. Moreover when he applied his mind to a subject he had a faculty of intense, if fitful concentration; he could seize with great force on the heart of a matter; he had the power in a wonderfully short time of extracting the kernel and leaving the husk. His judgments in writing are like those recorded by Boswell from his conversation; that is to say he does not, as a critic whose medium was normally the pen rather than the tongue would tend to do, search for fine shades of distinction, subdivide subtleties, or be careful to admit caveats or exceptions; he passes, on the contrary, rapid and forcible verdicts, not seldom in their assertions untenably sweeping, and always decided and dogmatic. He never affects diffidence or defers to the judgments of others. His power of concentration, of

seizing on essentials, has given us his best critical work—nothing could be better, for instance, than his characterisation of the poets whom he calls the metaphysical school (Donne, Crashaw, and the rest) which is the most valuable part of his life of Cowley. Even where he is most prejudiced—for instance in his attack on Milton's *Lycidas*—there is usually something to be said for his point of view. And after this concentration, his excellence depends on his basic common sense. His classicism is always tempered, like Dryden's, by a humane and sensible dislike of pedantry; he sets no store by the unities; in his preface to Shakespeare he allows more than a "classic" could have been expected to admit, writing in it, in truth, some of the manliest and wisest things in Shakespearean literature. Of course, he had his failings—the greatest of them what Lamb called imperfect sympathy. He could see no good in republicans or agnostics, and none in Scotland or France. Not that the phrase "imperfect sympathy," which expresses by implication the romantic critic's point of view, would have appealed to him. When Dr. Johnson did not like people the fault was in them, not in him; a ruthless objectivity is part of the classic equipment. He failed, too, because he could neither understand nor appreciate poetry which concerned itself with the sensations that come from external nature. Nature was to him a closed book, very likely for a purely physical reason. He was short-sighted to the point of myopia, and a landscape meant nothing to him; when he tried to describe one as he did in the chapter on the "happy valley" in *Rasselas* he failed. What he did not see he could not appreciate; perhaps it is too much to ask of his self-contained and unbending intellect that he should appreciate the report of it by other men.

As we have seen, Johnson was not only great in himself, he was great in his friends. Round him, meeting him as an equal, gathered the greatest and most prolific writers of the time. There is no better way to study the central and accepted men of letters of the period than to take some full evening at the club from Boswell, read a page or two, watch what the talkers said, and then trace each back to his own works for a complete picture of his personality. The lie of the literary landscape in this wonderful time will become apparent to you as you read. You will find Johnson enthroned, Boswell at his ear, round him men like Reynolds and Burke, Richardson and Fielding and Goldsmith, Robertson and Gibbon, and occasionally drawn to the circle minnows like Beattie and a genius like Adam Smith. Gray, studious in his college at Cambridge, is exercising his fastidious talent; Collins' sequestered, carefully nurtured muse is silent; a host of minor poets are riding Pope's poetic diction, and heroic couplet to death. Outside scattered about is the van of Romance—Percy collecting his ballads; Burns making songs and verses in Scotland; the "mad" people, Smart and Chatterton, and above all Blake, obscurely beginning the work that was to finish in Wordsworth and Coleridge and Keats. Of Johnson's set the most remarkable figure was Edmund Burke—"the supreme writer," as De Quincey called him, "of his century." His writings belong more to the history of politics than to that of literature, and a close examination of them would be out of place here. His political theory strikes a middle course which offends—and in his own day offended—both parties in the common strife of political thinking. He believed the best government to consist in a patriotic aristocracy, ruling for the good of the people. By birth an Irishman, he had the innate practicality which commonly lies beneath the flash and colour of Irish forcefulness and rhetoric. That, and his historical training, which influenced him in the direction of conceiving every institution as the culmination of an evolutionary development, sent him directly counter to the newest and most enthusiastically urged political philosophy of his day—the philosophy stated by Rousseau, and put in action by the French Revolution. He disliked and distrusted "metaphysical theories," when they left the field of speculation for that of practice, had no patience with "natural rights" (which as an Irishman he conceived as the product of sentimentalism) and applied what would nowadays be called a "pragmatic" test to political affairs. Practice was the touchstone; a theory was useless unless you could prove that it had worked. It followed that he was not a democrat, opposed parliamentary reform, and held that the true remedy for corruption and venality was not to increase the size of the electorate, but to reduce it so as to obtain electors of greater weight and independence. For him a member of Parliament was a representative and not a delegate, and must act not on his elector's wishes but on his own judgment. These opinions are little in fashion in our own day, but it is well to remember that in Burke's case they were the outcome not of prejudice but of thought, and that even democracy may admit they present a case that must be met and answered. Burke's reputation as a thinker has suffered somewhat unjustly as a result of his refusal to square his tenets either with democracy or with its opposite. It has been said that ideas were only of use to him so far as they were of polemical service, that the amazing fertility and acuteness of his mind worked only in a not too scrupulous determination to overwhelm his antagonists in the several arguments—on India, or America, on Ireland or on France—which made up his political career. He was, said Carlyle, "vehement rather than earnest; a resplendent far-

sighted rhetorician, rather than a deep and earnest thinker." The words as they stand would be a good description of a certain type of politician; they would fit, for instance, very well on Mr. Gladstone; but they do Burke less than justice. He was an innovator in modern political thought, and his application of the historical method to the study of institutions is in its way a not less epoch-making achievement than Bacon's application of the inductive method to science. At a time when current political thought, led by Rousseau, was drawing its theories from the abstract conception of "natural rights" Burke was laying down that sounder and deeper notion of politics which has governed thinking in that department of knowledge since. Besides this, he had face to face with the affairs of his own day, a far-sightedness and sagacity which kept him right where other men went wrong. In a nation of the blind he saw the truth about the American colonies; he predicted with exactitude the culmination of the revolution in Napoleon. Mere rhetorical vehemence cannot explain the earnestness with which in a day of diplomatic cynicism he preached the doctrine of an international morality as strict and as binding as the morality which exists between man and man. Surest of all, we have the testimony, uninfluenced by the magic of language, of the men he met. You could not, said Dr. Johnson, shelter with him in a shed for a few moments from the rain without saying, "This is an extraordinary man."

His literary position depends chiefly on his amazing gift of expression, on a command of language unapproached by any writer of his time. His eloquence (in writing not in speaking; he is said to have had a monotonous delivery) was no doubt at bottom a matter of race, but to his Irish readiness and flash and colour he added the strength of a full mind, fortified by a wonderful store of reading which a retentive and exact memory enabled him to bring instantly to bear on the subject in hand. No writer before him, except Defoe, had such a wide knowledge of the technicalities of different men's occupations, and of all sorts of the processes of daily business, nor could enlighten an abstract matter with such a wealth of luminous analogy. It is this characteristic of his style which has led to the common comparison of his writing with Shakespeare's; both seem to be preternaturally endowed with more information, to have a wider sweep of interest than ordinary men. Both were not only, as Matthew Arnold said of Burke, "saturated with ideas," but saturated too in the details of the business and desire of ordinary men's lives; nothing human was alien from them. Burke's language is, therefore, always interesting and always appropriate to his thought; it is also on occasion very beautiful. He had a wonderful command of clear and ringing utterance and could appeal when he liked very powerfully to the sensibilities of his readers. Rhetoricians are seldom free from occasional extravagance, and Burke fell under the common danger of his kind. He had his moments of falsity, could heap coarse and outrageous abuse on Warren Hastings, illustrate the horrors of the Revolution by casting a dagger on the floor of the House of Commons, and nourish hatred beyond the bounds of justice or measure. But these things do not affect his position, nor take from the solid greatness of his work.

Boswell we have seen; after Burke and Boswell, Goldsmith was the most brilliant member of the Johnson circle. If part of Burke's genius is referable to his nationality, Goldsmith's is wholly so. The beginning and the end of him was Irish; every quality he possessed as a man and as a writer belongs to his race. He had the Irish carelessness, the Irish generosity, the Irish quick temper, the Irish humour. This latter gift, displayed constantly in a company which had little knowledge of the peculiar quality of Irish wit and no faculty of sympathy or imagination, is at the bottom of the constant depreciation of him on the part of Boswell and others of his set. His mock self-importance they thought ill-breeding; his humorous self-depreciation and keen sense of his own ridiculousness, mere lack of dignity and folly. It is curious to read Boswell and watch how often Goldsmith, without Boswell's knowing it, got the best of the joke. In writing he had what we can now recognise as peculiarly Irish gifts. All our modern writers of light half-farcical comedy are Irish. Goldsmith's *She Stoops to Conquer*, is only the first of a series which includes *The School for Scandal*, *The Importance of being Earnest*, and *You Never can Tell*. And his essays—particularly those of the *Citizen of the World* with its Chinese vision of England and English life—are the first fruit of that Irish detachment, that ability to see "normally" English habits and institutions and foibles which in our own day has given us the prefaces of Mr. Shaw. As a writer Goldsmith has a lightness and delicate ease which belongs rather to the school of the earlier eighteenth century than to his own day; the enthusiasm of Addison for French literature which he retained gave him a more graceful model than the "Johnsonian" school, to which he professed himself to belong, could afford.



The eighteenth century novel demands separate treatment, and of the other prose authors the most eminent, Edward Gibbon, belongs to historical rather than to literary studies. It is time to turn to poetry. There orthodox classicism still held sway; the manner and metre of Pope or Thomson ruled the roost of singing fowl. In the main it had done its work, and the bulk of fresh things conceived in it were dull and imitative, even though occasionally, as in the poems of Johnson himself and of Goldsmith, an author arose who was able to infuse sincerity and emotion into a now moribund convention. The classic manner—now more that of Thomson than of Pope—persisted till it overlapped romanticism; Cowper and Crabbe each owe a doubtful allegiance, leaning by their formal metre and level monotony of thought to the one and by their realism to the other. In the meantime its popularity and its assured position were beginning to be assailed in the coteries by the work of two new poets. The output of Thomas Gray and William Collins is small; you might almost read the complete poetical works of either in an evening. But for all that they mark a period; they are the first definite break with the classic convention which had been triumphant for upwards of seventy years when their prime came. It is a break, however, in style rather than in essentials, and a reader who seeks in them the inspiriting freshness which came later with Wordsworth and Coleridge will be disappointed. Their carefully drawn still wine tastes insipidly after the "beaded bubbles winking at the brim" of romance. They are fastidious and academic; they lack the authentic fire; their poetry is "made" poetry like Tennyson's and Matthew Arnold's. On their comparative merits a deal of critical ink has been spilt, Arnold's characterisation of Gray is well known—"he never spoke out." Sterility fell upon him because he lived in an age of prose just as it fell upon Arnold himself because he lived too much immersed in business and routine. But in what he wrote he had the genuine poetic gift—the gift of insight and feeling. Against this, Swinburne with characteristic vehemence raised the standard of Collins, the latchet of whose shoe Gray, as a lyric poet, was not worthy to unloose. "The muse gave birth to Collins, she did but give suck to Gray." It is more to our point to observe that neither, though their work abounds in felicities and in touches of a genuine poetic sense, was fitted to raise the standard of revolt. Revolution is for another and braver kind of genius than theirs. Romanticism had to wait for Burns and Blake.

In every country at any one time there are in all probability not one but several literatures flourishing. The main stream flowing through the publishers and booksellers, condescended by critics and coteries, recognized as the national literature, is commonly only the largest of several channels of thought. There are besides the national literature local literatures—books, that is, are published which enjoy popularity and critical esteem in their own county or parish and are utterly unknown outside; there may even be (indeed, there are in several parts of the country) distinct local schools of writing and dynasties of local authors. These localized literatures rarely become known to the outside world; the national literature takes little account of them, though their existence and probably some special knowledge of one or other of them is within the experience of most of us. But every now and again some one of their authors transcends his local importance, gives evidence of a genius which is not to be denied even by those who normally have not the knowledge to appreciate the particular flavour of locality which his writings impart, and becomes a national figure. While he lives and works the national and his local stream turn and flow together. This was the case of Robert Burns. All his life long he was the singer of a parish—the last of a long line of "forbears" who had used the Scottish lowland vernacular to rhyme in about their neighbours and their scandals, their loves and their church. Himself at the confluence of the two streams, the national and the local, he pays his tribute to two sets of originals, talks with equal reverence of names known to us like Pope and Gray and Shenstone and names unknown which belonged to local "bards," as he would have called them, who wrote their poems for an Ayrshire public. If he came upon England as an innovator it was simply because he brought with him the highly individualized style of Scottish local vernacular verse; to his own people he was no innovator but a fulfilment; as his best critic says he brought nothing to the literature he became a part of but himself. His daring and splendid genius made the local universal, raised out of rough and cynical satirizing a style as rich and humorous and astringent as that of Rabelais, lent inevitableness and pathos and romance to lyric and song. But he was content to better the work of other men. He made hardly anything new. Stevenson in his essay on Burns remarks his readiness to use up the work of others or take a large hint from it "as if he had some difficulty in commencing." He omits to observe that the very same trait applies to other great artists. There seem to be two orders of creative writers. On the one hand are the innovators, the new men like Blake, Wordsworth, Byron and Shelley, and later Browning. These men owe little to their predecessors; they work on their own devices and construct their medium afresh for themselves. Commonly their fame and acceptance is slow, for they speak in an unfamiliar tongue and they have to educate a generation to understand their work. The other order of artists have to be shown the way.

They have little fertility in construction or invention. You have to say to them "Here is something that you could do too; go and do it better," or "Here is a story to work on, or a refrain of a song; take it and give it your subtlety, your music." The villainy you teach them they will use and it will go hard with them if they do not better the invention; but they do not invent for themselves. To this order of artists Burns like Shakespeare, and among the lesser men Tennyson, belongs. In all his plays Shakespeare is known to have invented only one plot; in many he is using not only the structure but in many places the words devised by an older author; his mode of treatment depends on the conventions common in his day, on the tragedy of blood, and madness and revenge, on the comedy of intrigue and disguises, on the romance with its strange happenings and its reuniting of long parted friends. Burns goes the same way to work; scarcely a page of his but shows traces of some original in the Scottish vernacular school. The elegy, the verse epistle, the satirical form of Holy Willie's Prayer, the song and recitative of The Jolly Beggars, are all to be found in his predecessors, in Fergusson, Ramsay, and the local poets of the south-west of Scotland. In the songs often whole verses, nearly always the refrains, are from older folk poetry. What he did was to pour into these forms the incomparable richness of a personality whose fire and brilliance and humour transcended all locality and all tradition, a personality which strode like a colossus over the formalism and correctness of his time. His use of familiar forms explains, more than anything else, his immediate fame. His countrymen were ready for him; they could hail him on the instant (just as an Elizabethan audience could hail Shakespeare) as something familiar and at the same time more splendid than anything they knew. He spoke in a tongue they could understand.

It is impossible to judge Burns from his purely English verse; though he did it as well as any of the minor followers of the school of Pope he did it no better. Only the weakest side of his character—his sentimentalism—finds expression in it; he had not the sense of tradition nor the intimate knowledge necessary to use English to the highest poetic effect; it was indeed a foreign tongue to him. In the vernacular he wrote the language he spoke, a language whose natural force and colour had become enriched by three centuries of literary use, which was capable, too, of effects of humour and realism impossible in any tongue spoken out of reach of the soil. It held within it an unmatched faculty for pathos, a capacity for expressing a lambent and kindly humour, a power of pungency in satire and a descriptive vividness that English could not give. How express in the language of Pope or even of Wordsworth an effect like this:—

"They reeled, they set, they cross'd, they cleekit,  
Till ilka carlin swat and reekit,  
And coost her duddies to the wark,  
And linket at it in her sark."

or this—

"Yestreen when to the trembling string,  
The dance gaed thro' the lighted ha'  
To thee my fancy took its wing—  
I sat but neither heard nor saw:  
Tho' this was fair, and that was braw,  
And yon the toast of a' the toun,  
I sigh'd and said amang them a',  
You are na Mary Morison."

It may be objected that in all this there is only one word, and but two or three forms of words that are not English. But the accent, the rhythm, the air of it are all Scots, and it was a Burns thinking in his native tongue who wrote it, not the Burns of "Anticipation forward points the view";

or

"Pleasures are like poppies spread,  
You grasp the flower, the bloom is shed."

or any other of the exercises in the school of Thomson and Pope.

It is easy to see that though Burns admired unaffectedly the "classic" writers, his native realism and his melody made him a potent agent in the cause of naturalism and romance. In his ideas, even more than in his

style, he belongs to the oncoming school. The French Revolution, which broke upon Europe when he was at the height of his career, found him already converted to its principles. As a peasant, particularly a Scotch peasant, he believed passionately in the native worth of man as man and gave ringing expression to it in his verse. In his youth his liberal-mindedness made him a Jacobite out of mere antagonism to the existing régime; the Revolution only discovered for him the more logical Republican creed. As the leader of a loose-living, hard drinking set, such as was to be found in every parish, he was a determined and free-spoken enemy of the kirk, whose tyranny he several times encountered. In his writing he is as vehement an anti-clerical as Shelley and much more practical. The political side of romanticism, in fact, which in England had to wait for Byron and Shelley, is already full-grown in his work. He anticipates and gives complete expression to one half of the Romantic movement. What Burns did for the idea of liberty, Blake did for that and every other idea current among Wordsworth and his successors. There is nothing stranger in the history of English literature than the miracle by which this poet and artist, working in obscurity, utterly unknown to the literary world that existed outside him, summed up in himself all the thoughts and tendencies which were the fruit of anxious discussion and propaganda on the part of the authors—Wordsworth, Coleridge, Lamb—who believed themselves to be the discoverers of fresh truth unknown to their generation. The contemporary and independent discovery by Wallace and Darwin of the principle of natural selection furnishes, perhaps, a rough parallel, but the fact serves to show how impalpable and universal is the spread of ideas, how impossible it is to settle literary indebtedness or construct literary genealogy with any hope of accuracy. Blake, by himself, held and expressed quite calmly that condemnation of the "classic" school that Wordsworth and Coleridge proclaimed against the opposition of a deriding world. As was his habit he compressed it into a rude epigram,

"Great things are done when men and mountains meet;  
This is not done by jostling in the street."

The case for nature against urbanity could not be more tersely nor better put. The German metaphysical doctrine which was the deepest part of the teaching of Wordsworth and Coleridge and their main discovery, he expresses as curtly and off-handedly,

"The sun's light when he unfolds it,  
Depends on the organ that beholds it."

In the realm of childhood and innocence, which Wordsworth entered fearfully and pathetically as an alien traveller, he moves with the simple and assured ease of one native. He knows the mystical wonder and horror that Coleridge set forth in *The Ancient Mariner*. As for the beliefs of Shelley, they are already fully developed in his poems. "The king and the priest are types of the oppressor; humanity is crippled by "mind-forg'd manacles"; love is enslaved to the moral law, which is broken by the Saviour of mankind; and, even more subtly than by Shelley, life is pictured by Blake as a deceit and a disguise veiling from us the beams of the Eternal." In truth, Blake, despite the imputation of insanity which was his contemporaries' and has later been his commentators' refuge from assenting to his conclusions, is as bold a thinker in his own way as Nietzsche and as consistent. An absolute unity of belief inspires all his utterances, cryptic and plain. That he never succeeded in founding a school nor gathering followers must be put down in the first place to the form in which his work was issued (it never reached the public of his own day) and the dark and mysterious mythology in which the prophetic books which are the full and extended statement of his philosophy, are couched, and in the second place to the inherent difficulty of the philosophy itself. As he himself says, where we read black, he reads white. For the common distinction between good and evil, Blake substitutes the distinction between imagination and reason; and reason, the rationalizing, measuring, comparing faculty by which we come to impute praise or blame is the only evil in his eyes. "There is nothing either good or bad but thinking makes it so;" to rid the world of thinking, to substitute for reason, imagination, and for thought, vision, was the object of all that he wrote or drew. The implications of this philosophy carry far, and Blake was not afraid to follow where they led him. Fortunately for those who hesitate to embark on that dark and adventurous journey, his work contains delightful and simpler things. He wrote lyrics of extraordinary freshness and delicacy and spontaneity; he could speak in a child's voice of innocent joys and sorrows and the simple elemental things. His odes to "Spring" and "Autumn" are the harbingers of Keats. Not since Shakespeare and Campion died could English show songs like his

"My silks and fine array."

and the others which carry the Elizabethan accent. He could write these things as well as the Elizabethans.  
In others he was unique.

"Tiger! Tiger! burning bright  
In the forests of the night,  
What immortal hand or eye  
Could frame thy fearful symmetry."

In all the English lyric there is no voice so clear, so separate or distinctive as his.

## CHAPTER VII

### THE ROMANTIC REVIVAL

There are two ways of approaching the periods of change and new birth in literature. The commonest and, for all the study which it entails, the easiest, is that summed up in the phrase, literature begets literature. Following it, you discover and weigh literary influences, the influence of poet on poet, and book on book. You find one man harking back to earlier models in his own tongue, which an intervening age misunderstood or despised; another, turning to the contemporary literatures of neighbouring countries; another, perhaps, to the splendour and exoticism of the east. In the matter of form and style, such a study carries you far. You can trace types of poetry and metres back to curious and unsuspected originals, find the well-known verse of Burns' epistles turning up in Provençal; Tennyson's In Memoriam stanza in use by Ben Jonson; the metre of Christabel in minor Elizabethan poetry; the peculiar form of Fitzgerald's translation of Omar Khayyam followed by so many imitators since, itself to be the actual reflection of the rough metrical scheme of his Persian original. But such a study, though it is profitable and interesting, can never lead to the whole truth. As we saw in the beginning of this book, in the matter of the Renaissance, every age of discovery and re-birth has its double aspect. It is a revolution in style and language, an age of literary experiment and achievement, but its experiments are dictated by the excitement of a new subject-matter, and that subject-matter is so much in the air, so impalpable and universal that it eludes analysis. Only you can be sure that it is this weltering contagion of new ideas, and new thought—the "Zeitgeist," the spirit of the age, or whatever you may call it—that is the essential and controlling force. Literary loans and imports give the forms into which it can be moulded, but without them it would still exist, and they are only the means by which a spirit which is in life itself, and which expresses itself in action, and in concrete human achievement, gets itself into the written word. The romantic revival numbers Napoleon amongst its leaders as well as Byron, Wellington, Pitt and Wilberforce, as well as Keats and Wordsworth. Only the literary manifestations of the time concern us here, but it is important to remember that the passion for simplification and for a return to nature as a refuge from the artificial complexities of society, which inspired the Lyrical Ballads, inspired no less the course of the Revolution in France, and later, the destruction by Napoleon of the smaller feudal states of Germany, which made possible German nationality and a national spirit.

In this romantic revival, however, the revolution in form and style matters more than in most. The classicism of the previous age had been so fixed and immutable; it had been enthroned in high places, enjoyed the esteem of society, arrogated to itself the acceptance which good breeding and good manners demanded. Dryden had been a Court poet, careful to change his allegiance with the changing monarchy. Pope had been the equal and intimate of the great people of his day, and his followers, if they did not enjoy the equality, enjoyed at any rate the patronage of many noble lords. The effect of this was to give the prestige of social usage to the verse in which they wrote and the language they used. "There was," said Dr. Johnson, "before the time of Dryden no poetical diction, no system of words at once refined from the grossness of domestic use, and free from the harshness of terms appropriated to particular arts. Words too familiar or too remote to defeat the purpose of a poet." This poetic diction, refined from the grossness of domestic use, was the standard poetic speech of the eighteenth century. The heroic couplet in which it was cast was the standard metre. So that the first object of the revolt of the romantics was the purely literary object of getting rid of the vice of an unreal and artificial manner of writing. They desired simplicity of style.

When the Lyrical Ballads of Wordsworth and Coleridge were published in 1798, the preface which Wordsworth wrote as their manifesto hardly touched at all on the poetic imagination or the attitude of the poet to life and nature. The only question is that of diction. "The majority of the following poems," he writes, "are to be considered as experiments. They were written chiefly with a view to ascertain how far the language of conversation in the middle and lower classes of society is adapted to the purposes of poetic pleasure." And in the longer preface to the second edition, in which the theories of the new school on the nature and methods of the poetic imagination are set forth at length, he returns to the same point. "The language too, of these men (that is those in humble and rustic life) has been adopted ... because such men hourly communicate with the best objects from which the best part of language is originally derived, and because from their rank in society, and the sameness and narrow circle of their intercourse, being less under

the influence of social vanity, they convey their feelings and notions in simple unelaborated expressions." Social vanity—the armour which we wear to conceal our deepest thoughts and feelings—that was what Wordsworth wished to be rid of, and he chose the language of the common people, not because it fitted, as an earlier school of poets who used the common speech had asserted, the utterance of habitual feeling and common sense, but because it is the most sincere expression of the deepest and rarest passion. His object was the object attained by Shakespeare in some of his supremest moments; the bare intolerable force of the speeches after the murder of Macbeth, or of King Lear's

"Do not laugh at me,  
For as I am a man, I think this lady  
To be my child Cordelia."

Here, then, was one avenue of revolt from the tyranny of artificiality, the getting back of common speech into poetry. But there was another, earlier and more potent in its effect. The eighteenth century, weary of its own good sense and sanity, turned to the Middle Ages for picturesqueness and relief. Romance of course, had not been dead in all these years, when Pope and Addison made wit and good sense the fashionable temper for writing. There was a strong romantic tradition in the eighteenth century, though it does not give its character to the writing of the time. Dr. Johnson was fond of old romances. When he was in Skye he amused himself by thinking of his Scottish tour as the journey of a knight-errant. "These fictions of the Gothic romances," he said, "are not so remote from credibility as is commonly supposed." It is a mistake to suppose that the passion for mediaevalism began with either Coleridge or Scott. Horace Walpole was as enthusiastic as either of them; good eighteenth century prelates like Hurd and Percy, found in what they called the Gothic an inexhaustible source of delight. As was natural, what attracted them in the Middle Ages was not their resemblances to the time they lived in, but the points in which the two differed. None of them had knowledge enough, or insight enough, to conceive or sympathize with the humanity of the thirteenth century, to shudder at its cruelties and hardnesses and persecutions, or to comprehend the spiritual elevation and insight of its rarest minds. "It was art," said William Morris, "art in which all men shared, that made life romantic as people called it in those days. That and not robber barons, and inaccessible kings, with their hierarchy of serving nobles, and other rubbish." Morris belonged to a time which knew its middle ages better. To the eighteenth century the robber barons and the "other rubbish" were the essence of romance. For Percy and his followers, medievalism was a collection of what actors call "properties" gargoyles, and odds and ends of armour and castle keeps with secret passages, banners and gay colours, and gay shimmering obsolete words. Mistaking what was on its surface at any rate a subtle and complex civilization, for rudeness and quaintness, they seemed to themselves to pass back into a freer air, where any extravagance was possible, and good breeding and mere circumspection and restraint vanished like the wind.

A similar longing to be rid of the precision and order of everyday life drove them to the mountains, and to the literature of Wales and the Highlands, to Celtic, or pseudo-Celtic romance. To the fashion of the time mountains were still frowning and horrid steeps; in Gray's Journal of his tour in the Lakes, a new understanding and appreciation of nature is only struggling through; and when mountains became fashionable, it was at first and remained in part at least, till the time of Byron, for those very theatrical qualities which had hitherto put them in abhorrence. Wordsworth, in his Lines written above Tintern Abbey, in which he sets forth the succeeding stages of his mental development, refers to this love of the mountains for their spectacular qualities, as the first step in the progress of his mind to poetic maturity:

"The sounding cataract  
Haunted me like a passion; the tall rock,  
The mountain and the deep and gloomy wood,  
Their colours and their forms were then to me  
An appetite."

This same passion for the "sounding cataract" and the "tall rock," this appetite for the deep and gloomy wood, gave its vogue in Wordsworth's boyhood to Macpherson's Ossian, a book which whether it be completely fraudulent or not, was of capital importance in the beginnings of the romantic movement.

The love of mediaeval quaintness and obsolete words, however, led to a more important literary event—the publication of Bishop Percy's edition of the ballads in the Percy folio—the Reliques of Ancient Poetry. Percy to his own mind knew the Middle Ages better than they knew themselves, and he took care to dress

to advantage the rudeness and plainness of his originals. Perhaps we should not blame him. Sir Walter Scott did the same with better tact and skill in his Border minstrelsy, and how many distinguished editors are there, who have tamed and smoothed down the natural wildness and irregularity of Blake? But it is more important to observe that when Percy's reliques came to have their influence on writing his additions were imitated as much as the poems on which he grafted them. Chatterton's Rowley Poems, which in many places seem almost inconceivably banal and artificial to us to-day, caught their accent from the episcopal editor as much as from the ballads themselves. None the less, whatever its fault, Percy's collection gave its impetus to one half of the romantic movement; it was eagerly read in Germany, and when it came to influence Scott and Coleridge it did so not only directly, but through Burger's imitation of it; it began the modern study and love of the ballad which has given us *Sister Helen*, the *White Ship* and the *Lady of Shalott*.

But the romantic revival goes deeper than any change, however momentous of fashion or style. It meant certain fundamental changes in human outlook. In the first place, one notices in the authors of the time an extraordinary development of imaginative sensibility; the mind at its countless points of contact with the sensuous world and the world of thought, seems to become more alive and alert. It is more sensitive to fine impressions, to finely graded shades of difference. Outward objects and philosophical ideas seem to increase in their content and their meaning, and acquire a new power to enrich the intensest life of the human spirit. Mountains and lakes, the dignity of the peasant, the terror of the supernatural, scenes of history, mediaeval architecture and armour, and mediaeval thought and poetry, the arts and mythology of Greece—all became springs of poetic inspiration and poetic joy. The impressions of all these things were unfamiliar and ministered to a sense of wonder, and by that very fact they were classed as romantic, as modes of escape from a settled way of life. But they were also in a sense familiar too. The mountains made their appeal to a deep implanted feeling in man, to his native sense of his own worth and dignity and splendour as a part of nature, and his recognition of natural scenery as necessary, and in its fullest meaning as sufficient for his spiritual needs. They called him back from the artificiality and complexity of the cities he had built for himself, and the society he had weaved round him, to the natural world in which Providence had planted him of old, and which was full of significance for his soul. The greatest poets of the romantic revival strove to capture and convey the influence of nature on the mind, and of the mind on nature interpenetrating one another. They were none the less artists because they approached nature in a state of passive receptivity. They believed in the autocracy of the individual imagination none the less because their mission was to divine nature and to understand her, rather than to correct her profusions in the name of art.

In the second place the romantic revival meant a development of the historical sense. Thinkers like Burke and Montesquieu helped students of politics to acquire perspective; to conceive modern institutions not as things separate, and separately created, but as conditioned by, and evolved from, the institutions of an earlier day. Even the revolutionary spirit of the time looked both before and after, and took history as well as the human perfectibility imagined by philosophers into its purview. In France the reformers appealed in the first instance for a *States General*—a mediaeval institution—as the corrective of their wrongs, and later when they could not, like their neighbours in Belgium, demand reform by way of the restoration of their historical rights, they were driven to go a step further back still, beyond history to what they conceived to be primitive society, and demand the rights of man. This development of the historical sense, which had such a widespread influence on politics, got itself into literature in the creation of the historical novel. Scott and Chateaubriand revived the old romance in which by a peculiar ingenuity of form, the adventures of a typical hero of fiction are cast in a historical setting and set about with portraits of real personages. The historical sense affected, too, novels dealing with contemporary life. Scott's best work, his novels of Scottish character, catch more than half their excellence from the richness of colour and proportion which the portraiture of the living people acquires when it is aided by historical knowledge and imagination.

Lastly, besides this awakened historical sense, and this quickening of imaginative sensibility to the message of nature, the Romantic revival brought to literature a revival of the sense of the connection between the visible world and another world which is unseen. The supernatural which in all but the crudest of mechanisms had been out of English literature since *Macbeth*, took hold on the imaginations of authors, and brought with it a new subtlety and a new and nameless horror and fascination. There is nothing in earlier English literature to set beside the strange and terrible indefiniteness of the *Ancient Mariner*, and

though much in this kind has been written since, we have not got far beyond the skill and imagination with which Coleridge and Scott worked on the instinctive fears that lie buried in the human mind.

Of all these aspects of the revival, however, the new sensitiveness and accessibility to the influences of external nature was the most pervasive and the most important. Wordsworth speaks for the love that is in homes where poor men lie, the daily teaching that is in

"Woods and rills;

The silence that is in the starry sky,

The peace that is among the lonely hills."

Shelley for the wildness of the west wind, and the ubiquitous spiritual emotion which speaks equally in the song of a skylark or a political revolution. Byron for the swing and roar of the sea. Keats for verdurous glooms and winding mossy ways. Scott and Coleridge, though like Byron they are less with nature than with romance, share the same communion. This imaginative sensibility of the romantics not only deepened their communion with nature, it brought them into a truer relation with what had before been created in literature and art. The romantic revival is the Golden Age of English criticism; all the poets were critics of one sort or another—either formally in essays and prefaces, or in passing and desultory flashes of illumination in their correspondence. Wordsworth, in his prefaces, in his letter to a friend of Burns which contains such a breadth and clarity of wisdom on things that seem alien to his sympathies, even in some of his poems; Coleridge, in his *Biographia Literaria*, in his notes on Shakespeare, in those rhapsodies at Highgate which were the basis for his recorded table talk; Keats in his letters; Shelley in his *Defence of Poetry*; Byron in his satires and journals; Scott in those lives of the novelists which contain so much truth and insight into the works of fellow craftsmen—they are all to be found turning the new acuteness of impression which was in the air they breathed, to the study of literature, as well as to the study of nature. Alongside of them were two authors, Lamb and Hazlitt, whose bent was rather critical than creative, and the best part of whose intelligence and sympathy was spent on the sensitive and loving divination of our earlier literature. With these two men began the criticism of acting and of pictorial art that have developed since into two of the main kinds of modern critical writing.

Romantic criticism, both in its end and its method, differs widely from that of Dr. Johnson and his school. Wordsworth and Coleridge were concerned with deep-seated qualities and temperamental differences. Their critical work revolved round their conception of the fancy and the imagination, the one dealing with nature on the surface and decorating it with imagery, the other penetrating to its deeper significances. Hazlitt and Lamb applied their analogous conception of wit as a lower quality than humour, in the same fashion. Dr. Johnson looked on the other hand for correctness of form, for the subordination of the parts to the whole, for the self-restraint and good sense which common manners would demand in society, and wisdom in practical life. His school cared more for large general outlines than for truth in detail. They would not permit the idiosyncrasy of a personal or individual point of view: hence they were incapable of understanding lyricism, and they preferred those forms of writing which set themselves to express the ideas and feelings that most men may be supposed to have in common. Dr. Johnson thought a bombastic and rhetorical passage in Congreve's *Mourning Bride* better than the famous description of Dover cliff in *King Lear*. "The crows, sir," he said of the latter, "impede your fall." Their town breeding, and possibly, as we saw in the case of Dr. Johnson, an actual physical disability, made them distrust any clear and sympathetic rendering of the sense impressions which nature creates. One cannot imagine Dr. Johnson caring much for the minute observations of Tennyson's nature poems, or delighting in the verdurous and mossy alleys of Keats. His test in such a case would be simple; he would not have liked to have been in such places, nor reluctantly compelled to go there would he in all likelihood have had much to say about them beyond that they were damp. For the poetry—such as Shelley's—which worked by means of impalpable and indefinite suggestion, he would, one may conceive, have cared even less. New modes of poetry asked of critics new sympathies and a new way of approach. But it is time to turn to the authors themselves.

The case of Wordsworth is peculiar. In his own day he was vilified and misunderstood; poets like Byron, whom most of us would now regard simply as depending from the school he created, sneered at him. Shelley and Keats failed to understand him or his motives; he was suspected of apostasy, and when he became poet laureate he was written off as a turn-coat who had played false to the ideals of his youth. Now common opinion regards him as a poet above all the others of his age, and amongst all the English poets standing beside Milton, but a step below Shakespeare himself—and we know more about him, more about



the processes by which his soul moved from doubts to certainties, from troubles to triumph, than we do about any other author we have. This knowledge we have from the poem called, *The Prelude*, which was published after his death. It was designed to be only the opening and explanatory section of a philosophical poem, which was never completed. Had it been published earlier it would have saved Wordsworth from the coldness and neglect he suffered at the hands of younger men like Shelley; it might even have made their work different from what it is. It has made Wordsworth very clear to us now. Wordsworth is that rarest thing amongst poets, a complete innovator. He looked at things in a new way. He found his subjects in new places; and he put them into a new poetic form. At the turning point of his life, in his early manhood, he made one great discovery, had one great vision. By the light of that vision and to communicate that discovery he wrote his greatest work. By and by the vision faded, the world fell back into the light of common day, his philosophy passed from discovery to acceptance, and all unknown to him his pen fell into a common way of writing. The faculty of reading which has added fuel to the fire of so many waning inspirations was denied him. He was much too self-centred to lose himself in the works of others. Only the shock of a change of environment—a tour in Scotland, or abroad—shook him into his old thrill of imagination, so that a few fine things fitfully illumine the enormous and dreary bulk of his later work. If we lost all but the *Lyrical Ballads*, the poems of 1804, and the *Prelude*, and the *Excursion*, Wordsworth's position as a poet would be no lower than it is now, and he would be more readily accepted by those who still find themselves uncertain about him.

The determining factor in his career was the French Revolution—that great movement which besides re-making France and Europe, made our very modes of thinking anew. While an undergraduate in Cambridge Wordsworth made several vacation visits to France. The first peaceful phase of the Revolution was at its height; France and the assembly were dominated by the little group of revolutionary orators who took their name from the south-western province from which most of them came, and with this group—the Girondists—Wordsworth threw in his lot. Had he remained he would probably have gone with them to the guillotine. As it was, the commands of his guardian brought him back to England, and he was forced to contemplate from a distance the struggle in which he burned to take an active part. One is accustomed to think of Wordsworth as a mild old man, but such a picture if it is thrown back as a presentment of the Wordsworth of the nineties is a far way from the truth. This darkly passionate man tortured himself with his longings and his horror. War came and the prayers for victory in churches found him in his heart praying for defeat; then came the execution of the king; then the plot which slew the Gironde. Before all this Wordsworth trembled as Hamlet did when he learned the ghost's story. His faith in the world was shaken. First his own country had taken up arms against what he believed to be the cause of liberty. Then faction had destroyed his friends whom he believed to be its standard bearers. What was in the world, in religion, in morality that such things could be? In the face of this tremendous problem, Wordsworth, unlike Hamlet, was resolute and determined. It was, perhaps, characteristic of him that in his desire to get his feet on firm rock again he fled for a time to the exactest of sciences—to mathematics. But though he got certainties there, they must have been, one judges, certainties too arid for his thirsting mind. Then he made his great discovery—helped to it, perhaps, by his sister Dorothy and his friend Coleridge—he found nature, and in nature, peace. Not a very wonderful discovery, you will say, but though the cleansing and healing force of natural surroundings on the mind is a familiar enough idea in our own day, that is only because Wordsworth found it. When he gave his message to the world it was a new message. It is worth while remembering that it is still an unaccepted one. Most of his critics still consider it only Wordsworth's fun when he wrote:

"One impulse from the vernal wood  
Can teach us more of man,  
Of moral evil and of good,  
Than all the sages can."

Yet Wordsworth really believed that moral lessons and ideas were to be gathered from trees and stones. It was the main part of his teaching. He claimed that his own morality had been so furnished him, and he wrote his poetry to convince other people that what had been true for him could be true for them too. For him life was a series of impressions, and the poet's duty was to recapture those impressions, to isolate them and brood over them, till gradually as a result of his contemplation emotion stirred again—an emotion akin to the authentic thrill that had excited him when the impression was first born in experience. Then

poetry is made; this emotion "recollected" as Wordsworth said (we may add, recreated) "in tranquillity" passes into enduring verse. He treasured numberless experiences of this kind in his own life. Some of them are set forth in the Prelude, that for instance on which the poem *The Thorn* in the *Lyrical Ballads* is based; they were one or other of them the occasion of most of his poems; the best of them produced his finest work—such a poem for instance as *Resolution and Independence* or *Gipsies*, where some chance sight met with in one of the poet's walks is brooded over till it becomes charged with a tremendous significance for him and for all the world. If we ask how he differentiated his experiences, which had most value for him, we shall find something deficient. That is to say, things which were unique and precious to him do not always appear so to his readers. He counted as gold much that we regard as dross. But though we may differ from his judgments, the test which he applied to his recollected impressions is clear. He attached most value to those which brought with them the sense of an indwelling spirit, transfusing and interpenetrating all nature, transfiguring with its radiance, rocks and fields and trees and the men and women who lived close enough to them to partake of their strength—the sense, as he calls it in his *Lines above Tintern Abbey* of something "more deeply interfused" by which all nature is made one. Sometimes, as in the hymn to *Duty*, it is conceived as law. *Duty* before whom the flowers laugh, is the daughter of the voice of God, through whom the most ancient heavens are fresh and strong. But in most of his poems its ends do not trouble; it is omnipresent; it penetrates everything and transfigures everything; it is God. It was Wordsworth's belief that the perception of this indwelling spirit weakened as age grew. For a few precious and glorious years he had the vision

"When meadow, grove, and stream,  
The earth, and every common sight  
To me did seem  
Apparelled in celestial light,  
The glory and the freshness of a dream."

Then as childhood, when "these intimations of immortality," this perception of the infinite are most strong, passed further and further away, the vision faded and he was left gazing in the light of common day. He had his memories and that was all. There is, of course, more in the matter than this, and Wordsworth's beliefs were inextricably entangled with the conception which Coleridge borrowed from German philosophy.

"We receive but what we give"

wrote Coleridge to his friend,  
"And in our life alone doth Nature live."

And Wordsworth came to know that the light he had imagined to be bestowed, was a light reflected from his own mind. It is easy to pass from criticism to metaphysics where Coleridge leads, and wise not to follow. If Wordsworth represents that side of the Romantic Revival which is best described as the return to Nature, Coleridge has justification for the phrase "Renascence of Wonder." He revived the supernatural as a literary force, emancipated it from the crude mechanism which had been applied to it by dilettantes like Horace Walpole and Mrs. Radcliffe, and invested it instead with that air of suggestion and indefiniteness which gives the highest potency to it in its effect on the imagination. But Coleridge is more noteworthy for what he suggested to others than for what he did in himself. His poetry is, even more than Wordsworth's, unequal; he is capable of large tracts of dreariness and flatness; he seldom finished what he began. The *Ancient Mariner*, indeed, which was the fruit of his close companionship with Wordsworth, is the only completed thing of the highest quality in the whole of his work. *Christabel* is a splendid fragment; for years the first part lay uncompleted and when the odd accident of an evening's intoxication led him to commence the second, the inspiration had fled. For the second part, by giving to the fairy atmosphere of the first a local habitation and a name, robbed it of its most precious quality; what it gave in exchange was something the public could get better from Scott. *Kubla Khan* went unfinished because the call of a friend broke the thread of the reverie in which it was composed. In the end came opium and oceans of talk at Highgate and fouled the springs of poetry. Coleridge never fulfilled the promise of his early days with Wordsworth. "He never spoke out." But it is on the lines laid down by his share in the pioneer work rather than on the lines of Wordsworth's that the second generation of Romantic poets—that of Shelley and Keats—developed.

The work of Wordsworth was conditioned by the French Revolution but it hardly embodied the revolutionary spirit. What he conceived to be its excesses revolted him, and though he sought and sang freedom, he found it rather in the later revolt of the nationalities against the Revolution as manifested in Napoleon himself. The spirit of the revolution, as it was understood in France and in Europe, had to wait for Shelley for its complete expression. Freedom is the breath of his work—freedom not only from the tyranny of earthly powers, but from the tyranny of religion, expressing itself in republicanism, in atheism, and in complete emancipation from the current moral code both in conduct and in writing. The reaction which had followed the overthrow of Napoleon at Waterloo, sent a wave of absolutism and repression all over Europe, Italy returned under the heel of Austria; the Bourbons were restored in France; in England came the days of Castlereagh and Peterloo. The poetry of Shelley is the expression of what the children of the revolution—men and women who were brought up in and believed the revolutionary gospel—thought about these things.

But it is more than that. Of no poet in English, nor perhaps in any other tongue, could it be said with more surety, that the pursuit of the spirit of beauty dominates all his work. For Shelley it interfused all nature and to possess it was the goal of all endeavour. The visible world and the world of thought mingle themselves inextricably in his contemplation of it. For him there is no boundary-line between the two, the one is as real and actual as the other. In his hands that old trick of the poets, the simile, takes on a new and surprising form. He does not enforce the creations of his imagination by the analogy of natural appearances; his instinct is just the opposite—to describe and illumine nature by a reference to the creatures of thought. Other poets, Keats for instance, or Tennyson, or the older poets like Dante and Homer, might compare ghosts flying from an enchanter like leaves flying before the wind. They might describe a poet wrapped up in his dreams as being like a bird singing invisible in the brightness of the sky. But Shelley can write of the west wind as

"Before whose unseen presence the leaves, dead,  
Are driven like ghosts from an enchanter fleeing,"

and he can describe a skylark in the heavens as

"Like a poet hidden  
In the light of thought."

Of all English poets he is the most completely lyrical. Nothing that he wrote but is wrought out of the anguish or joy of his own heart.

"Most wretched souls,"

he writes

"Are cradled into poetry by wrong  
They learn in suffering what they teach in song."

Perhaps his work is too impalpable and moves in an air too rarefied. It sometimes lacks strength. It fails to take grip enough of life. Had he lived he might have given it these things; there are signs in his last poems that he would have given it. But he could hardly have bettered the sheer and triumphant lyricism of *The Skylark*, of some of his choruses, and of the *Ode to Dejection*, and of the *Lines written on the Eugenioen hills*. If the Romantic sense of the one-ness of nature found its highest exponent in Shelley, the Romantic sensibility to outward impressions reached its climax in Keats. For him life is a series of sensations, felt with almost febrile acuteness. Records of sight and touch and smell crowd every line of his work; the scenery of a garden in Hampstead becomes like a landscape in the tropics, so extraordinary vivid and detailed is his apprehension and enjoyment of what it has to give him. The luxuriance of his sensations is matched by the luxuriance of his powers of expression. Adjectives heavily charged with messages for the senses, crowd every line of his work, and in his earlier poems overlay so heavily the thought they are meant to convey that all sense of sequence and structure is apt to be smothered under their weight. Not that consecutive thought claims a place in his conception of his poetry. His ideal was passive contemplation rather than active mental exertion. "O for a life of sensations rather than of thoughts," he exclaims in one of his letters; and in another, "It is more noble to sit like Jove than to fly like Mercury." His work has one message and one only, the lastingness of beauty and its supreme truth. It is stated in *Endymion* in lines that are worn bare with quotation. It is stated again, at the height of his work in his greatest ode,

"Beauty is truth, truth beauty: that is all  
We know on earth and all we need to know."

His work has its defects; he died at twenty-six so it would be a miracle if it were not so. He lacks taste and measure; he offends by an over-luxuriousness and sensuousness; he fails when he is concerned with flesh and blood; he is apt, as Mr. Robert Bridges has said, "to class women with roses and sweetmeats." But in his short life he attained with surprising rapidity and completeness to poetic maturity, and perhaps from no other poet could we find things to match his greatest—Hyperion, Isabella, the Eve of St. Agnes and the Odes. There remains a poet over whom opinion is more sharply divided than it is about any other writer in English. In his day Lord Byron was the idol, not only of his countrymen, but of Europe. Of all the poets of the time he was, if we except Scott, whose vogue he eclipsed, the only one whose work was universally known and popular. Everybody read him; he was admired not only by the multitude and by his equals, but by at least one who was his superior, the German poet Goethe, who did not hesitate to say of him that he was the greatest talent of the century. Though this exalted opinion still persists on the Continent, hardly anyone could be found in England to subscribe to it now. Without insularity, we may claim to be better judges of authors in our own tongue than foreign critics, however distinguished and comprehending. How then shall we explain Lord Byron's instant popularity and the position he won? What were the qualities which gave him the power he enjoyed?

In the first place he appealed by virtue of his subject-matter—the desultory wanderings of Childe Harold traversed ground every mile of which was memorable to men who had watched the struggle which had been going on in Europe with scarcely a pause for twenty years. Descriptive journalism was then and for nearly half a century afterwards unknown, and the poem by its descriptiveness, by its appeal to the curiosity of its readers, made the same kind of success that vividly written special correspondence would to-day, the charm of metre super-added. Lord Byron gave his readers something more, too, than mere description. He added to it the charm of a personality, and when that personality was enforced by a title, when it proclaimed its sorrows as the age's sorrows, endowed itself with an air of symbolism and set itself up as a kind of scapegoat for the nation's sins, its triumph was complete. Most men have from time to time to resist the temptation to pose to themselves; many do not even resist it. For all those who chose to believe themselves blighted by pessimism, and for all the others who would have loved to believe it, Byron and his poetry came as an echo of themselves. Shallow called to shallow. Men found in him, as their sons found more reputably in Tennyson, a picture of what they conceived to be the state of their own minds. But he was not altogether a man of pretence. He really and passionately loved freedom; no one can question his sincerity in that. He could be a fine and scathing satirist; and though he was careless, he had great poetic gifts.

The age of the Romantic Revival was one of poetry rather than of prose; it was in poetry that the best minds of the time found their means of expression. But it produced prose of rare quality too, and there is delightful reading in the works of its essayists and occasional writers. In its form the periodical essay had changed little since it was first made popular by Addison and Steele. It remained, primarily, a vehicle for the expression of a personality, and it continued to seek the interests of its readers by creating or suggesting an individuality strong enough to carry off any desultory adventure by the mere force of its own attractiveness. Yet there is all the difference in the world between Hazlitt and Addison, or Lamb and Steele. The *Tatler* and the *Spectator* leave you with a sense of artifice; Hazlitt and Lamb leave you with a grip of a real personality—in the one case very vigorous and combative, in the other set about with a rare plaintiveness and gentleness, but in both absolutely sincere. Addison is gay and witty and delightful but he only plays at being human; Lamb's essays—the translation into print of a heap of idiosyncrasies and oddities, and likes and dislikes, and strange humours—come straight and lovably from a human soul. The prose writers of the romantic movement brought back two things into writing which had been out of it since the seventeenth century. They brought back egotism and they brought back enthusiasm. They had the confidence that their own tastes and experiences were enough to interest their readers; they mastered the gift of putting themselves on paper. But there is one wide difference between them and their predecessors. Robert Burton was an egotist but he was an unconscious one; the same is, perhaps, true though much less certainly of Sir Thomas Browne. In Lamb and Hazlitt and De Quincey egotism was deliberate, consciously assumed, the result of a compelling and shaping art. If one reads Lamb's earlier essays and prose pieces one can see the process at work—watch him consciously imitating Fuller, or Burton, or Browne, mirroring their

idiosyncrasies, making their quaintnesses and graces his own. By the time he came to write the *Essays of Elia*, he had mastered the personal style so completely that his essays seem simply the overflow of talk. They are so desultory; they move from one subject to another so waywardly—such an essay as a Chapter on Ears, for instance, passing with the easy inconsequence of conversation from anatomy through organ music to beer—when they quote, as they do constantly, it is incorrectly, as in the random reminiscences of talk. Here one would say is the cream risen to the surface of a full mind and skimmed at one taking. How far all this is from the truth we know—know, too, how for months he polished and rewrote these magazine articles, rubbing away roughnesses and corners, taking off the traces of logical sequences and argument, till in the finished work of art he mimicked inconsequence so perfectly that his friends might have been deceived. And the personality he put on paper was partly an artistic creation, too. In life Lamb was a nervous, easily excitable and emotional man; his years were worn with the memory of a great tragedy and the constantly impending fear of a repetition of it. One must assume him in his way to have been a good man of business—he was a clerk in the India House, then a throbbing centre of trade, and the largest commercial concern in England, and when he retired his employers gave him a very handsome pension. In the early portrait by Hazlitt there is a dark and gleaming look of fire and decision. But you would never guess it from his books. There he is the gentle recluse, dreaming over old books, old furniture, old prints, old plays and play-bills; living always in the past, loving in the town secluded byways like the Temple, or the libraries of Oxford Colleges, and in the country quiet and shaded lanes, none of the age's enthusiasm for mountains in his soul. When he turned critic it was not to discern and praise the power and beauty in the works of his contemporaries but to rediscover and interpret the Elizabethan and Jacobean romantic plays. This quality of egotism Lamb shares with other writers of the time, with De Quincey, for instance, who left buried in work which is extensive and unequal, much that lives by virtue of the singular elaborateness and loftiness of the style which he could on occasion command. For the revival of enthusiasm one must turn to Hazlitt, who brought his passionate and combative disposition to the service of criticism, and produced a series of studies remarkable for their earnestness and their vigour, and for the essential justness which they display despite the prejudice on which each of them was confessedly based.

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE VICTORIAN AGE

Had it not been that with two exceptions all the poets of the Romantic Revival died early, it might be more difficult to draw a line between their school and that of their successors than it is. As it happened, the only poet who survived and wrote was Wordsworth, the oldest of them all. For long before his death he did nothing that had one touch of the fire and beauty of his earlier work. The respect he began, after a lifetime of neglect, to receive in the years immediately before his death, was paid not to the conservative laureate of 1848, but to the revolutionary in art and politics of fifty years before. He had lived on long after his work was done

"To hear the world applaud the hollow ghost  
That blamed the living man."

All the others, Keats, Shelley, Byron were dead before 1830, and the problem which might have confronted us had they lived, of adult work running counter to the tendencies and ideals of youth, does not exist for us. Keats or Shelley might have lived as long as Carlyle, with whom they were almost exactly contemporary; had they done so, the age of the Romantic Revival and the Victorian age would have been united in the lives of authors who were working in both. We should conceive that is, the whole period as one, just as we conceive of the Renaissance in England, from Surrey to Shirley, as one. As it is, we have accustomed ourselves to a strongly marked line of division. A man must be on either one side or the other; Wordsworth, though he wrote on till 1850, is on the further side, Carlyle, though he was born in the same year as Keats, on the hither side. Still the accident of length of days must not blind us to the fact that the Victorian period, though in many respects its ideals and modes of thinking differed from those of the period which preceded it, is essentially an extension of the Romantic Revival and not a fresh start. The coherent inspiration of romanticism disintegrated into separate lines of development, just as in the seventeenth century the single inspiration of the Renaissance broke into different schools. Along these separate lines represented by such men as Browning, the Pre-Raphaelites, Arnold, and Meredith, literature enriched and elaborated itself into fresh forms. None the less, every author in each of these lines of literary activity invites his readers to understand his direct relations to the romantic movement. Rossetti touches it through his original, Keats; Arnold through Goethe and Byron; Browning first through Shelley and then in item after item of his varied subject-matter.

In one direction the Victorian age achieved a salient and momentous advance. The Romantic Revival had been interested in nature, in the past, and in a lesser degree in art, but it had not been interested in men and women. To Wordsworth the dalesmen of the lakes were part of the scenery they moved in; he saw men as trees walking, and when he writes about them as in such great poems as *Resolution and Independence*, the *Brothers*, or *Michael*, it is as natural objects he treats them, invested with the lonely remoteness that separates them from the complexities and passions of life as it is lived. They are there, you feel, to teach the same lesson as the landscape teaches in which they are set. The passing of the old Cumberland beggar through villages and past farmsteads, brings to those who see him the same kind of consolation as the impulses from a vernal wood that Wordsworth celebrated in his purely nature poetry. Compare with Wordsworth, Browning, and note the fundamental change in the attitude of the poet that his work reveals. *Pippa Passes* is a poem on exactly the same scheme as the *Old Cumberland Beggar*, but in treatment no two things could be further apart. The intervention of Pippa is dramatic, and though her song is in the same key as the wordless message of Wordsworth's beggar she is a world apart from him, because she is something not out of natural history, but out of life. The Victorian age extended the imaginative sensibility which its predecessor had brought to bear on nature and history, to the complexities of human life. It searched for individuality in character, studied it with a loving minuteness, and built up out of its discoveries amongst men and women a body of literature which in its very mode of conception was more closely related to life, and thus the object of greater interest and excitement to its readers, than anything which had been written in the previous ages. It is the direct result of this extension of romanticism that the novel became the characteristic means of literary expression of the time, and that Browning, the poet who more than all others represents the essential spirit of his age, should have been as it were, a novelist in verse. Only one other literary form, indeed, could have ministered adequately to this awakened interest, but by some luck

not easy to understand, the drama, which might have done with greater economy and directness the work the novel had to do, remained outside the main stream of literary activity. To the drama at last it would seem that we are returning, and it may be that in the future the direct representation of the clash of human life which is still mainly in the hands of our novelists, may come back to its own domain.

The Victorian age then added humanity to nature and art as the subject-matter of literature. But it went further than that. For the first time since the Renaissance, came an era which was conscious of itself as an epoch in the history of mankind, and confident of its mission. The fifteenth and sixteenth centuries revolutionized cosmography, and altered the face of the physical world. The nineteenth century, by the discoveries of its men of science, and by the remarkable and rapid succession of inventions which revolutionized the outward face of life, made hardly less alteration in accepted ways of thinking. The evolutionary theory, which had been in the air since Goethe, and to which Darwin was able to give an incontrovertible basis of scientific fact, profoundly influenced man's attitude to nature and to religion. Physical as apart from natural science made scarcely less advance, and instead of a world created in some fixed moment of time, on which had been placed by some outward agency all the forms and shapes of nature that we know, came the conception of a planet congealing out of a nebula, and of some lower, simpler and primeval form of life multiplying and diversifying itself through succeeding stages of development to form both the animal and the vegetable world. This conception not only enormously excited and stimulated thought, but it gave thinkers a strange sense of confidence and certainty not possessed by the age before. Everything seemed plain to them; they were heirs of all the ages. Their doubts were as certain as their faith.

"There lives more faith in honest doubt  
Believe me than in half the creeds."

said Tennyson; "honest doubt," hugged with all the certainty of a revelation, is the creed of most of his philosophical poetry, and what is more to the point was the creed of the masses that were beginning to think for themselves, to whose awakening interest his work so strongly appealed. There were no doubt, literary side-currents. Disraeli survived to show that there were still young men who thought Byronically. Rossetti and his school held themselves proudly aloof from the rationalistic and scientific tendencies of the time, and found in the Middle ages, better understood than they had been either by Coleridge or Scott, a refuge from a time of factories and fact. The Oxford movement ministered to the same tendencies in religion and philosophy; but it is the scientific spirit, and all that the scientific spirit implied, its certain doubt, its care for minuteness, and truth of observation, its growing interest in social processes, and the conditions under which life is lived, that is the central fact in Victorian literature.

Tennyson represents more fully than any other poet this essential spirit of the age. If it be true, as has been often asserted, that the spirit of an age is to be found best in the work of lesser men, his complete identity with the thought of his time is in itself evidence of his inferiority to his contemporary, Browning. Comparison between the two men seem inevitable; they were made by readers when *In Memoriam* and *Men and Women* came hot from the press, and they have been made ever since. There could, of course, scarcely be two men more dissimilar, Tennyson elaborating and decorating the obvious; Browning delving into the esoteric and the obscure, and bringing up strange and unfamiliar finds; Tennyson in faultless verse registering current newly accepted ways of thought; Browning in advance thinking afresh for himself, occupied ceaselessly in the arduous labour of creating an audience fit to judge him. The age justified the accuracy with which Tennyson mirrored it, by accepting him and rejecting Browning. It is this very accuracy that almost forces us at this time to minimise and dispraise Tennyson's work. We have passed from Victorian certainties, and so he is apt when he writes in the mood of *Locksley Hall* and the rest, to appear to us a little shallow, a little empty, and a little pretentious. His earlier poetry, before he took upon himself the burden of the age, is his best work, and it bears strongly marked upon it the influence of Keats. Such a poem for instance as *Oenone* shows an extraordinarily fine sense of language and melody, and the capacity caught from Keats of conveying a rich and highly coloured pictorial effect. No other poet, save Keats, has had a sense of colour so highly developed as Tennyson's. From his boyhood he was an exceedingly close and sympathetic observer of the outward forms of nature, and he makes a splendid use of what his eyes had taught him in these earlier poems. Later his interest in insects and birds and flowers outran the legitimate opportunity he possessed of using it in poetry. It was his habit, his son tells us, to keep notebooks of things he had observed in his garden or in his walks, and to work them up afterwards into similes for the *Princess* and the *Idylls of the King*. Read in the books written by admirers, in which they

have been studied and collected (there are several of them) these similes are pleasing enough; in the text where they stand they are apt to have the air of impertinences, beautiful and extravagant impertinences no doubt, but alien to their setting. In one of the Idylls of the King the fall of a drunken knight from his horse is compared to the fall of a jutting edge of cliff and with it a lance-like fir-tree, which Tennyson had observed near his home, and one cannot resist the feeling that the comparison is a thought too great for the thing it was meant to illustrate. So, too, in the Princess when he describes a handwriting,

"In such a hand as when a field of corn  
Bows all its ears before the roaring East."

he is using up a sight noted in his walks and transmuted into poetry on a trivial and frivolous occasion. You do not feel, in fact, that the handwriting visualized spontaneously called up the comparison; you are as good as certain that the simile existed waiting for use before the handwriting was thought of.

The accuracy of his observation of nature, his love of birds and larvae is matched by the carefulness with which he embodies, as soon as ever they were made, the discoveries of natural and physical science. Nowadays, possibly because these things have become commonplace to us, we may find him a little school-boy-like in his pride of knowledge. He knows that

"This world was once a fluid haze of light,  
Till toward the centre set the starry tides  
And eddied wild suns that wheeling cast  
The planets."

just as he knows what the catkins on the willows are like, or the names of the butterflies: but he is capable, on occasion of "dragging it in," as in

"The nebulous star we call the sun,  
If that hypothesis of theirs be sound."

from the mere pride in his familiarity with the last new thing. His dealings with science, that is, no more than his dealings with nature, have that inevitableness, that spontaneous appropriateness that we feel we have a right to ask from great poetry. Had Edgar Allan Poe wanted an example for his theory of the impossibility of writing, in modern times, a long poem, he might have found it in Tennyson. His strength is in his shorter pieces; even where as in *In Memoriam* he has conceived and written something at once extended and beautiful, the beauty lies rather in the separate parts; the thing is more in the nature of a sonnet sequence than a continuous poem. Of his other larger works, the Princess, a scarcely happy blend between burlesque in the manner of the *Rape of the Lock*, and a serious apostleship of the liberation of women, is solely redeemed by these lyrics. Tennyson's innate conservatism hardly squared with the liberalising tendencies he caught from the more advanced thought of his age, in writing it. Something of the same kind is true of *Maud*, which is a novel told in dramatically varied verse. The hero is morbid, his social satire peevish, and a story which could have been completely redeemed by the ending (the death of the hero), which artistic fitness demands, is of value for us now through its three amazing songs, in which the lyric genius of Tennyson reached its finest flower. It cannot be denied, either, that he failed—though magnificently—in the *Idylls of the King*. The odds were heavily against him in the choice of a subject. Arthur is at once too legendary and too shadowy for an epic hero, and nothing but the treatment that Milton gave to Satan (i.e. flat substitution of the legendary person by a newly created character) could fit him for the place. Even if Arthur had been more promising than he is, Tennyson's sympathies were fundamentally alien from the moral and religious atmosphere of Arthurian romance. His robust Protestantism left no room for mysticism; he could neither appreciate nor render the mystical fervour and exultation which is in the old history of the Holy Grail. Nor could he comprehend the morality of a society where courage, sympathy for the oppressed, loyalty and courtesy were the only essential virtues, and love took the way of freedom and the heart rather than the way of law. In his heart Tennyson's attitude to the ideals of chivalry and the old stories in which they are embodied differed probably very little from that of Roger Ascham, or of any other Protestant Englishman; when he endeavoured to make an epic of them and to fasten to it an allegory in which Arthur should typify the war of soul against sense, what happened was only what might have been expected. The heroic enterprise failed, and left us with a series of mid-Victorian novels in verse in which the knights figure as heroes of the generic mid-Victorian type.



But if he failed in his larger poems, he had a genius little short of perfect in his handling of shorter forms. The Arthurian story which produced only middling moralizing in the Idylls, gave us as well the supremely written Homeric episode of the Morte d'Arthur, and the sharp and defined beauty of Sir Galahad and the Lady of Shallott. Tennyson had a touch of the pre-Raphaelite faculty of minute painting in words, and the writing of these poems is as clear and naïve as in the best things of Rossetti. He had also what neither Rossetti nor any of his contemporaries in verse, except Browning, had, a fine gift of understanding humanity. The peasants of his English idylls are conceived with as much breadth of sympathy and richness of humour, as purely and as surely, as the peasants of Chaucer or Burns. A note of passionate humanity is indeed in all his work. It makes vivid and intense his scholarly handling of Greek myth; always the unchanging human aspect of it attracts him most, in Oenone's grief, in the indomitableness of Ulysses, the weariness and disillusionment in Tithonus. It has been the cause of the comfort he has brought to sorrow; none of his generation takes such a human attitude to death. Shelley could yearn for the infinite, Browning treat it as the last and greatest adventure, Arnold meet it clear eyed and resigned. To Wordsworth it is the mere return of man the transient to Nature the eternal.

"No motion has she now; no force,  
She neither hears nor sees,  
Roiled round in earth's diurnal course  
With rocks and stones and trees."

To Tennyson it brings the fundamental human home-sickness for familiar things.  
"Ah, sad and strange as on dark summer dawns,  
The earliest pipe of half-awakened birds  
To dying ears when unto dying eyes  
The casement slowly grows a glimmering square."

It is an accent which wakes an echo in a thousand hearts.

While Tennyson, in his own special way and, so to speak, in collaboration with the spirit of the age, was carrying on the work of Romanticism on its normal lines, Browning was finding a new style and a new subject matter. In his youth he had begun as an imitator of Shelley, and *Pauline and Paracelsus* remain to show what the influence of the "sun-treader" was on his poetry. But as early as his second publication, *Bells and Pomegranates*, he had begun to speak for himself, and with *Men and Women*, a series of poems of amazing variety and brilliance, he placed himself unassailably in the first rank. Like Tennyson's, his genius continued high and undimmed while life was left him. *Men and Women* was followed by an extraordinary narrative poem, *The Ring and the Book*, and it by several volumes of scarcely less brilliance, the last of which appeared on the very day of his death. Of the two classes into which, as we saw when we were studying Burns, creative artists can be divided, Browning belongs to that one which makes everything new for itself, and has in consequence to educate the readers by whom its work can alone be judged. He was an innovator in nearly everything he did; he thought for himself; he wrote for himself, and in his own way. And because he refused to follow ordinary modes of writing, he was and is still widely credited with being tortured and obscure.[7] The charge of obscurity is unfortunate because it tends to shut off from him a large class of readers for whom he has a sane and special and splendid message. His most important innovation in form was his device of the dramatic lyric. What interested him in life was men and women, and in them, not their actions, but the motives which governed their actions. To lay bare fully the working of motive in a narrative form with himself as narrator was obviously impossible; the strict dramatic form, though he attained some success in it, does not seem to have attracted him, probably because in it the ultimate stress must be on the thing done rather than the thing thought; there remained, therefore, of the ancient forms of poetry, the lyric. The lyric had of course been used before to express emotions imagined and not real to the poet himself; Browning was the first to project it to express imagined emotions of men and women, whether typical or individual, whom he himself had created. Alongside this perversion of the lyric, he created a looser and freer form, the dramatic monologue, in which most of his most famous poems, *Cleon*, *Sludge the Medium*, *Bishop Blougram's Apology*, etc., are cast. In the convention which Browning established in it, all kinds of people are endowed with a miraculous articulation, a new gift of tongues; they explain themselves, their motives, the springs of those motives (for in Browning's view every thought and act of a man's life is part of an interdependent whole), and their author's peculiar and robust

philosophy of life. Out of the dramatic monologues he devised the scheme of *The Ring and the Book*, a narrative poem in which the episodes, and not the plot, are the basis of the structure, and the story of a trifling and sordid crime is set forth as it appeared to the minds of the chief actors in succession. To these new forms he added the originality of an extraordinary realism in style. Few poets have the power by a word, a phrase, a flash of observation in detail to make you see the event as Browning makes you see it. Many books have been written on the philosophy of Browning's poetry. Stated briefly its message is that of an optimism which depends on a recognition of the strenuousness of life. The base of his creed, as of Carlyle's, is the gospel of labour; he believes in the supreme moral worth of effort. Life is a "training school" for a future existence, and our place in it depends on the courage and strenuousness with which we have laboured here. Evil is in the world only as an instrument in the process of development; by conquering it we exercise our spiritual faculties the more. Only torpor is the supreme sin, even as in *The Statue and the Bust* where effort would have been to a criminal end.

"The counter our lovers staked was lost  
As surely as if it were lawful coin:  
And the sin I impute to each frustrate ghost  
Was, the unlit lamp and the ungirt loin,  
Though the end in sight was a crime, I say."

All the other main ideas of his poetry fit with perfect consistency on to his scheme. Love, the manifestation of a man's or a woman's nature, is the highest and most intimate relationship possible, for it is an opportunity—the highest opportunity—for spiritual growth. It can reach this end though an actual and earthly union is impossible.

"She has lost me, I have gained her;  
Her soul's mine and thus grown perfect,  
I shall pass my life's remainder.  
Life will just hold out the proving  
Both our powers, alone and blended:  
And then come the next life quickly!  
This world's use will have been ended."

It follows that the reward of effort is the promise of immortality, and that for each man, just because his thoughts and motives taken together count, and not one alone, there is infinite hope. The contemporaries of Tennyson and Browning in poetry divide themselves into three separate schools. Nearest to them in temper is the school of Matthew Arnold and Clough; they have the same quick sensitiveness to the intellectual tendencies of the age, but their foothold in a time of shifting and dissolving creeds is a stoical resignation very different from the buoyant optimism of Browning, or Tennyson's mixture of science and doubt and faith. Very remote from them on the other hand is the backward-gazing mediaevalism of Rossetti and his circle, who revived (Rossetti from Italian sources, Morris from Norman) a Middle age which neither Scott nor Coleridge had more than partially and brokenly understood. The last school, that to which Swinburne and Meredith with all their differences unite in belonging, gave up Christianity with scarcely so much as a regret,

"We have said to the dream that caress'd and the dread that smote us,  
Good-night and good-bye."

and turned with a new hope and exultation to the worship of our immemorial mother the earth. In both of them, the note of enthusiasm for political liberty which had been lost in Wordsworth after 1815, and was too early extinguished with Shelley, was revived by the Italian Revolution in splendour and fire.

As one gets nearer one's own time, a certain change comes insensibly over one's literary studies. Literature comes more and more to mean imaginative literature or writing about imaginative literature. The mass of writing comes to be taken not as literature, but as argument or information; we consider it purely from the point of view of its subject matter. A comparison will make this at once clear. When a man reads Bacon, he commonly regards himself as engaged in the study of English literature; when he reads Darwin he is

occupied in the study of natural science. A reader of Bacon's time would have looked on him as we look on Darwin now. The distinction is obviously illogical, but a writer on English literature within brief limits is forced to bow to it if he wishes his book to avoid the dreariness of a summary, and he can plead in extenuation the increased literary output of the later age, and the incompleteness with which time so far has done its work in sifting the memorable from the forgettable, the ephemeral from what is going to last. The main body of imaginative prose literature—the novel—is treated of in the next chapter and here no attempt will be made to deal with any but the admittedly greatest names. Nothing can be said, for instance, of that fluent journalist and biased historian Macaulay, nor of the mellifluousness of Newman, nor of the vigour of Kingsley or Maurice; nor of the writings, admirable in their literary qualities of purity and terseness, of Darwin or Huxley; nor of the culture and apostleship of Matthew Arnold. These authors, one and all, interpose no barrier, so to speak, between their subject-matter and their readers; you are not when you read them conscious of a literary intention, but of some utilitarian one, and as an essay on English literature is by no means a handbook to serious reading they will be no more mentioned here.

In the case of one nineteenth century writer in prose, this method of exclusion cannot apply. Both Carlyle and Ruskin were professional men of letters; both in the voluminous compass of their works touched on a large variety of subjects; both wrote highly individual and peculiar styles; and both without being either professional philosophers or professional preachers, were as every good man of letters, whether he denies it or not, is and must be, lay moralists and prophets. Of the two Ruskin is plain and easily read, and he derives his message; Carlyle, his original, is apt to be tortured and obscure. Inside the body of his work the student of nineteenth century literature is probably in need of some guidance; outside so far as prose is concerned he can fend for himself. As we saw, Carlyle was the oldest of the Victorians; he was over forty when the Queen came to the throne. Already his years of preparation in Scotland, town and country, were over, and he had settled in that famous little house in Chelsea which for nearly half a century to come was to be one of the central hearths of literary London. More than that, he had already fully formed his mode of thought and his peculiar style. *Sartor Resartus* was written and published serially before the Queen came to the throne; the French Revolution came in the year of her accession at the very time that Carlyle's lectures were making him a fashionable sensation; most of his miscellaneous essays had already appeared in the reviews. But with the strict Victorian era, as if to justify the usually arbitrary division of literary history by dynastic periods, there came a new spirit into his work. For the first time he applied his peculiar system of ideas to contemporary politics. Chartism appeared in 1839; *Past and Present*, which does the same thing as Chartism in an artistic form, three years later. They were followed by one other book—*Latter Day Pamphlets*—addressed particularly to contemporary conditions, and by two remarkable and voluminous historical works. Then came the death of his wife, and for the last fifteen years of his life silence, broken only briefly and at rare intervals.

The reader who comes to Carlyle with preconceived notions based on what he has heard of the subject-matter of his books is certain to be surprised by what he finds. There are histories in the canon of his works and pamphlets on contemporary problems, but they are composed on a plan that no other historian and no other social reformer would own. A reader will find in them no argument, next to no reasoning, and little practical judgment. Carlyle was not a great "thinker" in the strictest sense of that term. He was under the control, not of his reason, but of his emotions; deep feeling, a volcanic intensity of temperament flaming into the light and heat of prophecy, invective, derision, or a simple splendour of eloquence, is the characteristic of his work. Against cold-blooded argument his passionate nature rose in fierce rebellion; he had no patience with the formalist or the doctrinaire. Nor had he the faculty of analysis; his historical works are a series of pictures or tableaux, splendidly and vividly conceived, and with enormous colour and a fine illusion of reality, but one-sided as regards the truth. In his essays on hero-worship he contents himself with a noisy reiteration of the general predicate of heroism; there is very little except their names and the titles to differentiate one sort of hero from another. His picture of contemporary conditions is not so much a reasoned indictment as a wild and fantastic orgy of epithets: "dark simmering pit of Tophet," "bottomless universal hypocrisies," and all the rest. In it all he left no practical scheme. His works are fundamentally not about politics or history or literature, but about himself. They are the exposition of a splendid egotism, fiercely enthusiastic about one or two deeply held convictions; their strength does not lie in their matter of fact. This is, perhaps, a condemnation of him in the minds of those people who ask of a social reformer an actuarially accurate scheme for the abolition of poverty, or from a prophet a correct forecast of the result of the next general election. Carlyle has little help for these and no message save the disconcerting one of their own futility. His message is at once larger and simpler, for though his form was prose, his soul was a poet's

soul, and what he has to say is a poet's word. In a way, it is partly Wordsworth's own. The chief end of life, his message is, is the performance of duty, chiefly the duty of work. "Do thy little stroke of work; this is Nature's voice, and the sum of all the commandments, to each man." All true work is religion, all true work is worship; to labour is to pray. And after work, obedience the best discipline, so he says in *Past and Present*, for governing, and "our universal duty and destiny; wherein whoso will not bend must break." Carlyle asked of every man, action and obedience and to bow to duty; he also required of him sincerity and veracity, the duty of being a real and not a sham, a strenuous warfare against cant. The historical facts with which he had to deal he grouped under these embracing categories, and in the French Revolution, which is as much a treasure-house of his philosophy as a history, there is hardly a page on which they do not appear. "Quack-ridden," he says, "in that one word lies all misery whatsoever."

These bare elemental precepts he clothes in a garment of amazing and bizarre richness. There is nothing else in English faintly resembling the astonishing eccentricity and individuality of his style. Gifted with an extraordinarily excitable and vivid imagination; seeing things with sudden and tremendous vividness, as in a searchlight or a lightning flash, he contrived to convey to his readers his impressions full charged with the original emotion that produced them, and thus with the highest poetic effect. There is nothing in all descriptive writing to match the vividness of some of the scenes in the French Revolution or in the narrative part of *Cromwell's Letters and Speeches*, or more than perhaps in any of his books, because in it he was setting down deep-seated impressions of his boyhood rather than those got from brooding over documents, in *Sartor Resartus*. Alongside this unmatched pictorial vividness and a quite amazing richness and rhythm of language, more surprising and original than anything out of Shakespeare, there are of course, striking defects—a wearisome reiteration of emphasis, a clumsiness of construction, a saddening fondness for solecisms and hybrid inventions of his own. The reader who is interested in these (and every one who reads him is forced to become so) will find them faithfully dealt with in John Sterling's remarkable letter (quoted in *Carlyle's Life of Sterling*) on *Sartor Resartus*. But gross as they are, and frequently as they provide matter for serious offence, these eccentricities of language link themselves up in a strange indissoluble way with Carlyle's individuality and his power as an artist. They are not to be imitated, but he would be much less than he is without them, and they act by their very strength and pungency as a preservative of his work. That of all the political pamphlets which the new era of reform occasioned, his, which were the least in sympathy with it and are the furthest off the main stream of our political thinking now, alone continue to be read, must be laid down not only to the prophetic fervour and fire of their inspiration but to the dark and violent magic of their style.

## CHAPTER IX

### THE NOVEL

The faculty for telling stories is the oldest artistic faculty in the world, and the deepest implanted in the heart of man. Before the rudest cave-pictures were scratched on the stone, the story-teller, it is not unreasonable to suppose, was plying his trade. All early poetry is simply story-telling in verse. Stories are the first literary interest of the awakening mind of a child. As that is so, it is strange that the novel, which of all literary ways of story-telling seems closest to the unstudied tale-spinning of talk, should be the late discovery that it is. Of all the main forms into which the literary impulse moulds the stuff of imagination, the novel is the last to be devised. The drama dates from prehistoric times, so does the epic, the ballad and the lyric. The novel, as we know it, dates practically speaking from 1740. What is the reason it is so late in appearing? The answer is simply that there seems no room for good drama and good fiction at the same time in literature; drama and novels cannot exist side by side, and the novel had to wait for the decadence of the drama before it could appear and triumph. If one were to make a table of succession for the various kinds of literature as they have been used naturally and spontaneously (not academically), the order would be the epic, the drama, the novel; and it would be obvious at once that the order stood for something more than chronological succession, and that literature in its function as a representation and criticism of life passed from form to form in the search of greater freedom, greater subtlety, and greater power. At present we seem to be at the climax of the third stage in this development; there are signs that the fourth is on the way, and that it will be a return to drama, not to the old, formal, ordered kind, but, something new and freer, ready to gather up and interpret what there is of newness and freedom in the spirit of man and the society in which he lives.

The novel, then, had to wait for the drama's decline, but there was literary story-telling long before that. There were mediaeval romances in prose and verse; Renaissance pastoral tales, and stories of adventure; collections, plenty of them, of short stories like Boccaccio's, and those in Painter's Palace of Pleasure. But none of these, not even romances which deal in moral and sententious advice like Euphues, approach the essence of the novel as we know it. They are all (except Euphues, which is simply a framework of travel for a book of aphorisms) simple and objective; they set forth incidents or series of incidents; long or short they are anecdotes only—they take no account of character. It was impossible we should have the novel as distinct from the tale, till stories acquired a subjective interest for us; till we began to think about character and to look at actions not only outwardly, but within at their springs. As has been stated early in this book, it was in the seventeenth century that this interest in character was first awakened. Shakespeare had brought to the drama, which before him was concerned with actions viewed outwardly, a psychological interest; he had taught that "character is destiny," and that men's actions and fates spring not from outward agencies, but from within in their own souls. The age began to take a deep and curious interest in men's lives; biography was written for the first time and autobiography; it is the great period of memoir-writing both in England and France; authors like Robert Burton came, whose delight it was to dig down into human nature in search for oddities and individualities of disposition; humanity as the great subject of enquiry for all men, came to its own. All this has a direct bearing on the birth of the novel. One transient form of literature in the seventeenth century—the Character—is an ancestor in the direct line. The collections of them—Earle's *Microcosmography* is the best—are not very exciting reading, and they never perhaps quite succeeded in naturalizing a form borrowed from the later age of Greece, but their importance in the history of the novel to come is clear. Take them and add them to the story of adventure—i.e., introduce each fresh person in your plot with a description in the character form, and the step you have made towards the novel is enormous; you have given to plot which was already there, the added interest of character.

That, however, was not quite how the thing worked in actual fact. At the heels of the "Character" came the periodical essay of Addison and Steele. Their interest in contemporary types was of the same quality as Earle's or Hall's, but they went a different way to work. Where these compressed and cultivated a style which was staccato and epigrammatic, huddling all the traits of their subject in short sharp sentences that follow each other with all the brevity and curtness of items in a prescription, Addison and Steele observed a more artistic plan. They made, as it were, the prescription up, adding one ingredient after another slowly as the mixture dissolved. You are introduced to Sir Roger de Coverley, and to a number of other typical people, and then in a series of essays which if they were disengaged from their setting would be to all intents a novel and a fine one, you are made aware one by one of different traits in his character and those

of his friends, each trait generally enshrined in an incident which illustrates it; you get to know them, that is, gradually, as you would in real life, and not all in a breath, in a series of compressed statements, as is the way of the character writers. With the Coverley essays in the *Spectator*, the novel in one of its forms—that in which an invisible and all knowing narrator tells a story in which some one else whose character he lays bare for us is the hero—is as good as achieved.

Another manner of fiction—the autobiographical—had already been invented. It grew directly out of the public interest in autobiography, and particularly in the tales of their voyages which the discoverers wrote and published on their return from their adventures. Its establishment in literature was the work of two authors, Bunyan and Defoe. The books of Bunyan, whether they are told in the first person or no, are and were meant to be autobiographical; their interest is a subjective interest. Here is a man who endeavours to interest you, not in the character of some other person he has imagined or observed, but in himself. His treatment of it is characteristic of the awakening talent for fiction of his time. The *Pilgrim's Progress* is begun as an allegory, and so continues for a little space till the story takes hold of the author. When it does, whether he knew it or not, allegory goes to the winds. But the autobiographical form of fiction in its highest art is the creation of Defoe. He told stories of adventure, incidents modelled on real life as many tellers of tales had done before him, but to the form as he found it he super-added a psychological interest—the interest of the character of the narrator. He contrived to observe in his writing a scrupulous and realistic fidelity and appropriateness to the conditions in which the story was to be told. We learn about Crusoe's island, for instance, gradually just as Crusoe learns of it himself, though the author is careful by taking his narrator up to a high point of vantage the day after his arrival, that we shall learn the essentials of it, as long as verisimilitude is not sacrificed, as soon as possible. It is the paradox of the English novel that these our earliest efforts in fiction were meant, unlike the romances which preceded them, to pass for truth. Defoe's *Journal of the Plague Year* was widely taken as literal fact, and it is still quoted as such occasionally by rash though reputable historians. So that in England the novel began with realism as it has culminated, and across two centuries Defoe and the "naturalists" join hands. Defoe, it is proper also in this place to notice, fixed the peculiar form of the historical novel. In his *Memoirs of a Cavalier*, the narrative of an imaginary person's adventures in a historical setting is interspersed with the entrance of actual historical personages, exactly the method of historical romancing which was brought to perfection by Sir Walter Scott.

In the eighteenth century came the decline of the drama for which the novel had been waiting. By 1660 the romantic drama of Elizabeth's time was dead; the comedy of the Restoration which followed, witty and brilliant though it was, reflected a society too licentious and artificial to secure its permanence; by the time of Addison play-writing had fallen to journey-work, and the theatre to openly expressed contempt. When Richardson and Fielding published their novels there was nothing to compete with fiction in the popular taste. It would seem as though the novel had been waiting for this favourable circumstance. In a sudden burst of prolific inventiveness, which can be paralleled in all letters only by the period of Marlowe and Shakespeare, masterpiece after masterpiece poured from the press. Within two generations, besides Richardson and Fielding came Sterne and Goldsmith and Smollett and Fanny Burney in naturalism, and Horace Walpole and Mrs. Radcliffe in the new way of romance. Novels by minor authors were published in thousands as well. The novel, in fact, besides being the occasion of literature of the highest class, attracted by its lucrativeness that under-current of journey-work authorship which had hitherto busied itself in poetry or plays. Fiction has been its chief occupation ever since. Anything like a detailed criticism or even a bare narrative of this voluminous literature is plainly impossible without the limits of a single chapter. Readers must go for it to books on the subject. It is possible here merely to draw attention to those authors to whom the English novel as a more or less fixed form is indebted for its peculiar characteristics. Foremost amongst these are Richardson and Fielding; after them there is Walter Scott. After him, in the nineteenth century, Dickens and Meredith and Mr. Hardy; last of all the French realists and the new school of romance. To one or other of these originals all the great authors in the long list of English novelists owe their method and their choice of subject-matter.

With Defoe fiction gained verisimilitude, it ceased to deal with the incredible; it aimed at exhibiting, though in strange and memorable circumstances, the workings of the ordinary mind. It is Richardson's main claim to fame that he contrived a form of novel which exhibited an ordinary mind working in normal circumstances, and that he did this with a minuteness which till then had never been thought of and has not since been surpassed. His talent is very exactly a microscopical talent; under it the common stuff of life

separated from its surroundings and magnified beyond previous knowledge, yields strange and new and deeply interesting sights. He carried into the study of character which had begun in Addison with an eye to externals and eccentricities, a minute faculty of inspection which watched and recorded unconscious mental and emotional processes.

To do this he employed a method which was, in effect, a compromise between that of the autobiography, and that of the tale told by an invisible narrator. The weakness of the autobiography is that it can write only of events within the knowledge of the supposed speaker, and that consequently the presentation of all but one of the characters of the book is an external presentation. We know, that is, of *Man Friday* only what Crusoe could, according to realistic appropriateness, tell us about him. We do not know what he thought or felt within himself. On the other hand the method of invisible narration had not at his time acquired the faculty which it possesses now of doing *Friday's* thinking aloud or exposing fully the workings of his mind. So that Richardson, whose interests were psychological, whose strength and talent lay in the presentation of the states of mind appropriate to situations of passion or intrigue, had to look about him for a new form, and that form he found in the novel of letters. In a way, if the end of a novel be the presentation not of action, but of the springs of action; if the external event is in it always of less importance than the emotions which conditioned it, and the emotions which it set working, the novel of letters is the supreme manner for fiction. Consider the possibilities of it; there is a series of events in which A, B, and C are concerned. Not only can the outward events be narrated as they appeared to all three separately by means of letters from each to another, or to a fourth party, but the motives of each and the emotions which each experiences as a result of the actions of the others or them all, can be laid bare. No other method can wind itself so completely into the psychological intricacies and recesses which lie behind every event. Yet the form, as everybody knows, has not been popular; even an expert novel-reader could hardly name off-hand more than two or three examples of it since Richardson's day. Why is this? Well, chiefly it is because the mass of novelists have not had Richardson's knowledge of, or interest in, the psychological under side of life, and those who have, as, amongst the moderns, Henry James, have devised out of the convention of the invisible narrator a method by which they can with greater economy attain in practice fairly good results. For the mere narration of action in which the study of character plays a subsidiary part, it was, of course, from the beginning impossible. Scott turned aside at the height of his power to try it in "*Redgauntlet*"; he never made a second attempt. For Richardson's purpose, it answered admirably, and he used it with supreme effect. Particularly he excelled in that side of the novelist's craft which has ever since (whether because he started it or not) proved the subtlest and most attractive, the presentation of women. Richardson was one of those men who are not at their ease in other men's society, and whom other men, to put it plainly, are apt to regard as coxcombs and fools. But he had a genius for the friendship and confidence of women. In his youth he wrote love-letters for them. His first novel grew out of a plan to exhibit in a series of letters the quality of feminine virtue, and in its essence (though with a ludicrous, and so to speak "kitchen-maidish" misunderstanding of his own sex) adheres to the plan. His second novel, which designs to set up a model man against the monster of iniquity in *Pamela*, is successful only so far as it exhibits the thoughts and feelings of the heroine whom he ultimately marries. His last, *Clarissa Harlowe* is a masterpiece of sympathetic divination into the feminine mind. *Clarissa* is, as has been well said, the "Eve of fiction, the prototype of the modern heroine"; feminine psychology as good as unknown before (Shakespeare's women being the "*Fridays*" of a highly intelligent Crusoe) has hardly been brought further since. But *Clarissa* is more than mere psychology; whether she represents a contemporary tendency or whether Richardson made her so, she starts a new epoch. "This," says Henley, "is perhaps her finest virtue as it is certainly her greatest charm; that until she set the example, woman in literature as a self-suffering individuality, as an existence endowed with equal rights to independence—of choice, volition, action—with man had not begun to be." She had not begun to be it in life either.

What Richardson did for the subtlest part of a novelist's business, his dealings with psychology, Fielding did for the most necessary part of it, the telling of the story. Before him hardly any story had been told well; even if it had been plain and clear as in Bunyan and Defoe it had lacked the emphasis, the light and shade of skilful grouping. On the "picaresque" (so the autobiographical form was called abroad) convention of a journey he grafted a structure based in its outline on the form of the ancient epic. It proved extraordinarily suitable for his purpose. Not only did it make it easy for him to lighten his narrative with excursions in a heightened style, burlesquing his origins, but it gave him at once the right attitude to his material. He told his story as one who knew everything; could tell conversations and incidents as he conceived them

happening, with no violation of credibility, nor any strain on his reader's imagination, and without any impropriety could interpose in his own person, pointing things to the reader which might have escaped his attention, pointing at parallels he might have missed, laying bare the irony or humour beneath a situation. He allowed himself digressions and episodes, told separate tales in the middle of the action, introduced, as in Partridge's visit to the theatre, the added piquancy of topical allusion; in fact he did anything he chose. And he laid down that free form of the novel which is characteristically English, and from which, in its essence, no one till the modern realists has made a serious departure.

In the matter of his novels, he excels by reason of a Shakespearean sense of character and by the richness and rightness of his faculty of humour. He had a quick eye for contemporary types, and an amazing power of building out of them men and women whose individuality is full and rounded. You do not feel as you do with Richardson that his fabric is spun silk-worm-wise out of himself; on the contrary you know it to be the fruit of a gentle and observant nature, and a stock of fundamental human sympathy. His gallery of portraits, Joseph Andrews, Parson Adams, Parson Trulliber, Jones, Blifil, Partridge, Sophia and her father and all the rest are each of them minute studies of separate people; they live and move according to their proper natures; they are conceived not from without but from within. Both Richardson and Fielding were conscious of a moral intention; but where Richardson is sentimental, vulgar, and moral only so far as it is moral (as in Pamela), to inculcate selling at the highest price or (as in Grandison) to avoid temptations which never come in your way, Fielding's morality is fresh and healthy, and (though not quite free from the sentimentality of scoundrelism) at bottom sane and true. His knowledge of the world kept him right. His acquaintance with life is wide, and his insight is keen and deep. His taste is almost as catholic as Shakespeare's own, and the life he knew, and which other men knew, he handles for the first time with the freedom and imagination of an artist.

Each of the two—Fielding and Richardson—had his host of followers. Abroad Richardson won immediate recognition; in France Diderot went so far as to compare him with Homer and Moses! He gave the first impulse to modern French fiction. At home, less happily, he set going the sentimental school, and it was only when that had passed away that—in the delicate and subtle character-study of Miss Austen—his influence comes to its own. Miss Austen carried a step further, and with an observation which was first hand and seconded by intuitive knowledge, Richardson's analysis of the feminine mind, adding to it a delicate and finely humorous feeling for character in both sexes which was all her own. Fielding's imitators (they number each in his own way, and with his own graces or talent added his rival Smollett, Sterne, and Goldsmith) kept the way which leads to Thackeray and Dickens—the main road of the English Novel.

That road was widened two ways by Sir Walter Scott. The historical novel, which had been before his day either an essay in anachronism with nothing historical in it but the date, or a laborious and uninspired compilation of antiquarian research, took form and life under his hands. His wide reading, stored as it was in a marvellously retentive memory, gave him all the background he needed to achieve a historical setting, and allowed him to concentrate his attention on the actual telling of his story; to which his genial and sympathetic humanity and his quick eye for character gave a humorous depth and richness that was all his own. It is not surprising that he made the historical novel a literary vogue all over Europe. In the second place, he began in his novels of Scottish character a sympathetic study of nationality. He is not, perhaps, a fair guide to contemporary conditions; his interests were too romantic and too much in the past to catch the rattle of the looms that caught the ear of Galt, and if we want a picture of the great fact of modern Scotland, its industrialisation, it is to Galt we must go. But in his comprehension of the essential character of the people he has no rival; in it his historical sense seconded his observation, and the two mingling gave us the pictures whose depth of colour and truth make his Scottish novels, *Old Mortality*, *The Antiquary*, *Redgauntlet*, the greatest things of their kind in literature.

The peculiarly national style of fiction founded by Fielding and carried on by his followers reached its culminating point in *Vanity Fair*. In it the reader does not seem to be simply present at the unfolding of a plot the end of which is constantly present to the mind of the author and to which he is always consciously working, every incident having a bearing on the course of the action; rather he feels himself to be the spectator of a piece of life which is too large and complex to be under the control of a creator, which moves to its close not under the impulsion of a directing hand, but independently impelled by causes evolved in the course of its happening. With this added complexity goes a more frequent interposition of the author in his own person—one of the conventions as we have seen of this national style. Thackeray is present to his



readers, indeed, not as the manager who pulls the strings and sets the puppets in motion, but as an interpreter who directs the reader's attention to the events on which he lays stress, and makes them a starting-point for his own moralising. This persistent moralizing—sham cynical, real sentimental—this thumping of death-bed pillows as in the dreadful case of Miss Crawley, makes Thackeray's use of the personal interposition almost less effective than that of any other novelist. Already while he was doing it, Dickens had conquered the public; and the English novel was making its second fresh start.

He is an innovator in more ways than one. In the first place he is the earliest novelist to practise a conscious artistry of plot. The *Mystery of Edwin Drood* remains mysterious, but those who essay to conjecture the end of that unfinished story have at last the surety that its end, full worked out in all its details, had been in its author's mind before he set pen to paper. His imagination was as diligent and as disciplined as his pen, Dickens' practice in this matter could not be better put than in his own words, when he describes himself as "in the first stage of a new book, which consists in going round and round the idea, as you see a bird in his cage go about and about his sugar before he touches it." That his plots are always highly elaborated is the fruit of this preliminary disciplined exercise of thought. The method is familiar to many novelists now; Dickens was the first to put it into practice. In the second place he made a new departure by his frankly admitted didacticism and by the skill with which in all but two or three of his books—*Bleak House*, perhaps, and *Little Dorrit*—he squared his purpose with his art. Lastly he made the discovery which has made him immortal. In him for the first time the English novel produced an author who dug down into the masses of the people for his subjects; apprehended them in all their inexhaustible character and humour and pathos, and reproduced them with a lively and loving artistic skill.

Dickens has, of course, serious faults. In particular, readers emancipated by lapse of time from the enslavement of the first enthusiasm, have quarrelled with the mawkishness and sentimentality of his pathos, and with the exaggeration of his studies of character. It has been said of him, as it has of Thackeray, that he could not draw a "good woman" and that Agnes Copperfield, like Amelia Sedley, is a very doll-like type of person. To critics of this kind it may be retorted that though "good" and "bad" are categories relevant to melodrama, they apply very ill to serious fiction, and that indeed to the characters of any of the novelists—the Brontës, Mrs. Gaskell or the like—who lay bare character with fullness and intimacy, they could not well be applied at all. The faultiness of them in Dickens is less than in Thackeray, for in Dickens they are only incident to the scheme, which lies in the hero (his heroes are excellent) and in the grotesque characters, whereas in his rival they are in the theme itself. For his pathos, not even his warmest admirer could perhaps offer a satisfactory case. The charge of exaggeration however is another matter. To the person who complains that he has never met Dick Swiveller or Micawber or Mrs. Gamp the answer is simply Turner's to the sceptical critic of his sunset, "Don't you wish you could?" To the other, who objects more plausibly to Dickens's habit of attaching to each of his characters some label which is either so much flaunted all through that you cannot see the character at all or else mysteriously and unaccountably disappears when the story begins to grip the author, Dickens has himself offered an amusing and convincing defence. In the preface to *Pickwick* he answers those who criticised the novel on the ground that *Pickwick* began by being purely ludicrous and developed into a serious and sympathetic individuality, by pointing to the analogous process which commonly takes place in actual human relationships. You begin a new acquaintanceship with perhaps not very charitable prepossessions; these later a deeper and better knowledge removes, and where you have before seen an idiosyncrasy you come to love a character. It is ingenious and it helps to explain Mrs. Nickleby, the Pecksniff daughters, and many another. Whether it is true or not (and it does not explain the faultiness of such pictures as Carker and his kind) there can be no doubt that this trick in Dickens of beginning with a salient impression and working outward to a fuller conception of character is part at least of the reason of his enormous hold upon his readers. No man leads you into the mazes of his invention so easily and with such a persuasive hand.

The great novelists who were writing contemporarily with him—the Brontës, Mrs. Gaskell, George Eliot—it is impossible to deal with here, except to say that the last is indisputably, because of her inability to fuse completely art and ethics, inferior to Mrs. Gaskell or to either of the Brontë sisters. Nor of the later Victorians who added fresh variety to the national style can the greatest, Meredith, be more than mentioned for the exquisiteness of his comic spirit and the brave gallery of English men and women he has given us in what is, perhaps, fundamentally the most English thing in fiction since Fielding wrote. For our purpose Mr. Hardy, though he is a less brilliant artist, is more to the point. His novels brought into England the

contemporary pessimism of Schopenhauer and the Russians, and found a home for it among the English peasantry. Convinced that in the upper classes character could be studied and portrayed only subjectively because of the artificiality of a society which prevented its outlet in action, he turned to the peasantry because with them conduct is the direct expression of the inner life. Character could be shown working, therefore, not subjectively but in the act, if you chose a peasant subject. His philosophy, expressed in this medium, is sombre. In his novels you can trace a gradual realization of the defects of natural laws and the quandary men are put to by their operation. Chance, an irritating and trifling series of coincidences, plays the part of fate. Nature seems to enter with the hopelessness of man's mood. Finally the novelist turns against life itself. "Birth," he says, speaking of Tess, "seemed to her an ordeal of degrading personal compulsion whose gratuitousness nothing in the result seemed to justify and at best could only palliate." It is strange to find pessimism in a romantic setting; strange, too, to find a paganism which is so little capable of light or joy.

The characteristic form of English fiction, that in which the requisite illusion of the complexity and variety of life is rendered by discursiveness, by an author's licence to digress, to double back on himself, to start may be in the middle of a story and work subsequently to the beginning and the end; in short by his power to do whatever is most expressive of his individuality, found a rival in the last twenty years of the nineteenth century in the French Naturalistic or Realist school, in which the illusion of life is got by a studied and sober veracity of statement, and by the minute accumulation of detail. To the French Naturalists a novel approached in importance the work of a man of science, and they believed it ought to be based on documentary evidence, as a scientific work would be. Above all it ought not to allow itself to be coloured by the least gloss of imagination or idealism; it ought never to shrink from a confrontation of the naked fact. On the contrary it was its business to carry it to the dissecting table and there minutely examine everything that lay beneath its surface. The school first became an English possession in the early translations of the work of Zola; its methods were transplanted into English fiction by Mr. George Moore. From his novels, both in passages of direct statement and in the light of his practice, it is possible to gather together the materials of a manifesto of the English Naturalistic school. The naturalists complained that English fiction lacked construction in the strictest sense; they found in the English novel a remarkable absence of organic wholeness; it did not fulfil their first and broadest canon of subject-matter—by which a novel has to deal in the first place with a single and rhythmical series of events; it was too discursive. They made this charge against English fiction; they also retorted the charge brought by native writers and their readers against the French of foulness, sordidness and pessimism in their view of life. "We do not," says a novelist in one of Mr. Moore's books, "we do not always choose what you call unpleasant subjects, but we do try to get to the roots of things; and the basis of life being material and not spiritual, the analyst sooner or later finds himself invariably handling what this sentimental age calls coarse." "The novel," says the same character, "if it be anything is contemporary history, an exact and complete reproduction of the social surroundings of the age we live in." That succinctly is the naturalistic theory of the novel as a work of science—that as the history of a nation lies hidden often in social wrongs and in domestic grief as much as in the movements of parties or dynasties, the novelist must do for the former what the historian does for the latter. It is his business in the scheme of knowledge of his time.

But the naturalists believed quite as profoundly in the novel as a work of art. They claimed for their careful pictures of the grey and sad and sordid an artistic worth, varying in proportion to the intensity of the emotion in which the picture was composed and according to the picture's truth, but in its essence just as real and permanent as the artistic worth of romance. "Seen from afar," writes Mr. Moore, "all things in nature are of equal worth; and the meanest things, when viewed with the eyes of God, are raised to heights of tragic awe which conventionality would limit to the deaths of kings and patriots." On such a lofty theory they built their treatment and their style. It is a mistake to suppose that the realist school deliberately cultivates the sordid or shocking. Examine in this connection Mr. Moore's *Mummer's Wife*, our greatest English realist novel, and for the matter of that one of the supreme things in English fiction, and you will see that the scrupulous fidelity of the author's method, though it denies him those concessions to a sentimentalist or romantic view of life which are the common implements of fiction, denies him no less the extremities of horror or loathsomeness. The heroine sinks into the miserable squalor of a dipsomaniac and dies from a drunkard's disease, but her end is shown as the ineluctable consequence of her life, its early greyness and monotony, the sudden shock of a new and strange environment and the resultant weakness of will which a morbid excitability inevitably brought about. The novel, that is to say, deals with a

"rhythmical series of events and follows them to their conclusion"; it gets at the roots of things; it tells us of something which we know to be true in life whether we care to read it in fiction or not. There is nothing in it of sordidness for sordidness' sake nor have the realists any philosophy of an unhappy ending. In this case the ending is unhappy because the sequence of events admitted of no other solution; in others the ending is happy or merely neutral as the preceding story decides. If what one may call neutral endings predominate, it is because they also—notoriously—predominate in life. But the question of unhappiness or its opposite has nothing whatever to do with the larger matter of beauty; it is the triumph of the realists that at their best they discovered a new beauty in things, the loveliness that lies in obscure places, the splendour of sordidness, humility, and pain. They have taught us that beauty, like the Spirit, blows where it lists and we know from them that the antithesis between realism and idealism is only on their lower levels; at their summits they unite and are one. No true realist but is an idealist too.

Most of what is best in English fiction since has been directly occasioned by their work; Gissing and Mr. Arnold Bennett may be mentioned as two authors who are fundamentally realist in their conception of the art of the novel, and the realist ideal partakes in a greater or less degree in the work of nearly all our eminent novelists to-day. But realism is not and cannot be interesting to the great public; it portrays people as they are, not as they would like to be, and where they are, not where they would like to be. It gives no background for day-dreaming. Now literature (to repeat what has been than more once stated earlier in this book) is a way of escape from life as well as an echo or mirror of it, and the novel as the form of literature which more than any other men read for pleasure, is the main avenue for this escape. So that alongside this invasion of realism it is not strange that there grew a revival in romance. The main agent of it, Robert Louis Stevenson, had the romantic strain in him intensified by the conditions under which he worked; a weak and anaemic man, he loved bloodshed as a cripple loves athletics—passionately and with the intimate enthusiasm of make-believe which an imaginative man can bring to bear on the contemplation of what can never be his. His natural attraction for "redness and juice" in life was seconded by a delightful and fantastic sense of the boundless possibilities of romance in every-day things. To a realist a hansom-cab driver is a man who makes twenty-five shillings a week, lives in a back street in Pimlico, has a wife who drinks and children who grow up with an alcoholic taint; the realist will compare his lot with other cab-drivers, and find what part of his life is the product of the cab-driving environment, and on that basis he will write his book. To Stevenson and to the romanticist generally, a hansom cab-driver is a mystery behind whose apparent commonplaceness lie magic possibilities beyond all telling; not one but may be the agent of the Prince of Bohemia, ready to drive you off to some mad and magic adventure in a street which is just as commonplace to the outward eye as the cab-driver himself, but which implicates by its very deceitful commonness whole volumes of romance. The novel-reader to whom Demos was the repetition of what he had seen and known, and what had planted sickness in his soul, found the New Arabian Nights a refreshing miracle. Stevenson had discovered that modern London had its possibilities of romance. To these two elements of his romantic equipment must be added a third—travel. Defoe never left England, and other early romanticists less gifted with invention than he wrote from the mind's eye and from books. To Stevenson, and to his successor Mr. Kipling, whose "discovery" of India is one of the salient facts of modern English letters, and to Mr. Conrad belongs the credit of teaching novelists to draw on experience for the scenes they seek to present. A fourth element in the equipment of modern romanticism—that which draws its effects from the "miracles" of modern science, has been added since by Mr. H. G. Wells, in whose latest work the realistic and romantic schools seem to have united.

## CHAPTER X

### THE PRESENT AGE

We have carried our study down to the death of Ruskin and included in it authors like Swinburne and Meredith who survived till recently; and in discussing the novel we have included men like Kipling and Hardy—living authors. It would be possible and perhaps safer to stop there and make no attempt to bring writers later than these into our survey. To do so is to court an easily and quickly stated objection. One is anticipating the verdict of posterity. How can we who are contemporaries tell whether an author's work is permanent or no? Of course, in a sense the point of view expressed by these questions is true enough. It is always idle to anticipate the verdict of posterity. Remember Matthew Arnold's prophecy that at the end of the nineteenth century Wordsworth and Byron would be the two great names in Romantic poetry. We are ten years and more past that date now, and so far as Byron is concerned, at any rate, there is no sign that Arnold's prediction has come true. But the obvious fact that we cannot do our grandchildren's thinking for them, is no reason why we should refuse to think for ourselves. No notion is so destructive to the formation of a sound literary taste as the notion that books become literature only when their authors are dead. Round us men and women are putting into plays and poetry and novels the best that they can or know. They are writing not for a dim and uncertain future but for us, and on our recognition and welcome they depend, sometimes for their livelihood, always for the courage which carries them on to fresh endeavour. Literature is an ever-living and continuous thing, and we do it less than its due service if we are so occupied reading Shakespeare and Milton and Scott that we have no time to read Mr. Yeats, Mr. Shaw or Mr. Wells. Students of literature must remember that classics are being manufactured daily under their eyes, and that on their sympathy and comprehension depends whether an author receives the success he merits when he is alive to enjoy it.

The purpose of this chapter, then, is to draw a rough picture of some of the lines or schools of contemporary writing—of the writing mainly, though not altogether, of living authors. It is intended to indicate some characteristics of the general trend or drift of literary effort as a whole. The most remarkable feature of the age, as far as writing is concerned, is without doubt its inattention to poetry. Tennyson was a popular author; his books sold in thousands; his lines passed into that common conversational currency of unconscious quotation which is the surest testimony to the permeation of a poet's influence. Even Browning, though his popularity came late, found himself carried into all the nooks and corners of the reading public. His robust and masculine morality, understood at last, or expounded by a semi-priestly class of interpreters, made him popular with those readers—and they are the majority—who love their reading to convey a moral lesson, just as Tennyson's reflection of his time's distraction between science and religion endeared them to those who found in him an answer or at least an echo to their own perplexities. A work widely different from either of these, Fitzgerald's *Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam*, shared and has probably exceeded their popularity for similar reasons. Its easy pessimism and cult of pleasure, its delightful freedom from any demand for continuous thought from its readers, its appeal to the indolence and moral flaccidity which is implicit in all men, all contributed to its immense vogue; and among people who perhaps did not fully understand it but were merely lulled by its sonorousness, a knowledge of it has passed for the insignia of a love of literature and the possession of literary taste. But after Fitzgerald—who? What poet has commanded the ear of the reading public or even a fraction of it? Not Swinburne certainly, partly because of his undoubted difficulty, partly because of a suspicion held of his moral and religious tenets, largely from material reasons quite unconnected with the quality of his work; not Morris, nor his followers; none of the so-called minor poets whom we shall notice presently—poets who have drawn the moods that have nourished their work from the decadents of France. Probably the only writer of verse who is at the same time a poet and has acquired a large popularity and public influence is Mr. Kipling. His work as a novelist we mentioned in the last chapter. It remains to say something of his achievements in verse.

Let us grant at once his faults. He can be violent, and over-rhetorical; he belabours you with sense impressions, and with the polysyllabic rhetoric he learned from Swinburne—and (though this is not the place for a discussion of political ideas) he can offend by the sentimental brutalism which too often passes for patriotism in his poetry. Not that this last represents the total impression of his attitude as an Englishman. His later work in poetry and prose, devoted to the reconstruction of English history, is remarkable for the justness and saneness of its temper. There are other faults—a lack of sureness in taste is one—that could be mentioned but they do not affect the main greatness of his work. He is great because he

discovered a new subject-matter, and because of the white heat of imagination which in his best things he brought to bear on it and by which he transposed it into poetry. It is Mr. Kipling's special distinction that the apparatus of modern civilization—steam engines, and steamships, and telegraph lines, and the art of flight—take on in his hands a poetic quality as authentic and inspiring as any that ever was cast over the implements of other and what the mass of men believe to have been more picturesque days. Romance is in the present, so he teaches us, not in the past, and we do it wrong to leave it only the territory we have ourselves discarded in the advance of the race. That and the great discovery of India—an India misunderstood for his own purposes no doubt, but still the first presentiment of an essential fact in our modern history as a people—give him the hold that he has, and rightly, over the minds of his readers. It is in a territory poles apart from Mr. Kipling's that the main stream of romantic poetry flows. Apart from the gravely delicate and scholarly work of Mr. Bridges, and the poetry of some others who work separately away from their fellows, English romantic poetry has concentrated itself into one chief school—the school of the "Celtic Revival" of which the leader is Mr. W.B. Yeats. Two sources went to its making. In its inception, it arose out of a group of young poets who worked in a conscious imitation of the methods of the French decadents; chiefly of Baudelaire and Verlaine. As a whole their work was merely imitative and not very profound, but each of them—Ernest Dowson and Lionel Johnson, who are both now dead, and others who are still living—produced enough to show that they had at their command a vein of poetry that might have deepened and proved more rich had they gone on working it. One of them, Mr. W.B. Yeats, by his birth and his reading in Irish legend and folklore, became possessed of a subject-matter denied to his fellows, and it is from the combination of the mood of the decadents with the dreaminess and mystery of Celtic tradition and romance—a combination which came to pass in his poetry—that the Celtic school has sprung. In a sense it has added to the territory explored by Coleridge and Scott and Morris a new province. Only nothing could be further from the objectivity of these men, than the way in which the Celtic school approaches its material. Its stories are clear to itself, it may be, but not to its readers. Deirdre and Conchubar, and Angus and Maeve and Dectora and all the shadowy figures in them scarcely become embodied. Their lives and deaths and loves and hates are only a scheme on which they weave a delicate and dim embroidery of pure poetry—of love and death and old age and the passing of beauty and all the sorrows that have been since the world began and will be till the world ends. If Mr. Kipling is of the earth earthy, if the clangour and rush of the world is in everything he writes, Mr. Yeats and his school live consciously sequestered and withdrawn, and the world never breaks in on their ghostly troubles or their peace. Poetry never fails to relate itself to its age; if it is not with it, it is against it; it is never merely indifferent. The poetry of these men is the denial, passionately made, of everything the world prizes. While such a denial is sincere, as in the best of them, then the verses they make are true and fine. But when it is assumed, as in some of their imitators, then the work they did is not true poetry.

But the literary characteristic of the present age—the one which is most likely to differentiate it from its predecessor, is the revival of the drama. When we left it before the Commonwealth the great English literary school of playwriting—the romantic drama—was already dead. It has had since no second birth. There followed after it the heroic tragedy of Dryden and Shadwell—a turgid, declamatory form of art without importance—and two brilliant comic periods, the earlier and greater that of Congreve and Wycherley, the later more sentimental with less art and vivacity, that of Goldsmith and Sheridan. With Sheridan the drama as a literary force died a second time. It has been born again only in our own day. It is, of course, unnecessary to point out that the writing of plays did not cease in the interval; it never does cease. The production of dramatic journey-work has been continuous since the re-opening of the theatres in 1660, and it is carried on as plentifully as ever at this present time. Only side by side with it there has grown up a new literary drama, and gradually the main stream of artistic endeavour which for nearly a century has preoccupied itself with the novel almost to the exclusion of other forms of art, has turned back to the stage as its channel to articulation and an audience. An influence from abroad set it in motion. The plays of Ibsen—produced, the best of them, in the eighties of last century—came to England in the nineties. In a way, perhaps, they were misunderstood by their worshippers hardly less than by their enemies, but all excrescences of enthusiasm apart they taught men a new and freer approach to moral questions, and a new and freer dramatic technique. Where plays had been constructed on a journeyman plan evolved by Labiche and Sardou—mid-nineteenth century writers in France—a plan delighting in symmetry, close-jointedness, false correspondences, an impossible use of coincidence, and a quite unreal complexity and elaboration, they become bolder and less artificial, more close to the likelihoods of real life. The gravity of the problems with which they set themselves to deal heightened their influence. In England men began to ask themselves

whether the theatre here too could not be made an avenue towards the discussion of living difficulties, and then arose the new school of dramatists—of whom the first and most remarkable is Mr. George Bernard Shaw. In his earlier plays he set himself boldly to attack established conventions, and to ask his audiences to think for themselves. *Arms and the Man* dealt a blow at the cheap romanticism with which a peace-loving public invests the profession of arms; *The Devil's Disciple* was a shrewd criticism of the preposterous self-sacrifice on which melodrama, which is the most popular non-literary form of play-writing, is commonly based; Mrs. Warren's *Profession* made a brave and plain-spoken attempt to drag the public face to face with the nauseous realities of prostitution; *Widowers' Houses* laid bare the sordidness of a Society which bases itself on the exploitation of the poor for the luxuries of the rich. It took Mr. Shaw close on ten years to persuade even the moderate number of men and women who make up a theatre audience that his plays were worth listening to. But before his final success came he had attained a substantial popularity with the public which reads. Possibly his early failure on the stage—mainly due to the obstinacy of playgoers immersed in a stock tradition—was partly due also to his failure in constructive power. He is an adept at tying knots and impatient of unravelling them; his third acts are apt either to evaporate in talk or to find some unreal and unsatisfactory solution for the complexity he has created. But constructive weakness apart, his amazing brilliance and fecundity of dialogue ought to have given him an immediate and lasting grip of the stage. There has probably never been a dramatist who could invest conversation with the same vivacity and point, the same combination of surprise and inevitableness that distinguishes his best work.

Alongside of Mr. Shaw more immediately successful, and not traceable to any obvious influence, English or foreign, came the comedies of Oscar Wilde. For a parallel to their pure delight and high spirits, and to the exquisite wit and artifice with which they were constructed, one would have to go back to the dramatists of the Restoration. To Congreve and his school, indeed, Wilde belongs rather than to any later period. With his own age he had little in common; he was without interest in its social and moral problems; when he approved of socialism it was because in a socialist state the artist might be absolved from the necessity of carrying a living, and be free to follow his art undisturbed. He loved to think of himself as symbolic, but all he symbolized was a fantasy of his own creating; his attitude to his age was decorative and withdrawn rather than representative. He was the licensed jester to society, and in that capacity he gave us his plays. Mr. Shaw may be said to have founded a school; at any rate he gave the start to Mr. Galsworthy and some lesser dramatists. Wilde founded nothing, and his works remain as complete and separate as those of the earlier artificial dramatists of two centuries before.

Another school of drama, homogeneous and quite apart from the rest, remains. We have seen how the "Celtic Revival," as the Irish literary movement has been called by its admirers, gave us a new kind of romantic poetry. As an offshoot from it there came into being some ten years ago an Irish school of drama, drawing its inspiration from two sources—the body of the old Irish legends and the highly individualized and richly-coloured life of the Irish peasants in the mountains of Wicklow and of the West, a life, so the dramatists believed, still unspoiled by the deepening influences of a false system of education and the wear and tear of a civilization whose values are commercial and not spiritual or artistic. The school founded its own theatre, trained its own actors, fashioned its own modes of speech (the chief of which was a frank restoration of rhythm in the speaking of verse and of cadence in prose), and having all these things it produced a series of plays all directed to its special ends, and all composed and written with a special fidelity to country life as it has been preserved, or to what it conceived to be the spirit of Irish folk-legend. It reached its zenith quickly, and as far as the production of plays is concerned, it would seem to be already in its decline. That is to say, what in the beginning was a fresh and vivid inspiration caught direct from life has become a pattern whose colours and shape can be repeated or varied by lesser writers who take their teaching from the original discoverers. But in the course of its brief and striking course it produced one great dramatist—a writer whom already not three years after his death, men instinctively class with the masters of his art.

J.M. Synge, in the earlier years of his manhood, lived entirely abroad, leading the life of a wandering scholar from city to city and country to country till he was persuaded to give up the Continent and the criticism and imitation of French literature, to return to England, and to go and live on the Aran Islands. From that time till his death—some ten years—he spent a large part of each year amongst the peasantry of the desolate Atlantic coast and wrote the plays by which his name is known. His literary output was not large, but he supplied the Irish dramatic movement with exactly what it needed—a vivid contact with the realities of life. Not that he was a mere student or transcriber of manners. His wandering life among many

peoples and his study of classical French and German literature had equipped him as perhaps no other modern dramatist has been equipped with an imaginative insight and a reach of perception which enabled him to give universality and depth to his portrayal of the peasant types around him. He got down to the great elemental forces which throb and pulse beneath the common crises of everyday life and laid them bare, not as ugly and horrible, but with a sense of their terror, their beauty and their strength. His earliest play, *The Well of the Saints*, treats of a sorrow that is as old as Helen of the vanishing of beauty and the irony of fulfilled desire. The great realities of death pass through the *Riders to the Sea*, till the language takes on a kind of simplicity as of written words shrivelling up in a flame. *The Playboy of the Western World* is a study of character, terrible in its clarity, but never losing the savour of imagination and of the astringency and saltiness that was characteristic of his temper. He had at his command an instrument of incomparable fineness and range in the language which he fashioned out the speech of the common people amongst whom he lived. In his dramatic writings this language took on a kind of rhythm which had the effect of producing a certain remoteness of the highest possible artistic value. The people of his imagination appear a little disembodied. They talk with that straightforward and simple kind of innocency which makes strange and impressive the dialogue of Maeterlinck's earlier plays. Through it, as Mr. Yeats has said, he saw the subject-matter of his art "with wise, clear-seeing, unreflecting eyes—and he preserved the innocence of good art in an age of reasons and purposes." He had no theory except of his art; no "ideas" and no "problems"; he did not wish to change anything or to reform anything; but he saw all his people pass by as before a window, and he heard their words. This resolute refusal to be interested in or to take account of current modes of thought has been considered by some to detract from his eminence. Certainly if by "ideas" we mean current views on society or morality, he is deficient in them; only his very deficiency brings him nearer to the great masters of drama—to Ben Johnson, to Cervantes, to Molière—even to Shakespeare himself. Probably in no single case amongst our contemporaries could a high and permanent place in literature be prophesied with more confidence than in his.

In the past it has seemed impossible for fiction and the drama, i.e. serious drama of high literary quality, to flourish, side by side. It seems as though the best creative minds in any age could find strength for any one of these two great outlets for the activity of the creative imagination. In the reign of Elizabeth the drama outshone fiction; in the reign of Victoria the novel crowded out the drama. There are signs that a literary era is commencing, in which the drama will again regain to the full its position as a literature. More and more the bigger creative artists will turn to a form which by its economy of means to ends, and the chance it gives not merely of observing but of creating and displaying character in action, has a more vigorous principle of life in it than its rival.

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It is best to study English literature one period, or, even in the case of the greatest, one author at a time. In every case the student should see to it that he knows the text of his authors; a knowledge of what critics have said about our poets is a poor substitute for a knowledge of what they have said themselves. Poetry ought to be read slowly and carefully, and the reader ought to pay his author the compliment of crediting him with ideas as important and, on occasion, as abstruse as any in a work of philosophy or abstract science. When the meaning is mastered, the poem ought to be read a second time aloud to catch the magic of the language and the verse. The reading of prose presents less difficulty, but there again the rule is, never allow yourself to be lulled by sound. Reading is an intellectual and not an hypnotic exercise.

The following short bibliography is divided to correspond with the chapters in this book. Prices and publishers are mentioned only when there is no more than one cheap edition of a book known to the author. For the subject as a whole, Chamber's *Cyclopaedia of English Literature* (3 vols., 10s. 6d. net each), which contains biographical and critical articles on all authors, arranged chronologically and furnished very copiously with specimen passages, may be consulted at any library.

\* The books with an asterisk are suggested as those on which reading should be begun. The reader can then proceed to the others and after them to the many authors—great authors—who are not included in this short list.

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Wordsworth, William,  
Wyatt, Thomas,

Yeats, W. B.,

John Miller Dow Meiklejohn

*A Brief History of the English Language and Literature Vol. 2*

**PUBLISHER'S NOTICE.**

The present volume is the second part of the author's "English Language—Its Grammar, History, and Literature." It includes the History of the English Language and the History of English Literature. The first part comprises the department of Grammar, under which are included Etymology, Syntax, Analysis, Word Formation, and History, with a brief outline of Composition and of Prosody. The two may be had separately or bound together. Each constitutes a good one year's course of English study. The first part is suited for high schools; the second, for high schools and colleges. The book, which is worthy of the wide reputation and ripe experience of the eminent author, is distinguished throughout by clear, brief, and comprehensive statement and illustration. It is especially suited for private students or for classes desiring to make a brief and rapid review, and also for teachers who want only a brief text as a basis for their own instruction.

**PREFACE.**

This book provides sufficient matter for the four years of study required, in England, of a pupil-teacher, and also for the first year at his training college. An experienced master will easily be able to guide his pupils in the selection of the proper parts for each year. The ten pages on the Grammar of Verse ought to be reserved for the fifth year of study. It is hoped that the book will also be useful in Colleges, Ladies' Seminaries, High Schools, Academies, Preparatory and Normal Schools, to candidates for teachers' examinations and Civil Service examinations, and to all who wish for any reason to review the leading facts of the English Language and Literature.

Only the most salient features of the language have been described, and minor details have been left for the teacher to fill in. The utmost clearness and simplicity have been the aim of the writer, and he has been obliged to sacrifice many interesting details to this aim. The study of English Grammar is becoming every day more and more historical—and necessarily so. There are scores of inflections, usages, constructions, idioms, which cannot be truly or adequately explained without a reference vi to the past states of the language—to the time when it was a synthetic or inflected language, like German or Latin.

The Syntax of the language has been set forth in the form of RULES. This was thought to be better for young learners who require firm and clear dogmatic statements of fact and duty. But the skilful teacher will slowly work up to these rules by the interesting process of induction, and will—when it is possible—induce his pupil to draw the general conclusions from the data given, and thus to make rules for himself. Another convenience that will be found by both teacher and pupil in this form of rules will be that they can be compared with the rules of, or general statements about, a foreign language—such as Latin, French, or German.

It is earnestly hoped that the slight sketches of the History of our Language and of its Literature may not only enable the young student to pass his examinations with success, but may also throw him into the attitude of mind of Oliver Twist, and induce him to "ask for more." The Index will be found useful in preparing the parts of each subject; as all the separate paragraphs about the same subject will be found there grouped together.

J. M. D. M.

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## INTRODUCTION.

1. Tongue, Speech, Language.—We speak of the “English tongue” or of the “French language”; and we say of two nations that they “do not understand each other’s speech.” The existence of these three words—speech, tongue, language—proves to us that a language is something spoken,—that it is a number of sounds; and that the writing or printing of it upon paper is a quite secondary matter. Language, rightly considered, then, is an organised set of sounds. These sounds convey a meaning from the mind of the speaker to the mind of the hearer, and thus serve to connect man with man.

2. Written Language.—It took many hundreds of years—perhaps thousands—before human beings were able to invent a mode of writing upon paper—that is, of representing sounds by signs. These signs are called letters; and the whole set of them goes by the name of the Alphabet—from the two first letters of the Greek alphabet, which are called alpha, beta. There are languages that have never been put upon paper at all, such as many of the African languages, many in the South Sea Islands, and other parts of the globe. But in all cases, every language that we know anything about—English, Latin, French, German—existed for hundreds of years before any one thought of writing it down on paper.

3. A Language Grows.—A language is an organism or organic existence. Now every organism lives; and, if it lives, it grows; and, if it grows, it also dies. Our language grows; it is growing still; and it has been growing for many 194 hundreds of years. As it grows it loses something, and it gains something else; it alters its appearance; changes take place in this part of it and in that part,—until at length its appearance in age is something almost entirely different from what it was in its early youth. If we had the photograph of a man of forty, and the photograph of the same person when he was a child of one, we should find, on comparing them, that it was almost impossible to point to the smallest trace of likeness in the features of the two photographs. And yet the two pictures represent the same person. And so it is with the English language. The oldest English, which is usually called Anglo-Saxon, is as different from our modern English as if they were two distinct languages; and yet they are not two languages, but really and fundamentally one and the same. Modern English differs from the oldest English as a giant oak does from a small oak sapling, or a broad stalwart man of forty does from a feeble infant of a few months old.

4. The English Language.—The English language is the speech spoken by the Anglo-Saxon race in England, in most parts of Scotland, in the larger part of Ireland, in the United States, in Canada, in Australia and New Zealand, in South Africa, and in many other parts of the world. In the middle of the fifth century it was spoken by a few thousand men who had lately landed in England from the Continent: it is now spoken by more than one hundred millions of people. In the course of the next sixty years, it will probably be the speech of two hundred millions.

5. English on the Continent.—In the middle of the fifth century it was spoken in the north-west corner of Europe—between the mouths of the Rhine, the Weser, and the Elbe; and in Schleswig there is a small district which is called Angeln to this day. But it was not then called English; it was more probably called Teutish, or Teutsch, or Deutsch—all words connected with a generic word which covers many families and languages—Teutonic. It was a rough guttural speech of one or two thousand words; and it was brought over to this country by the Jutes, Angles, and Saxons in the year 449. These 195 men left their home on the Continent to find here farms to till and houses to live in; and they drove the inhabitants of the island—the Britons—ever farther and farther west, until they at length left them in peace in the more mountainous parts of the island—in the southern and western corners, in Cornwall and in Wales.

6. The British Language.—What language did the Teutonic conquerors, who wrested the lands from the poor Britons, find spoken in this island when they first set foot on it? Not a Teutonic speech at all. They found a language not one word of which they could understand. The island itself was then called Britain; and the tongue spoken in it belonged to the Keltic group of languages. Languages belonging to the Keltic group are still spoken in Wales, in Brittany (in France), in the Highlands of Scotland, in the west of Ireland, and in the Isle of Man. A few words—very few—from the speech of the Britons, have come into our own English language; and what these are we shall see by-and-by.

7. The Family to which English belongs.—Our English tongue belongs to the Aryan or Indo-European Family of languages. That is to say, the main part or substance of it can be traced back to the race which inhabited the high table-lands that lie to the back of the western end of the great range of the Himalaya, or “Abode of Snow.” This Aryan race grew and increased, and spread to the south and west; and from it have sprung languages which are now spoken in India, in Persia, in Greece and Italy, in France and Germany, in Scandinavia, and in Russia. From this Aryan family we are sprung; out of the oldest Aryan speech our own language has grown.

8. The Group to which English belongs.—The Indo-European family of languages consists of several groups. One of these is called the Teutonic Group, because it is spoken by the Teuts (or the Teutonic race), who are found in Germany, in England and Scotland, in Holland, in parts of Belgium, in Denmark, in Norway and Sweden, in Iceland, and the Faroe Islands. The Teutonic group consists of three branches—High German, Low German, and Scandinavian. High 196 German is the name given to the kind of German spoken in Upper Germany—that is, in the table-land which lies south of the river Main, and which rises gradually till it runs into the Alps. New High German is the German of books—the literary language—the German that is taught and learned in schools. Low German is the name given to the German dialects spoken in the lowlands—in the German part of the Great Plain of Europe, and round the mouths of those German rivers that flow into the Baltic and the North Sea. Scandinavian is the name given to the languages spoken in Denmark and in the great Scandinavian Peninsula. Of these three languages, Danish and Norwegian are practically the same—their literary or book-language is one; while Swedish is very different. Icelandic is the oldest and purest form of Scandinavian. The following is a table of the

GROUP OF TEUTONIC LANGUAGES.  
TEUTONIC.

LOW GERMAN. HIGH GERMAN. SCANDINAVIAN.

Dutch.	Flemish.	Frisian.	English.	Old.	Middle.	New.	Icelandic	Dansk
(or Norsk).		Ferroc.	Svensk					
(Swedish).								

It will be observed, on looking at the above table, that High German is subdivided according to time, but that the other groups are subdivided according to space.

9. English a Low-German Speech.—Our English tongue is the lowest of all Low-German dialects. Low German is the German spoken in the lowlands of Germany. As we descend the rivers, we come to the lowest level of all—the level of the sea. Our English speech, once a mere dialect, came down to that, crossed the German Ocean, and settled in Britain, to which it gave in time the name of Angla-land or England. The Low German spoken in the Netherlands is called Dutch; the Low German spoken in Friesland—a prosperous province of Holland—is called Frisian; and the Low German spoken in Great Britain is called English. These three languages are extremely like one another; but the Continental language that is likest 197 the English is the Dutch or Hollandish dialect called Frisian. We even possess a couplet, every word of which is both English and Frisian. It runs thus—

Good butter and good cheese  
Is good English and good Fries.

10. Dutch and Welsh—a Contrast.—When the Teuton conquerors came to this country, they called the Britons foreigners, just as the Greeks called all other peoples besides themselves barbarians. By this they did not at first mean that they were uncivilised, but only that they were not Greeks. Now, the Teutonic or Saxon or English name for foreigners was *Wealhas*, a word afterwards contracted into *Welsh*. To this day the modern Teuts or Teutons (or Germans, as we call them) call all Frenchmen and Italians *Welshmen*; and, when a German, peasant crosses the border into France, he says: “I am going into *Welshland*.”

11. The Spread of English over Britain.—The Jutes, who came from *Juteland* or *Jylland*—now called *Jutland*—settled in Kent and in the Isle of Wight. The Saxons settled in the south and western parts of England, and gave their names to those kingdoms—now counties—whose names came to end in *sex*. There was the kingdom of the East Saxons, or *Essex*; the kingdom of the West Saxons, or *Wessex*; the kingdom of the Middle Saxons, or *Middlesex*; and the kingdom of the South Saxons, or *Sussex*. The Angles settled chiefly on the east coast. The kingdom of East Anglia was divided into the regions of the North Folk and the South Folk, words which are still perpetuated in the names *Norfolk* and *Suffolk*. These three sets of Teutons all spoke different dialects of the same Teutonic speech; and these dialects, with their differences, peculiarities, and odd habits, took root in English soil, and lived an independent life, apart from each other, uninfluenced by each other, for several hundreds of years. But, in the slow course of time, they joined together to make up our beautiful English language—a language which, however, still bears in itself the traces of dialectic forms, and is in no respect of one kind or of one fibre all through.

## CHAPTER I. THE PERIODS OF ENGLISH.

1. Dead and Living Languages.—A language is said to be dead when it is no longer spoken. Such a language we know only in books. Thus, Latin is a dead language, because no nation anywhere now speaks it. A dead language can undergo no change; it remains, and must remain, as we find it written in books. But a living language is always changing, just like a tree or the human body. The human body has its periods or stages. There is the period of infancy, the period of boyhood, the period of manhood, and the period of old age. In the same way, a language has its periods.

2. No Sudden Changes—a Caution.—We divide the English language into periods, and then mark, with some approach to accuracy, certain distinct changes in the habits of our language, in the inflexions of its words, in the kind of words it preferred, or in the way it liked to put its words together. But we must be carefully on our guard against fancying that, at any given time or in any given year, the English people threw aside one set of habits as regards language, and adopted another set. It is not so, nor can it be so. The changes in language are as gentle, gradual, and imperceptible as the changes in the growth of a tree or in the skin of the human body. We renew our skin slowly and gradually; but we are never conscious of the process, nor can we say at any given time that we have got a completely new skin.

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3. The Periods of English.—Bearing this caution in mind, we can go on to look at the chief periods in our English language. These are five in number; and they are as follows:—

- I. Ancient English or Anglo-Saxon, 449-1100
- II. Early English, 1100-1250
- III. Middle English, 1250-1485
- IV. Tudor English, 1485-1603
- V. Modern English, 1603-1900

These periods merge very slowly, or are shaded off, so to speak, into each other in the most gradual way. If we take the English of 1250 and compare it with that of 900, we shall find a great difference; but if we compare it with the English of 1100 the difference is not so marked. The difference between the English of the nineteenth and the English of the fourteenth century is very great, but the difference between the English of the fourteenth and that of the thirteenth century is very small.

4. Ancient English or Anglo-Saxon, 450-1100.—This form of English differed from modern English in having a much larger number of inflexions. The noun had five cases, and there were several declensions, just as in Latin; adjectives were declined, and had three genders; some pronouns had a dual as well as a plural number; and the verb had a much larger number of inflexions than it has now. The vocabulary of the language contained very few foreign elements. The poetry of the language employed head-rhyme or alliteration, and not end-rhyme, as we do now. The works of the poet Caedmon and the great prose-writer King Alfred belong to this Anglo-Saxon period.

5. Early English, 1100-1250.—The coming of the Normans in 1066 made many changes in the land, many changes in the Church and in the State, and it also introduced many changes into the language. The inflexions of our speech began to drop off, because they were used less and less; and though we never adopted new inflexions from French or from any other language, new French words began to creep in. In some parts of the country English had ceased to be written in books; the language existed as a spoken language only; and hence accuracy in the use of words and the inflexions of words could not be 200 ensured. Two notable books—written, not printed, for there was no printing in this island till the year 1474—belong to this period. These are the *Ormulum*, by Orm or Ormin, and the *Brut*, by a monk called Layamon or Laweman. The latter tells the story of Brutus, who was believed to have been the son of Æneas of Troy; to have escaped after the downfall of that city; to have sailed through the Mediterranean, ever farther and farther to the west; to have landed in Britain, settled here, and given the country its name.

6. Middle English, 1250-1485.—Most of the inflexions of nouns and adjectives have in this period—between the middle of the thirteenth and the end of the fifteenth century—completely disappeared. The inflexions of verbs are also greatly reduced in number. The strong mode of inflexion has ceased to be employed for verbs that are new-comers, and the weak mode has been adopted in its place. During the earlier part of this period, even country-people tried to speak French, and in this and other modes many French words found their way into English. A writer of the thirteenth century, John de Trevisa, says that country-people “fondeth [that is, try] with great bysynes for to speke Freynsch for to be more y-told of.”

The country-people did not succeed very well, as the ordinary proverb shows: "Jack would be a gentleman if he could speak French." Boys at school were expected to turn their Latin into French, and in the courts of law French only was allowed to be spoken. But in 1362 Edward III. gave his assent to an Act of Parliament allowing English to be used instead of Norman-French. "The yer of oure Lord," says John de Trevisa, "a thousand thre hondred foure score and fyve of the secunde Kyng Richard after the conquest, in al the gramer scoles of Engelond children leveth Freynsch, and construeth and turneth an Englysch." To the first half of this period belong a Metrical Chronicle, attributed to Robert of Gloucester; Langtoft's Metrical Chronicle, translated by Robert de Brunne; the Agenbite of Inwit, by Dan Michel of Northgate in Kent; and a few others. But to the second 201 half belong the rich and varied productions of Geoffrey Chaucer, our first great poet and always one of our greatest writers; the alliterative poems of William Langley or Langlande; the more learned poems of John Gower; and the translation of the Bible and theological works of the reformer John Wyclif.

7. Tudor English, 1485-1603.—Before the end of the sixteenth century almost all our inflexions had disappeared. The great dramatist Ben Jonson (1574-1637) laments the loss of the plural ending *en* for verbs, because *wenten* and *hopen* were much more musical and more useful in verse than *went* or *hope*; but its recovery was already past praying for. This period is remarkable for the introduction of an enormous number of Latin words, and this was due to the new interest taken in the literature of the Romans—an interest produced by what is called the Revival of Letters. But the most striking, as it is also the most important fact relating to this period, is the appearance of a group of dramatic writers, the greatest the world has ever seen. Chief among these was William Shakespeare. Of pure poetry perhaps the greatest writer was Edmund Spenser. The greatest prose-writer was Richard Hooker, and the pithiest Francis Bacon.

8. Modern English, 1603-1900.—The grammar of the language was fixed before this period, most of the accidents having entirely vanished. The vocabulary of the language, however, has gone on increasing, and is still increasing; for the English language, like the English people, is always ready to offer hospitality to all peaceful foreigners—words or human beings—that will land and settle within her coasts. And the tendency at the present time is not only to give a hearty welcome to newcomers from other lands, but to call back old words and old phrases that had been allowed to drop out of existence. Tennyson has been one of the chief agents in this happy restoration.

## CHAPTER II.

### THE HISTORY OF THE VOCABULARY OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE.

1. The English Nation.—The English people have for many centuries been the greatest travellers in the world. It was an Englishman—Francis Drake—who first went round the globe; and the English have colonised more foreign lands in every part of the world than any other people that ever existed. The English in this way have been influenced by the world without. But they have also been subjected to manifold influences from within—they have been exposed to greater political changes, and profounder though quieter political revolutions, than any other nation. In 1066 they were conquered by the Norman-French; and for several centuries they had French kings. Seeing and talking with many different peoples, they learned to adopt foreign words with ease, and to give them a home among the native-born words of the language. Trade is always a kindly and useful influence; and the trade of Great Britain has for many centuries been larger than that of any other nation. It has spread into every part of the world; it gives and receives from all tribes and nations, from every speech and tongue.

2. The English Element in English.—When the English came to this island in the fifth century, the number of words in the language they spoke was probably not over two thousand. Now, however, we possess a vocabulary of perhaps more than one hundred thousand words. And so eager and willing have we been to welcome foreign words, that it may be said with truth that: The majority of words in the English Tongue are not English. In fact, if we take the Latin language by itself, there are in our language more Latin words than English. But the grammar is distinctly English, and not Latin at all.

3. The Spoken Language and the Written Language—a Caution.—We must not forget what has been said about a language,—that it is not a printed thing—not a set of black marks upon paper, but that it is in truest truth a tongue or a speech. Hence we must be careful to distinguish between the spoken language and the written or printed language; between the language of the ear and the language of the eye; between the language of the mouth and the language of the dictionary; between the moving vocabulary of the market and the street, and the fixed vocabulary that has been catalogued and imprisoned in our dictionaries. If we

can only keep this in view, we shall find that, though there are more Latin words in our vocabulary than English, the English words we possess are used in speaking a hundred times, or even a thousand times, oftener than the Latin words. It is the genuine English words that have life and movement; it is they that fly about in houses, in streets, and in markets; it is they that express with greatest force our truest and most usual sentiments—our inmost thoughts and our deepest feelings. Latin words are found often enough in books; but, when an English man or woman is deeply moved, he speaks pure English and nothing else. Words are the coin of human intercourse; and it is the native coin of pure English with the native stamp that is in daily circulation.

### **CHAPTER III.**

#### **HISTORY OF THE GRAMMAR OF ENGLISH.**

1. The Oldest English Synthetic.—The oldest English, or Anglo-Saxon, that was brought over here in the fifth century, was a language that showed the relations of words to each other by adding different endings to words, or by synthesis. These endings are called inflexions. Latin and Greek are highly inflected languages; French and German have many more inflexions than modern English; and ancient English (or Anglo-Saxon) also possessed a large number of inflexions.

2. Modern English Analytic.—When, instead of inflexions, a language employs small particles—such as prepositions, auxiliary verbs, and suchlike words—to express the relations of words to each other, such a language is called analytic or non-inflexional. When we say, as we used to say in the oldest English, “God is ealra cyninga cyning,” we speak a synthetic language. But when we say, “God is king of all kings,” then we employ an analytic or uninflected language.

3. Short View of the History of English Grammar.—From the time when the English language came over to this island, it has grown steadily in the number of its words. On the other hand, it has lost just as steadily in the number of its inflexions. Put in a broad and somewhat rough fashion, it may be said that—

(i) Up to the year 1100—one generation after the Battle of Senlac—the English language was a **SYNTHETIC** Language.

(ii) From the year 1100 or thereabouts, English has been losing its inflexions, and gradually becoming more and more an **ANALYTIC** Language.

4. Causes of this Change.—Even before the coming of the Danes and the Normans, the English people had shown a tendency to get rid of some of their inflexions. A similar tendency can be observed at the present time among the Germans of the Rhine Province, who often drop an *n* at the end of a word, and show in other respects a carelessness about grammar. But, when a foreign people comes among natives, such a tendency is naturally encouraged, and often greatly increased. The natives discover that these inflexions are not so very important, if only they can get their meaning rightly conveyed to the foreigners. Both parties, accordingly, come to see that the root of the word is the most important element; they stick to that, and they come to neglect the mere inflexions. Moreover, the accent in English words always struck the root; and hence this part of the word always fell on the ear with the greater force, and carried the greater weight. When the Danes—who spoke a cognate language—began to settle in England, the tendency to drop inflexions increased; but when the Normans—who spoke an entirely different language—came, the tendency increased enormously, and the inflexions of Anglo-Saxon began to “fall as the leaves fall” in the dry wind of a frosty October. Let us try to trace some of these changes and losses.

5. Grammar of the First Period, 450-1100.—The English of this period is called the Oldest English or Anglo-Saxon. The gender of nouns was arbitrary, or—it may be—poetical; it did not, as in modern English it does, follow the sex. Thus *nama*, a name, was masculine; *tunge*, a tongue, feminine; and *eáge*, an eye, neuter. Like *nama*, the proper names of men ended in *a*; and we find such names as *Isa*, *Offa*, *Penda*, as the names of kings. Nouns at this period had five cases, with inflexions for each; now we possess but one inflexion—that for the possessive.—Even the definite article was inflected.—The infinitive of verbs ended in *an*; and the sign to—which we received from the 241 Danes—was not in use, except for the dative of the infinitive. This dative infinitive is still preserved in such phrases as “a house to let;” “bread to eat;” “water to drink.”—The present participle ended in *ende* (in the North *ande*). This present participle may be said still to exist—in spoken, but not in written speech; for some people regularly say *walkin*, *goin*, for walking and going.—The plural of the present indicative ended in *ath* for all three persons. In the perfect tense, the

plural ending was on.—There was no future tense; the work of the future was done by the present tense. Fragments of this usage still survive in the language, as when we say, “He goes up to town next week.”—Prepositions governed various cases; and not always the objective (or accusative), as they do now.

6. Grammar of the Second Period, 1100-1250.—The English of this period is called Early English. Even before the coming of the Normans, the inflexions of our language had—as we have seen—begun to drop off, and it was slowly on the way to becoming an analytic language. The same changes—the same simplification of grammar, has taken place in nearly every Low German language. But the coming of the Normans hastened these changes, for it made the inflexional endings of words of much less practical importance to the English themselves.—Great changes took place in the pronunciation also. The hard c or k was softened into ch; and the hard guttural g was refined into a y or even into a silent w.—A remarkable addition was made to the language. The Oldest English or Anglo-Saxon had no indefinite article. They said ofer stán for on a rock. But, as the French have made the article un out of the Latin unus, so the English pared down the northern ane (= one) into the article an or a. The Anglo-Saxon definite article was se, seo, þæt; and in the grammar of this Second Period it became þe, þeo, þe.—The French plural in es took the place of the English plural in en. But housen and shoon existed for many centuries after the Norman coming; and Mr Barnes, the Dorsetshire poet, still deplures the ugly sound of nests and fists, and would like to be able to say and to write nesten and fisten.—The dative plural, which ended in um, becomes an e or an en. The um, 242 however, still exists in the form of om in seldom (= at few times) and whilom (= in old times).—The gender of nouns falls into confusion, and begins to show a tendency to follow the sex.—Adjectives show a tendency to drop several of their inflexions, and to become as serviceable and accommodating as they are now—when they are the same with all numbers, genders, and cases.—The of the infinitive becomes en, and sometimes even the n is dropped.—Shall and will begin to be used as tense-auxiliaries for the future tense.

7. Grammar of the Third Period, 1250-1350.—The English of this period is often called Middle English.—The definite article still preserves a few inflexions.—Nouns that were once masculine or feminine become neuter, for the sake of convenience.—The possessive in es becomes general.—Adjectives make their plural in e.—The infinitive now takes to before it—except after a few verbs, like bid, see, hear, etc.—The present participle in inge makes its appearance about the year 1300.

8. Grammar of the Fourth Period, 1350-1485.—This may be called Later Middle English. An old writer of the fourteenth century points out that, in his time—and before it—the English language was “a-deled a thre,” divided into three; that is, that there were three main dialects, the Northern, the Midland, and the Southern. There were many differences in the grammar of these dialects; but the chief of these differences is found in the plural of the present indicative of the verb. This part of the verb formed its plurals in the following manner:—

NORTHERN.	MIDLAND.	SOUTHERN.
We hopës	We hopen	We hopeth.
You hopës	You hopen	You hopeth.
They hopës	They hopen	They hopeth.

In time the Midland dialect conquered; and the East Midland form of it became predominant all over England. As early as the beginning of the thirteenth century, this dialect had thrown off most of the old inflexions, and had become almost as flexionless as the English of the present day. Let us note a few of the more prominent changes.—The first personal pronoun Ic or Ich loses the guttural, and becomes I.—The pronouns him, them, and whom, which are true datives, are used either as datives or as objectives.—The imperative plural ends in eth. “Riseth up,” Chaucer makes one of his characters say, “and stondesth by me!”—The useful and almost ubiquitous letter e comes in as a substitute for a, u, and even an. Thus nama becomes name, sunu (son) becomes sune, and withutan changes into withute.—The dative of adjectives is used as an adverb. Thus we find softë, brightë employed like our softly, brightly.—The n in the infinitive has fallen away; but the ë is sounded as a separate syllable. Thus we find brekë, smitë for breken and smiten.

9. General View.—In the time of King Alfred, the West-Saxon speech—the Wessex dialect—took precedence of the rest, and became the literary dialect of England. But it had not, and could not have, any influence on the spoken language of other parts of England, for the simple reason that very few persons were able to travel, and it took days—and even weeks—for a man to go from Devonshire to Yorkshire. In course of time the Midland dialect—that spoken between the Humber and the Thames—became the predominant dialect of England; and the East Midland variety of this dialect became the parent of modern

standard English. This predominance was probably due to the fact that it, soonest of all, got rid of its inflexions, and became most easy, pleasant, and convenient to use. And this disuse of inflexions was itself probably due to the early Danish settlements in the east, to the larger number of Normans in that part of England, to the larger number of thriving towns, and to the greater and more active communication between the eastern seaports and the Continent. The inflexions were first confused, then weakened, then forgotten, finally lost. The result was an extreme simplification, which still benefits all learners of the English language. Instead of spending a great deal of time on the learning of a large number of inflexions, which are to them arbitrary and meaningless, 244 foreigners have only to fix their attention on the words and phrases themselves, that is, on the very pith and marrow of the language—indeed, on the language itself. Hence the great German grammarian Grimm, and others, predict that English will spread itself all over the world, and become the universal language of the future. In addition to this almost complete sweeping away of all inflexions,—which made Dr Johnson say, “Sir, the English language has no grammar at all,”—there were other remarkable and useful results which accrued from the coming in of the Norman-French and other foreign elements.

10. Monosyllables.—The stripping off of the inflexions of our language cut a large number of words down to the root. Hundreds, if not thousands, of our verbs were dissyllables, but, by the gradual loss of the ending *en* (which was in Anglo-Saxon *an*), they became monosyllables. Thus *bindan*, *drincan*, *findan*, became *bind*, *drink*, *find*; and this happened with hosts of other verbs. Again, the expulsion of the guttural, which the Normans never could or would take to, had the effect of compressing many words of two syllables into one. Thus *haegel*, *twaegen*, and *faegen*, became *hail*, *twain*, and *fain*.—In these and other ways it has come to pass that the present English is to a very large extent of a monosyllabic character. So much is this the case, that whole books have been written for children in monosyllables. It must be confessed that the monosyllabic style is often dull, but it is always serious and homely. We can find in our translation of the Bible whole verses that are made up of words of only one syllable. Many of the most powerful passages in Shakespeare, too, are written in monosyllables. The same may be said of hundreds of our proverbs—such as, “Cats hide their claws”; “Fair words please fools”; “He that has most time has none to lose.” Great poets, like Tennyson and Matthew Arnold, understand well the fine effect to be produced from the mingling of short and long words—of the homely English with the more ornate Romance language. In the following verse from Matthew Arnold the words are all monosyllables, with the exception of *tired* and *contention* (which is Latin):—

“Let the long contention cease;  
Geese are swans, and swans are geese;  
Let them have it how they will,  
Thou art tired. Best be still!”

In Tennyson’s “Lord of Burleigh,” when the sorrowful husband comes to look upon his dead wife, the verse runs almost entirely in monosyllables:—

“And he came to look upon her,  
And he looked at her, and said:  
‘Bring the dress, and put it on her,  
That she wore when she was wed.’”

An American writer has well indicated the force of the English monosyllable in the following sonnet:—

“Think not that strength lies in the big, round word,  
Or that the brief and plain must needs be weak.  
To whom can this be true who once has heard  
The cry for help, the tongue that all men speak,  
When want, or fear, or woe, is in the throat,  
So that each word gasped out is like a shriek  
Pressed from the sore heart, or a strange, wild note  
Sung by some fay or fiend! There is a strength,  
Which dies if stretched too far, or spun too fine,  
Which has more height than breadth, more depth than length;  
Let but this force of thought and speech be mine,  
And he that will may take the sleek fat phrase,

Which glows but burns not, though it beam and shine;  
Light, but no heat,—a flash, but not a blaze.”

It will be observed that this sonnet consists entirely of monosyllables, and yet that the style of it shows considerable power and vigour. The words printed in italics are all derived from Latin, with the exception of the word phrase, which is Greek.

11. Change in the Order of Words.—The syntax—or order of words—of the oldest English was very different from that of Norman-French. The syntax of an Old English sentence was clumsy and involved; it kept the attention long on the strain; it was rumbling, rambling, and unpleasant to the ear. It kept the attention on the strain, because the verb in a subordinate clause was held back, and not revealed till we had come to the 246 end of the clause. Thus the Anglo-Saxon wrote (though in different form and spelling)—

“When Darius saw, that he overcome be would.”

The newer English, under French influence, wrote—

“When Darius saw that he was going to be overcome.”

This change has made an English sentence lighter and more easy to understand, for the reader or hearer is not kept waiting for the verb; but each word comes just when it is expected, and therefore in its “natural” place. The Old English sentence—which is very like the German sentence of the present day—has been compared to a heavy cart without springs, while the newer English sentence is like a modern well-hung English carriage. Norman-French, then, gave us a brighter, lighter, freer rhythm, and therefore a sentence more easy to understand and to employ, more supple, and better adapted to everyday use.

12. The Expulsion of Gutturals.—(i) Not only did the Normans help us to an easier and pleasanter kind of sentence, they aided us in getting rid of the numerous throat-sounds that infested our language. It is a remarkable fact that there is not now in the French language a single guttural. There is not an h in the whole language. The French write an h in several of their words, but they never sound it. Its use is merely to serve as a fence between two vowels—to keep two vowels separate, as in *la haine*, hatred. No doubt the Normans could utter throat-sounds well enough when they dwelt in Scandinavia; but, after they had lived in France for several generations, they acquired a great dislike to all such sounds. No doubt, too, many, from long disuse, were unable to give utterance to a guttural. This dislike they communicated to the English; and hence, in the present day, there are many people—especially in the south of England—who cannot sound a guttural at all. The muscles in the throat that help to produce these sounds have become atrophied—have lost their power for want of practice. The purely English part of the population, for many centuries after the Norman invasion, could sound gutturals quite easily—just as the Scotch 247 and the Germans do now; but it gradually became the fashion in England to leave them out.

13. The Expulsion of Gutturals.—(ii) In some cases the guttural disappeared entirely; in others, it was changed into or represented by other sounds. The *ge* at the beginning of the passive (or past) participles of many verbs disappeared entirely. Thus *gebróht*, *gebóht*, *geworht*, became brought, bought, and wrought. The *g* at the beginning of many words also dropped off. Thus *Gyppenswich* became Ipswich; *gif* became if; *genoh*, enough.—The guttural at the end of words—hard *g* or *c*—also disappeared. Thus *halig* became holy; *eordhlic*, earthly; *gastlic*, ghastly or ghostly. The same is the case in *dough*, *through*, *plough*, etc.—the guttural appearing to the eye but not to the ear.—Again, the guttural was changed into quite different sounds—into labials, into sibilants, into other sounds also. The following are a few examples:—

(a) The guttural has been softened, through Norman-French influence, into a sibilant. Thus *rigg*, *egg*, and *brigg* have become ridge, edge, and bridge.

(b) The guttural has become a labial—*f*—as in *cough*, *enough*, *trough*, *laugh*, *draught*, etc.

(c) The guttural has become an additional syllable, and is represented by a vowel-sound. Thus *sorg* and *mearh* have become sorrow and marrow.

(d) In some words it has disappeared both to eye and ear. Thus *makēd* has become made.

14. The Story of the GH.—How is it, then, that we have in so many words the two strongest gutturals in the language—*g* and *h*—not only separately, in so many of our words, but combined? The story is an odd one. Our Old English or Saxon scribes wrote—not *light*, *might*, and *night*, but *liht*, *miht*, and *niht*. When, however, they found that the Norman-French gentlemen would not sound the *h*, and say—as is still said in



Scotland—licht, &c., they redoubled the guttural, strengthened the h with a hard g, and again presented the dose to the Norman. But, if the Norman could not sound the h alone, still less could he sound the double guttural; and he very coolly let both alone— 248 ignored both. The Saxon scribe doubled the signs for his guttural, just as a farmer might put up a strong wooden fence in front of a hedge; but the Norman cleared both with perfect ease and indifference. And so it came to pass that we have the symbol gh in more than seventy of our words, and that in most of these we do not sound it at all. The gh remains in our language, like a moss-grown boulder, brought down into the fertile valley in a glacial period, when gutturals were both spoken and written, and men believed in the truthfulness of letters—but now passed by in silence and noticed by no one.

15. The Letters that represent Gutturals.—The English guttural has been quite Protean in the written or printed forms it takes. It appears as an i, as a y, as a w, as a ch, as a dge, as a j, and—in its more native forms—as a g, a k, or a gh. The following words give all these forms: hail, day, fowl, teach, edge, ajar, drag, truck, and trough. Now hail was hagol, day was daeg, fowl was fugol, teach was taecan, edge was egg, ajar was achar. In seek, beseech, sought—which are all different forms of the same word—we see the guttural appearing in three different forms—as a hard k, as a soft ch, as an unnoticed gh. In think and thought, drink and draught, sly and sleight, dry and drought, slay and slaughter, it takes two different forms. In dig, ditch, and dike—which are all the same word in different shapes—it again takes three forms. In fly, flew, and flight, it appears as a y, a w, and a gh. But, indeed, the manners of a guttural, its ways of appearing and disappearing, are almost beyond counting.

16. Grammatical Result of the Loss of Inflexions.—When we look at a Latin or French or German word, we know whether it is a verb or a noun or a preposition by its mere appearance—by its face or by its dress, so to speak. But the loss of inflexions which has taken place in the English language has resulted in depriving us of this advantage—if advantage it is. Instead of looking at the face of a word in English, we are obliged to think of its function,—that is, of what it does. We have, for example, a large number of words that are both nouns and verbs—we may use them as the one or as the other; and, 249 till we have used them, we cannot tell whether they are the one or the other. Thus, when we speak of “a cut on the finger,” cut is a noun, because it is a name; but when we say, “Harry cut his finger,” then cut is a verb, because it tells something about Harry. Words like bud, cane, cut, comb, cap, dust, fall, fish, heap, mind, name, pen, plaster, punt, run, rush, stone, and many others, can be used either as nouns or as verbs. Again, fast, quick, and hard may be used either as adverbs or as adjectives; and back may be employed as an adverb, as a noun, and even as an adjective. Shakespeare is very daring in the use of this licence. He makes one of his characters say, “But me no buts!” In this sentence, the first but is a verb in the imperative mood; the second is a noun in the objective case. Shakespeare uses also such verbs as to glad, to mad, such phrases as a seldom pleasure, and the fairest she. Dr Abbott says, “In Elizabethan English, almost any part of speech can be used as any other part of speech. An adverb can be used as a verb, ‘they askance their eyes’; as a noun, ‘the backward and abysm of time’; or as an adjective, ‘a seldom pleasure.’ Any noun, adjective, or neuter verb can be used as an active verb. You can ‘happy’ your friend, ‘malice’ or ‘fool’ your enemy, or ‘fall’ an axe upon his neck.” Even in modern English, almost any noun can be used as a verb. Thus we can say, “to paper a room”; “to water the horses”; “to black-ball a candidate”; to “iron a shirt” or “a prisoner”; “to toe the line.” On the other hand, verbs may be used as nouns; for we can speak of a work, of a beautiful print, of a long walk, and so on.

#### **CHAPTER IV. SPECIMENS OF ENGLISH OF DIFFERENT PERIODS.**

1. Vocabulary and Grammar.—The oldest English or Anglo-Saxon differs from modern English both in vocabulary and in grammar—in the words it uses and in the inflexions it employs. The difference is often startling. And yet, if we look closely at the words and their dress, we shall most often find that the words which look so strange are the very words with which we are most familiar—words that we are in the habit of using every day; and that it is their dress alone that is strange and antiquated. The effect is the same as if we were to dress a modern man in the clothes worn a thousand years ago: the chances are that we should not be able to recognise even our dearest friend.

2. A Specimen from Anglo-Saxon.—Let us take as an example a verse from the Anglo-Saxon version of one of the Gospels. The well-known verse, Luke ii. 40, runs thus in our oldest English version:—

Sóþlice ðaet cild weox, and waes gestrangod, wisdómes full; and Godes gyfu waes on him.  
 Now this looks like an extract from a foreign language; but it is not: it is our own veritable mother-tongue. Every word is pure ordinary English; it is the dress—the spelling and the inflexions—that is quaint and old-fashioned. This will be plain from a literal translation:—  
 Soothly that child waxed, and was strengthened, wisdoms full (= full of wisdom); and God's gift was on him.

3. A Comparison.—This will become plainer if we compare the English of the Gospels as it was written in different periods of our language. The alteration in the meanings of words, the changes in the application of them, the variation in the use of phrases, the falling away of the inflexions—all these things become plain to the eye and to the mind as soon as we thoughtfully compare the different versions. The following are extracts from the Anglo-Saxon version (995), the version of Wycliffe (1389) and of Tyndale (1526), of the passage in Luke ii. 44, 45:—

ANGLO-SAXON.                      WYCLIFFE.                      TYNDALE.  
 Wéndon ðaet he on heora gefére wære, ðá comon hig ánes daeges faer, and hine sóhton betweox his magas and his cúðan.      Forsothe thei gessinge him to be in the felowschipe, camen the wey of á day, and souþten him among his cosyns and knowen.      For they supposed he had bene in the company, they cam a days iorney, and sought hym amonge their kynsfolke and acquayntaunce.  
 Ða hig hynne ne fúndon, hig gewendon to Hierusalem, hine sécende.      And thei not fyndinge, wenten aþen to Jerusalem, sekyng him.      And founde hym not, they went backe agayne to Hierusalem, and sought hym.

The literal translation of the Anglo-Saxon version is as follows:—  
 (They) weened that he on their companionship were (= was), when came they one day's faring, and him sought betwixt his relations and his couth (folk = acquaintances).  
 When they him not found, they turned to Jerusalem, him seeking.

4. The Lord's Prayer.—The same plan of comparison may be applied to the different versions of the Lord's Prayer that have come down to us; and it will be seen from this comparison that the greatest changes have taken place in the grammar, and especially in that part of the grammar which contains the inflexions.

#### THE LORD'S PRAYER.

1130.    1250.    1380.    1526.

REIGN OF STEPHEN.    REIGN OF HENRY III.    WYCLIFFE'S VERSION.                      TYNDALE'S VERSION.

Fader ure, þe art on heofone.                      Fadir ur, that es in hevene, Our Fadir, that art in hevenys,                      Our Father which art in heaven;  
 Sy gebletsod name þin,                      Halud thi nam to nevene;                      Halewid be thi name;                      Halowed be thy name;  
 Cume þin rike.                      Thou do as thi rich rike;                      Thi kingdom come to;                      Let thy kingdom come;  
 Si þin wil swa swa on heofone and on eorþan.                      Thi will on erd be wrought, eek as it is wrought in heven ay.                      Be thi wil done in erthe, as in hevene.                      Thy will be fulfilled as well in earth as it is in heven.  
 Breed ure degwamlich geof us to daeg.                      Ur ilk day brede give us to day.                      Give to us this day oure breed ovir othir substaunce,                      Geve us this day ur dayly bred,  
 And forgeof us ageltes ura swa swa we forgeofen agiltendum urum.                      Forgive thou all us dettes urs, als we forgive till ur detturs.                      And forgive to us our dettis, as we forgiven to oure dettouris.                      And forgeve us oure dettes as we forgeve ur detters.  
 And ne led us on costunge.                      And lede us not into temptacioun;                      And ledde us in na fandung.                      And leade us not into temptation,  
 Ac alys us fram yfele. Swa beo hit. But sculd us fra iverl thing. Amen.                      But delyvere us from yvel. Amen.                      But delyver us from evyll. For thyne is the kyngdom, and the power, and the glorye, for ever.  
 Amen.

It will be observed that Wycliffe's version contains five Romance terms—substaunce, dettis, dettouris, temptacioun, and delyvere.

5. Oldest English and Early English.—The following is a short passage from the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, under date 1137: first, in the Anglo-Saxon form; second, in Early English, or—as it has sometimes been

called—Broken Saxon; 253 third, in modern English. The breaking-down of the grammar becomes still more strikingly evident from this close juxtaposition.

- |       |             |                    |                 |                 |          |                |
|-------|-------------|--------------------|-----------------|-----------------|----------|----------------|
| (i)   | Hí          | swencton           | Þá              | wreccan         | menn     |                |
| (ii)  | Hí          | swencten           | the             | wrece           | men      |                |
| (iii) | They        | swinked (harassed) | the             | wretched        | men      |                |
| (i)   | Þæs         | landes             | mid             | castel-weorcum. |          |                |
| (ii)  | Of-the-land | mid                | castel-weorces. |                 |          |                |
| (iii) | Of the land | with               | castle-works.   |                 |          |                |
| (i)   | Ða          | Þá                 | castelas        | waeron          | gemacod, |                |
| (ii)  | Tha         | the                | castles         | waren           | maked,   |                |
| (iii) | When        | the                | castles         | were            | made,    |                |
| (i)   | Þá          | fyldon             | hí              | hí              | mid      | yfelum mannum. |
| (ii)  | thá         | fylden             | hi              | hi              | mid      | yvele men.     |
| (iii) | then        | filled             | they            | them            | with     | evil men.      |

6. Comparisons of Words and Inflexions.—Let us take a few of the most prominent words in our language, and observe the changes that have fallen upon them since they made their appearance in our island in the fifth century. These changes will be best seen by displaying them in columns:—

ANGLO-SAXON.            EARLY ENGLISH.            MIDDLE ENGLISH.            MODERN ENGLISH.

heom.    to heom. to hem. to them.

seó.    heó.    ho, scho. she.

sweostrum.            to the swestres.    to the swistren.    to the sisters.

geboren. gebore.    iboré.    born.

lufigende.            lufigend. lovand.    loving.

weoxon. woxen.    wexide.    waxed.

7. Conclusions from the above Comparisons.—We can now draw several conclusions from the comparisons we have made of the passages given from different periods of the language. These conclusions relate chiefly to verbs and nouns; and they 254 may become useful as a KEY to enable us to judge to what period in the history of our language a passage presented to us must belong. If we find such and such marks, the language is Anglo-Saxon; if other marks, it is Early English; and so on.

I.—MARKS OF ANGLO-SAXON.            II.—MARKS OF EARLY ENGLISH (1100-1250).    III.—

MARKS OF MIDDLE ENGLISH (1250-1485).

VERBS. VERBS. VERBS.

Infinitive in an.

Pres. part. in ende.

Past part. with ge.

3d plural pres. in ath.

3d plural past in on.

Plural of imperatives in ath.            Infin. in en or e.

Pres. part. in ind.

ge of past part. turned into i or y.

3d plural in en.    Infin. with to (the en was dropped about 1400).

Pres. part. in inge.

3d plural in en.

Imperative in eth.

NOUNS.            NOUNS.            NOUNS.

Plurals in an, as, or a.

Dative plural in um.            Plural in es.

Dative plural in es.            Plurals in es (separate syllable).

Possessives in es (separate syllable).

8. The English of the Thirteenth Century.—In this century there was a great breaking-down and stripping-off of inflexions. This is seen in the Ormulum of Orm, a canon of the Order of St Augustine, whose English is nearly as flexionless as that of Chaucer, although about a century and a half before him. Orm has also the peculiarity of always doubling a consonant after a short vowel. Thus, in his introduction, he says:—

“Þiss boc iss nemmedd Ormulum

Forr þi þatt Orm itt wrohhte.”

That is, "This book is named Ormulum, for the (reason) that Orm wrought it." The absence of inflexions is probably due to the fact that the book is written in the East-Midland dialect. But, in a song called "The Story of Genesis and Exodus," written about 1250, we find a greater number of inflexions. Thus we read:—

"Hunger wex in lond Chanaan;  
And his x sunes Jacob for-ðan

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Sente in to Egypt to bringen coren;  
He bilefe at hom ðe was gungest boren."

That is, "Hunger waxed (increased) in the land of Canaan; and Jacob for that (reason) sent his ten sons into Egypt to bring corn: he remained at home that was youngest born."

9. The English of the Fourteenth Century.—The four greatest writers of the fourteenth century are—in verse, Chaucer and Langlande; and in prose, Mandeville and Wycliffe. The inflexions continue to drop off; and, in Chaucer at least, a larger number of French words appear. Chaucer also writes in an elaborate verse-measure that forms a striking contrast to the homely rhythms of Langlande. Thus, in the "Man of Lawes Tale," we have the verse:—

"O queenës, lyvyng in prosperitée,  
Duchessës, and ladyës everichone,  
Haveth som routhe on hir adversitée;  
An emperourës doughter stant allone;  
She hath no wight to whom to make hir mone.  
O blood roial! that stondest in this dredë  
Fer ben thy frendës at thy gretë nedë!"

Here, with the exception of the imperative in Haveth som routhe (= have some pity), stant, and ben (= are), the grammar of Chaucer is very near the grammar of to-day. How different this is from the simple English of Langlande! He is speaking of the great storm of wind that blew on January 15, 1362:—

"Piries and Plomtres weore passchet to þe grounde,  
In ensauple to Men þat we scholde do þe bettre,  
Beches and brode okes weore blowen to þe eorþe."

Here it is the spelling of Langlande's English that differs most from modern English, and not the grammar.—Much the same may be said of the style of Wycliffe (1324-1384) and of Mandeville (1300-1372). In Wycliffe's version of the Gospel of Mark, v. 26, he speaks of a woman "that hadde suffride many thingis of ful many lechis (doctors), and spendid alle hir thingis; and no-thing profitide." Sir John Mandeville's English keeps many old inflexions and spellings; but is, in other respects, modern enough. Speaking of Mahomet, he says: "And ȝee 256 schulle understonds that Machamete was born in Arabye, that was first a pore knave that kept cameles, that wenten with marchantes for marchandise." Knave for boy, and wenten for went are the two chief differences—the one in the use of words, the other in grammar—that distinguish this piece of Mandeville's English from our modern speech.

10. The English of the Sixteenth Century.—This, which is also called Tudor-English, differs as regards grammar hardly at all from the English of the nineteenth century. This becomes plain from a passage from one of Latimer's sermons (1490-1555), "a book which gives a faithful picture of the manners, thoughts, and events of the period." "My father," he writes, "was a yeoman, and had no lands of his own, only he had a farm of three or four pound a year at the uttermost, and hereupon he tilled so much as kept half a dozen men. He had walk for a hundred sheep; and my mother milked thirty kine." In this passage, it is only the old-fashionedness, homeliness, and quaintness of the English—not its grammar—that makes us feel that it was not written in our own times. When Ridley, the fellow-martyr of Latimer, stood at the stake, he said, "I commit our cause to Almighty God, which shall indifferently judge all." Here he used indifferently in the sense of impartially—that is, in the sense of making no difference between parties; and this is one among a very large number of instances of Latin words, when they had not been long in our language, still retaining the older Latin meaning.

11. The English of the Bible (i).—The version of the Bible which we at present use was made in 1611; and we might therefore suppose that it is written in seventeenth-century English. But this is not the case. The translators were commanded by James I. to "follow the Bishops' Bible"; and the Bishops' Bible was itself founded on the "Great Bible," which was published in 1539. But the Great Bible is itself only a revision of Tyndale's, part of which appeared as early as 1526. When we are reading the Bible, therefore, we are reading English of the sixteenth century, and, to a large extent, of the early part of that century. It is true that successive generations of 257 printers have, of their own accord, altered the spelling, and even, to a

slight extent, modified the grammar. Thus we have fetched for the older fet, more for moe, sown for sowen, brittle for brickle (which gives the connection with break), jaws for chaws, sixth for sixt, and so on. But we still find such participles as shined and understood; and such phrases as “they can skill to hew timber” (1 Kings v. 6), “objects” for abject persons, “three days ago” for ago, the “captivated Hebrews” for “the captive Hebrews,” and others.

12. The English of the Bible (ii).—We have, again, old words retained, or used in the older meaning. Thus we find, in Psalm v. 6, the phrase “them that speak leasing,” which reminds us of King Alfred’s expression about “leasum spellum” (lying stories). Trow and ween are often found; the “champaign over against Gilgal” (Deut. xi. 30) means the plain; and a publican in the New Testament is a tax-gatherer, who sent to the Roman Treasury or Publicum the taxes he had collected from the Jews. An “ill-favoured person” is an ill-looking person; and “bravery” (Isa. iii. 18) is used in the sense of finery in dress.—Some of the oldest grammar, too, remains, as in Esther viii. 8, “Write ye, as it liketh you,” where the you is a dative. Again, in Ezek. xxx. 2, we find “Howl ye, Woe worth the day!” where the imperative worth governs day in the dative case. This idiom is still found in modern verse, as in the well-known lines in the first canto of the “Lady of the Lake”:

“Woe worth the chase, woe worth the day  
That cost thy life, my gallant grey!”

## CHAPTER V. MODERN ENGLISH.

1. Grammar Fixed.—From the date of 1485—that is, from the beginning of the reign of Henry VII.—the changes in the grammar or constitution of our language are so extremely small, that they are hardly noticeable. Any Englishman of ordinary education can read a book belonging to the latter part of the fifteenth or to the sixteenth century without difficulty. Since that time the grammar of our language has hardly changed at all, though we have altered and enlarged our vocabulary, and have adopted thousands of new words. The introduction of Printing, the Revival of Learning, the Translation of the Bible, the growth and spread of the power to read and write—these and other influences tended to fix the language and to keep it as it is to-day. It is true that we have dropped a few old-fashioned endings, like the *n* or *en* in *silvern* and *golden*; but, so far as form or grammar is concerned, the English of the sixteenth and the English of the nineteenth centuries are substantially the same.

2. New Words.—But, while the grammar of English has remained the same, the vocabulary of English has been growing, and growing rapidly, not merely with each century, but with each generation. The discovery of the New World in 1492 gave an impetus to maritime enterprise in England, which it never lost, brought us into connection with the Spaniards, and hence contributed to our language several Spanish words. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Italian literature was largely read; Wyatt and Surrey show its influence in their poems; and Italian words began to come in in considerable numbers. Commerce, too, has done much for us in this way; and along with the article imported, we have in general introduced also the name it bore in its own native country. In later times, Science has been making rapid strides—has been bringing to light new discoveries and new inventions almost every week; and along with these new discoveries, the language has been enriched with new names and new terms. Let us look a little more closely at the character of these foreign contributions to the vocabulary of our tongue.

3. Spanish Words.—The words we have received from the Spanish language are not numerous, but they are important. In addition to the ill-fated word *armada*, we have the Spanish for Mr, which is *Don* (from Lat. *dominus*, a lord), with its feminine *Duenna*. They gave us also *alligator*, which is our English way of writing *el lagarto*, the lizard. They also presented us with a large number of words that end in *o*—such as *buffalo*, *cargo*, *desperado*, *guano*, *indigo*, *mosquito*, *mulatto*, *negro*, *potato*, *tornado*, and others. The following is a tolerably full list:—

Alligator.  
Armada.  
Barricade.  
Battledore.  
Bravado.  
Buffalo.  
Cargo.  
Cigar.

Cochineal.           Cork.  
 Creole.  
 Desperado.  
 Don.  
 Duenna.  
 Eldorado.  
 Embargo.  
 Filibuster.  
 Flotilla. Galleon (a ship).  
 Grandee.  
 Grenade.  
 Guerilla.  
 Indigo.  
 Jennet.  
 Matador.  
 Merino.  
 Mosquito.           Mulatto.  
 Negro.  
 Octoroon.  
 Quadroon.  
 Renegade.  
 Savannah.  
 Sherry (= Xeres).  
 Tornado.  
 Vanilla.

4. Italian Words.—Italian literature has been read and cultivated in England since the time of Chaucer—since the fourteenth century; and the arts and artists of Italy have for many centuries exerted a great deal of influence on those of England. Hence it is that we owe to the Italian language a large number of words. These relate to poetry, such as canto, sonnet, stanza; to music, as pianoforte, opera, oratorio, soprano, alto, contralto; to architecture and sculpture, as portico, piazza, cupola, torso; and to painting, as studio, fresco (an open-air painting), and others. The following is a complete list:—

Alarm.  
 Alert.  
 Alto.  
 Arcade.  
 Balcony.  
 Balustrade.  
 Bandit.  
 Bankrupt.  
 Bravo.  
 Brigade.  
 Brigand.  
 Broccoli.  
 Burlesque.  
 Bust.  
 Cameo.  
 Canteen.  
 Canto.  
 Caprice.  
 Caricature.  
 Carnival.  
 Cartoon.  
 Cascade.  
 Cavalcade.           Charlatan.  
 Citadel.

Colonnade.  
Concert.  
Contralto.  
Conversazione.  
Cornice.  
Corridor.  
Cupola.  
Curvet.  
Dilettante.  
Ditto.  
Doge.  
Domino.  
Extravaganza.  
Fiasco.  
Folio.  
Fresco.  
Gazette.  
Gondola.  
Granite.  
Grotto.  
Guitar. Incognito.  
Influenza.  
Lagoon.  
Lava.  
Lazaretto.  
Macaroni.  
Madonna.  
Madrigal.  
Malaria.  
Manifesto.  
Motto.  
Moustache.  
Niche.  
Opera.  
Oratorio.  
Palette.  
Pantaloon.  
Parapet.  
Pedant.  
Pianoforte.  
Piazza.  
Pistol.  
Portico. Proviso.  
Quarto.  
Regatta.  
Ruffian.  
Serenade.  
Sonnet.  
Soprano.  
Stanza.  
Stiletto.  
Stucco.  
Studio.  
Tenor.  
Terra-cotta.  
Tirade.

Torso.  
Trombone.  
Umbrella.  
Vermilion.  
Vertu.  
Virtuoso.  
Vista.  
Volcano.  
Zany.

5. Dutch Words.—We have had for many centuries commercial dealings with the Dutch; and as they, like ourselves, are a great seafaring people, they have given us a number of words relating to the management of ships. In the fourteenth century, the southern part of the German Ocean was the most frequented sea in the world; and the chances of plunder were so great that ships of war had to keep cruising up and down to protect the trading vessels that sailed between England and the Low Countries. The following are the words which we owe to the Netherlands:—

Ballast.  
Boom.  
Boor.  
Burgomaster.  
Hoy. Luff.  
Reef.  
Schiedam (gin).  
Skates.  
Skipper. Sloop.  
Smack.  
Smuggle.  
Stiver.  
Taffrail. Trigger.  
Wear (said of a ship).  
Yacht.  
Yawl.

6. French Words.—Besides the large additions to our language made by the Norman-French, we have from time to time imported direct from France a number of French words, without change in the spelling, and with little change in the pronunciation. The French have been for centuries the most polished nation in Europe; from France the changing fashions in dress spread over all the countries of the Continent; French literature has been much read in England since the time of Charles II.; and for a long time all diplomatic correspondence between foreign countries and England was carried on in French. Words relating to manners and customs are common, such as *soirée*, *etiquette*, *séance*, *élite*; and we have also the names of things which were invented in France, such as *mitrailleuse*, *carte-de-visite*, *coup d'état*, and others. Some of these words are, in spelling, exactly like English; and advantage of this has been taken in a well-known epigram:—

The French have taste in all they do,  
Which we are quite without;  
For Nature, which to them gave goût,<sup>15</sup>  
To us gave only gout.

The following is a list of French words which have been imported in comparatively recent times:—

Aide-de-camp.  
Belle.  
Bivouac.  
Blonde.  
Bouquet.  
Brochure.  
Brunette.  
Brusque. Carte-de-visite.



Coup-d'état.  
 Débris.  
 Début.  
 Déjeûner.  
 Depot.  
 Éclat.  
 Ennui. Etiquette.  
 Façade.  
 Goût.  
 Naïve.  
 Naïveté.  
 Nonchalance.  
 Outré.  
 Penchant. Personnel.  
 Précis.  
 Programme.  
 Protégé.  
 Recherché.  
 Séance.  
 Soirée.  
 Trousseau.

The Scotch have always had a closer connection with the French nation than England; and hence we find in the Scottish dialect of English a number of French words that are not used in South Britain at all. A leg of mutton is called in Scotland a gigot; the dish on which it is laid is an ashet (from assiette); a cup for tea or for wine is a tassie (from tasse); the gate of a town is 262 called the port; and a stubborn person is dour (Fr. dur, from Lat. durus); while a gentle and amiable person is douce (Fr. douce, Lat. dulcis).

7. German Words.—It must not be forgotten that English is a Low-German dialect, while the German of books is New High-German. We have never borrowed directly from High-German, because we have never needed to borrow. Those modern German words that have come into our language in recent times are chiefly the names of minerals, with a few striking exceptions, such as loafer, which came to us from the German immigrants to the United States, and plunder, which seems to have been brought from Germany by English soldiers who had served under Gustavus Adolphus. The following are the German words which we have received in recent times:—

Cobalt.  
 Felspar.  
 Hornblende. Landgrave.  
 Loafer.  
 Margrave. Meerschaum.  
 Nickel.  
 Plunder. Poodle.  
 Quartz.  
 Zinc.

8. Hebrew Words.—These, with very few exceptions, have come to us from the translation of the Bible, which is now in use in our homes and churches. Abbot and abbey come from the Hebrew word abba, father; and such words as cabal and Talmud, though not found in the Old Testament, have been contributed by Jewish literature. The following is a tolerably complete list:—

Abbey.  
 Abbot.  
 Amen.  
 Behemoth.  
 Cabal.  
 Cherub. Cinnamon.  
 Hallelujah.

Hosannah.  
 Jehovah.  
 Jubilee.  
 Gehenna.            Leviathan.  
 Manna.  
 Paschal.  
 Pharisee.  
 Pharisaical.  
 Rabbi. Sabbath.  
 Sadducees.  
 Satan.  
 Seraph.  
 Shibboleth.  
 Talmud.

9. Other Foreign Words.—The English have always been the greatest travellers in the world; and our sailors always the most daring, intelligent, and enterprising. There is hardly a port or a country in the world into which an English ship has not penetrated; and our commerce has now been maintained for centuries with every people on the face of the globe. We exchange goods with almost every nation and tribe under the 263 sun. When we import articles or produce from abroad, we in general import the native name along with the thing. Hence it is that we have guano, maize, and tomato from the two Americas; coffee, cotton, and tamarind from Arabia; tea, congou, and nankeen from China; calico, chintz, and rupee from Hindostan; bamboo, gamboge, and sago from the Malay Peninsula; lemon, musk, and orange from Persia; boomerang and kangaroo from Australia; chibouk, ottoman, and tulip from Turkey. The following are lists of these foreign words; and they are worth examining with the greatest minuteness:—

AFRICAN DIALECTS.

Baobab.  
 Canary.  
 Chimpanzee.      Gnu.  
 Gorilla.  
 Guinea. Karoo.  
 Kraal.  
 Oasis. Quagga.  
 Zebra.

AMERICAN TONGUES.

Alpaca.  
 Buccaneer.  
 Cacique.  
 Cannibal.  
 Canoe.  
 Caoutchouc.  
 Cayman.  
 Chocolate.      Condor.  
 Guano.  
 Hammock.  
 Jaguar.  
 Jalap.  
 Jerked (beef).  
 Llama.  
 Mahogany.      Maize.  
 Manioc.  
 Moccasin.  
 Mustang.  
 Opossum.  
 Pampas.

Pemmican.  
Potato. Raccoon.  
Skunk.  
Squaw.  
Tapioca.  
Tobacco.  
Tomahawk.  
Tomato.  
Wigwam.  
ARABIC.  
(The word al means the. Thus alcohol = the spirit.)  
Admiral (Milton writes ammiral).  
Alcohol.  
Alcove.  
Alembic.  
Algebra.  
Alkali.  
Amber.  
Arrack.  
Arsenal.  
Artichoke.  
Assassin.  
Assegai.  
Attar.  
Azimuth.            Azure.  
Caliph.  
Carat.  
Chemistry.  
Cipher.  
Civet.  
Coffee.  
Cotton.  
Crimson.  
Dragoman.  
Elixir.  
Emir.  
Fakir.  
Felucca.  
Gazelle.  
Giraffe. Harem.  
Hookah.  
Koran (or Alcoran).  
Lute.  
Magazine.  
Mattress.  
Minaret.  
Mohair.  
Monsoon.  
Mosque.  
Mufti.  
Nabob.  
Nadir.  
Naphtha.  
Saffron. Salaam.  
Senna.  
Sherbet.

Shrub (the drink).  
Simoom.  
Sirocco.  
Sofa.  
Sultan.  
Syrup.  
Talisman.  
Tamarind.  
Tariff.  
Vizier.  
Zenith.  
Zero.  
264 CHINESE.  
Bohea.  
China.  
Congou. Hyson.  
Joss.  
Junk. Nankeen.  
Pekoe.  
Silk. Souchong.  
Tea.  
Typhoon.  
HINDU.  
Avatar.  
Banyan.  
Brahmin.  
Bungalow.  
Calico.  
Chintz.  
Coolie. Cowrie.  
Durbar.  
Jungle.  
Lac (of rupees).  
Loot.  
Mulligatawny.  
Musk. Pagoda.  
Palanquin.  
Pariah.  
Punch.  
Pundit.  
Rajah.  
Rupee. Ryot.  
Sepoy.  
Shampoo.  
Sugar.  
Suttee.  
Thug.  
Toddy.  
HUNGARIAN.  
Hussar. Sabre. Shako. Tokay.  
MALAY.  
Amuck.  
Bamboo.  
Bantam.  
Caddy. Cassowary.  
Cockatoo.

Dugong.  
 Gamboge.           Gong.  
 Gutta-percha.  
 Mandarin.  
 Mango. Orang-outang.  
 Rattan.  
 Sago.  
 Upas.  
 PERSIAN.  
 Awning.  
 Bazaar.  
 Bashaw.  
 Caravan.  
 Check.  
 Checkmate.  
 Chess.  
 Curry. Dervish.  
 Divan.  
 Firman.  
 Hazard.  
 Horde.  
 Houri.  
 Jar.  
 Jackal. Jasmine.  
 Lac (a gum).  
 Lemon.  
 Lilac.  
 Lime (the fruit).  
 Musk.  
 Orange.  
 Paradise.           Pasha.  
 Rook.  
 Saraband.  
 Sash.  
 Scimitar.  
 Shawl.  
 Taffeta.  
 Turban.  
 POLYNESIAN DIALECTS.  
 Boomerang.       Kangaroo.       Taboo. Tattoo.  
 PORTUGUESE.  
 Albatross.  
 Caste.  
 Cobra. Cocoa-nut.  
 Commodore.  
 Fetish. Lasso.  
 Marmalade.  
 Moidore.           Molasses.  
 Palaver.  
 Port (= Oporto).  
 RUSSIAN.  
 Czar.  
 Drosky. Knout.  
 Morse. Rouble.  
 Steppe. Ukase.  
 Verst.

TARTAR.

Khan.

TURKISH.

Bey.

Caftan.

Chibouk.           Chouse.

Dey.

Janissary.       Kiosk.

Odalisque.

Ottoman.       Tulip.

Yashmak.

Yataghan.

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10. Scientific Terms.—A very large number of discoveries in science have been made in this century; and a large number of inventions have introduced these discoveries to the people, and made them useful in daily life. Thus we have telegraph and telegram; photograph; telephone and even photophone. The word dynamite is also modern; and the unhappy employment of it has made it too widely known. Then passing fashions have given us such words as athlete and aesthete. In general, it may be said that, when we wish to give a name to a new thing—a new discovery, invention, or fashion—we have recourse not to our own stores of English, but to the vocabularies of the Latin and Greek languages.

#### LANDMARKS IN THE HISTORY OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE.

A.D.

1. The Beowulf, an old English epic, “written on the mainland”           450
2. Christianity introduced by St Augustine (and with it many Latin and a few Greek words)           597
3. Caedmon—‘Paraphrase of the Scriptures,’—first English poem           670
4. Baeda—“The Venerable Bede”—translated into English part of St John’s Gospel           735
5. King Alfred translated several Latin works into English, among others, Bede’s ‘Ecclesiastical History of the English Nation’ (851)           901
6. Aelfric, Archbishop of York, turned into English most of the historical books of the Old Testament           1000
7. The Norman Conquest, which introduced Norman French words           1066
8. Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, said to have been begun by King Alfred, and brought to a close in           1160
9. Orm or Orrmin’s Ormulum, a poem written in the East Midland dialect, about 1200
10. Normandy lost under King John. Norman-English now have their only home in England, and use our English speech more and more           1204
11. Layamon translates the ‘Brut’ from the French of Robert Wace. This is the first English book (written in Southern English) after the stoppage of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle           1205
12. The Ancren Riwle (“Rules for Anchorites”) written in the Dorsetshire dialect. “It is the forerunner of a wondrous change in our speech.” “It swarms with French words”           1220
13. First Royal Proclamation in English, issued by Henry III.           1258
14. Robert of Gloucester’s Chronicle (swarms with foreign terms)           1300
- 267 15. Robert Manning, “Robert of Brunn,” compiles the ‘Handlyng Synne.’ “It contains a most copious proportion of French words”           1303
16. Ayenbite of Inwit (= “Remorse of Conscience”)           1340
17. The Great Plague. After this it becomes less and less the fashion to speak French           1349
18. Sir John Mandeville, first writer of the newer English Prose—in his ‘Travels,’ which contained a large admixture of French words. “His English is the speech spoken at Court in the latter days of King Edward III.”           1356
19. English becomes the language of the Law Courts           1362
20. Wickliffe’s Bible           1380
21. Geoffrey Chaucer, the first great English poet, author of the ‘Canterbury Tales’; born in 1340, died 1400

22. William Caxton, the first English printer, brings out (in the Low Countries) the first English book ever printed, the 'Recuyell of the Historyes of Troye,'—"not written with pen and ink, as other books are, to the end that every man may have them at once" 1471
23. First English Book printed in England (by Caxton) the 'Game and Playe of the Chesse' 1474
24. Lord Berners' translation of Froissart's Chronicle 1523
25. William Tyndale, by his translation of the Bible "fixed our tongue once for all." "His New Testament has become the standard of our tongue: the first ten verses of the Fourth Gospel are a good sample of his manly Teutonic pith" 1526-30
26. Edmund Spenser publishes his 'Faerie Queene.' "Now began the golden age of England's literature; and this age was to last for about fourscore years" 1590
27. Our English Bible, based chiefly on Tyndale's translation. "Those who revised the English Bible in 1611 were bidden to keep as near as they could to the old versions, such as Tyndale's" 1611
28. William Shakespeare carried the use of the English language to the greatest height of which it was capable. He employed 15,000 words. "The last act of 'Othello' is a rare specimen of Shakespeare's diction: of every five nouns, verbs, and adverbs, four are Teutonic" (Born 1564)1616
29. John Milton, "the most learned of English poets," publishes his 'Paradise Lost,'—"a poem in which Latin words are introduced with great skill" 1667
- 086 + 182 30. The Prayer-Book revised and issued in its final form. "Are was substituted for be in forty-three places. This was a great victory of the North over the South" 1661
31. John Bunyan writes his 'Pilgrim's Progress'—a book full of pithy English idiom. "The common folk had the wit at once to see the worth of Bunyan's masterpiece, and the learned long afterwards followed in the wake of the common folk" (Born 1628) 1688
32. Sir Thomas Browne, the author of 'Urn-Burial' and other works written in a highly Latinised diction, such as the 'Religio Medici,' written 1642
33. Dr Samuel Johnson was the chief supporter of the use of "long-tailed words in osity and ation," such as his novel called 'Rasselas,' published 1759
34. Tennyson, Poet-Laureate, a writer of the best English—"a countryman of Robert Manning's, and a careful student of old Malory, has done much for the revival of pure English among us" (Born 1809)

**PART IV.**  
**OUTLINE OF THE HISTORY OF ENGLISH LITERATURE**

**CHAPTER I.**  
**OUR OLDEST ENGLISH LITERATURE.**

1. Literature.—The history of English Literature is, in its external aspect, an account of the best books in prose and in verse that have been written by English men and English women; and this account begins with a poem brought over from the Continent by our countrymen in the fifth century, and comes down to the time in which we live. It covers, therefore, a period of nearly fourteen hundred years.

2. The Distribution of Literature.—We must not suppose that literature has always existed in the form of printed books. Literature is a living thing—a living outcome of the living mind; and there are many ways in which it has been distributed to other human beings. The oldest way is, of course, by one person repeating a poem or other literary composition he has made to another; and thus literature is stored away, not upon book-shelves, but in the memory of living men. Homer's poems are said to have been preserved in this way to the Greeks for five hundred years. Father chanted them to son; the sons to their sons; and so on from generation to generation. The next way of distributing literature is by the aid of signs called letters made upon leaves, flattened reeds, parchment, or the inner bark of trees. The next is by the help of writing upon paper. The last is by the aid of type upon paper. This has existed in England for more than four hundred years—since the year 1474; and thus it is that our libraries contain many hundreds of thousands of valuable books. 272 For the same reason is it, most probably, that as our power of retaining the substance and multiplying the copies of books has grown stronger, our living memories have grown weaker. This defect can be remedied only by education—that is, by training the memories of the young. While we possess so many printed books, it must not be forgotten that many valuable works exist still in manuscript—written either upon paper or on parchment.

3. Verse, the earliest form of Literature.—It is a remarkable fact that the earliest kind of composition in all languages is in the form of Verse. The oldest books, too, are those which are written in verse. Thus Homer's poems are the oldest literary work of Greece; the Sagas are the oldest productions of Scandinavian literature; and the Beowulf is the oldest piece of literature produced by the Anglo-Saxon race. It is also from the strong creative power and the lively inventions of poets that we are even now supplied with new thoughts and new language—that the most vivid words and phrases come into the language; just as it is the ranges of high mountains that send down to the plains the ever fresh soil that gives to them their unending fertility. And thus it happens that our present English speech is full of words and phrases that have found their way into the most ordinary conversation from the writings of our great poets—and especially from the writings of our greatest poet, Shakespeare. The fact that the life of prose depends for its supplies on the creative minds of poets has been well expressed by an American writer:—

“I looked upon a plain of green,  
Which some one called the Land of Prose,  
Where many living things were seen  
In movement or repose.  
I looked upon a stately hill  
That well was named the Mount of Song,  
Where golden shadows dwelt at will,  
The woods and streams among.  
But most this fact my wonder bred  
(Though known by all the nobly wise),  
It was the mountain stream that fed  
That fair green plain's amenities.”

4. Our oldest English Poetry.—The verse written by our old English writers was very different in form from the verse that appears now from the hands of Tennyson, or Browning, or Matthew Arnold. The old English or Anglo-Saxon writers used a kind of rhyme called head-rhyme or alliteration; while, from the fourteenth century downwards, our poets have always employed end-rhyme in their verses.

“Lightly down leaping he loosened his helmet.”

Such was the rough old English form. At least three words in each long line were alliterative—two in the first half, and one in the second. Metaphorical phrases were common, such as war-adder for arrow, war-



shirts for armour, whale's-path or swan-road for the sea, wave-horse for a ship, tree-wright for carpenter. Different statements of the same fact, different phrases for the same thing—what are called parallelisms in Hebrew poetry—as in the line—

“Then saw they the sea head-lands—the windy walls,”

were also in common use among our oldest English poets.

5. *Beowulf*.—The *Beowulf* is the oldest poem in the English language. It is our “old English epic”; and, like much of our ancient verse, it is a war poem. The author of it is unknown. It was probably composed in the fifth century—not in England, but on the Continent—and brought over to this island—not on paper or on parchment—but in the memories of the old Jutish or Saxon vikings or warriors. It was not written down at all, even in England, till the end of the ninth century, and then, probably, by a monk of Northumbria. It tells among other things the story of how *Beowulf* sailed from Sweden to the help of *Hrothgar*, a king in *Jutland*, whose life was made miserable by a monster—half man, half fiend—named *Grendel*. For about twelve years this monster had been in the habit of creeping up to the banqueting-hall of *King Hrothgar*, seizing upon his thanes, carrying them off, and devouring them. *Beowulf* attacks and overcomes the dragon, which is mortally wounded, and flees away to die. The 274 poem belongs both to the German and to the English literature; for it is written in a Continental English, which is somewhat different from the English of our own island. But its literary shape is, as has been said, due to a Christian writer of Northumbria; and therefore its written or printed form—as it exists at present—is not German, but English. Parts of this poem were often chanted at the feasts of warriors, where all sang in turn as they sat after dinner over their cups of mead round the massive oaken table. The poem consists of 3184 lines, the rhymes of which are solely alliterative.

6. The First Native English Poem.—The *Beowulf* came to us from the Continent; the first native English poem was produced in Yorkshire. On the dark wind-swept cliff which rises above the little land-locked harbour of *Whitby*, stand the ruins of an ancient and once famous abbey. The head of this religious house was the Abbess *Hilda* or *Hilda*: and there was a secular priest in it,—a very shy retiring man, who looked after the cattle of the monks, and whose name was *Caedmon*. To this man came the gift of song, but somewhat late in life. And it came in this wise. One night, after a feast, singing began, and each of those seated at the table was to sing in his turn. *Caedmon* was very nervous—felt he could not sing. Fear overcame his heart, and he stole quietly away from the table before the turn could come to him. He crept off to the cowshed, lay down on the straw and fell asleep. He dreamed a dream; and, in his dream, there came to him a voice: “*Caedmon*, sing me a song!” But *Caedmon* answered: “I cannot sing; it was for this cause that I had to leave the feast.” “But you must and shall sing!” “What must I sing, then?” he replied. “Sing the beginning of created things!” said the vision; and forthwith *Caedmon* sang some lines in his sleep, about God and the creation of the world. When he awoke, he remembered some of the lines that had come to him in sleep, and, being brought before *Hilda*, he recited them to her. The Abbess thought that this wonderful gift, which had come to him so suddenly, must have come from God, received him into the monastery, made him a monk, and 275 had him taught sacred history. “All this *Caedmon*, by remembering, and, like a clean animal, ruminating, turned into sweetest verse.” His poetical works consist of a metrical paraphrase of the Old and the New Testament. It was written about the year 670; and he died in 680. It was read and re-read in manuscript for many centuries, but it was not printed in a book until the year 1655.

7. The War-Poetry of England.—There were many poems about battles, written both in Northumbria and in the south of England; but it was only in the south that these war-songs were committed to writing; and of these written songs there are only two that survive up to the present day. These are the *Song of Brunanburg*, and the *Song of the Fight at Maldon*. The first belongs to the date 938; the second to 991. The *Song of Brunanburg* was inscribed in the *SAXON CHRONICLE*—a current narrative of events, written chiefly by monks, from the ninth century to the end of the reign of *Stephen*. The song tells the story of the fight of *King Athelstan* with *Anlaf the Dane*. It tells how five young kings and seven earls of *Anlaf's* host fell on the field of battle, and lay there “quieted by swords,” while their fellow-Northmen fled, and left their friends and comrades to “the screamers of war—the black raven, the eagle, the greedy battle-hawk, and the grey wolf in the wood.” The *Song of the Fight at Maldon* tells us of the heroic deeds and death of *Byrhtnoth*, an ealdorman of Northumbria, in battle against the Danes at *Maldon*, in *Essex*. The speeches of the chiefs are given; the single combats between heroes described; and, as in *Homer*, the names and genealogies of the foremost men are brought into the verse.

8. The First English Prose.—The first writer of English prose was *Baeda*, or, as he is generally called, the *Venerable Bede*. He was born in the year 672 at *Monkwearmouth*, a small town at the mouth of the river *Wear*, and was, like *Caedmon*, a native of the kingdom of Northumbria. He spent most of his life at the

famous monastery of Jarrow-on-Tyne. He spent his life in writing. His works, which were written in Latin, rose to the number of forty-five; his chief 276 work being an Ecclesiastical History. But though Latin was the tongue in which he wrote his books, he wrote one book in English; and he may therefore be fairly considered the first writer of English prose. This book was a Translation of the Gospel of St John—a work which he laboured at until the very moment of his death. His disciple Cuthbert tells the story of his last hours. “Write quickly!” said Baeda to his scribe, for he felt that his end could not be far off. When the last day came, all his scholars stood around his bed. “There is still one chapter wanting, Master,” said the scribe; “it is hard for thee to think and to speak.” “It must be done,” said Baeda; “take thy pen and write quickly.” So through the long day they wrote—scribe succeeding scribe; and when the shades of evening were coming on, the young writer looked up from his task and said, “There is yet one sentence to write, dear Master.” “Write it quickly!” Presently the writer, looking up with joy, said, “It is finished!” “Thou sayest truth,” replied the weary old man; “it is finished: all is finished.” Quietly he sank back upon his pillow, and, with a psalm of praise upon his lips, gently yielded up to God his latest breath. It is a great pity that this translation—the first piece of prose in our language—is utterly lost. No MS. of it is at present known to be in existence.

9. The Father of English Prose.—For several centuries, up to the year 866, the valleys and shores of Northumbria were the homes of learning and literature. But a change was not long in coming. Horde after horde of Danes swept down upon the coasts, ravaged the monasteries, burnt the books—after stripping the beautiful bindings of the gold, silver, and precious stones which decorated them—killed or drove away the monks, and made life, property, and thought insecure all along that once peaceful and industrious coast. Literature, then, was forced to desert the monasteries of Northumbria, and to seek for a home in the south—in Wessex, the kingdom over which Alfred the Great reigned for more than thirty years. The capital of Wessex was Winchester; and an able writer says: “As 277 Whitby is the cradle of English poetry, so is Winchester of English prose.” King Alfred founded colleges, invited to England men of learning from abroad, and presided over a school for the sons of his nobles in his own Court. He himself wrote many books, or rather, he translated the most famous Latin books of his time into English. He translated into the English of Wessex, for example, the ‘Ecclesiastical History’ of Baeda; the ‘History of Orosius,’ into which he inserted geographical chapters of his own; and the ‘Consolations of Philosophy,’ by the famous Roman writer, Boëthius. In these books he gave to his people, in their own tongue, the best existing works on history, geography, and philosophy.

10. The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle.—The greatest prose-work of the oldest English, or purely Saxon, literature, is a work—not by one person, but by several authors. It is the historical work which is known as The Saxon Chronicle. It seems to have been begun about the middle of the ninth century; and it was continued, with breaks now and then, down to 1154—the year of the death of Stephen and the accession of Henry II. It was written by a series of successive writers, all of whom were monks; but Alfred himself is said to have contributed to it a narrative of his own wars with the Danes. The Chronicle is found in seven separate forms, each named after the monastery in which it was written. It was the newspaper, the annals, and the history of the nation. “It is the first history of any Teutonic people in their own language; it is the earliest and most venerable monument of English prose.” This Chronicle possesses for us a twofold value. It is a valuable storehouse of historical facts; and it is also a storehouse of specimens of the different states of the English language—as regards both words and grammar—from the eighth down to the twelfth century.

11. Layamon’s Brut.—Layamon was a native of Worcestershire, and a priest of Ernley on the Severn. He translated, about the year 1205, a poem called Brut, from the French of a monkish writer named Master Wace. Wace’s work itself is 278 little more than a translation of parts of a famous “Chronicle or History of the Britons,” written in Latin by Geoffrey of Monmouth, who was Bishop of St Asaph in 1152. But Geoffrey himself professed only to have translated from a chronicle in the British or Celtic tongue, called the “Chronicle of the Kings of Britain,” which was found in Brittany—long the home of most of the stories, traditions, and fables about the old British Kings and their great deeds. Layamon’s poem called the “Brut” is a metrical chronicle of Britain from the landing of Brutus to the death of King Cadwallader, about the end of the seventh century. Brutus was supposed to be a great-grandson of Æneas, who sailed west and west till he came to Great Britain, where he settled with his followers.—This metrical chronicle is written in the dialect of the West of England; and it shows everywhere a breaking down of the grammatical forms of the oldest English, as we find it in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle. In fact, between the landing of the Normans and the fourteenth century, two things may be noted: first, that during this time—that is, for three centuries—the inflections of the oldest English are gradually and surely stripped off; and, secondly, that

there is little or no original English literature given to the country, but that by far the greater part consists chiefly of translations from French or from Latin.

12. Orm's Ormulum.—Less than half a century after Layamon's Brut appeared a poem called the Ormulum, by a monk of the name of Orm or Ormin. It was probably written about the year 1215. Orm was a monk of the order of St Augustine, and his book consists of a series of religious poems. It is the oldest, purest, and most valuable specimen of thirteenth-century English, and it is also remarkable for its peculiar spelling. It is written in the purest English, and not five French words are to be found in the whole poem of twenty thousand short lines. Orm, in his spelling, doubles every consonant that has a short vowel before it; and he writes pann for pan, but pan for pane. The following is a specimen of his poem:—

Ice hafe wennd inntill Enngliss    I have wended (turned) into English  
Goddspellless hallghe lare, Gospel's holy lore,  
Affterr thatt little witt tatt me    After the little wit that me  
Min Drihhtin hafethth lenedd.    My Lord hath lent.

Other famous writers of English between this time and the appearance of Chaucer were Robert of Gloucester and Robert of Brunne, both of whom wrote Chronicles of England in verse.

## CHAPTER II. THE FOURTEENTH CENTURY.

1. The opening of the fourteenth century saw the death of the great and able king, Edward I., the "Hammer of the Scots," the "Keeper of his word." The century itself—a most eventful period—witnessed the feeble and disastrous reign of Edward II.; the long and prosperous rule—for fifty years—of Edward III.; the troubled times of Richard II., who exhibited almost a repetition of the faults of Edward II.; and the appearance of a new and powerful dynasty—the House of Lancaster—in the person of the able and ambitious Henry IV. This century saw also many striking events, and many still more striking changes. It beheld the welding of the Saxon and the Norman elements into one—chiefly through the French wars; the final triumph of the English language over French in 1362; the frequent coming of the Black Death; the victories of Crecy and Poitiers; it learned the universal use of the mariner's compass; it witnessed two kings—of France and of Scotland—prisoners in London; great changes in the condition of labourers; the invention of gunpowder in 1340; the rise of English commerce under Edward III.; and everywhere in England the rising up of new powers and new ideas.

2. The first prose-writer in this century is Sir John Mandeville (who has been called the "Father of English Prose"). King Alfred has also been called by this name; but as the English written by Alfred was very different from that written 281 by Mandeville,—the latter containing a large admixture of French and of Latin words, both writers are deserving of the epithet. The most influential prose-writer was John Wyclif, who was, in fact, the first English Reformer of the Church. In poetry, two writers stand opposite each other in striking contrast—Geoffrey Chaucer and William Langlande, the first writing in courtly "King's English" in end-rhyme, and with the fullest inspirations from the literatures of France and Italy, the latter writing in head-rhyme, and—though using more French words than Chaucer—with a style that was always homely, plain, and pedestrian. John Gower, in Kent, and John Barbour, in Scotland, are also noteworthy poets in this century. The English language reached a high state of polish, power, and freedom in this period; and the sweetness and music of Chaucer's verse are still unsurpassed by modern poets. The sentences of the prose-writers of this century are long, clumsy, and somewhat helpless; but the sweet homely English rhythm exists in many of them, and was continued, through Wyclif's version, down into our translation of the Bible in 1611.

3. SIR JOHN MANDEVILLE, (1300-1372), "the first prose-writer in formed English," was born at St Albans, in Hertfordshire, in the year 1300. He was a physician; but, in the year 1322, he set out on a journey to the East; was away from home for more than thirty years, and died at Liège, in Belgium, in 1372. He wrote his travels first in Latin, next in French, and then turned them into English, "that every man of my nation may understand it." The book is a kind of guide-book to the Holy Land; but the writer himself went much further east—reached Cathay or China, in fact. He introduced a large number of French words into our speech, such as cause, contrary, discover, quantity, and many hundred others. His works were much admired, read, and copied; indeed, hundreds of manuscript copies of his book were made. There are nineteen still in the British Museum. The book was not printed till the year 1499—that is, twenty-five years after printing was introduced into this country. Many of the Old English inflexions still survive in his style.

Thus he says: "Machamete was born in Arabye, that was a pore knave (boy) that kepte cameles that wenten with marchantes for marchandise."

4. JOHN WYCLIF (his name is spelled in about forty different ways)—1324-1384—was born at Hipswell, near Richmond, in Yorkshire, in the year 1324, and died at the vicarage of Lutterworth, in Leicestershire, in 1384. His fame rests on two bases—his efforts as a reformer of the abuses of the Church, and his complete translation of the Bible. This work was finished in 1383, just one year before his death. But the translation was not done by himself alone; the larger part of the Old Testament version seems to have been made by Nicholas de Hereford. Though often copied in manuscript, it was not printed for several centuries. Wyclif's New Testament was printed in 1731, and the Old Testament not until the year 1850. But the words and the style of his translation, which was read and re-read by hundreds of thoughtful men, were of real and permanent service in fixing the language in the form in which we now find it.

5. JOHN GOWER (1325-1408) was a country gentleman of Kent. As Mandeville wrote his travels in three languages, so did Gower his poems. Almost all educated persons in the fourteenth century could read and write with tolerable and with almost equal ease, English, French, and Latin. His three poems are the *Speculum Meditantis* ("The Mirror of the Thoughtful Man"), in French; the *Vox Clamantis* ("Voice of One Crying"), in Latin; and *Confessio Amantis* ("The Lover's Confession"), in English. No manuscript of the first work is known to exist. He was buried in St Saviour's, Southwark, where his effigy is still to be seen—his head resting on his three works. Chaucer called him "the moral Gower"; and his books are very dull, heavy, and difficult to read.

6. WILLIAM LANGLANDE (1332-1400), a poet who used the old English head-rhyme, as Chaucer used the foreign end-rhyme, was born at Cleobury-Mortimer in Shropshire, in the year 1332. The date of his death is doubtful. His poem is called the *Vision of Piers the Plowman*; and it is the last long poem in our literature that was written in Old English alliterative rhyme. From this period, if rhyme is employed at all, it is the end-rhyme, which we borrowed from the French and Italians. The poem has an appendix called *Do-well, Do-bet, Do-best*—the three stages in the growth of a Christian. Langlande's writings remained in manuscript until the reign of Edward VI.; they were printed then, and went through three editions in one year. The English used in the *Vision* is the Midland dialect—much the same as that used by Chaucer; only, oddly enough, Langlande admits into his English a 283 larger amount of French words than Chaucer. The poem is a distinct landmark in the history of our speech. The following is a specimen of the lines. There are three alliterative words in each line, with a pause near the middle—

"A voice loud in that light • to Lucifer criëd,  
'Princes of this palace • prestl6 undo the gatës,  
For here cometh with crown • the king of all glory!"

7. GEOFFREY CHAUCER (1340-1400), the "father of English poetry," and the greatest narrative poet of this country, was born in London in or about the year 1340. He lived in the reigns of Edward III., Richard II., and one year in the reign of Henry IV. His father was a vintner. The name Chaucer is a Norman name, and is found on the roll of Battle Abbey. He is said to have studied both at Oxford and Cambridge; served as page in the household of Prince Lionel, Duke of Clarence, the third son of Edward III.; served also in the army, and was taken prisoner in one of the French campaigns. In 1367, he was appointed gentleman-in-waiting (valetus) to Edward III., who sent him on several embassies. In 1374 he married a lady of the Queen's chamber; and by this marriage he became connected with John of Gaunt, who afterwards married a sister of this lady. While on an embassy to Italy, he is reported to have met the great poet Petrarch, who told him the story of the Patient Griselda. In 1381, he was made Comptroller of Customs in the great port of London—an office which he held till the year 1386. In that year he was elected knight of the shire—that is, member of Parliament for the county of Kent. In 1389, he was appointed Clerk of the King's Works at Westminster and Windsor. From 1381 to 1389 was probably the best and most productive period of his life; for it was in this period that he wrote the *House of Fame*, the *Legend of Good Women*, and the best of the *Canterbury Tales*. From 1390 to 1400 was spent in writing the other *Canterbury Tales*, ballads, and some moral poems. He died at Westminster in the year 1400, and was the first writer who was buried in the Poets' Corner of the Abbey. We see from his life—and it was fortunate for his poetry—that Chaucer had the most varied experience as student, courtier, soldier, ambassador, official, and member of Parliament; and was able to mix freely and on equal terms with all sorts and conditions of men, from the king to the poorest hind in the fields. He was a stout man, with a small bright face, soft eyes, 284 dazed by long and hard reading, and with the English passion for flowers, green fields, and all the sights and sounds of nature.

8. Chaucer's Works.—Chaucer's greatest work is the *Canterbury Tales*. It is a collection of stories written in heroic metre—that is, in the rhymed couplet of five iambic feet. The finest part of the *Canterbury Tales*

is the Prologue; the noblest story is probably the *Knights Tale*. It is worthy of note that, in 1362, when Chaucer was a very young man, the session of the House of Commons was first opened with a speech in English; and in the same year an Act of Parliament was passed, substituting the use of English for French in courts of law, in schools, and in public offices. English had thus triumphed over French in all parts of the country, while it had at the same time become saturated with French words. In the year 1383 the Bible was translated into English by Wyclif. Thus Chaucer, whose writings were called by Spenser "the well of English undefiled," wrote at a time when our English was freshest and newest. The grammar of his works shows English with a large number of inflexions still remaining. The *Canterbury Tales* are a series of stories supposed to be told by a number of pilgrims who are on their way to the shrine of St Thomas (Becket) at Canterbury. The pilgrims, thirty-two in number, are fully described—their dress, look, manners, and character in the Prologue. It had been agreed, when they met at the Tabard Inn in Southwark, that each pilgrim should tell four stories—two going and two returning—as they rode along the grassy lanes, then the only roads, to the old cathedral city. But only four-and-twenty stories exist.

9. Chaucer's Style.—Chaucer expresses, in the truest and liveliest way, "the true and lively of everything which is set before him;" and he first gave to English poetry that force, vigour, life, and colour which raised it above the level of mere rhymed prose. All the best poems and histories in Latin, French, and Italian were well known to Chaucer; and he borrows from them with the greatest freedom. He handles, with masterly power, all the characters and events in his *Tales*; and he is hence, beyond doubt, the greatest narrative poet that England ever produced. In the Prologue, his masterpiece, Dryden says, "we have our forefathers and great-grand-dames all before us, as they were in Chaucer's days." His dramatic power, too, is nearly as great as his narrative power; and Mr Marsh affirms that he was "a dramatist before that which is technically known as the existing drama had been invented." That is to say, he could set men and women talking as they would and did talk in real life, but with more point, spirit, verve, and picturesqueness. As regards the matter of his poems, it may be sufficient to say that 285 Dryden calls him "a perpetual fountain of good sense;" and that Hazlitt makes this remark: "Chaucer was the most practical of all the great poets,—the most a man of business and of the world. His poetry reads like history." Tennyson speaks of him thus in his "Dream of Fair Women":—

"Dan Chaucer, the first warbler, whose sweet breath  
Preluded those melodious bursts that fill  
The spacious times of great Elizabeth,  
With sounds that echo still."

10. JOHN BARBOUR (1316-1396).—The earliest Scottish poet of any importance in the fourteenth century is John Barbour, who rose to be Archdeacon of Aberdeen. Barbour was of Norman blood, and wrote Northern English, or, as it is sometimes called, Scotch. He studied both at Oxford and at the University of Paris. His chief work is a poem called *The Bruce*. The English of this poem does not differ very greatly from the English of Chaucer. Barbour has *fechtand* for fighting; *pressit* for *pressèd*; *theretill* for *thereto*; but these differences do not make the reading of his poem very difficult. As a Norman he was proud of the doings of Robert de Bruce, another Norman; and Barbour must often have heard stories of him in his boyhood, as he was only thirteen when Bruce died.

### CHAPTER III. THE FIFTEENTH CENTURY.

1. The fifteenth century, a remarkable period in many ways, saw three royal dynasties established in England—the Houses of Lancaster, York, and Tudor. Five successful French campaigns of Henry V., and the battle of Agincourt; and, on the other side, the loss of all our large possessions in France, with the exception of Calais, under the rule of the weak Henry VI., were among the chief events of the fifteenth century. The Wars of the Roses did not contribute anything to the prosperity of the century, nor could so unsettled and quarrelsome a time encourage the cultivation of literature. For this among other reasons, we find no great compositions in prose or verse; but a considerable activity in the making and distribution of ballads. The best of these are *Sir Patrick Spens*, *Edom o' Gordon*, *The Nut-Brown Mayde*, and some of those written about Robin Hood and his exploits. The ballad was everywhere popular; and minstrels sang them in every city and village through the length and breadth of England. The famous ballad of *Chevy Chase* is generally placed after the year 1460, though it did not take its present form till the seventeenth century. It tells the story of the Battle of Otterburn, which was fought in 1388. This century was also witness to the short struggle of Richard III., followed by the rise of the House of Tudor. And, in 1498, just

at its close, the wonderful apparition of a new world—of The New World— 287 rose on the horizon of the English mind, for England then first heard of the discovery of America. But, as regards thinking and writing, the fifteenth century is the most barren in our literature. It is the most barren in the production of original literature; but, on the other hand, it is, compared with all the centuries that preceded it, the most fertile in the dissemination and distribution of the literature that already existed. For England saw, in the memorable year of 1474, the establishment of the first printing-press in the Almonry at Westminster, by William Caxton. The first book printed by him in this country was called ‘The Game and Playe of the Chesse.’ When Edward IV. and his friends visited Caxton’s house and looked at his printing-press, they spoke of it as a pretty toy; they could not foresee that it was destined to be a more powerful engine of good government and the spread of thought and education than the Crown, Parliaments, and courts of law all put together. The two greatest names in literature in the fifteenth century are those of James I. (of Scotland) and William Caxton himself. Two followers of Chaucer, Occleve and Lydgate are also generally mentioned. Put shortly, one might say that the chief poetical productions of this century were its ballads; and the chief prose productions, translations from Latin or from foreign works.

2. JAMES I. OF SCOTLAND (1394-1437), though a Scotchman, owed his education to England. He was born in 1394. Whilst on his way to France when a boy of eleven, he was captured, in time of peace, by the order of Henry IV., and kept prisoner in England for about eighteen years. It was no great misfortune, for he received from Henry the best education that England could then give in language, literature, music, and all knightly accomplishments. He married Lady Jane Beaufort, the grand-daughter of John of Gaunt, the friend and patron of Chaucer. His best and longest poem is *The Kings Quair* (that is, *Book*), a poem which was inspired by the subject of it, Lady Jane Beaufort herself. The poem is written in a stanza of seven lines (called *Rime Royal*); and the style is a close copy of the style of Chaucer. After reigning thirteen years in Scotland, King James was murdered at Perth, in the year 1437. A Norman by blood, he is the best poet of the fifteenth century.

3. WILLIAM CAXTON (1422-1492) is the name of greatest importance and significance in the history of our literature in the fifteenth century. He was born in Kent in the year 1422. He was not merely a printer, he was also a literary man; and, when he devoted himself to printing, he took to it as an art, and not as a mere mechanical device. Caxton in early life was a mercer in the city of London; and in the course of his business, which was a thriving one, he had to make frequent journeys to the Low Countries. Here he saw the printing-press for the first time, with the new separate types, was enchanted with it, and fired by the wonderful future it opened. It had been introduced into Holland about the year 1450. Caxton’s press was set up in the Almonry at Westminster, at the sign of the Red Pole. It produced in all sixty-four books, nearly all of them in English, some of them written by Caxton himself. One of the most important of them was Sir Thomas Malory’s *History of King Arthur*, the storehouse from which Tennyson drew the stories which form the groundwork of his *Idylls of the King*.

#### CHAPTER IV.

##### THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY.

1. The Wars of the Roses ended in 1485, with the victory of Bosworth Field. A new dynasty—the House of Tudor—sat upon the throne of England; and with it a new reign of peace and order existed in the country, for the power of the king was paramount, and the power of the nobles had been gradually destroyed in the numerous battles of the fifteenth century. Like the fifteenth, this century also is famous for its ballads, the authors of which are not known, but which seem to have been composed “by the people for the people.” They were sung everywhere, at fairs and feasts, in town and country, at going to and coming home from work; and many of them were set to popular dance-tunes.

“When Tom came home from labour,  
And Cis from milking rose,  
Merrily went the tabor,  
And merrily went their toes.”

The ballads of *King Lear* and *The Babes in the Wood* are perhaps to be referred to this period.

2. The first half of the sixteenth century saw the beginning of a new era in poetry; and the last half saw the full meridian splendour of this new era. The beginning of this era was marked by the appearance of Sir Thomas Wyatt (1503-1542), and of the Earl of Surrey (1517-1547). These two eminent 290 writers have been called the “twin-stars of the dawn,” the “founders of English lyrical poetry”; and it is worthy of especial note, that it is to Wyatt that we owe the introduction of the Sonnet into our literature, and to Surrey that is due the introduction of Blank Verse. The most important prose-writers of the first half of the century

were Sir Thomas More, the great lawyer and statesman, and William Tyndale, who translated the New Testament into English. In the latter half of the century, the great poets are Spenser and Shakespeare; the great prose-writers, Richard Hooker and Francis Bacon.

3. SIR THOMAS MORE'S (1480-1535) chief work in English is the *Life and Reign of Edward V*. It is written in a plain, strong, nervous English style. Hallam calls it "the first example of good English—pure and perspicuous, well chosen, without vulgarisms, and without pedantry." His *Utopia* (a description of the country of Nowhere) was written in Latin.

4. WILLIAM TYNDALE (1484-1536)—a man of the greatest significance, both in the history of religion, and in the history of our language and literature—was a native of Gloucestershire, and was educated at Magdalen Hall, Oxford. His opinions on religion and the rule of the Catholic Church, compelled him to leave England, and drove him to the Continent in the year 1523. He lived in Hamburg for some time. With the German and Swiss reformers he held that the Bible should be in the hands of every grown-up person, and not in the exclusive keeping of the Church. He accordingly set to work to translate the Scriptures into his native tongue. Two editions of his version of the New Testament were printed in 1525-34. He next translated the five books of Moses, and the book of Jonah. In 1535 he was, after many escapes and adventures, finally tracked and hunted down by an emissary of the Pope's faction, and thrown into prison at the castle of Vilvoorde, near Brussels. In 1536 he was brought to Antwerp, tried, condemned, led to the stake, strangled, and burned.

5. *The Work of William Tyndale*.—Tyndale's translation has, since the time of its appearance, formed the basis of all the after versions of the Bible. It is written in the purest and simplest English; and very few of the words used in his translation have grown obsolete in our modern speech. Tyndale's work is indeed, 291 one of the most striking landmarks in the history of our language. Mr Marsh says of it: "Tyndale's translation of the New Testament is the most important philological monument of the first half of the sixteenth century,—perhaps I should say, of the whole period between Chaucer and Shakespeare.... The best features of the translation of 1611 are derived from the version of Tyndale." It may be said without exaggeration that, in the United Kingdom, America, and the colonies, about one hundred millions of people now speak the English of Tyndale's Bible; nor is there any book that has exerted so great an influence on English rhythm, English style, the selection of words, and the build of sentences in our English prose.

6. EDMUND SPENSER (1552-1599), "The Poet's Poet," and one of the greatest poetical writers of his own or of any age, was born at East Smithfield, near the Tower of London, in the year 1552, about nine years before the birth of Bacon, and in the reign of Edward VI. He was educated at Merchant Taylors' School in London, and at Pembroke Hall, Cambridge. In 1579, we find him settled in his native city, where his best friend was the gallant Sir Philip Sidney, who introduced him to his uncle, the Earl of Leicester, then at the height of his power and influence with Queen Elizabeth. In the same year was published his first poetical work, *The Shepheard's Calendar*—a set of twelve pastoral poems. In 1580, he went to Ireland as Secretary to Lord Grey de Wilton, the Viceroy of that country. For some years he resided at Kilcolman Castle, in county Cork, on an estate which had been granted him out of the forfeited lands of the Earl of Desmond. Sir Walter Raleigh had obtained a similar but larger grant, and was Spenser's near neighbour. In 1590 Spenser brought out the first three books of *The Faerie Queene*. The second three books of his great poem appeared in 1596. Towards the end of 1598, a rebellion broke out in Ireland; it spread into Munster; Spenser's house was attacked and set on fire; in the fighting and confusion his only son perished; and Spenser escaped with the greatest difficulty. In deep distress of body and mind, he made his way to London, where he died—at an inn in King Street, Westminster, at the age of forty-six, in the beginning of the year 1599. He was buried in the Abbey, not far from the grave of Chaucer.

7. *Spenser's Style*.—His greatest work is *The Faerie Queene*; but that in which he shows the most striking command of language is his *Hymn of Heavenly Love*. *The Faerie Queene* is written in a nine-lined stanza, which has since been called the Spenserian 292 Stanza. The first eight lines are of the usual length of five iambic feet; the last line contains six feet, and is therefore an Alexandrine. Each stanza contains only three rhymes, which are disposed in this order: a b a b b c b c c.—The music of the stanza is long-drawn out, beautiful, involved, and even luxuriant.—The story of the poem is an allegory, like the 'Pilgrim's Progress'; and in it Spenser undertook, he says, "to represent all the moral virtues, assigning to every virtue a knight to be the patron and defender of the same."<sup>17</sup> Only six books were completed; and these relate the adventures of the knights who stand for Holiness, Temperance, Chastity, Friendship, Justice, and Courtesy. *The Faerie Queene* herself is called Gloriana, who represents Glory in his "general intention," and Queen Elizabeth in his "particular intention."

8. Character of the Faerie Queene.—This poem is the greatest of the sixteenth century. Spenser has not only been the delight of nearly ten generations; he was the study of Shakespeare, the poetical master of Cowley and of Milton, and, in some sense, of Dryden and Pope. Keats, when a boy, was never tired of reading him. “There is something,” says Pope, “in Spenser that pleases one as strongly in old age as it did in one’s youth.” Professor Craik says: “Without calling Spenser the greatest of all poets, we may still say that his poetry is the most poetical of all poetry.” The outburst of national feeling after the defeat of the Armada in 1588; the new lands opened up by our adventurous Devonshire sailors; the strong and lively loyalty of the nation to the queen; the great statesmen and writers of the period; the high daring shown by England against Spain—all these animated and inspired the glowing genius of Spenser. His rhythm is singularly sweet and beautiful. Hazlitt says: “His versification is at once the most smooth and the most sounding in the language. It is a labyrinth of sweet sounds.” Nothing can exceed the wealth of Spenser’s phrasing and expression; there seems to be no limit to its flow. He is very fond of the Old-English practice of alliteration or head-rhyme—“*hunting the letter*,” as it was called. Thus he has—

“In woods, in waves, in wars, she wont to dwell.

Gay without good is good heart’s greatest loathing.”

9. WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE (1564-1616), the greatest dramatist that England ever produced, was born at Stratford-on-Avon, in Warwickshire, on the 23d of April—St George’s Day—of the year 1564. His father, John Shakespeare, was a wool dealer and grower. 293 William was educated at the grammar-school of the town, where he learned “small Latin and less Greek”; and this slender stock was his only scholastic outfit for life. At the early age of eighteen he married Anne Hathaway, a yeoman’s daughter. In 1586, at the age of twenty-two, he quitted his native town, and went to London.

10. Shakespeare’s Life and Character.—He was employed in some menial capacity at the Blackfriars Theatre, but gradually rose to be actor and also adapter of plays. He was connected with the theatre for about five-and-twenty years; and so diligent and so successful was he, that he was able to purchase shares both in his own theatre and in the Globe. As an actor, he was only second-rate: the two parts he is known to have played are those of the Ghost in Hamlet, and Adam in As You Like It. In 1597, at the early age of thirty-three, he was able to purchase New Place, in Stratford, and to rebuild the house. In 1612, at the age of forty-eight, he left London altogether, and retired for the rest of his life to New Place, where he died in the year 1616. His old father and mother spent the last years of their lives with him, and died under his roof. Shakespeare had three children—two girls and a boy. The boy, Hamnet, died at the age of twelve. Shakespeare himself was beloved by every one who knew him; and “gentle Shakespeare” was the phrase most often upon the lips of his friends. A placid face, with a sweet, mild expression; a high, broad, noble, “two-storey” forehead; bright eyes; a most speaking mouth—though it seldom opened; an open, frank manner, a kindly, handsome look,—such seems to have been the external character of the man Shakespeare.

11. Shakespeare’s Works.—He has written thirty-seven plays and many poems. The best of his rhymed poems are his Sonnets, in which he chronicles many of the various moods of his mind. The plays consist of tragedies, historical plays, and comedies. The greatest of his tragedies are probably Hamlet and King Lear; the best of his historical plays, Richard III. and Julius Cæsar; and his finest comedies, *Midsummer Night’s Dream* and *As You Like It*. He wrote in the reign of Elizabeth as well as in that of James; but his greatest works belong to the latter period.

12. Shakespeare’s Style.—Every one knows that Shakespeare is great; but how is the young learner to discover the best way of forming an adequate idea of his greatness? In the first place, Shakespeare has very many sides; and, in the second place, he is great on every one of them. Coleridge says: “In all points, from the most important to the most minute, the judgment of Shakespeare 294 is commensurate with his genius—nay, his genius reveals itself in his judgment, as in its most exalted form.” He has been called “mellifluous Shakespeare;” “honey-tongued Shakespeare;” “silver-tongued Shakespeare;” “the thousand-souled Shakespeare;” “the myriad-minded;” and by many other epithets. He seems to have been master of all human experience; to have known the human heart in all its phases; to have been acquainted with all sorts and conditions of men—high and low, rich and poor; and to have studied the history of past ages, and of other countries. He also shows a greater and more highly skilled mastery over language than any other writer that ever lived. The vocabulary employed by Shakespeare amounts in number of words to twenty-one thousand. The vocabulary of Milton numbers only seven thousand words. But it is not sufficient to say that Shakespeare’s power of thought, of feeling, and of expression required three times the number of words to express itself; we must also say that Shakespeare’s power of expression shows infinitely greater skill, subtlety, and cunning than is to be found in the works of Milton. Shakespeare had also a marvellous



power of making new phrases, most of which have become part and parcel of our language. Such phrases as every inch a king; witch the world; the time is out of joint, and hundreds more, show that modern Englishmen not only speak Shakespeare, but think Shakespeare. His knowledge of human nature has enabled him to throw into English literature a larger number of genuine “characters” that will always live in the thoughts of men, than any other author that ever wrote. And he has not drawn his characters from England alone and from his own time—but from Greece and Rome, from other countries, too, and also from all ages. He has written in a greater variety of styles than any other writer. “Shakespeare,” says Professor Craik, “has invented twenty styles.” The knowledge, too, that he shows on every kind of human endeavour is as accurate as it is varied. Lawyers say that he was a great lawyer; theologians, that he was an able divine, and unequalled in his knowledge of the Bible; printers, that he must have been a printer; and seamen, that he knew every branch of the sailor’s craft.

13. Shakespeare’s contemporaries.—But we are not to suppose that Shakespeare stood alone in the end of the sixteenth and the beginning of the seventeenth century as a great poet; and that everything else was flat and low around him. This never is and never can be the case. Great genius is the possession, not of one man, but of several in a great age; and we do not find a great writer standing alone and unsupported, just as we do not find a high mountain rising 295 from a low plain. The largest group of the highest mountains in the world, the Himalayas, rise from the highest table-land in the world; and peaks nearly as high as the highest—Mount Everest—are seen cleaving the blue sky in the neighbourhood of Mount Everest itself. And so we find Shakespeare surrounded by dramatists in some respects nearly as great as himself; for the same great forces welling up within the heart of England that made him created also the others. Marlowe, the teacher of Shakespeare, Peele, and Greene, preceded him; Ben Jonson, Beaumont and Fletcher, Massinger and Ford, Webster, Chapman, and many others, were his contemporaries, lived with him, talked with him; and no doubt each of these men influenced the work of the others. But the works of these men belong chiefly to the seventeenth century. We must not, however, forget that the reign of Queen Elizabeth—called in literature the Elizabethan Period—was the greatest that England ever saw,—greatest in poetry and in prose, greatest in thought and in action, perhaps also greatest in external events.

14. CHRISTOPHER MARLOWE (1564-1593), the first great English dramatist, was born at Canterbury in the year 1564, two months before the birth of Shakespeare himself. He studied at Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, and took the degree of Master of Arts in 1587. After leaving the university, he came up to London and wrote for the stage. He seems to have led a wild and reckless life, and was stabbed in a tavern brawl on the 1st of June 1593. “As he may be said to have invented and made the verse of the drama, so he created the English drama.” His chief plays are *Dr Faustus* and *Edward the Second*. His style is one of the greatest vigour and power: it is often coarse, but it is always strong. Ben Jonson spoke of “Marlowe’s mighty line”; and Lord Jeffrey says of him: “In felicity of thought and strength of expression, he is second only to Shakespeare himself.”

15. BEN JONSON (1574-1637), the greatest dramatist of England after Shakespeare, was born in Westminster in the year 1574, just nine years after Shakespeare’s birth. He received his education at Westminster School. It is said that, after leaving school, he was obliged to assist his stepfather as a bricklayer; that he did not like the work; and that he ran off to the Low Countries, and there enlisted as a soldier. On his return to London, he began to write for the stage. Jonson was a friend and companion of Shakespeare’s; and at the Mermaid, in Fleet Street, they had, in presence of men like Raleigh, Marlowe, Greene, Peele, and other distinguished Englishmen, many “wit-combats” together. Jonson’s greatest plays are *Volpone* or *the Fox*, and *the Alchemist*—both comedies. In 1616 he was created Poet-Laureate. For many years he was in receipt of a pension from James I. and from Charles I.; but so careless and profuse were his habits, that he died in poverty in the year 1637. He was buried in an upright position in Westminster Abbey; and the stone over his grave still bears the inscription, “O rare Ben Jonson!” He has been called a “robust, surly, and observing dramatist.”

16. RICHARD HOOKER (1553-1600), one of the greatest of Elizabethan prose-writers, was born at Heavitree, a village near the city of Exeter, in the year 1553. By the kind aid of Jewel, Bishop of Salisbury, he was sent to Oxford, where he distinguished himself as a hard-working student, and especially for his knowledge of Hebrew. In 1581 he entered the Church. In the same year he made an imprudent marriage with an ignorant, coarse, vulgar, and domineering woman. He was appointed Master of the Temple in 1585; but, by his own request, he was removed from that office, and chose the quieter living of Boscombe, near Salisbury. Here he wrote the first four books of his famous work, *The Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*, which were published in the year 1594. In 1595 he was translated to the living of Bishopsborne, near

Canterbury. His death took place in the year 1600. The complete work, which consisted of eight books, was not published till 1662.

17. Hooker's Style.—His writings are said to "mark an era in English prose." His sentences are generally very long, very elaborate, but full of "an extraordinary musical richness of language." The order is often more like that of a Latin than of an English sentence; and he is fond of Latin inversions. Thus he writes: "That which by wisdom he saw to be requisite for that people, was by as great wisdom compassed." The following sentences give us a good example of his sweet and musical rhythm. "Of law there can be no less acknowledged, than that her seat is the bosom of God, her voice the harmony of the world. All things in heaven and earth do her homage; the very least as feeling her care, and the greatest as not exempted from her power: both angels and men, and creatures of what condition soever, though each in different sort and manner, yet all, with uniform consent, admiring her as the mother of their peace and joy."

18. SIR PHILIP SIDNEY (1554-1586), a noble knight, a statesman, and one of the best prose-writers of the Elizabethan age, was born at Penshurst, in Kent, in the year 1554. He was educated at Shrewsbury School, and then at Christ Church, Oxford. At the age of seventeen he went abroad for three years' travel on the Continent; and, while in Paris, witnessed, from the windows of the English Embassy, the horrible Massacre of St Bartholomew in the year 1572. At the early age of twenty-two he was sent as ambassador to the Emperor of Germany; and while on that embassy, he met William of Orange—"William the Silent"—who pronounced him one of the ripest statesmen in Europe. This was said of a young man "who seems to have been the type of what was noblest in the youth of England during times that could produce a statesman." In 1580 he wrote the *Arcadia*, a romance, and dedicated it to his sister, the Countess of Pembroke. The year after, he produced his *Apologie for Poetrie*. His policy as a statesman was to side with Protestant rulers, and to break the power of the strongest Catholic kingdom on the Continent—the power of Spain. In 1585 the Queen sent him to the Netherlands as governor of the important fortress of Flushing. He was mortally wounded in a skirmish at Zutphen; and as he was being carried off the field, handed to a private the cup of cold water that had been brought to quench his raging thirst. He died of his wounds on the 17th of October 1586. One of his friends wrote of him:—

"Death, courage, honour, make thy soul to live!—

Thy soul in heaven, thy name in tongues of men!"

19. Sidney's Poetry.—In addition to the *Arcadia* and the *Apologie for Poetrie*, Sidney wrote a number of beautiful poems. The best of these are a series of sonnets called *Astrophel and Stella*, of which his latest critic says: "As a series of sonnets, the *Astrophel and Stella* poems are second only to Shakespeare's; as a series of love-poems, they are perhaps unsurpassed." Spenser wrote an elegy upon Sidney himself, under the title of *Astrophel*. Sidney's prose is among the best of the sixteenth century. "He reads more modern than any other author of that century." He does not use "ink-horn terms," or cram his sentences with Latin or French or Italian words; but both his words and his idioms are of pure English. He is fond of using personifications. Such phrases as, "About the time that the candles began to inherit the sun's office;" "Seeing the day begin to disclose her comfortable beauties," are not uncommon. The rhythm of his sentences is always melodious, and each of them has a very pleasant close.

## CHAPTER V.

### THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY.

1. The First Half.—Under the wise and able rule of Queen Elizabeth, this country had enjoyed a long term of peace. The Spanish Armada had been defeated in 1588; the Spanish power had gradually waned before the growing might of England; and it could be said with perfect truth, in the words of Shakespeare:—

"In her days every man doth eat in safety

Under his own vine what he plants, and sing

The merry songs of peace to all his neighbours."

The country was at peace; and every peaceful art and pursuit prospered. As one sign of the great prosperity and outstretching enterprise of commerce, we should note the foundation of the East India Company on the last day of the year 1600. The reign of James I. (1603-1625) was also peaceful; and the country made steady progress in industries, in commerce, and in the arts and sciences. The two greatest prose-writers of the first half of the seventeenth century were Raleigh and Bacon; the two greatest poets were Shakespeare and Ben Jonson.

2. SIR WALTER RALEIGH (1552-1618).—Walter Raleigh, soldier, statesman, coloniser, historian, and poet, was born in Devonshire, in the year 1552. He was sent to Oriel College, Oxford; but he left at the

early age of seventeen to fight on the side of the Protestants in France. From that time his life is one long series of schemes, plots, adventures, and misfortunes—culminating in his execution at Westminster in the year 1618. He spent “the evening of a tempestuous life” in the Tower, where he lay for thirteen years; and during this imprisonment he wrote his greatest work, the *History of the World*, which was never finished. His life and adventures belong to the sixteenth; his works to the seventeenth century. Raleigh was probably the most dazzling figure of his time; and is “in a singular degree the representative of the vigorous versatility of the Elizabethan period.” Spenser, whose neighbour he was for some time in Ireland, thought highly of his poetry, calls him “the summer’s nightingale,” and says of him—

“Yet æmuling<sup>18</sup> my song, he took in hand  
My pipe, before that æmulèd of many,  
And played thereon (for well that skill he conn’d),  
Himself as skilful in that art as any.”

Raleigh is the author of the celebrated verses, “Go, soul, the body’s guest;” “Give me my scallop-shell of quiet;” and of the lines which were written and left in his Bible on the night before he was beheaded:—

“Even such is time, that takes in trust  
Our youth, our joys, our all we have,  
And pays us but with age and dust;  
Who, in the dark and silent grave,  
When we have wandered all our ways,  
Shuts up the story of our days:  
But from this earth, this grave, this dust,  
The Lord shall raise me up, I trust!”

Raleigh’s prose has been described as “some of the most flowing and modern-looking prose of the period;” and there can be no doubt that, if he had given himself entirely to literature, he would have been one of the greatest poets and prose-writers of his time. His style is calm, noble, and melodious. The following is the last sentence of the *History of the World*:—

“O eloquent, just, and mighty Death! whom none could advise, thou hast persuaded; what none hath dared, thou hast done; and whom all the world hath flattered, thou only hast cast out of the world and despised; thou hast drawn together all the far-stretched greatness, all the pride, cruelty, and ambition of man, and covered it all over with these two narrow words *Hic jacet*.”

3. FRANCIS BACON (1561-1626), one of the greatest of English thinkers, and one of our best prose-writers, was born at York House, 300 in the Strand, London, in the year 1561. He was a grave and precocious child; and Queen Elizabeth, who knew him and liked him, used to pat him and call him her “young Lord Keeper”—his father being Lord Keeper of the Seals in her reign. At the early age of twelve he was sent to Trinity College, Cambridge, and remained there for three years. In 1582 he was called to the bar; in 1593 he was M.P. for Middlesex. But his greatest rise in fortune did not take place till the reign of James I.; when, in the year 1618, he had risen to be Lord High Chancellor of England. The title which he took on this occasion—for the Lord High Chancellor is chairman of the House of Lords—was Baron Verulam; and a few years after he was created Viscount St Albans. His eloquence was famous in England; and Ben Jonson said of him: “The fear of every man that heard him was lest he should make an end.” In the year 1621 he was accused of taking bribes, and of giving unjust decisions as a judge. He had not really been unconscientious, but he had been careless; was obliged to plead guilty; and he was sentenced to pay a fine of £40,000, and to be imprisoned in the Tower during the king’s pleasure. The fine was remitted; Bacon was set free in two days; a pension was allowed him; but he never afterwards held office of any kind. He died on Easter-day of the year 1626, of a chill which he caught while experimenting on the preservative properties of snow.

4. His chief prose-works in English—for he wrote many in Latin—are the *Essays*, and the *Advancement of Learning*. His *Essays* make one of the wisest books ever written; and a great number of English thinkers owe to them the best of what they have had to say. They are written in a clear, forcible, pithy, and picturesque style, with short sentences, and a good many illustrations, drawn from history, politics, and science. It is true that the style is sometimes stiff, and even rigid; but the stiffness is the stiffness of a richly embroidered cloth, into which threads of gold and silver have been worked. Bacon kept what he called a *Promus* or *Commonplace-Book*; and in this he entered striking thoughts, sentences, and phrases that he met with in the course of his reading, or that occurred to him during the day. He calls these sentences “salt-pits, that you may extract salt out of, and sprinkle as you will.” The following are a few examples:—

“That that is Forced is not Forcible.”

“No Man loveth his Fetters though they be of Gold.”

“Clear and Round Dealing is the Honour of Man’s Nature.”

“The Arch-flatterer, with whom all the petty Flatterers have intelligence, is a Man’s Self.”

301 “If Things be not tossed upon the Arguments of Counsell, they will be tossed upon the Waves of Fortune.”

The following are a few striking sentences from his Essays:—

“Virtue is like a rich stone, best plain set.”

“A man’s nature runs either to herbs or weeds; therefore, let him seasonably water the one, and destroy the other.”

“A crowd is not company, and faces are but a gallery of pictures, and talk but a tinkling cymbal, when there is no love.”

No man could say wiser things in pithier words; and we may well say of his thoughts, in the words of Tennyson, that they are—

“Jewels, five words long,

That on the stretched forefinger of all time  
Sparkle for ever.”

5. WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE (1564-1616) has been already treated of in the chapter on the sixteenth century. But it may be noted here that his first two periods—as they are called—fall within the sixteenth, and his last two periods within the seventeenth century. His first period lies between 1591 and 1596; and to it are ascribed his early poems, his play of Richard II., and some other historical plays. His second period, which stretches from 1596 to 1601 holds the Sonnets, the Merchant of Venice, the Merry Wives of Windsor, and a few historical dramas. But his third and fourth periods were richer in production, and in greater productions. The third period, which belongs to the years 1601 to 1608, produced the play of Julius Cæsar, the great tragedies of Hamlet, Othello, Lear, Macbeth, and some others. To the fourth period, which lies between 1608 and 1613, belong the calmer and wiser dramas,—Winter’s Tale, The Tempest, and Henry VIII. Three years after—in 1616—he died.

6. The Second Half.—The second half of the great and unique seventeenth century was of a character very different indeed from that of the first half. The Englishmen born into it had to face a new world! New thoughts in religion, new forces in politics, new powers in social matters had been slowly, steadily, and irresistibly rising into supremacy ever since the Scottish King James came to take his seat upon the throne of England in 1603. These new forces had, in fact, become so strong that they led a king to the scaffold, and handed over the government of England to a section of Republicans. Charles I. was executed in 1649; and, though his son came back to the throne in 1660, the face, the manners, the thoughts of England and of Englishmen had undergone a complete internal and external change. The Puritan party was everywhere the ruling party; and its views and convictions, in religion, in politics, and in literature, held unquestioned sway in almost every part of England. In the Puritan party, the strongest section was formed by the Independents—the “root and branch men”—as they were called; and the greatest man among the Independents was Oliver Cromwell, in whose government John Milton was Foreign Secretary. Milton was certainly by far the greatest and most powerful writer, both in prose and in verse, on the side of the Puritan party. The ablest verse-writer on the Royalist or Court side was Samuel Butler, the unrivalled satirist—the Hogarth of language,—the author of Hudibras. The greatest prose-writer on the Royalist and Church side was Jeremy Taylor, Bishop of Down, in Ireland, and the author of Holy Living, Holy Dying, and many other works written with a wonderful eloquence. The greatest philosophical writer was Thomas Hobbes, the author of the Leviathan. The most powerful writer for the people was John Bunyan, the immortal author of The Pilgrim’s Progress. When, however, we come to the reigns of Charles II. and James II., and the new influences which their rule and presence imparted, we find the greatest poet to be John Dryden, and the most important prose-writer, John Locke.

7. The Poetry of the Second Half.—The poetry of the second half of the seventeenth century was not an outgrowth or lineal descendant of the poetry of the first half. No trace of the strong Elizabethan poetical emotion remained; no writer of this half-century can claim kinship with the great authors of the Elizabethan period. The three most remarkable poets in the latter half of this century are John Milton, Samuel Butler, and John Dryden. But Milton’s culture was derived chiefly from the great Greek and Latin writers; and his poems show few or no signs of belonging to any age or generation in particular of English literature. Butler’s poem, the Hudibras, is the only one of its kind; and if its author owes anything to other writers, it is to France and not to England that we must look for its sources. Dryden, again, shows no sign of being

related to Shakespeare or the dramatic writers of the early part of the century; he is separated from them by a great gulf; he owes most, when he owes anything, to the French school of poetry.

8. JOHN MILTON (1608-1674), the second greatest name in English poetry, and the greatest of all our epic poets, was born in Bread Street, Cheapside, London, in the year 1608—five years after the accession of James I. to the throne, and eight years before the death of Shakespeare. He was educated at St Paul's School, and then at Christ's College, Cambridge. He was so handsome—with a delicate complexion, clear blue eyes, and light-brown hair flowing down his shoulders—that he was known as the “Lady of Christ's.” He was destined for the Church; but, being early seized with a strong desire to compose a great poetical work which should bring honour to his country and to the English tongue, he gave up all idea of becoming a clergyman. Filled with his secret purpose, he retired to Horton, in Buckinghamshire, where his father had bought a small country seat. Between the years 1632 and 1638 he studied all the best Greek and Latin authors, mathematics, and science; and he also wrote *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*, *Comus*, *Lycidas*, and some shorter poems. These were preludes, or exercises, towards the great poetical work which it was the mission of his life to produce. In 1638-39 he took a journey to the Continent. Most of his time was spent in Italy; and, when in Florence, he paid a visit to Galileo in prison. It had been his intention to go on to Greece; but the troubled state of politics at home brought him back sooner than he wished. The next ten years of his life were engaged in teaching and in writing his prose works. His ideas on teaching are to be found in his *Tractate on Education*. The most eloquent of his prose-works is his *Areopagitica*, a *Speech for the Liberty of Unlicensed Printing* (1644)—a plea for the freedom of the press, for relieving all writings from the criticism of censors. In 1649—the year of the execution of Charles I.—Milton was appointed Latin or Foreign Secretary to the Government of Oliver Cromwell; and for the next ten years his time was taken up with official work, and with writing prose-volumes in defence of the action of the 304 Republic. In 1660 the Restoration took place; and Milton was at length free, in his fifty-third year, to carry out his long-cherished scheme of writing a great Epic poem. He chose the subject of the fall and the restoration of man. *Paradise Lost* was completed in 1665; but, owing to the Plague and the Fire of London, it was not published till the year 1667. Milton's young Quaker friend, Ellwood, said to him one day: “Thou hast said much of *Paradise Lost*, what hast thou to say of *Paradise Found*?” *Paradise Regained* was the result—a work which was written in 1666, and appeared, along with *Samson Agonistes*, in the year 1671. Milton died in the year 1674—about the middle of the reign of Charles II. He had been three times married.

9. *L'Allegro* (or “*The Cheerful Man*”) is a companion poem to *Il Penseroso* (or “*The Meditative Man*”). The poems present two contrasted views of the life of the student. They are written in an irregular kind of octosyllabic verse. The *Comus*—mostly in blank verse—is a lyrical drama; and Milton's work was accompanied by a musical composition by the then famous musician Henry Lawes. *Lycidas*—a poem in irregular rhymed verse—is a threnody on the death of Milton's young friend, Edward King, who was drowned in sailing from Chester to Dublin. This poem has been called “the touchstone of taste;” the man who cannot admire it has no feeling for true poetry. The *Paradise Lost* is the story of how Satan was allowed to plot against the happiness of man; and how Adam and Eve fell through his designs. The style is the noblest in the English language; the music of the rhythm is lofty, involved, sustained, and sublime. “In reading ‘*Paradise Lost*,’” says Mr Lowell, “one has a feeling of spaciousness such as no other poet gives.” *Paradise Regained* is, in fact, the story of the Temptation, and of Christ's triumph over the wiles of Satan. Wordsworth says: “‘*Paradise Regained*’ is most perfect in execution of any written by Milton;” and Coleridge remarks that “it is in its kind the most perfect poem extant, though its kind may be inferior in interest.” *Samson Agonistes* (“*Samson in Struggle*”) is a drama, in highly irregular unrhymed verse, in which the poet sets forth his own unhappy fate—

“Eyeless, in Gaza, at the mill with slaves.”

It is, indeed, an autobiographical poem—it is the story of the last years of the poet's life.

10. SAMUEL BUTLER (1612-1680), the wittiest of English poets, was born at Strensham, in Worcestershire, in the year 1612, four years 305 after the birth of Milton, and four years before the death of Shakespeare. He was educated at the grammar-school of Worcester, and afterwards at Cambridge—but only for a short time. At the Restoration he was made secretary to the Earl of Carbery, who was then President of the Principality of Wales, and steward of Ludlow Castle. The first part of his long poem called *Hudibras* appeared in 1662; the second part in 1663; the third in 1678. Two years after, Butler died in the greatest poverty in London. He was buried in St Paul's, Covent Garden; but a monument was erected to him in Westminster Abbey. Upon this fact Wesley wrote the following epigram:—

“While Butler, needy wretch, was yet alive,

No generous patron would a dinner give;

See him, when starved to death, and turned to dust,  
Presented with a monumental bust.  
The poet's fate is here in emblem shown,—  
He asked for bread, and he received a stone.”

11. The *Hudibras* is a burlesque poem,—a long lampoon, a laboured caricature,—in mockery of the weaker side of the great Puritan party. It is an imaginary account of the adventures of a Puritan knight and his squire in the Civil Wars. It is choke-full of all kinds of learning, of the most pungent remarks—a very hoard of sentences and saws, “of vigorous locutions and picturesque phrases, of strong, sound sense, and robust English.” It has been more quoted from than almost any book in our language. Charles II. was never tired of reading it and quoting from it—

“He never ate, nor drank, nor slept,  
But *Hudibras* still near him kept”—  
says Butler himself.

The following are some of his best known lines:—

“And, like a lobster boil'd, the morn  
From black to red began to turn.”

“For loyalty is still the same,  
Whether it win or lose the game:

True as the dial to the sun,  
Altho' it be not shin'd upon.”

“He that complies against his will,  
Is of his own opinion still.”

12. JOHN DRYDEN (1631-1700), the greatest of our poets in the second rank, was born at Aldwinckle, in Northamptonshire, in the 306 year 1631. He was descended from Puritan ancestors on both sides of his house. He was educated at Westminster School, and at Trinity College, Cambridge. London became his settled abode in the year 1657. At the Restoration, in 1660, he became an ardent Royalist; and, in the year 1663, he married the daughter of a Royalist nobleman, the Earl of Berkshire. It was not a happy marriage; the lady, on the one hand, had a violent temper, and, on the other, did not care a straw for the literary pursuits of her husband. In 1666 he wrote his first long poem, the *Annus Mirabilis* (“The Wonderful Year”), in which he paints the war with Holland, and the Fire of London; and from this date his life is “one long literary labour.” In 1670, he received the double appointment of Historiographer-Royal and Poet-Laureate. Up to the year 1681, his work lay chiefly in writing plays for the theatre; and these plays were written in rhymed verse, in imitation of the French plays; for, from the date of the Restoration, French influence was paramount both in literature and in fashion. But in this year he published the first part of *Absalom and Achitophel*—one of the most powerful satires in the language. In the year 1683 he was appointed Collector of Customs in the port of London—a post which Chaucer had held before him. (It is worthy of note that Dryden “translated” the *Tales of Chaucer* into modern English.) At the accession of James II., in 1685, Dryden became a Roman Catholic; most certainly neither for gain nor out of gratitude, but from conviction. In 1687, appeared his poem of *The Hind and the Panther*, in which he defends his new creed. He had, a few years before, brought out another poem called *Religio Laici* (“A Layman's Faith”), which was a defence of the Church of England and of her position in religion. In *The Hind and the Panther*, the Hind represents the Roman Catholic Church, “a milk-white hind, unspotted and unchanged,” the Panther the Church of England; and the two beasts reply to each other in all the arguments used by controversialists on these two sides. When the Revolution of 1688 took place, and James II. had to flee the kingdom, Dryden lost both his offices and the pension he had from the Crown. Nothing daunted, he set to work once more. Again he wrote for the stage; but the last years of his life were spent chiefly in translation. He translated passages from Homer, Ovid, and from some Italian writers; but his most important work was the translation of the whole of Virgil's *Æneid*. To the last he retained his fire and vigour, action and rush of verse; and some of his greatest lyric poems belong to his later years. His ode called *Alexander's Feast* was written at the age of sixty-six; and it was written at one sitting. At the age of sixty-nine he was meditating a 307 translation of the whole of Homer—both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. He died at his house in London, on May-day of 1700, and was buried with great pomp and splendour in Poets' Corner in Westminster Abbey.

13. His best satire is the *Absalom and Achitophel*; his best specimen of reasoning in verse is *The Hind and the Panther*. His best ode is his *Ode to the Memory of Mrs Anne Killigrew*. Dryden's style is distinguished by its power, sweep, vigour, and “long majestic march.” No one has handled the heroic couplet—and it was this form of verse that he chiefly used—with more vigour than Dryden; Pope was more correct, more

sparkling, more finished, but he had not Dryden's magnificent march or sweeping impulsiveness. "The fire and spirit of the 'Annus Mirabilis,'" says his latest critic, "are nothing short of amazing, when the difficulties which beset the author are remembered. The glorious dash of the performance is his own." His prose, though full of faults, is also very vigorous. It has "something of the lightning zigzag vigour and splendour of his verse." He always writes clear, homely, and pure English,—full of force and point.

Many of his most pithy lines are often quoted:—

"Men are but children of a larger growth."

"Errors, like straws, upon the surface flow;  
He that would search for pearls must dive below."

"The greatest argument for love is love."

"The secret pleasure of the generous act,  
Is the great mind's great bribe."

The great American critic and poet, Mr Lowell, compares him to "an ostrich, to be classed with flying things, and capable, what with leap and flap together, of leaving the earth for a longer or a shorter space, but loving the open plain, where wing and foot help each other to something that is both flight and run at once."

14. JEREMY TAYLOR (1613-1667), the greatest master of ornate and musical English prose in his own day, was born at Cambridge in the year 1613—just three years before Shakespeare died. His father was a barber. After attending the free grammar-school of Cambridge, he proceeded to the University. He took holy orders and removed to London. When he was lecturing one day at St Paul's, Archbishop Laud was so taken by his "youthful beauty, pleasant air," fresh eloquence, and exuberant style, that he had him created 308 a Fellow of All Souls' College, Oxford. When the Civil War broke out, he was taken prisoner by the Parliamentary forces; and, indeed, suffered imprisonment more than once. After the Restoration, he was presented with a bishopric in Ireland, where he died in 1667.

15. Perhaps his best works are his *Holy Living* and *Holy Dying*. His style is rich, even to luxury, full of the most imaginative illustrations, and often overloaded with ornament. He has been called "the Shakespeare of English prose," "the Spenser of divinity," and by other appellations. The latter title is a very happy description; for he has the same wealth of style, phrase, and description that Spenser has, and the same boundless delight in setting forth his thoughts in a thousand different ways. The following is a specimen of his writing. He is speaking of a shipwreck:—

"These are the thoughts of mortals, this is the end and sum of all their designs. A dark night and an ill guide, a boisterous sea and a broken cable, a hard rock and a rough wind, dash in pieces the fortune of a whole family; and they that shall weep loudest for the accident are not yet entered into the storm, and yet have suffered shipwreck."

His writings contain many pithy statements. The following are a few of them:—

"No man is poor that does not think himself so."

"He that spends his time in sport and calls it recreation, is like him whose garment is all made of fringe, and his meat nothing but sauce.."

"A good man is as much in awe of himself as of a whole assembly."

16. THOMAS HOBBES (1588-1679), a great philosopher, was born at Malmesbury in the year 1588. He is hence called "the philosopher of Malmesbury." He lived during the reigns of four English sovereigns—Elizabeth, James I., Charles I., and Charles II.; and he was twenty-eight years of age when Shakespeare died. He is in many respects the type of the hard-working, long-lived, persistent Englishman. He was for many years tutor in the Devonshire family—to the first Earl of Devonshire, and to the third Earl of Devonshire—and lived for several years at the family seat of Chatsworth. In his youth he was acquainted with Bacon and Ben Jonson; in his middle age he knew Galileo in Italy; and as he lived to the age of ninety-two, he might have conversed with John Locke or with Daniel Defoe. His greatest work is the *Leviathan*; or, *The Matter, Form, and Power of a Commonwealth*. His style is clear, manly, and vigorous. He tried to write poetry too. At 309 the advanced age of eighty-five, he wrote a translation of the whole of Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* into rhymed English verse, using the same quatrain and the same measure that Dryden employed in his 'Annus Mirabilis.' Two lines are still remembered of this translation: speaking of a child and his mother, he says—

"And like a star upon her bosom lay  
His beautiful and shining golden head."

17. JOHN BUNYAN (1628-1688), one of the most popular of our prose-writers, was born at Elstow, in Bedfordshire, in the year 1628—just three years before the birth of Dryden. He served, when a young man,

with the Parliamentary forces, and was present at the siege of Leicester. At the Restoration, he was apprehended for preaching, in disobedience to the Conventicle Act, "was had home to prison, and there lay complete twelve years." Here he supported himself and his family by making tagged laces and other small-wares; and here, too, he wrote the immortal *Pilgrim's Progress*. After his release, he became pastor of the Baptist congregation at Bedford. He had a great power of bringing persons who had quarrelled together again; and he was so popular among those who knew him, that he was generally spoken of as "Bishop Bunyan." On a journey, undertaken to reconcile an estranged father and a rebellious son, he caught a severe cold, and died of fever in London, in the year 1688. Every one has read, or will read, the *Pilgrim's Progress*; and it may be said, without exaggeration, that to him who has not read the book, a large part of English life and history is dumb and unintelligible. Bunyan has been called the "Spenser of the people," and "the greatest master of allegory that ever lived." His power of imagination is something wonderful; and his simple, homely, and vigorous style makes everything so real, that we seem to be reading a narrative of everyday events and conversations. His vocabulary is not, as Macaulay said, "the vocabulary of the common people;" rather should we say that his English is the English of the Bible and of the best religious writers. His style is, almost everywhere, simple, homely, earnest, and vernacular—without being vulgar. Bunyan's books have, along with Shakespeare and Tyndale's works, been among the chief supports of an idiomatic, nervous, and simple English.

18. JOHN LOCKE (1632-1704), a great English philosopher, was born at Wrington, near Bristol, in the year 1632. He was educated 310 at Oxford; but he took little interest in the Greek and Latin classics, his chief studies lying in medicine and the physical sciences. He became attached to the famous Lord Shaftesbury, under whom he filled several public offices—among others, that of Commissioner of Trade. When Shaftesbury was obliged to flee to Holland, Locke followed him, and spent several years in exile in that country. All his life a very delicate man, he yet, by dint of great care and thoughtfulness, contrived to live to the age of seventy-two. His two most famous works are *Some Thoughts concerning Education*, and the celebrated *Essay on the Human Understanding*. The latter, which is his great work, occupied his time and thoughts for eighteen years. In both these books, Locke exhibits the very genius of common-sense. The purpose of education is, in his opinion, not to make learned men, but to maintain "a sound mind in a sound body;" and he begins the education of the future man even from his cradle. In his philosophical writings, he is always simple; but, as he is loose and vacillating in his use of terms, this simplicity is often purchased at the expense of exactness and self-consistency.

## **CHAPTER VI.**

### **THE FIRST HALF OF THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY.**

1. The Age of Prose.—The eighteenth century was an age of prose in two senses. In the first place, it was a prosaic age; and, in the second place, better prose than poetry was produced by its writers. One remarkable fact may also be noted about the chief prose-writers of this century—and that is, that they were, most of them, not merely able writers, not merely distinguished literary men, but also men of affairs—men well versed in the world and in matters of the highest practical moment, while some were also statesmen holding high office. Thus, in the first half of the century, we find Addison, Swift, and Defoe either holding office or influencing and guiding those who held office; while, in the latter half, we have men like Burke, Hume, and Gibbon, of whom the same, or nearly the same, can be said. The poets, on the contrary, of this eighteenth century, are all of them—with the very slightest exceptions—men who devoted most of their lives to poetry, and had little or nothing to do with practical matters. It may also be noted here that the character of the eighteenth century becomes more and more prosaic as it goes on—less and less under the influence of the spirit of poetry, until, about the close, a great reaction makes itself felt in the persons of Cowper, Chatterton, and Burns, of Crabbe and Wordsworth.

2. The First Half.—The great prose-writers of the first half of the eighteenth century are Addison and Steele, Swift and 312 Defoe. All of these men had some more or less close connection with the rise of journalism in England; and one of them, Defoe, was indeed the founder of the modern newspaper. By far the most powerful intellect of these four was Swift. The greatest poets of the first half of the eighteenth century were Pope, Thomson, Collins, and Gray. Pope towers above all of them by a head and shoulders, because he was much more fertile than any, and because he worked so hard and so untiringly at the labour of the file—at the task of polishing and improving his verses. But the vein of poetry in the three others—and more especially in Collins—was much more pure and genuine than it was in Pope at any time of his life—at any period of his writing. Let us look at each of these writers a little more closely.



3. DANIEL DEFOE (1661-1731), one of the most fertile writers that England ever saw, and one who has been the delight of many generations of readers, was born in the city of London in the year 1661. He was educated to be a Dissenting minister; but he turned from that profession to the pursuit of trade. He attempted several trades,—was a hosier, a hatter, a printer; and he is said also to have been a brick and tile maker. In 1692 he failed in business; but, in no long time after, he paid every one of his creditors to the uttermost farthing. Through all his labours and misfortunes he was always a hard and careful reader,—an omnivorous reader, too, for he was in the habit of reading almost every book that came in his way. He made his first reputation by writing political pamphlets. One of his pamphlets brought him into high favour with King William; another had the effect of placing him in the pillory and lodging him in prison. But while in Newgate, he did not idle away his time or “languish”; he set to work, wrote hard, and started a newspaper, *The Review*,—the earliest genuine newspaper England had seen up to his time. This paper he brought out two or three times a-week; and every word of it he wrote himself. He continued to carry it on single-handed for eight years. In 1706, he was made a member of the Commission for bringing about the union between England and Scotland; and his great knowledge of commerce and commercial affairs were of singular value to this Commission. In 1715 he had a dangerous illness, brought on by political excitement; and, on his recovery, he gave up most of his political writing, and took to the composition of stories and romances. Although now a man of fifty-four, he wrote with the vigour and ease of a young man of thirty. His greatest imaginative work was written in 1719—when he was nearly sixty—*The Life and Strange Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe, of York, Mariner,...* written by Himself. Within six years he had produced twelve works of a similar kind. He is said to have written in all two hundred and fifty books in the course of his lifetime. He died in 1731.

4. His best known—and it is also his greatest—work is *Robinson Crusoe*; and this book, which every one has read, may be compared with ‘*Gulliver’s Travels*,’ for the purpose of observing how imaginative effects are produced by different means and in different ways. Another vigorous work of imagination by Defoe is the *Journal of the Plague*, which appeared in 1722. There are three chief things to be noted regarding Defoe and his writings. These are: first, that Defoe possessed an unparalleled knowledge—a knowledge wider than even Shakespeare’s—of the circumstances and details of human life among all sorts, ranks, and conditions of men; secondly, that he gains his wonderful realistic effects by the freest and most copious use of this detailed knowledge in his works of imagination; and thirdly, that he possessed a vocabulary of the most wonderful wealth. His style is strong, homely, and vigorous, but the sentences are long, loose, clumsy, and sometimes ungrammatical. Like Sir Walter Scott, he was too eager to produce large and broad effects to take time to balance his clauses or to polish his sentences. Like Sir Walter Scott, again, he possesses in the highest degree the art of particularising.

5. JONATHAN SWIFT (1667-1745), the greatest prose-writer, in his own kind, of the eighteenth century, and the opposite in most respects—especially in style—of Addison, was born in Dublin in the year 1667. Though born in Ireland, he was of purely English descent—his father belonging to a Yorkshire family, and his mother being a Leicestershire lady. His father died before he was born; and he was educated by the kindness of an uncle. After being at a private school at Kilkenny, he was sent to Trinity College, Dublin, where he was plucked for his degree at his first examination, and, on a second trial, only obtained his B.A. “by special favour.” He next came to England, and for eleven years acted as private secretary to Sir William Temple, a retired statesman and ambassador, who lived at Moor Park, near Richmond-on-Thames. 314 In 1692 he paid a visit to Oxford, and there obtained the degree of M.A. In 1700 he went to Ireland with Lord Berkeley as his chaplain, and while in that country was presented with several livings. He at first attached himself to the Whig party, but stung by this party’s neglect of his labours and merits, he joined the Tories, who raised him to the Deanery of St Patrick’s Cathedral in Dublin. But, though nominally resident in Dublin, he spent a large part of his time in London. Here he knew and met everybody who was worth knowing, and for some time he was the most imposing figure, and wielded the greatest influence in all the best social, political, and literary circles of the capital. In 1714, on the death of Queen Anne, Swift’s hopes of further advancement died out; and he returned to his Deanery, settled in Dublin, and “commenced Irishman for life.” A man of strong passions, he usually spent his birthday in reading that chapter of the *Book of Job* which contains the verse, “Let the day perish in which I was born.” He died insane in 1745, and left his fortune to found a lunatic asylum in Dublin. One day, when taking a walk with a friend, he saw a blasted elm, and, pointing to it, he said: “I shall be like that tree, and die first at the top.” For the last three years of his life he never spoke one word.

6. Swift has written verse; but it is his prose-works that give him his high and unrivalled place in English literature. His most powerful work, published in 1704, is the *Tale of a Tub*—a satire on the disputes

between the Roman Catholic, Anglican, and Presbyterian Churches. His best known prose-work is the *Gulliver's Travels*, which appeared in 1726. This work is also a satire; but it is a satire on men and women,—on humanity. "The power of Swift's prose," it has been said by an able critic, "was the terror of his own, and remains the wonder of after times." His style is strong, simple, straightforward; he uses the plainest words and the homeliest English, and every blow tells. Swift's style—as every genuine style does—reflects the author's character. He was an ardent lover and a good hater. Sir Walter Scott describes him as "tall, strong, and well made, dark in complexion, but with bright blue eyes (Pope said they were "as azure as the heavens"), black and bushy eyebrows, aquiline nose, and features which expressed the stern, haughty, and dauntless turn of his mind." He grew savage under the slightest contradiction; and dukes and great lords were obliged to pay court to him. His prose was as trenchant and powerful as were his manners: it has been compared to "cold steel." His own definition of a good style is "proper words in proper places."

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7. JOSEPH ADDISON (1672-1719), the most elegant prose-writer—as Pope was the most polished verse-writer—of the eighteenth century, was born at Milston, in Wiltshire, in the year 1672. He was educated at Charterhouse School, in London, where one of his friends and companions was the celebrated Dick Steele—afterwards Sir Richard Steele. He then went to Oxford, where he made a name for himself by his beautiful compositions in Latin verse. In 1695 he addressed a poem to King William; and this poem brought him into notice with the Government of the day. Not long after, he received a pension of £300 a-year, to enable him to travel; and he spent some time in France and Italy. The chief result of this tour was a poem entitled *A Letter from Italy to Lord Halifax*. In 1704, when Lord Godolphin was in search of a poet who should celebrate in an adequate style the striking victory of Blenheim, Addison was introduced to him by Lord Halifax. His poem called *The Campaign* was the result; and one simile in it took and held the attention of all English readers, and of "the town." A violent storm had passed over England; and Addison compared the calm genius of Marlborough, who was as cool and serene amid shot and shell as in a drawing-room or at the dinner-table, to the Angel of the Storm. The lines are these:—

"So when an Angel by divine command  
With rising tempests shakes a guilty land,  
Such as of late o'er pale Britannia passed,  
Calm and serene he drives the furious blast;  
And, pleased the Almighty's orders to perform,  
Rides in the whirlwind, and directs the storm."

For this poem Addison was rewarded with the post of Commissioner of Appeals. He rose, successively, to be Under Secretary of State; Secretary for Ireland; and, finally, Secretary of State for England—an office which would correspond to that of our present Home Secretary. He married the Countess of Warwick, to whose son he had been tutor; but it was not a happy marriage. Pope says of him in regard to it, that—  
"He married discord in a noble wife."

He died at Holland House, Kensington, London, in the year 1719, at the age of forty-seven.

8. But it is not at all as a poet, but as a prose-writer, that Addison is famous in the history of literature. While he was in Ireland, his friend Steele started *The Tatler*, in 1709; and Addison sent numerous contributions to this little paper. In 1711, Steele began a still more famous paper, which he called *The Spectator*; and 316 Addison's writings in this morning journal made its reputation. His contributions are distinguishable by being signed with some one of the letters of the name *Clio*—the *Muse of History*. A third paper, *The Guardian*, appeared a few years after; and Addison's contributions to it are designated by a hand (H) at the foot of each. In addition to his numerous prose-writings, Addison brought out the tragedy of *Cato* in 1713. It was very successful; but it is now neither read nor acted. Some of his hymns, however, are beautiful, and are well known. Such are the hymn beginning, "The spacious firmament on high;" and his version of the 23d Psalm, "The Lord my pasture shall prepare."

9. Addison's prose style is inimitable, easy, graceful, full of humour—full of good humour, delicate, with a sweet and kindly rhythm, and always musical to the ear. He is the most graceful of social satirists; and his genial creation of the character of Sir Roger de Coverley will live for ever. While his work in verse is never more than second-rate, his writings in prose are always first-rate. Dr Johnson said of his prose: "Whoever wishes to attain an English style—familiar but not coarse, and elegant but not ostentatious,—must give his days and nights to the study of Addison." Lord Lytton also remarks: "His style has that nameless urbanity in which we recognise the perfection of manner; courteous, but not courtier-like; so dignified, yet so kindly; so easy, yet high-bred. It is the most perfect form of English." His style, however, must be

acknowledged to want force—to be easy rather than vigorous; and it has not the splendid march of Jeremy Taylor, or the noble power of Savage Landor.

10. RICHARD STEELE (1671-1729), commonly called “Dick Steele,” the friend and colleague of Addison, was born in Dublin, but of English parents, in the year 1671. The two friends were educated at Charterhouse and at Oxford together; and they remained friends, with some slight breaks and breezes, to the close of life. Steele was a writer of plays, essays, and pamphlets—for one of which he was expelled from the House of Commons; but his chief fame was earned in connection with the *Society Journals*, which he founded. He started many—such as *Town-Talk*, *The Tea-Table*, *Chit-Chat*; but only the *Tatler* and the *Spectator* rose to success and to fame. The strongest quality in his writing is his pathos: the source of tears is always at his command; and, although himself of a gay and even rollicking temperament, he seems to have preferred this vein. The literary skill of Addison—his happy art in the choosing of words—did not fall to the lot of Steele; but he is more hearty and more human in his description of character. He died in 1729, ten years after the departure of his friend Addison.

11. ALEXANDER POPE (1688-1744), the greatest poet of the eighteenth century, was born in Lombard Street, London, in the year of the Revolution, 1688. His father was a wholesale linendraper, who, having amassed a fortune, retired to Binfield, on the borders of Windsor Forest. In the heart of this beautiful country young Pope’s youth was spent. On the death of his father, Pope left Windsor and took up his residence at Twickenham, on the banks of the Thames, where he remained till his death in 1744. His parents being Roman Catholics, it was impossible for young Pope to go either to a public school or to one of the universities; and hence he was educated privately. At the early age of eight, he met with a translation of Homer in verse; and this volume became his companion night and day. At the age of ten, he turned some of the events described in Homer into a play. The poems of Spenser, the poets’ poet, were his next favourites; but the writer who made the deepest and most lasting impression upon his mind was Dryden. Little Pope began to write verse very early. He says of himself—

“As yet a child, nor yet a fool to fame,  
I lisped in numbers, for the numbers came.”

His *Ode to Solitude* was written at the age of twelve; his *Pastorals* when he was fifteen. His *Essay on Criticism*, which was composed in his twentieth year, though not published till 1711, established his reputation as a writer of neat, clear, sparkling, and elegant verse. *The Rape of the Lock* raised his reputation still higher. Macaulay pronounced it his best poem. De Quincey declared it to be “the most exquisite monument of playful fancy that universal literature offers.” Another critic has called it the “perfection of the mock-heroic.” Pope’s most successful poem—if we measure it by the fame and the money it brought him—was his translation of the *Iliad* of Homer. A great scholar said of this translation that it was “a very pretty poem, but not Homer.” The fact is that Pope did not translate directly from the Greek, but from a French or a Latin version which he kept beside him. Whatever its faults, and however great its deficiency as a representation of the powerful and deep simplicity of the original Greek, no one can deny the charm and finish of its versification, or the rapidity, facility, and melody of the flow of the verse. These qualities make this work unique in English poetry.

12. After finishing the *Iliad*, Pope undertook a translation of the *Odyssey* of Homer. This was not so successful; nor was it so well done. In fact, Pope translated only half of it himself; the other half was written by two scholars called Broome and Fenton. His next great poem was the *Dunciad*,—a satire upon those petty writers, carping critics, and hired defamers who had tried to write down the reputation of Pope’s Homeric work. “The composition of the ‘*Dunciad*’ revealed to Pope where his true strength lay, in blending personalities with moral reflections.”

13. Pope’s greatest works were written between 1730 and 1740; and they consist of the *Moral Essays*, the *Essay on Man*, and the *Epistles and Satires*. These poems are full of the finest thoughts, expressed in the most perfect form. Mr Ruskin quotes the couplet—

“Never elated, while one man’s oppressed;  
Never dejected, whilst another’s blessed,”—

as “the most complete, concise, and lofty expression of moral temper existing in English words.” The poem of Pope which shows his best and most striking qualities in their most characteristic form, is probably the *Epistle to Dr Arbuthnot* or *Prologue to the Satires*. In this poem occur the celebrated lines about Addison—which make a perfect portrait, although it is far from being a true likeness.

His pithy lines and couplets have obtained a permanent place in literature. Thus we have:—

“True wit is nature to advantage dressed,

What oft was thought, but ne'er so well expressed."  
 "Good-nature and good-sense must ever join.  
 To err is human, to forgive divine."  
 "All seems infected that the infected spy,  
 As all looks yellow to the jaundic'd eye."  
 "Fear not the anger of the wise to raise;  
 Those best can bear reproof who merit praise."  
 The greatest conciseness is visible in his epigrams and in his compliments:—  
 "A vile encomium doubly ridicules:  
 There's nothing blackens like the ink of fools."  
 "And not a vanity is given in vain."  
 "Would ye be blest? despise low joys, low gains,  
 Disdain whatever Cornbury disdains,  
 Be virtuous, and be happy for your pains."

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14. Pope is the foremost literary figure of his age and century; and he is also the head of a school. He brought to perfection a style of writing verse which was followed by hundreds of clever writers. Cowper says of him:—

"But Pope—his musical finesse was such,  
 So nice his ear, so delicate his touch,—  
 Made poetry a mere mechanic art,  
 And every warbler has his tune by heart."

Pope was not the poet of nature or of humanity; he was the poet of "the town," and of the Court. He was greatly influenced by the neatness and polish of French verse; and, from his boyhood, his great ambition was to be "a correct poet." He worked and worked, polished and polished, until each idea had received at his hands its very neatest and most epigrammatic expression. In the art of condensed, compact, pointed, and yet harmonious and flowing verse, Pope has no equal. But, as a vehicle for poetry—for the love and sympathy with nature and man which every true poet must feel, Pope's verse is artificial; and its style of expression has now died out. It was one of the chief missions of Wordsworth to drive the Popian second-hand vocabulary out of existence.

15. JAMES THOMSON (1700-1748), the poet of *The Seasons*, was born at Ednam in Roxburghshire, Scotland, in the year 1700. He was educated at the grammar-school of Jedburgh, and then at the University of Edinburgh. It was intended that he should enter the ministry of the Church of Scotland; but, before his college course was finished, he had given up this idea: poetry proved for him too strong a magnet. While yet a young man, he had written his poem of *Winter*; and, with that in his pocket, he resolved to try his fortune in London. While walking about the streets, looking at the shops, and gazing at the new wonders of the vast metropolis, his pocket was picked of his pocket-handkerchief and his letters of introduction; and he found himself alone in London—thrown entirely on his own resources. A publisher was, however, in time found for *Winter*; and the poem slowly rose into appreciation and popularity. This was in 1726. Next year, *Summer*; two years after, *Spring* appeared; while *Autumn*, in 1730, completed the *Seasons*. The *Castle of Indolence*—a poem in the Spenserian stanza—appeared in 1748. In the same year he was appointed Surveyor-General of the Leeward Islands, though he never visited the scene of his duty, but had his work done by deputy. He died at Kew in the year 1748.

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16. Thomson's place as a poet is high in the second rank. His *Seasons* have always been popular; and, when Coleridge found a well-thumbed and thickly dog's-eared copy lying on the window-sill of a country inn, he exclaimed "This is true fame!" His *Castle of Indolence* is, however, a finer piece of poetical work than any of his other writings. The first canto is the best. But the *Seasons* have been much more widely read; and a modern critic says: "No poet has given the special pleasure which poetry is capable of giving to so large a number of persons in so large a measure as Thomson." Thomson is very unequal in his style. Sometimes he rises to a great height of inspired expression; at other times he sinks to a dull dead level of pedestrian prose. His power of describing scenery is often very remarkable. Professor Craik says: "There is no other poet who surrounds us with so much of the truth of nature;" and he calls the *Castle of Indolence* "one of the gems of the language."

17. THOMAS GRAY (1716-1771), the greatest elegiac poet of the century, was born in London in 1716. His father was a "money-scrivener," as it was called; in other words, he was a stock-broker. His mother's

brother was an assistant-master at Eton; and at Eton, under the care of this uncle, Gray was brought up. One of his schoolfellows was the famous Horace Walpole. After leaving school, Gray proceeded to Cambridge; but, instead of reading mathematics, he studied classical literature, history, and modern languages, and never took his degree. After some years spent at Cambridge, he entered himself of the Inner Temple; but he never gave much time to the study of law. His father died in 1741; and Gray, soon after, gave up the law and went to live entirely at Cambridge. The first published of his poems was the Ode on a Distant Prospect of Eton College. The Elegy written in a Country Churchyard was handed about in manuscript before its publication in 1750; and it made his reputation at once. In 1755 the Progress of Poesy was published; and the ode entitled The Bard was begun. In 1768 he was appointed Professor of Modern History at Cambridge; but, though he studied hard, he never lectured. He died at Cambridge, at the age of fifty-four, in the year 1771. Gray was never married. He was said by those who knew him to be the most learned man of his time in Europe. Literature, history, and several sciences—all were thoroughly known to him. He had read everything in the world that was best worth reading; while his knowledge of botany, zoology, and entomology was both wide and exact.

18. Gray's Elegy took him seven years to write; it contains thirty-two stanzas; and Mr Palgrave says "they are perhaps the noblest stanzas in the language." General Wolfe, when sailing down to attack Quebec, recited the Elegy to his officers, and declared, "Now, gentlemen, I would rather be the author of that poem than take Quebec." Lord Byron called the Elegy "the corner-stone of Gray's poetry." Gray ranks with Milton as the most finished workman in English verse; and certainly he spared no pains. Gray said himself that "the style he aimed at was extreme conciseness of expression, yet pure, perspicuous, and musical;" and this style, at which he aimed, he succeeded fully in achieving. One of the finest stanzas in the whole Elegy is the last, which the writer omitted in all the later editions:—

"There scattered oft, the earliest of the year,  
By hands unseen, are showers of violets found;  
The red-breast loves to build and warble there,  
And little footsteps lightly print the ground."

19. WILLIAM COLLINS (1721-1759), one of the truest lyrical poets of the century, was born at Chichester on Christmas-day, 1721. He was educated at Winchester School; afterwards at Queen's, and also at Magdalen College, Oxford. Before he left school he had written a set of poems called Persian Eclogues. He left the university with a reputation for ability and for indolence; went to London "with many projects in his head and little money in his pocket;" and there found a kind and fast friend in Dr Johnson. His Odes appeared in 1747. The volume fell stillborn from the press: not a single copy was sold; no one bought, read, or noticed it. In a fit of furious despair, the unhappy author called in the whole edition and burnt every copy with his own hands. And yet it was, with the single exception of the songs of Burns, the truest poetry that had appeared in the whole of the eighteenth century. A great critic says: "In the little book there was hardly a single false note: there was, above all things, a purity of music, a clarity of style, to which I know of no parallel in English verse from the death of Andrew Marvell to the birth of William Blake." Soon after this great disappointment he went to live at Richmond, where he formed a friendship with Thomson and other poets. In 1749 he wrote the Ode on the Death of Thomson, beginning—

"In yonder grave a Druid lies"—

one of the finest of his poems. Not long after, he was attacked by a 322 disease of the brain, from which he suffered, at intervals, during the remainder of his short life. He died at Chichester in 1759, at the age of thirty-eight.

20. Collins's best poem is the Ode to Evening; his most elaborate, the Ode on the Passions; and his best known, the Ode beginning—

"How sleep the brave, who sink to rest  
By all their country's wishes blessed!"

His latest and best critic says of his poems: "His range of flight was perhaps the narrowest, but assuredly the highest, of his generation. He could not be taught singing like a finch, but he struck straight upward for the sun like a lark.... The direct sincerity and purity of their positive and straightforward inspiration will always keep his poems fresh and sweet in the senses of all men. He was a solitary song-bird among many more or less excellent pipers and pianists. He could put more spirit of colour into a single stroke, more breath of music into a single note, than could all the rest of his generation into all the labours of their lives."

## CHAPTER VII. THE SECOND HALF OF THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY.

1. Prose-Writers.—The four greatest prose-writers of the latter half of the eighteenth century are Johnson, Goldsmith, Burke, and Gibbon. Dr Johnson was the most prominent literary figure in London at this period; and filled in his own time much the same position that Carlyle lately held in literary circles. He wrote on many subjects—but chiefly on literature and morals; and hence he was called “The Great Moralist.” Goldsmith stands out clearly as the writer of the most pleasant and easy prose; his pen was ready for any subject; and it has been said of him with perfect truth, that he touched nothing that he did not adorn. Burke was the most eloquent writer of his time, and by far the greatest political thinker that England has ever produced. He is known by an essay he wrote when a very young man—on “The Sublime and Beautiful”; but it is to his speeches and political writings that we must look for his noblest thoughts and most eloquent language. Gibbon is one of the greatest historians and most powerful writers the world has ever seen.

2. SAMUEL JOHNSON (1709-1784), the great essayist and lexicographer, was born at Lichfield in the year 1709. His father was a bookseller; and it was in his father’s shop that Johnson acquired his habit of omnivorous reading, or rather devouring of books. The mistress of the dame’s school, to which he first went, declared him 324 to be the best scholar she ever had. After a few years at the free grammar-school of Lichfield, and one year at Stourbridge, he went to Pembroke College, Oxford, at the age of nineteen. Here he did not confine himself to the studies of the place, but indulged in a wide range of miscellaneous reading. He was too poor to take a degree, and accordingly left Oxford without graduating. After acting for some time as a bookseller’s hack, he married a Mrs Porter of Birmingham—a widow with £800. With this money he opened a boarding-school, or “academy” as he called it; but he had never more than three scholars—the most famous of whom was the celebrated player, David Garrick. In 1737 he went up to London, and for the next quarter of a century struggled for a living by the aid of his pen. During the first ten years of his London life he wrote chiefly for the ‘Gentleman’s Magazine.’ In 1738 his London—a poem in heroic metre—appeared. In 1747 he began his famous Dictionary; it was completed in 1755; and the University of Oxford conferred on him the honorary degree of M.A. In 1749 he wrote another poem—also in heroic metre—the ‘Vanity of Human Wishes.’ In 1750 he had begun the periodical that raised his fame to its full height—a periodical to which he gave the name of *The Rambler*. It appeared twice a-week; and Dr Johnson wrote every article in it for two years. In 1759 he published the short novel called *Rasselas*: it was written to defray the expenses of his mother’s funeral; and he wrote it “in the evenings of a week.” The year 1762 saw him with a pension from the Government of £300 a-year; and henceforth he was free from heavy hack-work and literary drudgery, and could give himself up to the largest enjoyment of that for which he cared most—social conversation. He was the best talker of his time; and he knew everybody worth knowing—Burke, Goldsmith, Gibbon, the great painter Sir Joshua Reynolds, and many other able men. In 1764 he founded the “Literary Club,” which still exists and meets in London. Oddly enough, although a prolific writer, it is to another person—to Mr James Boswell, who first met him in 1763—that he owes his greatest and most lasting fame. A much larger number of persons read Boswell’s *Life of Johnson*—one of the most entertaining books in all literature—than Johnson’s own works. Between the years 1779 and 1781 appeared his last and ablest work, *The Lives of the Poets*, which were written as prefaces to a collective edition of the English Poets, published by several London booksellers. He died in 1784.

3. Johnson’s earlier style was full of Latin words; his later style is more purely English than most of the journalistic writing of the present day. His *Rambler* is full of “long-tailed words in osity and 325 ation;” but his ‘*Lives of the Poets*’ is written in manly, vigorous, and idiomatic English. In verse, he occupies a place between Pope and Goldsmith, and is one of the masters in the “didactic school” of English poetry. His rhythm and periods are swelling and sonorous; and here and there he equals Pope in the terseness and condensation of his language. The following is a fair specimen:—

“Of all the griefs that harass the distressed,  
Sure the most bitter is a scornful jest;  
Fate never wounds more deep the generous heart,  
Than when a blockhead’s insult points the dart.”

4. OLIVER GOLDSMITH (1728-1774), poet, essayist, historian, and dramatist, was born at Pallas, in the county of Longford, Ireland, in the year 1728. His father was an Irish clergyman, careless, good-hearted, and the original of the famous Dr Primrose, in *The Vicar of Wakefield*. He was also the original of the “village preacher” in *The Deserted Village*.

“A man he was to all the country dear,

And passing rich with forty pounds a-year.”

Oliver was educated at Trinity College, Dublin; but he left it with no fixed aim. He thought of law, and set off for London, but spent all his money in Dublin. He thought of medicine, and resided two years in Edinburgh. He started for Leyden, in Holland, to continue what he called his medical studies; but he had a thirst to see the world—and so, with a guinea in his pocket, one shirt, and a flute, he set out on his travels through the continent of Europe. At length, on the 1st of February 1756, he landed at Dover, after an absence of two years, without a farthing in his pocket. London reached, he tried many ways of making a living, as assistant to an apothecary, physician, reader for the press, usher in a school, writer in journals. His first work was ‘An Inquiry into the State of Polite Learning in Europe,’ in 1759; but it appeared without his name. From that date he wrote books of all kinds, poems, and plays. He died in his chambers in Brick Court, Temple, London, in 1774.

5. Goldsmith’s best poems are *The Traveller* and *The Deserted Village*,—both written in the Popian couplet. His best play is *She Stoops to Conquer*. His best prose work is *The Vicar of Wakefield*, “the first genuine novel of domestic life.” He also wrote histories of England, of Rome, of *Animated Nature*. All this was done as professional, nay, almost as hack work; but 326 always in a very pleasant, lively, and readable style. Ease, grace, charm, naturalness, pleasant rhythm, purity of diction—these were the chief characteristics of his writings. “Almost to all things could he turn his hand”—poem, essay, play, story, history, natural science. Even when satirical, he was good-natured; and his *Retaliation* is the friendliest and pleasantest of satires. In his poetry, his words seem artless, but are indeed delicately chosen with that consummate art which conceals and effaces itself: where he seems most simple and easy, there he has taken most pains and given most labour.

6. EDMUND BURKE (1730-1797) was born at Dublin in the year 1730. He was educated at Trinity College, Dublin; and in 1747 was entered of the Middle Temple, with the purpose of reading for the Bar. In 1766 he was so fortunate as to enter Parliament as member for Wendover, in Buckinghamshire; and he sat in the House of Commons for nearly thirty years. While in Parliament, he worked hard to obtain justice for the colonists of North America, and to avert the separation of them from the mother country; and also to secure good government for India. At the close of his life, it was his intention to take his seat in the House of Peers as Earl Beaconsfield—the title afterwards assumed by Mr Disraeli; but the death of his son, and only child—for whom the honour was really meant and wished—quite broke his heart, and he never carried out his purpose. He died at Beaconsfield in the year 1797. The lines of Goldsmith on Burke, in his poem of “*Retaliation*,” are well known:—

“Here lies our good Edmund, whose genius was such  
We scarcely can praise it or blame it too much;  
Who, born for the universe, narrowed his mind,  
And to party gave up what was meant for mankind;  
Who, too deep for his hearers, still went on refining,  
And thought of convincing while they thought of dining.”

7. Burke’s most famous writings are *Thoughts on the Cause of the present Discontents*, published in 1773; *Reflections on the French Revolution* (1790); and the *Letters on a Regicide Peace* (1797). His “*Thoughts*” is perhaps the best of his works in point of style; his “*Reflections*,” are full of passages of the highest and most noble eloquence. Burke has been described by a great critic as “the supreme writer of the century;” and Macaulay says, that “in richness of imagination, he is superior to every orator ancient and modern.” In the power of expressing thought in the strongest, fullest, and most vivid manner, he must be classed with Shakespeare 327 and Bacon—and with these writers when at their best. He indulges in repetitions; but the repetitions are never monotonous; they serve to place the subject in every possible point of view, and to enable us to see all sides of it. He possessed an enormous vocabulary, and had the fullest power over it; “never was a man under whose hands language was more plastic and ductile.” He is very fond of metaphor, and is described by an able critic as “the greatest master of metaphor that the world has ever seen.”

8. EDWARD GIBBON (1737-1794), the second great prose-writer of the second half of the eighteenth century, was born at Putney, London, in 1737. His father was a wealthy landowner. Young Gibbon was a very sickly child—the only survivor of a delicate family of seven; he was left to pass his time as he pleased, and for the most part to educate himself. But he had the run of several good libraries; and he was an eager and never satiated reader. He was sent to Oxford at the early age of fifteen; and so full was his knowledge in some directions, and so defective in others, that he went there, he tells us himself, “with a stock of knowledge that might have puzzled a doctor, and a degree of ignorance of which a schoolboy would have been ashamed.” He was very fond of disputation while at Oxford; and the Dons of the University were

astonished to see the pathetic “thin little figure, with a large head, disputing and arguing with the greatest ability.” In the course of his reading, he lighted on some French and English books that convinced him for the time of the truth of the Roman Catholic faith; he openly professed his change of belief; and this obliged him to leave the University. His father sent him to Lausanne, and placed him under the care of a Swiss clergyman there, whose arguments were at length successful in bringing him back to a belief in Protestantism. On his return to England in 1758, he lived in his father’s house in Hampshire; read largely, as usual; but also joined the Hampshire militia as captain of a company, and the exercises and manœuvres of his regiment gave him an insight into military matters which was afterwards useful to him when he came to write history. He published his first work in 1761. It was an essay on the study of literature, and was written in French. In 1770 his father died; he came into a fortune, entered Parliament, where he sat for eight years, but never spoke; and, in 1776, he began his history of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire. This, by far the greatest of his works, was not completed till 1787, and was published in 1788, on his fifty-first birthday. His 328 account of the completion of the work—it was finished at Lausanne, where he had lived for six years—is full of beauty: “It was on the day, or rather night, of June 27, 1787, between the hours of eleven and twelve, that I wrote the last lines of the last page in a summer-house in my garden. After laying down my pen, I took several turns in a covered walk of acacias, which commands a prospect of the country, the lake, and the mountains. The air was temperate, the sky was serene. The silver orb of the moon was reflected from the waters, and all nature was silent. I will not describe the first emotion of joy on the recovery of my freedom, and perhaps the establishment of my fame. But my pride was soon humbled, and a sober melancholy was spread over my mind by the idea that I had taken an everlasting leave of an old and agreeable companion, and that, whatever might be the future fate of my history, the life of the historian must be short and precarious.” Gibbon died in 1794, about one year before the birth of another great historian, Grote, the author of the ‘History of Greece.’

9. Gibbon’s book is one of the great historical works of the world. It covers a space of about thirteen centuries, from the reign of Trajan (98), to the fall of the Eastern Empire in 1453; and the amount of reading and study required to write it, must have been almost beyond the power of our conceiving. The skill in arranging and disposing the enormous mass of matter in his history is also unparalleled. His style is said by a critic to be “copious, splendid, elegantly rounded, distinguished by supreme artificial skill.” It is remarkable for the proportion of Latin words employed. While some parts of our translation of the Bible contain as much as 96 per cent of pure English words, Gibbon has only 58 per cent: the rest, or 42 per cent, are words of Latin origin. In fact, of all our great English writers, Gibbon stands lowest in his use of pure English words; and the two writers who come nearest him in this respect are Johnson and Swift. The great Greek scholar, Professor Porson, said of Gibbon’s style, that “there could not be a better exercise for a schoolboy than to turn a page of it into English.”

10. Poets.—The chief poets of the latter half of the eighteenth century belong to a new world, and show very little trace in their writings of eighteenth-century culture, ideas, or prejudices. Most of the best poets who were born in this half of the eighteenth century and began to write in it—such as Crabbe and Wordsworth—are true denizens, in the character of their minds and feelings, of the nineteenth. The greatest poets of the 329 period are Cowper, Crabbe, and Burns; and along with these may be mentioned as little inferior, Chatterton and Blake, two of the most original poets that have appeared in any literature.

11. WILLIAM COWPER (1731-1800), one of the truest, purest, and sweetest of English poets, was born at Great Berkhamstead, in Hertfordshire, in 1731. His father, Dr Cowper, who was a nephew of Lord Chancellor Cowper, was rector of the parish, and chaplain to George II. Young Cowper was educated at Westminster School; and “the great proconsul of India,” Warren Hastings, was one of his schoolfellows. After leaving Westminster, he was entered of the Middle Temple, and was also articled to a solicitor. At the age of thirty-one he was appointed one of the Clerks to the House of Lords; but he was so terribly nervous and timid, that he threw up the appointment. He was next appointed Clerk of the Journals—a post which even the shyest man might hold; but, when he found that he would have to appear at the bar of the House of Lords, he went home and attempted to commit suicide. When at school, he had been terribly and persistently bullied; and, about this time, his mind had been somewhat affected by a disappointment in love. The form of his insanity was melancholia; and he had several long and severe attacks of the same disease in the after-course of his life. He had to be placed in the keeping of a physician; and it was only after fifteen months’ seclusion that he was able to face the world. Giving up all idea of professional or of public life, he went to live at Huntingdon with the Unwins; and, after the death of Mr Unwin, he removed with Mrs Unwin to Olney, in Buckinghamshire. Here, in 1773, another attack of melancholia came upon him. In 1779, Cowper joined with Mr Newton, the curate of the parish, in publishing the Olney Hymns, of



which he wrote sixty-eight. But it was not till he was past fifty years of age that he betook himself seriously to the writing of poetry. His first volume, which contained *Table-Talk*, *Conversation*, *Retirement*, and other poems in heroic metre, appeared in 1782. His second volume, which included *The Task* and *John Gilpin*, was published in 1785. His translation of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* of Homer—a translation into blank verse, which he wrote at the regular rate of forty lines a-day—was published in 1791. Mrs Unwin now had a shock of paralysis; Cowper himself was again seized with mental illness; and from 1791 till his death in 1800, his condition was one of extreme misery, depression, and despair. He thought himself an outcast from the mercy of God. “I seem to 330 myself,” he wrote to a friend, “to be scrambling always in the dark, among rocks and precipices, without a guide, but with an enemy ever at my heels, prepared to push me headlong.” The cloud never lifted; gloom and dejection enshrouded all his later years; a pension of £300 a-year from George III. brought him no pleasure; and he died insane, at East Dereham, in Norfolk, in the year 1800. In the poem of *The Castaway* he compares himself to a drowning sailor:—

“No voice divine the storm allayed,  
 No light propitious shone,  
 When, far from all effectual aid,  
 We perished—each alone—  
 But I beneath a rougher sea,  
 And whelmed in blacker gulfs than he.”

12. His greatest work is *The Task*; and the best poem in it is probably “*The Winter Evening*.” His best-known poem is *John Gilpin*, which, like “*The Task*,” he wrote at the request of his friend, Lady Austen. His most powerful poem is *The Castaway*. He always writes in clear, crisp, pleasant, and manly English. He himself says, in a letter to a friend: “Perspicuity is always more than half the battle... A meaning that does not stare you in the face is as bad as no meaning;” and this direction he himself always carried out. Cowper’s poems mark a new era in poetry; his style is new, and his ideas are new. He is no follower of Pope; Southey compared Pope and Cowper as “formal gardens in comparison with woodland scenery.” He is always original, always true—true to his own feeling, and true to the object he is describing. “My descriptions,” he writes of “*The Task*,” “are all from nature; not one of them second-handed. My delineations of the heart are from my own experience.” Everywhere in his poems we find a genuine love of nature; humour and pathos in his description of persons; and a purity and honesty of style that have never been surpassed. Many of his well-put lines have passed into our common stock of everyday quotations. Such are—

“God made the country, and man made the town.”

“Variety’s the very spice of life  
 That gives it all its flavour.”

“The heart

May give a useful lesson to the head,  
 And Learning wiser grow without his books.”

“Beware of desperate steps. The darkest day,  
 Live till to-morrow, will have passed away.”

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13. GEORGE CRABBE (1754-1832), the poet of the poor, was born at Aldborough, in Suffolk, on Christmas Eve of the year 1754. He stands thus midway between Goldsmith and Wordsworth—midway between the old and the new school of poetry. His father was salt-master—or collector of salt duties—at the little seaport. After being taught a little at several schools, it was agreed that George should be made a surgeon. He was accordingly apprenticed; but he was fonder of writing verses than of attending cases. His memory for poetry was astonishing; he had begun to write verses at the age of fourteen; and he filled the drawers of the surgery with his poetical attempts. After a time he set up for himself in practice at Aldborough; but most of his patients were poor people and poor relations, who paid him neither for his physic nor his advice. In 1779 he resolved “to go to London and venture all.” Accordingly, he took a berth on board of a sailing-packet, carrying with him a little money and a number of manuscript poems. But nothing succeeded with him; he was reduced to his last eightpence. In this strait, he wrote to the great statesman, Edmund Burke; and, while the answer was coming, he walked all night up and down Westminster Bridge. Burke took him in to his own house and found a publisher for his poems.

14. In 1781 *The Library* appeared; and in the same year Crabbe entered the Church. In 1783 he published *The Village*—a poem which Dr Johnson revised for him. This work won for him an established reputation; but, for twenty-four years after, Crabbe gave himself up entirely to the care of his parish, and published

only one poem—The Newspaper. In 1807 appeared The Parish Register; in 1810, The Borough; in 1812, Tales in Verse; and, in 1819, his last poetical work, Tales of the Hall. From this time, till his death in 1832—thirteen years after—he produced no other poem. Personally, he was one of the noblest and kindest of men; he was known as “the gentleman with the sour name and the sweet countenance;” and he spent most of his income on the wants of others.

15. Crabbe’s poetical work forms a prominent landmark in English literature. His style is the style of the eighteenth century—with a strong admixture of his own; his way of thinking, and the objects he selects for description, belong to the nineteenth. While Pope depicted “the town,” politics, and abstract moralities, Crabbe describes the country and the country poor, social matters, real life—the lowest and poorest life, and more especially, the intense misery of the village population of his time in the eastern counties—

“the wild amphibious race  
With sullen woe displayed in every face.”

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He does not paint the lot of the poor with the rose-coloured tints used by Goldsmith; he boldly denies the existence of such a village as Auburn; he groups such places with Eden, and says—

“Auburn and Eden can be found no more;”

he shows the gloomy, hard, despairing side of English country life. He has been called a “Pope in worsted stockings,” and “the Hogarth, of song.” Byron describes him as

“Nature’s sternest painter, yet the best.”

Now and then his style is flat, and even coarse; but there is everywhere a genuine power of strong and bold painting. He is also an excellent master of easy dialogue.

All of his poems are written in the Popian couplet of two ten-syllabled lines.

16. ROBERT BURNS (1759-1796), the greatest poet of Scotland, was born in Ayrshire, two miles from the town of Ayr, in 1759. The only education he received from his father was the schooling of a few months; but the family were fond of reading, and Robert was the most enthusiastic reader of them all. Every spare moment he could find—and they were not many—he gave to reading; he sat at meals “with a book in one hand and a spoon in the other;” and in this way he read most of the great English poets and prose-writers. This was an excellent education—one a great deal better than most people receive; and some of our greatest men have had no better. But, up to the age of sixteen, he had to toil on his father’s farm from early morning till late at night. In the intervals of his work he contrived, by dint of thrift and industry, to learn French, mathematics, and a little Latin. On the death of his father, he took a small farm, but did not succeed. He was on the point of embarking for Jamaica, where a post had been found for him, when the news of the successful sale of a small volume of his poems reached him; and he at once changed his mind, and gave up all idea of emigrating. His friends obtained for him a post as exciseman, in which his duty was to gauge the quantity and quality of ardent spirits—a post full of dangers to a man of his excitable and emotional temperament. He went a great deal into what was called society, formed the acquaintance of many boon companions, acquired habits of intemperance that he could not shake off, and died at Dumfries in 1796, in his thirty-seventh year.

17. His best poems are lyrical, and he is himself one of the foremost 333 lyrical poets in the world. His songs have probably been more sung, and in more parts of the globe, than the songs of any other writer that ever lived. They are of every kind—songs of love, war, mirth, sorrow, labour, and social gatherings. Professor Craik says: “One characteristic that belongs to whatever Burns has written is that, of its kind and in its own way, it is a perfect production. His poetry is, throughout, real emotion melodiously uttered, instinct with passion, but not less so with power of thought,—full of light as well as of fire.” Most of his poems are written in the North-English, or Lowland-Scottish, dialect. The most elevated of his poems is The Vision, in which he relates how the Scottish Muse found him at the plough, and crowned him with a wreath of holly. One of his longest, as well as finest poems, is The Cottar’s Saturday Night, which is written in the Spenserian stanza. Perhaps his most pathetic poem is that entitled To Mary in Heaven. It is of a singular eloquence, elevation, and sweetness. The first verse runs thus—

“Thou lingering star, with lessening ray,  
That lov’st to greet the early morn,  
Again thou usher’st in the day  
My Mary from my soul was torn.  
O Mary! dear departed shade!  
Where is thy place of blissful rest?  
See’st thou thy lover lowly laid?

Hear'st thou the groans that rend his breast?"

He is, as his latest critic says, "the poet of homely human nature;" and his genius shows the beautiful elements in this homeliness; and that what is homely need not therefore be dull and prosaic.

18. THOMAS CHATTERTON and WILLIAM BLAKE are two minor poets, of whom little is known and less said, but whose work is of the most poetical and genuine kind.—Chatterton was born at Bristol in the year 1752. He was the son of a schoolmaster, who died before he was born. He was educated at Colston's Blue-Coat School in Bristol; and, while at school, read his way steadily through every book in three circulating libraries. He began to write verses at the age of fifteen, and in two years had produced a large number of poems—some of them of the highest value. In 1770, he came up to London, with something under five pounds in his pocket, and his mind made up to try his fortune as a literary man, resolved, though he was only a boy of seventeen, to live by literature or to die. Accordingly, he set to work and wrote every kind of productions—poems, 334 essays, stories, political articles, songs for public singers; and all the time he was half starving. A loaf of bread lasted him a week; and it was "bought stale to make it last longer." He had made a friend of the Lord Mayor, Beckford; but before he had time to hold out a hand to the struggling boy, Beckford died. The struggle became harder and harder—more and more hopeless; his neighbours offered a little help—a small coin or a meal—he rejected all; and at length, on the evening of the 24th August 1770, he went up to his garret, locked himself in, tore up all his manuscripts, took poison, and died. He was only seventeen.

19. Wordsworth and Coleridge spoke with awe of his genius; Keats dedicated one of his poems to his memory; and Coleridge copied some of his rhythms. One of his best poems is the Minstrel's Roundelay—

"O sing unto my roundelay,  
O drop the briny tear with me,  
Dance no more on holy-day,  
Like a running river be.  
My love is dead,  
Gone to his death-bed  
All under the willow-tree.  
"Black his hair as the winter night,  
White his skin as the summer snow,  
Red his face as the morning light,  
Cold he lies in the grave below.  
My love is dead,  
Gone to his death-bed  
All under the willow-tree."

20. WILLIAM BLAKE (1757-1827), one of the most original poets that ever lived, was born in London in the year 1757. He was brought up as an engraver; worked steadily at his business, and did a great deal of beautiful work in that capacity. He in fact illustrated his own poems—each page being set in a fantastic design of his own invention, which he himself engraved. He was also his own printer and publisher. The first volume of his poems was published in 1783; the *Songs of Innocence*, probably his best, appeared in 1787. He died in Fountain Court, Strand, London, in the year 1827.

21. His latest critic says of Blake: "His detachment from the ordinary currents of practical thought left to his mind an unspoiled and delightful simplicity which has perhaps never been matched in English poetry." Simplicity—the perfect simplicity of a child— 335 beautiful simplicity—simple and childlike beauty,—such is the chief note of the poetry of Blake. "Where he is successful, his work has the fresh perfume and perfect grace of a flower." The most remarkable point about Blake is that, while living in an age when the poetry of Pope—and that alone—was everywhere paramount, his poems show not the smallest trace of Pope's influence, but are absolutely original. His work, in fact, seems to be the first bright streak of the golden dawn that heralded the approach of the full and splendid daylight of the poetry of Wordsworth and Coleridge, of Shelley and Byron. His best-known poems are those from the 'Songs of Innocence'—such as *Piping down the valleys wild*; *The Lamb*; *The Tiger*, and others. Perhaps the most remarkable element in Blake's poetry is the sweetness and naturalness of the rhythm. It seems careless, but it is always beautiful; it grows, it is not made; it is like a wild field-flower thrown up by Nature in a pleasant green field. Such are the rhythms in the poem entitled *Night*:—

"The sun descending in the west,  
The evening star does shine;  
The birds are silent in their nest,

And I must seek for mine.  
 The moon, like a flower  
 In heaven's high bower,  
 With silent delight  
 Sits and smiles on the night.  
 "Farewell, green fields and happy grove,  
 Where flocks have ta'en delight;  
 Where lambs have nibbled, silent move  
 The feet of angels bright:  
 Unseen they pour blessing,  
 And joy without ceasing,  
 On each bud and blossom,  
 On each sleeping bosom."

### CHAPTER VIII. THE FIRST HALF OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY.

1. New Ideas.—The end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth century are alike remarkable for the new powers, new ideas, and new life thrown into society. The coming up of a high flood-tide of new forces seems to coincide with the beginning of the French Revolution in 1789, when the overthrow of the Bastille marked the downfall of the old ways of thinking and acting, and announced to the world of Europe and America that the old régime—the ancient mode of governing—was over. Wordsworth, then a lad of nineteen, was excited by the event almost beyond the bounds of self-control. He says in his "Excursion"—  
 "Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive,  
 But to be young was very Heaven!"

It was, indeed, the dawn of a new day for the peoples of Europe. The ideas of freedom and equality—of respect for man as man—were thrown into popular form by France; they became living powers in Europe; and in England they animated and inspired the best minds of the time—Burns, Coleridge, Wordsworth, Shelley, and Byron. Along with this high tide of hope and emotion, there was such an outburst of talent and genius in every kind of human endeavour in England, as was never seen before except in the Elizabethan period. Great events produced great powers; and great powers in their turn brought about great events. The war with America, the long struggle with Napoleon, the new political ideas, great victories by sea and land,—all these were to be found in the beginning of the nineteenth century. The English race produced great men in numbers—almost, it might be said, in groups. We had great leaders, like Nelson and Wellington; brilliant generals, like Sir Charles Napier and Sir John Moore; great statesmen, like Fox and Pitt, like Washington and Franklin; great engineers, like Stephenson and Brunel; and great poets, like Wordsworth and Byron. And as regards literature, an able critic remarks: "We have recovered in this century the Elizabethan magic and passion, a more than Elizabethan sense of the beauty and complexity of nature, the Elizabethan music of language."

2. Great Poets.—The greatest poets of the first half of the nineteenth century may be best arranged in groups. There were Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Southey—commonly, but unnecessarily, described as the Lake Poets. In their poetic thought and expression they had little in common; and the fact that two of them lived most of their lives in the Lake country, is not a sufficient justification for the use of the term. There were Scott and Campbell—both of them Scotchmen. There were Byron and Shelley—both Englishmen, both brought up at the great public schools and the universities, but both carried away by the influence of the new revolutionary ideas. Lastly, there were Moore, an Irishman, and young Keats, the splendid promise of whose youth went out in an early death. Let us learn a little more about each, and in the order of the dates of their birth.

3. WILLIAM WORDSWORTH (1770-1850) was born at Cocker-mouth, a town in Cumberland, which stands at the confluence of the Cocker and the Derwent. His father, John Wordsworth, was law agent to Sir James Lowther, who afterwards became Earl of Lonsdale. William was a boy of a stiff, moody, and violent temper; and as his mother died when he was a very little boy, and his father when he was fourteen, he grew up with very little care from his 338 parents and guardians. He was sent to school at Hawkshead, in the Vale of Esthwaite, in Lancashire; and, at the age of seventeen, proceeded to St John's College, Cambridge. After taking his degree of B.A. in 1791, he resided for a year in France. He took sides with one of the parties in the Reign of Terror, and left the country only in time to save his head. He was designed by his

uncles for the Church; but a friend, Raisley Calvert, dying, left him £900; and he now resolved to live a plain and frugal life, to join no profession, but to give himself wholly up to the writing of poetry. In 1798, he published, along with his friend, S. T. Coleridge, the *Lyrical Ballads*. The only work of Coleridge's in this volume was the "Ancient Mariner." In 1802 he married Mary Hutchinson, of whom he speaks in the well-known lines—

"Her eyes as stars of Twilight fair,  
Like Twilight's, too, her dusky hair;  
But all things else about her drawn  
From May-time and the cheerful dawn."

He obtained the post of Distributor of Stamps for the county of Westmoreland; and, after the death of Southey, he was created Poet-Laureate by the Queen.—He settled with his wife in the Lake country; and, in 1813, took up his abode at Rydal Mount, where he lived till his death in 1850. He died on the 23d of April—the death-day of Shakespeare.

4. His longest works are the *Excursion* and the *Prelude*—both being parts of a longer and greater work which he intended to write on the growth of his own mind. His best poems are his shorter pieces, such as the poems on *Lucy*, *The Cuckoo*, the *Ode to Duty*, the *Intimations of Immortality*, and several of his *Sonnets*. He says of his own poetry that his purpose in writing it was "to console the afflicted; to add sunshine to daylight by making the happy happier; to teach the young and the gracious of every age to see, to think, and feel, and therefore to become more actively and securely virtuous." His poetical work is the noble landmark of a great transition—both in thought and in style. He drew aside poetry from questions and interests of mere society and the town to the scenes of Nature and the deepest feelings of man as man. In style, he refused to employ the old artificial vocabulary which Pope and his followers revelled in; he used the simplest words he could find; and, when he hits the mark in his simplest form of expression, his style is as forcible as it is true. He says of his own verse—

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"The moving accident is not my trade,  
To freeze the blood I have no ready arts;  
'Tis my delight, alone, in summer shade,  
To pipe a simple song for thinking hearts."

If one were asked what four lines of his poetry best convey the feeling of the whole, the reply must be that these are to be found in his "Song at the Feast of Brougham Castle,"—lines written about "the good Lord Clifford."

"Love had he found in huts where poor men lie,  
His daily teachers had been woods and rills,—  
The silence that is in the starry sky,  
The sleep that is among the lonely hills."

5. WALTER SCOTT (1771-1832), poet and novelist, the son of a Scotch attorney (called in Edinburgh a W.S. or Writer to H.M.'s Signet), was born there in the year 1771. He was educated at the High School, and then at the College—now called the University—of Edinburgh. In 1792 he was called to the Scottish Bar, or became an "advocate." During his boyhood, he had had several illnesses, one of which left him lame for life. Through those long periods of sickness and of convalescence, he read Percy's 'Reliques of Ancient Poetry,' and almost all the romances, old plays, and epic poems that have been published in the English language. This gave his mind and imagination a set which they never lost all through life.

6. His first publications were translations of German poems. In the year 1805, however, an original poem, the *Lay of the Last Minstrel*, appeared; and Scott became at one bound the foremost poet of the day. *Marmion*, the *Lady of the Lake*, and other poems, followed with great rapidity. But, in 1814, Scott took it into his head that his poetical vein was worked out; the star of Byron was rising upon the literary horizon; and he now gave himself up to novel-writing. His first novel, *Waverley*, appeared anonymously in 1814. *Guy Mannering*, *Old Mortality*, *Rob Roy*, and others, quickly followed; and, though the secret of the authorship was well kept both by printer and publisher, Walter Scott was generally believed to be the writer of these works, and he was frequently spoken of as "the Great Unknown." He was made a baronet by George IV. in 1820.

7. His expenses in building Abbotsford, and his desire to acquire land, induced him to go into partnership with Ballantyne, his printer, and with Constable, his publisher. Both firms failed in the dark 340 year of 1826; and Scott found himself unexpectedly liable for the large sum of £147,000. Such a load of debt would have utterly crushed most men; but Scott stood clear and undaunted in front of it. "Gentlemen," he

said to his creditors, "time and I against any two. Let me take this good ally into my company, and I believe I shall be able to pay you every farthing." He left his beautiful country house at Abbotsford; he gave up all his country pleasures; he surrendered all his property to his creditors; he took a small house in Edinburgh; and, in the short space of five years, he had paid off £130,000. But the task was too terrible; the pace had been too hard; and he was struck down by paralysis. But even this disaster did not daunt him. Again he went to work, and again he had a paralytic stroke. At last, however, he was obliged to give up; the Government of the day placed a royal frigate at his disposal; he went to Italy; but his health had utterly broken down, he felt he could get no good from the air of the south, and he turned his face towards home to die. He breathed his last breath at Abbotsford, in sight of his beloved Tweed, with his family around him, on the 21st of September 1832.

8. His poetry is the poetry of action. In imaginative power he ranks below no other poet, except Homer and Shakespeare. He delighted in war, in its movement, its pageantry, and its events; and, though lame, he was quartermaster of a volunteer corps of cavalry. On one occasion he rode to muster one hundred miles in twenty-four hours, composing verses by the way. Much of "Marmion" was composed on horseback. "I had many a grand gallop," he says, "when I was thinking of 'Marmion.'" His two chief powers in verse are his narrative and his pictorial power. His boyhood was passed in the Borderland of Scotland—"a district in which every field has its battle and every rivulet its song;" and he was at home in every part of the Highlands and the Lowlands, the Islands and the Borders, of his native country. But, both in his novels and his poems, he was a painter of action rather than of character.

9. His prose works are now much more read than his poems; but both are full of life, power, literary skill, knowledge of men and women, and strong sympathy with all past ages. He wrote so fast that his sentences are often loose and ungrammatical; but they are never unidiomatic or stiff. The rush of a strong and large life goes through them, and carries the reader along, forgetful of all minor blemishes. His best novels are *Old Mortality* and *Kenilworth*; his greatest romance is *Ivanhoe*.

10. SAMUEL TAYLOR COLERIDGE (1772-1834), a true poet, and 341 a writer of noble prose, was born at Ottery St Mary, in Devonshire, in 1772. His father, who was vicar of the parish, and master of the grammar-school, died when the boy was only nine years of age. He was educated at Christ's Hospital, in London, where his most famous schoolfellow was Charles Lamb; and from there he went to Jesus College, Cambridge. In 1793 he had fallen into debt at College; and, in despair, left Cambridge, and enlisted in the 15th Light Dragoons, under the name of Silas Tomkins Comberbatch. He was quickly discovered, and his discharge soon obtained. While on a visit to his friend Robert Southey, at Bristol, the plan of emigrating to the banks of the Susquehanna, in Pennsylvania, was entered on; but, when all the friends and fellow-emigrants were ready to start, it was discovered that no one of them had any money.—Coleridge finally became a literary man and journalist. His real power, however, lay in poetry; but by poetry he could not make a living. His first volume of poems was published at Bristol, in the year 1796; but it was not till 1798 that the *Rime of the Ancient Mariner* appeared in the 'Lyrical Ballads.' His next greatest poem, *Christabel*, though written in 1797, was not published till the year 1816. His other best poems are *Love; Dejection—an Ode*; and some of his shorter pieces. His best poetry was written about the close of the century: "Coleridge," said Wordsworth, "was in blossom from 1796 to 1800."—As a critic and prose-writer, he is one of the greatest men of his time. His best works in prose are *The Friend* and *the Aids to Reflection*. He died at Highgate, near London, in the year 1834.

11. His style, both in prose and in verse, marks the beginning of the modern era. His prose style is noble, elaborate, eloquent, and full of subtle and involved thought; his style in verse is always musical, and abounds in rhythms of the most startling and novel—yet always genuine—kind. *Christabel* is the poem that is most full of these fine musical rhythms.

12. ROBERT SOUTHEY (1774-1843), poet, reviewer, historian, but, above all, man of letters,—the friend of Coleridge and Wordsworth,—was born at Bristol in 1774. He was educated at Westminster School and at Balliol College, Oxford. After his marriage with Miss Edith Fricker—a sister of Sara, the wife of Coleridge—he settled at Greta Hall, near Keswick, in 1803; and resided there until his death in 1843. In 1813 he was created Poet-Laureate by George III.—He was the most indefatigable of writers. He wrote poetry before breakfast; history between breakfast and 342 dinner; reviews between dinner and supper; and, even when taking a constitutional, he had always a book in his hand, and walked along the road reading. He began to write and to publish at the age of nineteen; he never ceased writing till the year 1837, when his brain softened from the effects of perpetual labour.

13. Southey wrote a great deal of verse, but much more prose. His prose works amount to more than one hundred volumes; but his poetry, such as it is, will probably live longer than his prose. His best-known

poems are Joan of Arc, written when he was nineteen; Thalaba the Destroyer, a poem in irregular and unrhymed verse; The Curse of Kehama, in verse rhymed, but irregular; and Roderick, the last of the Goths, written in blank verse. He will, however, always be best remembered by his shorter pieces, such as The Holly Tree, Stanzas written in My Library, and others.—His most famous prose work is the Life of Nelson. His prose style is always firm, clear, compact, and sensible.

14. THOMAS CAMPBELL (1777-1844), a noble poet and brilliant reviewer, was born in Glasgow in the year 1777. He was educated at the High School and the University of Glasgow. At the age of twenty-two, he published his Pleasures of Hope, which at once gave him a place high among the poets of the day. In 1803 he removed to London, and followed literature as his profession; and, in 1806, he received a pension of £200 a-year from the Government, which enabled him to devote the whole of his time to his favourite study of poetry. His best long poem is the Gertrude of Wyoming, a tale written in the Spenserian stanza, which he handles with great ease and power. But he is best known, and will be longest remembered, for his short lyrics—which glow with passionate and fiery eloquence—such as The Battle of the Baltic, Ye Mariners of England, Hohenlinden, and others. He was twice Lord Rector of the University of Glasgow. He died at Boulogne in 1844, and was buried in Poets' Corner, Westminster Abbey.

15. THOMAS MOORE (1779-1852), poet, biographer, and historian—but most of all poet—was born in Dublin in the year 1779. He began to print verses at the age of thirteen, and may be said, like Pope, to have “lisped in numbers, for the numbers came.” He came to London in 1799, and was quickly received into fashionable society. In 1803 he was made Admiralty Registrar 343 at Bermuda; but he soon gave up the post, leaving a deputy in his place, who, some years after, embezzled the Government funds, and brought financial ruin upon Moore. The poet's friends offered to help him out of his money difficulties; but he most honourably declined all such help, and, like Sir W. Scott, resolved to clear off all claims against him by the aid of his pen alone. For the next twenty years of his life he laboured incessantly; and volumes of poetry, history, and biography came steadily from his pen. His best poems are his Irish Melodies, some fifteen or sixteen of which are perfect and imperishable; and it is as a writer of songs that Moore will live in the literature of this country. He boasted, and with truth, that it was he who awakened for this century the long-silent harp of his native land—

“Dear Harp of my Country! in darkness I found thee,  
The cold chain of silence had hung o'er thee long,  
When proudly, my own Island Harp, I unbound thee,  
And gave all thy chords to light, freedom, and song.”

His best long poem is Lalla Rookh.—His prose works are little read nowadays. The chief among them are his Life of Sheridan, and his Life of Lord Byron.—He died at Sloperton, in Wiltshire, in 1852, two years after the death of Wordsworth.

16. GEORGE GORDON, LORD BYRON (1788-1824), a great English poet, was born in London in the year 1788. He was the only child of a reckless and unprincipled father and a passionate mother. He was educated at Harrow School, and afterwards at Trinity College, Cambridge. His first volume—Hours of Idleness—was published in 1807, before he was nineteen. A critique of this juvenile work which appeared in the ‘Edinburgh Review’ stung him to passion; and he produced a very vigorous poetical reply in English Bards and Scotch Reviewers. After the publication of this book, Byron travelled in Germany, Spain, Greece, and Turkey for two years; and the first two cantos of the poem entitled Childe Harold's Pilgrimage were the outcome of these travels. This poem at once placed him at the head of English poets; “he woke one morning,” he said, “and found himself famous.” He was married in the year 1815, but left his wife in the following year; left his native country also, never to return. First of all he settled at Geneva, where he made the acquaintance of the poet Shelley, and where he wrote, among other poems, the third canto of Childe Harold and the Prisoner of Chillon. In 1817 he removed to Venice, where he 344 composed the fourth canto of Childe Harold and the Lament of Tasso; his next resting-place was Ravenna, where he wrote several plays. Pisa saw him next; and at this place he spent a great deal of his time in close intimacy with Shelley. In 1821 the Greek nation rose in revolt against the cruelties and oppression of the Turkish rule; and Byron's sympathies were strongly enlisted on the side of the Greeks. He helped the struggling little country with contributions of money; and, in 1823, sailed from Geneva to take a personal share in the war of liberation. He died, however, of fever, at Missolonghi, on the 19th of April 1824, at the age of thirty-six.

17. His best-known work is Childe Harold, which is written in the Spenserian stanza. His plays, the best of which are Manfred and Sardanapalus, are written in blank verse.—His style is remarkable for its strength and elasticity, for its immensely powerful sweep, tireless energy, and brilliant illustrations.

18. PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY (1792-1822),—who has, like Spenser, been called “the poet’s poet,”—was born at Field Place, near Horsham, in Sussex, in the year 1792. He was educated at Eton, and then at University College, Oxford. A shy, diffident, retiring boy, with sweet, gentle looks and manners—like those of a girl—but with a spirit of the greatest fearlessness and the noblest independence, he took little share in the sports and pursuits of his schoolfellows. Obligated to leave Oxford, in consequence of having written a tract of which the authorities did not approve, he married at the very early age of nineteen. The young lady whom he married died in 1816; and he soon after married Mary, daughter of William Godwin, the eminent author of ‘Political Justice.’ In 1818 he left England for Italy,—like his friend, Lord Byron, for ever. It was at Naples, Leghorn, and Pisa that he chiefly resided. In 1822 he bought a little boat—“a perfect plaything for the summer,” he calls it; and he used often to make short voyages in it, and wrote many of his poems on these occasions. When Leigh Hunt was lying ill at Leghorn, Shelley and his friend Williams resolved on a coasting trip to that city. They reached Leghorn in safety; but, on the return journey, the boat sank in a sudden squall. Captain Roberts was watching the vessel with his glass from the top of the Leghorn lighthouse, as it crossed the Bay of Spezzia: a black cloud arose; a storm came down; the vessels sailing with Shelley’s boat were wrapped in darkness; the cloud passed; the sun shone out, and all was clear again; the larger vessels rode on; but Shelley’s boat had disappeared. The poet’s body was cast on 345 shore, but the quarantine laws of Italy required that everything thrown up on the coast should be burned: no representations could alter the law; and Shelley’s ashes were placed in a box and buried in the Protestant cemetery at Rome.

19. Shelley’s best long poem is the Adonais, an elegy on the death of John Keats. It is written in the Spenserian stanza. But this true poet will be best remembered by his short lyrical poems, such as The Cloud, Ode to a Skylark, Ode to the West Wind, Stanzas written in Dejection, and others.—Shelley has been called “the poet’s poet,” because his style is so thoroughly transfused by pure imagination. He has also been called “the master-singer of our modern race and age; for his thoughts, his words, and his deeds all sang together.” He is probably the greatest lyric poet of this century.

20. JOHN KEATS (1795-1821), one of our truest poets, was born in Moorfields, London, in the year 1795. He was educated at a private school at Enfield. His desire for the pleasures of the intellect and the imagination showed itself very early at school; and he spent many a half-holiday in writing translations from the Roman and the French poets. On leaving school, he was apprenticed to a surgeon at Edmonton—the scene of one of John Gilpin’s adventures; but, in 1817, he gave up the practice of surgery, devoted himself entirely to poetry, and brought out his first volume. In 1818 appeared his Endymion. The ‘Quarterly Review’ handled it without mercy. Keats’s health gave way; the seeds of consumption were in his frame; and he was ordered to Italy in 1820, as the last chance of saving his life. But it was too late. The air of Italy could not restore him. He settled at Rome with his friend Severn; but, in spite of all the care, thought, devotion, and watching of his friend, he died in 1821, at the age of twenty-five. He was buried in the Protestant cemetery at Rome; and the inscription on his tomb, composed by himself, is, “Here lies one whose name was writ in water.”

21. His greatest poem is Hyperion, written, in blank verse, on the overthrow of the “early gods” of Greece. But he will most probably be best remembered by his marvellous odes, such as the Ode to a Nightingale, Ode on a Grecian Urn, To Autumn, and others. His style is clear, sensuous, and beautiful; and he has added to our literature lines that will always live. Such are the following:—

“A thing of beauty is a joy for ever.”

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“Silent, upon a peak in Darien.”

“Then felt I like some watcher of the skies

When a new planet swims into his ken.”

“Perhaps the self-same song that found a path

Through the sad heart of Ruth, when, sick for home,

She stood in tears amid the alien corn.”

22. Prose-Writers.—We have now to consider the greatest prose-writers of the first half of the nineteenth century. First comes Walter Scott, one of the greatest novelists that ever lived, and who won the name of “The Wizard of the North” from the marvellous power he possessed of enchaining the attention and fascinating the minds of his readers. Two other great writers of prose were Charles Lamb and Walter Savage Landor, each in styles essentially different. Jane Austen, a young English lady, has become a classic in prose, because her work is true and perfect within its own sphere. De Quincey is perhaps the writer of the most ornate and elaborate English prose of this period. Thomas Carlyle, a great Scotsman,



with a style of overwhelming power, but of occasional grotesqueness, like a great prophet and teacher of the nation, compelled statesmen and philanthropists to think, while he also gained for himself a high place in the rank of historians. Macaulay, also of Scottish descent, was one of the greatest essayists and ablest writers on history that Great Britain has produced. A short survey of each of these great men may be useful. Scott has been already treated of.

23. CHARLES LAMB (1775-1834), a perfect English essayist, was born in the Inner Temple, in London, in the year 1775. His father was clerk to a barrister of that Inn of Court. Charles was educated at Christ's Hospital, where his most famous schoolfellow was S. T. Coleridge. Brought up in the very heart of London, he had always a strong feeling for the greatness of the metropolis of the world. "I often shed tears," he said, "in the motley Strand, for fulness of joy at so much life." He was, indeed, a thorough Cockney and lover of London, as were also Chaucer, Spenser, Milton, and Lamb's friend Leigh Hunt. Entering the India House as a clerk in the year 1792, he remained there thirty-three years; and it was one of his odd sayings that, if any one wanted to see his "works," he would find them on the shelves of the India House.—He is greatest as a writer of prose; and his prose is, in its way, unequalled for sweetness, grace, humour, and quaint terms, among the writings of this century. His best prose work is the *Essays of Elia*, which show on every page the most whimsical and humorous subtleties, a quick play of intellect, and a deep sympathy with the sorrows and the joys of men. Very little verse came from his pen. "Charles Lamb's nosegay of verse," says Professor Dowden, "may be held by the small hand of a maiden, and there is not in it one flaunting flower." Perhaps the best of his poems are the short pieces entitled *Hester* and *The Old Familiar Faces*.—He retired from the India House, on a pension, in 1825, and died at Edmonton, near London, in 1834. His character was as sweet and refined as his style; Wordsworth spoke of him as "Lamb the frolic and the gentle;" and these and other fine qualities endeared him to a large circle of friends.

24. WALTER SAVAGE LANDOR (1775-1864), the greatest prose-writer in his own style of the nineteenth century, was born at Ipsley Court, in Warwickshire, on the 30th of January 1775—the anniversary of the execution of Charles I. He was educated at Rugby School and at Oxford; but his fierce and insubordinate temper—which remained with him, and injured him all his life—procured his expulsion from both of these places. As heir to a large estate, he resolved to give himself up entirely to literature; and he accordingly declined to adopt any profession. Living an almost purely intellectual life, he wrote a great deal of prose and some poetry; and his first volume of poems appeared before the close of the eighteenth century. His life, which began in the reign of George III., stretched through the reigns of George IV. and William IV., into the twenty-seventh year of Queen Victoria; and, in the course of this long life, he had manifold experiences, many loves and hates, friendships and acquaintanceships, with persons of every sort and rank. He joined the Spanish army to fight Napoleon, and presented the Spanish Government with large sums of money. He spent about thirty years of his life in Florence, where he wrote many of his works. He died at Florence in the year 1864. His greatest prose work is the *Imaginary Conversations*; his best poem is *Count Julian*; and the character of Count Julian has been ranked by De Quincey with the Satan of Milton. Some of his smaller poetic pieces are perfect; and there is one, *Rose Aylmer*, written about a dear young friend, that Lamb was never tired of repeating:—

"Ah! what avails the sceptred race!

Ah! what the form divine!

What every virtue, every grace!

Rose Aylmer, all were thine!

"Rose Aylmer, whom these wakeful eyes

Shall weep, but never see!

A night of memories and sighs

I consecrate to thee."

25. JANE AUSTEN (1775-1817), the most delicate and faithful painter of English social life, was born at Steventon, in Hampshire, in 1775—in the same year as Landor and Lamb. She wrote a small number of novels, most of which are almost perfect in their minute and true painting of character. Sir Walter Scott, Macaulay, and other great writers, are among her fervent admirers. Scott says of her writing: "The big bow-wow strain I can do myself, like any now going; but the exquisite touch which renders ordinary commonplace things and characters interesting, from the truth of the description and the sentiment, is denied to me." She works out her characters by making them reveal themselves in their talk, and by an infinite series of minute touches. Her two best novels are *Emma* and *Pride and Prejudice*. The interest of them depends on the truth of the painting; and many thoughtful persons read through the whole of her novels every year.

26. THOMAS DE QUINCEY (1785-1859), one of our most brilliant essayists, was born at Greenhays, Manchester, in the year 1785. He was educated at the Manchester grammar-school and at Worcester College, Oxford. While at Oxford he took little share in the regular studies of his college, but read enormous numbers of Greek, Latin, and English books, as his taste or whim suggested. He knew no one; he hardly knew his own tutor. "For the first two years of my residence in Oxford," he says, "I compute that I did not utter one hundred words." After leaving Oxford, he lived for about twenty years in the Lake country; and there he became acquainted with Wordsworth, Hartley Coleridge (the son of S. T. Coleridge), and John Wilson (afterwards known as 349 Professor Wilson, and also as the "Christopher North" of 'Blackwood's Magazine'). Suffering from repeated attacks of neuralgia, he gradually formed the habit of taking laudanum; and by the time he had reached the age of thirty, he drank about 8000 drops a-day. This unfortunate habit injured his powers of work and weakened his will. In spite of it, however, he wrote many hundreds of essays and articles in reviews and magazines. In the latter part of his life, he lived either near or in Edinburgh, and was always employed in dreaming (the opium increased his power both of dreaming and of musing), or in studying or writing. He died in Edinburgh in the year 1859.—Many of his essays were written under the signature of "The English Opium-Eater." Probably his best works are *The Confessions of an Opium-Eater* and *The Vision of Sudden Death*. The chief characteristics of his style are majestic rhythm and elaborate eloquence. Some of his sentences are almost as long and as sustained as those of Jeremy Taylor; while, in many passages of reasoning that glows and brightens with strong passion and emotion, he is not inferior to Burke. He possessed an enormous vocabulary—in wealth of words and phrases he surpasses both Macaulay and Carlyle; and he makes a very large—perhaps even an excessive—use of Latin words. He is also very fond of using metaphors, personifications, and other figures of speech. It may be said without exaggeration that, next to Carlyle's, De Quincey's style is the most stimulating and inspiriting that a young reader can find among modern writers.

27. THOMAS CARLYLE (1795-1881), a great thinker, essayist, and historian, was born at Ecclefechan, Dumfriesshire, in the year 1795. He was educated at the burgh school of Annan, and afterwards at the University of Edinburgh. Classics and the higher mathematics were his favourite studies; and he was more especially fond of astronomy. He was a teacher for some years after leaving the University. For a few years after this he was engaged in minor literary work; and translating from the German occupied a good deal of his time. In 1826 he married Jane Welsh, a woman of abilities only inferior to his own. His first original work was *Sartor Resartus* ("The Tailor Repatched"), which appeared in 1834, and excited a great deal of attention—a book which has proved to many the electric spark which first woke into life their powers of thought and reflection. From 1837 to 1840 he gave courses of lectures in London; and these lectures were listened to by the best and most thoughtful of the London people. The most striking series afterwards appeared in the form of a book, under the title of *Heroes 350 and Hero-Worship*. Perhaps his most remarkable book—a book that is unique in all English literature—is *The French Revolution*, which appeared in 1837. In the year 1845, his *Cromwell's Letters and Speeches* were published, and drew after them a large number of eager readers. In 1865 he completed the hardest piece of work he had ever undertaken, his *History of Frederick II.*, commonly called the *Great*. This work is so highly regarded in Germany as a truthful and painstaking history that officers in the Prussian army are obliged to study it, as containing the best account of the great battles of the Continent, the fields on which they were fought, and the strategy that went to win them. One of the crowning external honours of Carlyle's life was his appointment as Lord Rector of the University of Edinburgh in 1866; but at the very time that he was delivering his famous and remarkable Installation Address, his wife lay dying in London. This stroke brought terrible sorrow on the old man; he never ceased to mourn for his loss, and to recall the virtues and the beauties of character in his dead wife; "the light of his life," he said, "was quite gone out;" and he wrote very little after her death. He himself died in London on the 5th of February 1881.

28. *Carlyle's Style*.—Carlyle was an author by profession, a teacher of and prophet to his countrymen by his mission, and a student of history by the deep interest he took in the life of man. He was always more or less severe in his judgments—he has been called "The Censor of the Age,"—because of the high ideal which he set up for his own conduct and the conduct of others.—He shows in his historic writings a splendour of imagery and a power of dramatic grouping second only to Shakespeare's. In command of words he is second to no modern English writer. His style has been highly praised and also energetically blamed. It is rugged, gnarled, disjointed, full of irregular force—shot across by sudden lurid lights of imagination—full of the most striking and indeed astonishing epithets, and inspired by a certain grim Titanic force. His sentences are often clumsily built. He himself said of them: "Perhaps not more than nine-tenths stand straight on their legs; the remainder are in quite angular attitudes; a few even sprawl out

helplessly on all sides, quite broken-backed and dismembered.” There is no modern writer who possesses so large a profusion of figurative language. His works are also full of the pithiest and most memorable sayings, such as the following:—

“Genius is an immense capacity for taking pains.”

“Do the duty which lies nearest thee! Thy second duty will already have become clearer.”

351 “History is a mighty drama, enacted upon the theatre of time, with suns for lamps, and eternity for a background.”

“All true work is sacred. In all true work, were it but true hand-labour, there is something of divineness. Labour, wide as the earth, has its summit in heaven.”

“Remember now and always that Life is no idle dream, but a solemn reality based upon Eternity, and encompassed by Eternity. Find out your task: stand to it: the night cometh when no man can work.”

29. THOMAS BABINGTON MACAULAY (1800-1859), the most popular of modern historians,—an essayist, poet, statesman, and orator,—was born at Rothley Temple, in Leicestershire, in the year 1800. His father was one of the greatest advocates for the abolition of slavery; and received, after his death, the honour of a monument in Westminster Abbey. Young Macaulay was educated privately, and then at Trinity College, Cambridge. He studied classics with great diligence and success, but detested mathematics—a dislike the consequences of which he afterwards deeply regretted. In 1824 he was elected Fellow of his college. His first literary work was done for Knight’s ‘Quarterly Magazine’; but the earliest piece of writing that brought him into notice was his famous essay on Milton, written for the ‘Edinburgh Review’ in 1825. Several years of his life were spent in India, as Member of the Supreme Council; and, on his return, he entered Parliament, where he sat as M.P. for Edinburgh. Several offices were filled by him, among others that of Paymaster-General of the Forces, with a seat in the Cabinet of Lord John Russell. In 1842 appeared his Lays of Ancient Rome, poems which have found a very large number of readers. His greatest work is his History of England from the Accession of James II. To enable himself to write this history he read hundreds of books, Acts of Parliament, thousands of pamphlets, tracts, broadsheets, ballads, and other flying fragments of literature; and he never seems to have forgotten anything he ever read. In 1849 he was elected Lord Rector of the University of Glasgow; and in 1857 was raised to the peerage with the title of Baron Macaulay of Rothley—the first literary man who was ever called to the House of Lords. He died at Holly Lodge, Kensington, in the year 1859.

30. Macaulay’s Style.—One of the most remarkable qualities in his style is the copiousness of expression, and the remarkable power of putting the same statement in a large number of different ways. This enormous command of expression corresponded with the extraordinary power of his memory. At the age of eight he could repeat 352 the whole of Scott’s poem of “Marmion.” He was fond, at this early age, of big words and learned English; and once, when he was asked by a lady if his toothache was better, he replied, “Madam, the agony is abated!” He knew the whole of Homer and of Milton by heart; and it was said with perfect truth that, if Milton’s poetical works could have been lost, Macaulay would have restored every line with complete exactness. Sydney Smith said of him: “There are no limits to his knowledge, on small subjects as on great; he is like a book in breeches.” His style has been called “abrupt, pointed, and oratorical.” He is fond of the arts of surprise—of antithesis—and of epigram. Sentences like these are of frequent occurrence:—

“Cranmer could vindicate himself from the charge of being a heretic only by arguments which made him out to be a murderer.”

“The Puritan hated bear-baiting, not because it gave pain to the bear, but because it gave pleasure to the spectators.”

Besides these elements of epigram and antithesis, there is a vast wealth of illustration, brought from the stores of a memory which never seemed to forget anything. He studied every sentence with the greatest care and minuteness, and would often rewrite paragraphs and even whole chapters, until he was satisfied with the variety and clearness of the expression. “He could not rest,” it was said, “until the punctuation was correct to a comma; until every paragraph concluded with a telling sentence, and every sentence flowed like clear running water.” But, above all things, he strove to make his style perfectly lucid and immediately intelligible. He is fond of countless details; but he so masters and marshals these details that each only serves to throw more light upon the main statement. His prose may be described as pictorial prose. The character of his mind was, like Burke’s, combative and oratorical; and he writes with the greatest vigour and animation when he is attacking a policy or an opinion.

**CHAPTER IX.**  
**THE SECOND HALF OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY.**

1. Science.—The second half of the nineteenth century is distinguished by the enormous advance made in science, and in the application of science to the industries and occupations of the people. Chemistry and electricity have more especially made enormous strides. Within the last twenty years, chemistry has remade itself into a new science; and electricity has taken a very large part of the labour of mankind upon itself. It carries our messages round the world—under the deepest seas, over the highest mountains, to every continent, and to every great city; it lights up our streets and public halls; it drives our engines and propels our trains. But the powers of imagination, the great literary powers of poetry, and of eloquent prose,—especially in the domain of fiction,—have not decreased because science has grown. They have rather shown stronger developments. We must, at the same time, remember that a great deal of the literary work published by the writers who lived, or are still living, in the latter half of this century, was written in the former half. Thus, Longfellow was a man of forty-three, and Tennyson was forty-one, in the year 1850; and both had by that time done a great deal of their best work. The same is true of the prose-writers, Thackeray, Dickens, and Ruskin.

2. Poets and Prose-Writers.—The six greatest poets of the latter half of this century are Longfellow, a distinguished American poet, Tennyson, Mrs Browning, Robert Browning, 354 William Morris, and Matthew Arnold. Of these, Mrs Browning and Longfellow are dead—Mrs Browning having died in 1861, and Longfellow in 1882.—The four greatest writers of prose are Thackeray, Dickens, George Eliot, and Ruskin. Of these, only Ruskin is alive.

3. HENRY WADSWORTH LONGFELLOW (1807-1882), the most popular of American poets, and as popular in Great Britain as he is in the United States, was born at Portland, Maine, in the year 1807. He was educated at Bowdoin College, and took his degree there in the year 1825. His profession was to have been the law; but, from the first, the whole bent of his talents and character was literary. At the extraordinary age of eighteen the professorship of modern languages in his own college was offered to him; it was eagerly accepted, and in order to qualify himself for his duties, he spent the next four years in Germany, France, Spain, and Italy. His first important prose work was *Outre-Mer*, or a Pilgrimage beyond the Sea. In 1837 he was offered the Chair of Modern Languages and Literature in Harvard University, and he again paid a visit to Europe—this time giving his thoughts and study chiefly to Germany, Denmark, and Scandinavia. In 1839 he published the prose romance called *Hyperion*. But it was not as a prose-writer that Longfellow gained the secure place he has in the hearts of the English-speaking peoples; it was as a poet. His first volume of poems was called *Voices of the Night*, and appeared in 1841; *Evangeline* was published in 1848; and *Hiawatha*, on which his poetical reputation is perhaps most firmly based, in 1855. Many other volumes of poetry—both original and translations—have also come from his pen; but these are the best. The University of Oxford created him Doctor of Civil Law in 1869. He died at Harvard in the year 1882. A man of singularly mild and gentle character, of sweet and charming manners, his own lines may be applied to him with perfect appropriateness—

“His gracious presence upon earth  
Was as a fire upon a hearth;  
As pleasant songs, at morning sung,  
The words that dropped from his sweet tongue  
Strengthened our hearts, or—heard at night—  
Made all our slumbers soft and light.”

4. Longfellow’s Style.—In one of his prose works, Longfellow himself says, “In character, in manners, in style, in all things, the 355 supreme excellence is simplicity.” This simplicity he steadily aimed at, and in almost all his writings reached; and the result is the sweet lucidity which is manifest in his best poems. His verse has been characterised as “simple, musical, sincere, sympathetic, clear as crystal, and pure as snow.” He has written in a great variety of measures—in more, perhaps, than have been employed by Tennyson himself. His “*Evangeline*” is written in a kind of dactylic hexameter, which does not always scan, but which is almost always musical and impressive—

“Fair was she and young, when in hope began the long journey;  
Faded was she and old, when in disappointment it ended.”  
The “*Hiawatha*,” again, is written in a trochaic measure—each verse containing four trochees—  
“‘Farewell!’ said he, ‘Minnehaha,  
Farewell, O my laughing water!  
All my heart is buried with you,

All' my | thou'ghts go | on'ward | wi'th you!"

He is always careful and painstaking with his rhythm and with the cadence of his verse. It may be said with truth that Longfellow has taught more people to love poetry than any other English writer, however great.

5. ALFRED TENNYSON, a great English poet, who has written beautiful poetry for more than fifty years, was born at Somersby, in Lincolnshire, in the year 1809. He is the youngest of three brothers, all of whom are poets. He was educated at Cambridge, and some of his poems have shown, in a striking light, the forgotten beauty of the fens and flats of Cambridge and Lincolnshire. In 1829 he obtained the Chancellor's medal for a poem on "Timbuctoo." In 1830 he published his first volume, with the title of *Poems chiefly Lyrical*—a volume which contained, among other beautiful verses, the "Recollections of the Arabian Nights" and "The Dying Swan." In 1833 he issued another volume, called simply *Poems*; and this contained the exquisite poems entitled "The Miller's Daughter" and "The Lotos-Eaters." The Princess, a poem as remarkable for its striking thoughts as for its perfection of language, appeared in 1847. The *In Memoriam*, a long series of short poems in memory of his dear friend, Arthur Henry Hallam, the son of Hallam the historian, was published in the year 1850. When Wordsworth died in 1850, Tennyson was appointed to the office of Poet-Laureate. This office, from the time when Dryden was forced to resign it in 1689, to the 356 time when Southey accepted it in 1813, had always been held by third or fourth rate writers; in the present day it is held by the man who has done the largest amount of the best poetical work. The *Idylls of the King* appeared in 1859. This series of poems—perhaps his greatest—contains the stories of "Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table." Many other volumes of poems have been given by him to the world. In his old age he has taken to the writing of ballads and dramas. His ballad of *The Revenge* is one of the noblest and most vigorous poems that England has ever seen. The dramas of *Harold*, *Queen Mary*, and *Becket*, are perhaps his best; and the last was written when the poet had reached the age of seventy-four. In the year 1882 he was created Baron Tennyson, and called to the House of Peers.

6. Tennyson's Style.—Tennyson has been to the last two generations of Englishmen the national teacher of poetry. He has tried many new measures; he has ventured on many new rhythms; and he has succeeded in them all. He is at home equally in the slowest, most tranquil, and most meditative of rhythms, and in the rapidest and most impulsive. Let us look at the following lines as an example of the first. The poem is written on a woman who is dying of a lingering disease—

"Fair is her cottage in its place,  
Where yon broad water sweetly slowly glides:  
It sees itself from thatch to base  
Dream in the sliding tides.  
"And fairer she: but, ah! how soon to die!  
Her quiet dream of life this hour may cease:  
Her peaceful being slowly passes by  
To some more perfect peace."

The very next poem, "The Sailor Boy," in the same volume, is—though written in exactly the same measure—driven on with the most rapid march and vigorous rhythm—

"He rose at dawn and, fired with hope,  
Shot o'er the seething harbour-bar,  
And reached the ship and caught the rope  
And whistled to the morning-star."

And this is a striking and prominent characteristic of all Tennyson's poetry. Everywhere the sound is made to be "an echo to the sense"; the style is in perfect keeping with the matter. In the "Lotos-Eaters," we have the sense of complete indolence and deep repose in—

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"A land of streams! Some, like a downward smoke,  
Slow-dropping veils of thinnest lawn, did go."

In the "Boadicea," we have the rush and the shock of battle, the closing of legions, the hurtle of arms and the clash of armed men—

"Phantom sound of blows descending, moan of an enemy massacred,  
Phantom wail of women and children, multitudinous agonies."

Many of Tennyson's sweetest and most pathetic lines have gone right into the heart of the nation, such as—

"But oh for the touch of a vanished hand,  
And the sound of a voice that is still!"

All his language is highly polished, ornate, rich—sometimes Spenserian in luxuriant imagery and sweet music, sometimes even Homeric in massiveness and severe simplicity. Thus, in the “Morte d’Arthur,” he speaks of the knight walking to the lake as—

“Clothed with his breath, and looking as he walked,  
Larger than human on the frozen hills.”

Many of his pithy lines have taken root in the memory of the English people, such as these—

“Tis better to have loved and lost,  
Than never to have loved at all.”

“For words, like Nature, half reveal,  
And half conceal, the soul within.”

“Kind hearts are more than coronets,  
And simple faith than Norman blood.”

7. ELIZABETH BARRETT BARRETT, afterwards MRS BROWNING, the greatest poetess of this century, was born in London in the year 1809. She wrote verses “at the age of eight—and earlier,” she says; and her first volume of poems was published when she was seventeen. When still a girl, she broke a blood-vessel upon the lungs, was ordered to a warmer climate than that of London; and her brother, whom she loved very dearly, took her down to Torquay. There a terrible tragedy was enacted before her eyes. One day the weather and the water looked very tempting; her brother took a sailing-boat for a short cruise in Torbay; the boat went down in front of the house, and in view of his sister; the body was never recovered. This sad event completely destroyed her already weak health; she returned to London, and spent several years in a darkened room. Here she “read almost every book worth reading in 358 almost every language, and gave herself heart and soul to that poetry of which she seemed born to be the priestess.” This way of life lasted for many years: and, in the course of it, she published several volumes of noble verse. In 1846 she married Robert Browning, also a great poet. In 1856 she brought out *Aurora Leigh*, her longest, and probably also her greatest, poem. Mr Ruskin called it “the greatest poem which the century has produced in any language;” but this is going too far.—Mrs Browning will probably be longest remembered by her incomparable sonnets and by her lyrics, which are full of pathos and passion. Perhaps her two finest poems in this kind are the *Cry of the Children* and *Cowper’s Grave*. All her poems show an enormous power of eloquent, penetrating, and picturesque language; and many of them are melodious with a rich and wonderful music. She died in 1861.

Transcriber’s Note:

The above paragraph is given as printed. Elizabeth Barrett Browning was born Elizabeth Barrett Moulton, later Moulton-Barrett, in 1806. Her year of birth was universally given as 1809 until some time after Robert Browning’s death. Her brother’s fatal accident took place in 1840.

8. ROBERT BROWNING, the most daring and original poet of the century, was born in Camberwell, a southern suburb of London, in the year 1812. He was privately educated. In 1836 he published his first poem *Paracelsus*, which many wondered at, but few read. It was the story of a man who had lost his way in the mazes of thought about life,—about its why and wherefore,—about this world and the next,—about himself and his relations to God and his fellow-men. Mr Browning has written many plays, but they are more fit for reading in the study than for acting on the stage. His greatest work is *The Ring and the Book*; and it is most probably by this that his name will live in future ages. Of his minor poems, the best known and most popular is *The Pied Piper of Hamelin*—a poem which is a great favourite with all young people, from the picturesqueness and vigour of the verse. The most deeply pathetic of his minor poems is *Evelyn Hope*:—

“So, hush,—I will give you this leaf to keep—  
See, I shut it inside the sweet cold hand,  
There! that is our secret! go to sleep;  
You will wake, and remember, and understand.”

9. Browning’s Style.—Browning’s language is almost always very hard to understand; but the meaning, when we have got at it, is well worth all the trouble that may have been taken to reach it. His poems are more full of thought and more rich in experience than those of any other English writer except Shakspeare. The thoughts and emotions which throng his mind at the same moment so crowd upon and jostle each other, become so inextricably intermingled, that it is very often extremely difficult for us to make out any meaning at all. Then many of his thoughts are so subtle and so profound that they cannot easily be drawn up from the depths in which they lie. No man can write with greater directness, greater lyric vigour, fire, and impulse, than Browning when he chooses—write more clearly and forcibly about such subjects as

love and war; but it is very seldom that he does choose. The infinite complexity of human life and its manifold experiences have seized and imprisoned his imagination; and it is not often that he speaks in a clear, free voice.

10. MATTHEW ARNOLD, one of the finest poets and noblest stylists of the age, was born at Laleham, near Staines, on the Thames, in the year 1822. He is the eldest son of the great Dr Arnold, the famous Head-master of Rugby. He was educated at Winchester and Rugby, from which latter school he proceeded to Balliol College, Oxford. The Newdigate prize for English verse was won by him in 1843—the subject of his poem being Cromwell. His first volume of poems was published in 1848. In the year 1851 he was appointed one of H.M. Inspectors of Schools; and he held that office up to the year 1885. In 1857 he was elected Professor of Poetry in the University of Oxford. In 1868 appeared a new volume with the simple title of *New Poems*; and, since then, he has produced a large number of books, mostly in prose. He is no less famous as a critic than as a poet; and his prose is singularly beautiful and musical.

11. Arnold's Style.—The chief qualities of his verse are clearness, simplicity, strong directness, noble and musical rhythm, and a certain intense calm. His lines on Morality give a good idea of his style:—

“We cannot kindle when we will

The fire that in the heart resides:

The spirit bloweth and is still

In mystery our soul abides:

But tasks in hours of insight willed

Can be through hours of gloom fulfilled.

With aching hands and bleeding feet

We dig and heap, lay stone on stone;

We bear the burden and the heat

Of the long day, and wish 'twere done.

Not till the hours of light return,

All we have built do we discern.”

His finest poem in blank verse is his *Sohrab and Rustum*—a tale 360 of the Tartar wastes. One of his noblest poems, called *Rugby Chapel*, describes the strong and elevated character of his father, the Head-master of Rugby.—His prose is remarkable for its lucidity, its pleasant and almost conversational rhythm, and its perfection of language.

12. WILLIAM MORRIS, a great narrative poet, was born near London in the year 1834. He was educated at Marlborough and at Exeter College, Oxford. In 1858 appeared his first volume of poems. In 1863 he began a business for the production of artistic wall-paper, stained glass, and furniture; he has a shop for the sale of these works of art in Oxford Street, London; and he devotes most of his time to drawing and designing for artistic manufacturers. His first poem, *The Life and Death of Jason*, appeared in 1867; and his magnificent series of narrative poems—*The Earthly Paradise*—was published in the years from 1868 and 1870. ‘*The Earthly Paradise*’ consists of twenty-four tales in verse, set in a framework much like that of Chaucer’s ‘*Canterbury Tales*.’ The poetic power in these tales is second only to that of Chaucer; and Morris has always acknowledged himself to be a pupil of Chaucer’s—

“Thou, my Master still,

Whatever feet have climbed Parnassus’ hill.”

Mr Morris has also translated the *Æneid* of Virgil, and several works from the Icelandic.

13. Morris's Style.—Clearness, strength, music, picturesqueness, and easy flow, are the chief characteristics of Morris's style. Of the month of April he says:—

“O fair midspring, besung so oft and oft,

How can I praise thy loveliness enow?

Thy sun that burns not, and thy breezes soft

That o'er the blossoms of the orchard blow,

The thousand things that 'neath the young leaves grow

The hopes and chances of the growing year,

Winter forgotten long, and summer near.”

His pictorial power—the power of bringing a person or a scene fully and adequately before one's eyes by the aid of words alone—is as great as that of Chaucer. The following is his picture of Edward III. in middle age:—

“Broad-browed he was, hook-nosed, with wide grey eyes

No longer eager for the coming prize,

But keen and steadfast: many an ageing line,  
 Half-hidden by his sweeping beard and fine,  
 Ploughed his thin cheeks; his hair was more than grey,  
 And like to one he seemed whose better day  
 Is over to himself, though foolish fame  
 Shouts louder year by year his empty name.  
 Unarmed he was, nor clad upon that morn  
 Much like a king: an ivory hunting-horn  
 Was slung about him, rich with gems and gold,  
 And a great white ger-falcon did he hold  
 Upon his fist; before his feet there sat  
 A scrivener making notes of this and that  
 As the King bade him, and behind his chair  
 His captains stood in armour rich and fair.”

Morris's stores of language are as rich as Spenser's; and he has much the same copious and musical flow of poetic words and phrases.

14. WILLIAM MAKEPEACE THACKERAY (1811-1863), one of the most original of English novelists, was born at Calcutta in the year 1811. The son of a gentleman high in the civil service of the East India Company, he was sent to England to be educated, and was some years at Charterhouse School, where one of his schoolfellows was Alfred Tennyson. He then went on to the University of Cambridge, which he left without taking a degree. Painting was the profession that he at first chose; and he studied art both in France and Germany. At the age of twenty-nine, however, he discovered that he was on a false tack, gave up painting, and took to literary work as his true field. He contributed many pleasant articles to 'Fraser's Magazine,' under the name of Michael Angelo Titmarsh; and one of his most beautiful and most pathetic stories, *The Great Hoggarty Diamond*, was also written under this name. He did not, however, take his true place as an English novelist of the first rank until the year 1847, when he published his first serial novel, *Vanity Fair*. Readers now began everywhere to class him with Charles Dickens, and even above him. His most beautiful work is perhaps *The Newcomes*; but the work which exhibits most fully the wonderful power of his art and his intimate knowledge of the spirit and the details of our older English life is *The History of Henry Esmond*—a work written in the style and language of the days of Queen Anne, and as beautiful as anything ever done by Addison himself. He died in the year 1863.

15. CHARLES DICKENS (1812-1870), the most popular writer of 362 this century, was born at Landport, Portsmouth, in the year 1812. His delicate constitution debarred him from mixing in boyish sports, and very early made him a great reader. There was a little garret in his father's house where a small collection of books was kept; and, hidden away in this room, young Charles devoured such books as the 'Vicar of Wakefield,' 'Robinson Crusoe,' and many other famous English books. This was in Chatham. The family next removed to London, where the father was thrown into prison for debt. The little boy, weakly and sensitive, was now sent to work in a blacking manufactory at six shillings a-week, his duty being to cover the blacking-pots with paper. "No words can express," he says, "the secret agony of my soul, as I compared these my everyday associates with those of my happier childhood, and felt my early hopes of growing up to be a learned and distinguished man crushed in my breast.... The misery it was to my young heart to believe that, day by day, what I had learned, and thought, and delighted in, and raised my fancy and my emulation up by, was passing away from me, never to be brought back any more, cannot be written." When his father's affairs took a turn for the better, he was sent to school; but it was to a school where "the boys trained white mice much better than the master trained the boys." In fact, his true education consisted in his eager perusal of a large number of miscellaneous books. When he came to think of what he should do in the world, the profession of reporter took his fancy; and, by the time he was nineteen, he had made himself the quickest and most accurate—that is, the best reporter in the Gallery of the House of Commons. His first work, *Sketches by Boz*, was published in 1836. In 1837 appeared the *Pickwick Papers*; and this work at once lifted Dickens into the foremost rank as a popular writer of fiction. From this time he was almost constantly engaged in writing novels. His *Oliver Twist* and *David Copperfield* contain reminiscences of his own life; and perhaps the latter is his most powerful work. "Like many fond parents," he wrote, "I have in my heart of hearts a favourite child; and his name is David Copperfield." He lived with all the strength of his heart and soul in the creations of his imagination and fancy while he was writing about them; he says himself, "No one can ever believe this narrative, in the reading, more than I believed it in the writing;" and



each novel, as he wrote it, made him older and leaner. Great knowledge of the lives of the poor, and great sympathy with them, were among his most striking gifts; and Sir Arthur Helps goes so far as to say, "I doubt much whether there has ever been a writer of fiction who took such a real and living interest in the world about him." He died in the year 1870, and was buried in Westminster Abbey.

16. Dickens's Style.—His style is easy, flowing, vigorous, picturesque, and humorous; his power of language is very great; and, when he is writing under the influence of strong passion, it rises into a pure and noble eloquence. The scenery—the external circumstances of his characters, are steeped in the same colours as the characters themselves; everything he touches seems to be filled with life and to speak—to look happy or sorrowful,—to reflect the feelings of the persons. His comic and humorous powers are very great; but his tragic power is also enormous—his power of depicting the fiercest passions that tear the human breast,—avarice, hate, fear, revenge, remorse. The great American statesman, Daniel Webster, said that Dickens had done more to better the condition of the English poor than all the statesmen Great Britain had ever sent into the English Parliament.

17. JOHN RUSKIN, the greatest living master of English prose, an art-critic and thinker, was born in London in the year 1819. In his father's house he was accustomed "to no other prospect than that of the brick walls over the way; he had no brothers, nor sisters, nor companions." To his London birth he ascribes the great charm that the beauties of nature had for him from his boyhood: he felt the contrast between town and country, and saw what no country-bred child could have seen in sights that were usual to him from his infancy. He was educated at Christ Church, Oxford, and gained the Newdigate prize for poetry in 1839. He at first devoted himself to painting; but his true and strongest genius lay in the direction of literature. In 1843 appeared the first volume of his *Modern Painters*, which is perhaps his greatest work; and the four other volumes were published between that date and the year 1860. In this work he discusses the qualities and the merits of the greatest painters of the English, the Italian, and other schools. In 1851 he produced a charming fairy tale, 'The King of the Golden River, or the Black Brothers.' He has written on architecture also, on political economy, and on many other social subjects. He is the founder of a society called "The St George's Guild," the purpose of which is to spread abroad sound notions of what true life and true art are, and especially to make the life of the poor more endurable and better worth living.

18. Ruskin's Style.—A glowing eloquence, a splendid and full-flowing music, wealth of phrase, aptness of epithet, opulence of ideas—all these qualities characterise the prose style of Mr Ruskin. His similes are daring, but always true. Speaking of the countless statues that fill the innumerable niches of the cathedral of Milan, he says that "it is as though a flight of angels had alighted there and been struck to marble." His writings are full of the wisest sayings put into the most musical and beautiful language. Here are a few:—

"Every act, every impulse, of virtue and vice, affects in any creature, face, voice, nervous power, and vigour and harmony of invention, at once. Perseverance in rightness of human conduct renders, after a certain number of generations, human art possible; every sin clouds it, be it ever so little a one; and persistent vicious living and following of pleasure render, after a certain number of generations, all art impossible."

"In mortals, there is a care for trifles, which proceeds from love and conscience, and is most holy; and a care for trifles, which comes of idleness and frivolity, and is most base. And so, also, there is a gravity proceeding from dulness and mere incapability of enjoyment, which is most base."

His power of painting in words is incomparably greater than that of any other English author: he almost infuses colour into his words and phrases, so full are they of pictorial power. It would be impossible to give any adequate idea of this power here; but a few lines may suffice for the present:—

"The noonday sun came slanting down the rocky slopes of La Riccia, and its masses of enlarged and tall foliage, whose autumnal tints were mixed with the wet verdure of a thousand evergreens, were penetrated with it as with rain. I cannot call it colour; it was conflagration. Purple, and crimson, and scarlet, like the curtains of God's tabernacle, the rejoicing trees sank into the valley in showers of light, every separate leaf quivered with buoyant and burning life; each, as it turned to reflect or to transmit the sunbeam, first a torch and then an emerald."

19. GEORGE ELIOT (the literary name for Marian Evans, 1819-1880), one of our greatest writers, was born in Warwickshire in the year 1819. She was well and carefully educated; and her own serious and studious character made her a careful thinker and a most diligent reader. For some time the famous Herbert Spencer was her tutor; and under his care her mind developed with surprising rapidity. She taught herself German, French, Italian—studied the best works in the literature of these languages; and she was also fairly mistress of Greek and Latin. Besides all these, she was an accomplished musician.—She was for some time

assistant-editor of the 'Westminster Review.' The first of her works which called the attention of the public to her astonishing skill and power as a novelist was her *Scenes of Clerical Life*. Her most popular novel, *Adam Bede*, appeared in 1859; *Romola* in 1863; and *Middlemarch* in 1872. She has also written a good deal of poetry, among other volumes that entitled *The Legend of Jubal*, and other Poems. One of her best poems is *The Spanish Gypsy*. She died in the year 1880.

20. George Eliot's Style.—Her style is everywhere pure and strong, of the best and most vigorous English, not only broad in its power, but often intense in its description of character and situation, and always singularly adequate to the thought. Probably no novelist knew the English character—especially in the Midlands—so well as she, or could analyse it with so much subtlety and truth. She is entirely mistress of the country dialects. In humour, pathos, knowledge of character, power of putting a portrait firmly upon the canvas, no writer surpasses her, and few come near her. Her power is sometimes almost Shakespearian. Like Shakespeare, she gives us a large number of wise sayings, expressed in the pithiest language. The following are a few:—

"It is never too late to be what you might have been."

"It is easy finding reasons why other people should be patient."

"Genius, at first, is little more than a great capacity for receiving discipline."

"Things are not so ill with you and me as they might have been, half owing to the number who lived faithfully a hidden life, and rest in unvisited tombs."

"Nature never makes men who are at once energetically sympathetic and minutely calculating."

"To the far woods he wandered, listening,  
And heard the birds their little stories sing  
In notes whose rise and fall seem melted speech—  
Melted with tears, smiles, glances—that can reach  
More quickly through our frame's deep-winding night,  
And without thought raise thought's best fruit, delight."

#### TABLES OF ENGLISH LITERATURE.

In the printed book, this table covered 14 (fourteen) pages, with the header repeated at the top of each page. The column headed "Years" was labeled "Centuries" on the earlier pages, changing to "Decades" on the page beginning 1560.

WRITERS.	WORKS.	CONTEMPORARY EVENTS.	YEARS.
(Author unknown.)	Beowulf (brought over by Saxons and Angles from the Continent).		
	500		
CAEDMON.			
A secular monk of Whitby.			
Died about 680. Poems on the Creation and other subjects taken from the Old and the New Testament.			
Edwin (of Deira), King of the Angles, baptised 627.	600		
BAEDA.			
672-735.			
"The Venerable Bede," a monk of Jarrow-on-Tyne. An Ecclesiastical History in Latin. A translation of St John's Gospel into English (lost). First landing of the Danes, 787.			700
ALFRED THE GREAT.			
849-901.			
King; translator; prose-writer. Translated into the English of Wessex, Bede's Ecclesiastical History and other Latin works. Is said to have begun the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle.			The University of Oxford is said to have been founded in this reign. 800
Compiled by monks in various monasteries.	Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, 875-1154		
ASSER.			
Bishop of Sherborne. Died 910.	Life of King Alfred.		900
(Author unknown.)	A poem entitled The Grave.		1000
LAYAMON.			
1150-1210.			
A priest of Ernley-on-Severn. The Brut (1205), a poem on Brutus, the supposed first settler in Britain.			
John ascended the throne in 1199.	1100		

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ORM OR ORMIN.

1187-1237.

A canon of the Order of St Augustine. The Ormulum (1215), a set of religious services in metre.

ROBERT OF GLOUCESTER.

1255-1307. Chronicle of England in rhyme (1297). Magna Charta, 1215.

Henry III. ascends the throne, 1216.1200

ROBERT OF BRUNNE.

1272-1340.

(Robert Manning of Brun.) Chronicle of England in rhyme; Handlyng Sinne (1303).  
University of Cambridge founded, 1231.

Edward I. ascends the throne, 1272.

Conquest of Wales, 1284.

SIR JOHN MANDEVILLE.

1300-1372.

Physician; traveller; prose-writer. The Voyaige and Travaile. Travels to Jerusalem, India, and other countries, written in Latin French and English (1356). The first writer “in formed English.” Edward II ascends the throne, 1307.

Battle of Bannockburn, 1314. 1300

JOHN BARBOUR.

1316-1396.

Archdeacon of Aberdeen. The Bruce (1377), a poem written in the Northern English or “Scottish” dialect.  
Edward III. ascends the throne, 1327.

JOHN WYCLIF.

1324-1384.

Vicar of Lutterworth, in Leicestershire. Translation of the Bible from the Latin version; and many tracts and pamphlets on Church reform. Hundred Years’ War begins, 1338.

Battle of Crecy, 1346. 1350

JOHN GOWER.

1325-1408.

A country gentleman of Kent; probably also a lawyer. Vox Clamantis, Confessio Amantis, Speculum Meditantis (1393); and poems in French and Latin. The Black Death. 1349.

1361.

1369.

WILLIAM LANGLANDE.

1332-1400.

Born in Shropshire. Vision concerning Piers the Plowman—three editions (1362-78). Battle of Poitiers, 1356.

First law-pleadings in English, 1362.

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GEOFFREY CHAUCER.

1340-1400.

Poet; courtier; soldier; diplomatist; Comptroller of the Customs; Clerk of the King’s Works; M.P. The Canterbury Tales (1384-98), of which the best is the Knightes Tale. Dryden called him “a perpetual fountain of good sense.” Richard II. ascends the throne, 1377.

Wat Tyler’s insurrection, 1381.

JAMES I. OF SCOTLAND.

1394-1437.

Prisoner in England, and educated there, in 1405. The King’s Quair (= Book), a poem in the style of Chaucer. Henry IV. ascends the throne, 1399.

WILLIAM CAXTON.

1422-1492.

Mercer; printer; translator; prose-writer. The Game and Playe of the Chesse (1474)—the first book printed in England; Lives of the Fathers, “finished on the last day of his life;” and many other works.

Henry V. ascends the throne, 1415.

Battle of Agincourt, 1415.

Henry VI. ascends the throne, 1422.

Invention of Printing, 1438-45. 1400

WILLIAM DUNBAR.

1450-1530.

Franciscan or Grey Friar; Secretary to a Scotch embassy to France. The Golden Terge (1501); the Dance of the Seven Deadly Sins (1507); and other poems. He has been called “the Chaucer of Scotland.”

Jack Cade’s insurrection, 1450.

End of the Hundred Years’ War, 1453. 1450

GAWAIN DOUGLAS.

1474-1522.

Bishop of Dunkeld, in Perthshire. Palace of Honour (1501); translation of Virgil’s Æneid (1513)—the first translation of any Latin author into verse. Douglas wrote in Northern English. Wars of the Roses, 1455-86.

Edward IV. ascends the throne, 1461.

WILLIAM TYNDALE.

1477-1536.

Student of theology; translator. Burnt at Antwerp for heresy. New Testament translated (1525-34); the Five Books of Moses translated (1530). This translation is the basis of the Authorised Version. Edward V. king, 1483.

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SIR THOMAS MORE.

1480-1535.

Lord High Chancellor; writer on social topics; historian. History of King Edward V., and of his brother, and of Richard III. (1513); Utopia (= “The Land of Nowhere”), written in Latin; and other prose works. Richard III. ascends the throne, 1483.

Battle of Bosworth, 1485.

SIR DAVID LYNDESAY.

1490-1556.

Tutor of Prince James of Scotland (James V.); “Lord Lyon King-at-Arms;” poet. Lyndesay’s Dream (1528); The Complaint (1529); A Satire of the Three Estates (1535)—a “morality-play.” Henry VII. ascends the throne, 1485.

Greek began to be taught in England about 1497.

ROGER ASCHAM.

1515-1568.

Lecturer on Greek at Cambridge; tutor to Edward VI., Queen Elizabeth, and Lady Jane Grey. Toxophilus (1544), a treatise on shooting with the bow; The Scholemastre (1570). “Ascham is plain and strong in his style, but without grace or warmth.” Henry VIII. ascends the throne, 1509.

Battle of Flodden, 1513.

Wolsey Cardinal and Lord High Chancellor, 1515. 1500

JOHN FOXE.

1517-1587.

An English clergyman. Corrector for the press at Basle; Prebendary of Salisbury Cathedral; prose-writer. The Book of Martyrs (1563), an account of the chief Protestant martyrs. Sir Thomas More first layman who was Lord High Chancellor, 1529.

Reformation in England begins about 1534.

EDMUND SPENSER.

1552-1599.

Secretary to Viceroy of Ireland; political writer; poet. Shepheard’s Calendar (1579): Faerie Queene, in six books (1590-96). Edward VI. ascends the throne, 1547.

Mary Tudor ascends the throne, 1553.

SIR WALTER RALEIGH.

1552-1618.

Courtier; statesman; sailor; coloniser; historian. History of the World (1614), written during the author's imprisonment in the Tower of London. Cranmer burnt 1556. 1550

**RICHARD HOOKER.**

1553-1600.

English clergyman; Master of the Temple; Rector of Boscombe, in the diocese of Salisbury. Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity (1594). This book is an eloquent defence of the Church of England. The writer, from his excellent judgment, is generally called "the judicious Hooker." Elizabeth ascends the throne, 1558.

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**SIR PHILIP SIDNEY.**

1554-1586.

Courtier; general; romance-writer. Arcadia, a romance (1580). Defence of Poesie, published after his death (in 1595). Sonnets.

**FRANCIS BACON.**

1561-1626.

Viscount St Albans; Lord High Chancellor of England; lawyer; philosopher; essayist. Essays (1597); Advancement of Learning (1605); Novum Organum (1620); and other works on methods of inquiry into nature. Hawkins begins slave trade in 1562.

Rizzio murdered, 1566. 1560

**WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE.**

1564-1616.

Actor; owner of theatre; play-writer; poet. Born and died at Stratford-on-Avon. Thirty-seven plays. His greatest tragedies are Hamlet, Lear, and Othello. His best comedies are Midsummer Night's Dream, The Merchant of Venice, and As You Like It. His best historical plays are Julius Cæsar and Richard III. Many minor poems— chiefly sonnets. He wrote no prose. Marlowe, Dekker, Chapman, Beaumont and Fletcher, Ford, Webster, Ben Jonson, and other dramatists, were contemporaries of Shakspeare.

**BEN JONSON.**

1574-1637.

Dramatist; poet; prose-writer. Tragedies and comedies. Best plays: Volpone or the Fox; Every Man in his Humour. Drake sails round the world, 1577.

Execution of Mary Queen of Scots, 1578. 1570

**WILLIAM DRUMMOND ("OF HAWTHORNDEN").**

1585-1649.

Scottish poet; friend of Ben Jonson. Sonnets and poems. Raleigh in Virginia, 1584.

Babington's Plot, 1586.

Spanish Armada, 1588. 1580

**THOMAS HOBBS.**

1588-1679.

Philosopher; prose-writer; translator of Homer. The Leviathan (1651), a work on politics and moral philosophy. Battle of Ivry, 1590. 1590

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**SIR THOMAS BROWNE.**

1605-1682.

Physician at Norwich. Religio Medici (= "The Religion of a Physician"); Urn-Burial; and other prose works. Australia discovered, 1601.

James I. ascends the throne in 1603. 1600

**JOHN MILTON.**

1608-1674.

Student; political writer; poet; Foreign (or "Latin") Secretary to Cromwell. Became blind from over-work in 1654. Minor Poems; Paradise Lost; Paradise Regained; Samson Agonistes. Many prose works, the best being Areopagitica, a speech for the Liberty of Unlicensed Printing. Hampton Court Conference for translation of Bible, 1604-11.

Gunpowder Plot, 1605.

**SAMUEL BUTLER.**

1612-1680.

Literary man; secretary to the Earl of Carbery. Hudibras, a mock-heroic poem, written to ridicule the Puritan and Parliamentary party. Execution of Raleigh, 1618. 1610

JEREMY TAYLOR.

1613-1667.

English clergyman; Bishop of Down and Connor in Ireland. Holy Living and Holy Dying (1649); and a number of other religious books.

JOHN BUNYAN.

1628-1688.

Tinker and traveling preacher. The Pilgrim's Progress (1678); the Holy War; and other religious works. Charles I. ascends the throne in 1625.

Petition of Right, 1628. 1620

JOHN DRYDEN.

1631-1700.

Poet-Laureate and Historiographer-Royal; playwright; poet; prose-writer. Annus Mirabilis (= "The Wonderful Year," 1665-66, on the Plague and the Fire of London); Absalom and Achitophel (1681), a poem on political parties; Hind and Panther (1687), a religious poem. He also wrote many plays, some odes and a translation of Virgil's *Aeneid*. His prose consists chiefly of prefaces and introductions to his poems.

No Parliament from 1629-40.

Scottish National Covenant, 1638. 1630

Long Parliament, 1640-53.

Marston Moor, 1644.

Execution of Charles I., 1649 1640

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JOHN LOCKE.

1632-1704.

Diplomatist; Secretary to the Board of Trade; philosopher; prose-writer. Essay concerning the Human Understanding (1690); Thoughts on Education; and other prose works. The Commonwealth, 1649-60.

Cromwell Lord Protector, 1653-58. 1650

DANIEL DEFOE.

1661-1731.

Literary man; pamphleteer; journalist; member of Commission on Union with Scotland. The True-born Englishman (1701); Robinson Crusoe (1719); Journal of the Plague (1722); and more than a hundred books in all. Restoration, 1660.

First standing army, 1661.

First newspaper in England, 1663. 1660

JONATHAN SWIFT.

1667-1745.

English clergyman; literary man; satirist; prose-writer; poet; Dean of St Patrick's, in Dublin. Battle of the Books; Tale of a Tub (1704), an allegory on the Churches of Rome, England, and Scotland; Gulliver's Travels (1726); a few poems; and a number of very vigorous political pamphlets. Plague of London, 1665.

Fire of London, 1666.

SIR RICHARD STEELE.

1671-1729.

Soldier; literary man; courtier; journalist; M.P. Steele founded the 'Tatler,' 'Spectator,' 'Guardian,' and other small journals. He also wrote some plays. Charles II. pensioned by Louis XIV. of France, 1674.

1670

JOSEPH ADDISON.

1672-1719.

Essayist; poet; Secretary of State for the Home Department. Essays in the 'Tatler,' 'Spectator,' and 'Guardian.' Cato, a Tragedy (1713). Several Poems and Hymns. The Habeas Corpus Act, 1679.

ALEXANDER POPE.

1688-1744.

Poet. Essay on Criticism (1711); Rape of the Lock (1714); Translation of Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, finished in 1726; *Dunciad* (1729); Essay on Man (1739). A few prose Essays, and a volume of Letters.

James II. ascends the throne in 1685.

Revolution of 1688.

William III. and Mary II. ascend the throne, 1689. 1680

Battle of the Boyne, 1690. 1690

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JAMES THOMSON.

1700-1748.

Poet. The Seasons; a poem in blank verse (1730); The Castle of Indolence; a mock-heroic poem in the Spenserian stanza (1748). Censorship of the Press abolished, 1695.

Queen Anne ascends the throne in 1702. 1700

HENRY FIELDING.

1707-1754.

Police-magistrate, journalist; novelist. Joseph Andrews (1742); Amelia (1751). He was “the first great English novelist.” Battle of Blenheim, 1704.

Gibraltar taken, 1704.

DR SAMUEL JOHNSON.

1709-1784.

Schoolmaster; literary man; essayist; poet; dictionary-maker. London (1738); The Vanity of Human Wishes (1749); Dictionary of the English Language (1755); Rasselas (1759); Lives of the Poets (1781). He also wrote The Idler, The Rambler, and a play called Irene. Union of England and Scotland, 1707.

DAVID HUME.

1711-1776.

Librarian; Secretary to the French Embassy; philosopher; literary man. History of England (1754-1762); and a number of philosophical Essays. His prose is singularly clear, easy, and pleasant. George I. ascends the throne in 1714. 1710

THOMAS GRAY.

1716-1771.

Student; poet; letter-writer; Professor of Modern History in the University of Cambridge. Odes; Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard (1750)—one of the most perfect poems in our language. He was a great stylist, and an extremely careful workman. Rebellion in Scotland in 1715.

TOBIAS GEORGE SMOLLETT.

1721-1771.

Doctor; pamphleteer; literary hack; novelist. Roderick Random (1748); Humphrey Clinker (1771). He also continued Hume’s History of England. He published also some Plays and Poems. South-Sea

Bubble bursts, 1720. 1720

OLIVER GOLDSMITH.

1728-1774.

Literary man; play-writer; poet. The Traveller (1764); The Vicar of Wakefield (1766); The Deserted Village (1770); She Stoops to Conquer—a Play (1773); and a large number of books, pamphlets, and compilations. George II. ascends the throne, 1727.

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ADAM SMITH.

1723-1790.

Professor in the University of Glasgow. Theory of Moral Sentiments (1759); Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations (1776). He was the founder of the science of political economy.

EDMUND BURKE.

1730-1797.

M.P.; statesman; “the first man in the House of Commons;” orator; writer on political philosophy. Essay on the Sublime and Beautiful (1757); Reflections on the Revolution of France (1790); Letters on a Regicide Peace (1797); and many other works. “The greatest philosopher in practice the world ever saw.”

1730

WILLIAM COWPER.

1731-1800.

Commissioner in Bankruptcy; Clerk of the Journals of the House of Lords; poet. Table Talk (1782); John Gilpin (1785); A Translation of Homer (1791); and many other Poems. His Letters, like Gray’s, are among the best in the language.

EDWARD GIBBON.

1737-1794.

Historian; M.P. Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire (1776-87). "Heavily laden style and monotonous balance of every sentence." Rebellion in Scotland, 1745, commonly called "The 'Forty-five."  
1740

ROBERT BURNS.

1759-1796.

Farm-labourer; ploughman; farmer; excise-officer; lyrical poet. Poems and Songs (1786-96). His prose consists chiefly of Letters. "His pictures of social life, of quaint humour, come up to nature; and they cannot go beyond it." Clive in India, 1750-60. Earthquake at Lisbon, 1755.

Black Hole of Calcutta, 1756. 1750

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WILLIAM WORDSWORTH.

1770-1850

Distributor of Stamps for the county of Westmoreland; poet; poet-laureate. Lyrical Ballads (with Coleridge, 1798); The Excursion (1814); Yarrow Revisited (1835), and many poems. The Prelude was published after his death. His prose, which is very good, consists chiefly of Prefaces and Introductions.

George III. ascends the throne in 1760.

Napoleon and Wellington born, 1769. 1760

SIR WALTER SCOTT.

1771-1832.

Clerk to the Court of Session in Edinburgh; Scottish barrister; poet; novelist. Lay of the Last Minstrel (1805); Marmion (1808); Lady of the Lake (1810); Waverley—the first of the "Waverley Novels"—was published in 1814. The "Homer of Scotland." His prose is bright and fluent, but very inaccurate. Warren Hastings in India, 1772-85. 1770

SAMUEL TAYLOR COLERIDGE.

1772-1834.

Private soldier; journalist; literary man; philosopher; poet. The Ancient Mariner (1798); Christabel (1816); The Friend—a Collection of Essays (1812); Aids to Reflection (1825). His prose is very full both of thought and emotion.

ROBERT SOUTHEY.

1774-1843.

Literary man; Quarterly Reviewer; historian; poet-laureate. Joan of Arc (1796); Thalaba the Destroyer (1801); The Curse of Kehama (1810); A History of Brazil; The Doctor—a Collection of Essays; Life of Nelson. He wrote more than a hundred volumes. He was "the most ambitious and and most voluminous author of his age." American Declaration of Independence, 1776.

CHARLES LAMB.

1775-1834.

Clerk in the East India House; poet; prose-writer. Poems (1797); Tales from Shakespeare (1806); The Essays of Elia (1823-1833). One of the finest writers of writers of prose in the English language.

WALTER SAVAGE LANDOR.

1775-1864.

Poet; prose-writer. Gebir (1798); Count Julian (1812); Imaginary Conversations (1824-1846); Dry Sticks Faggoted (1858). He wrote books for more than sixty years. His style is full of vigour and sustained eloquence. Alliance of France and America, 1778.

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THOMAS CAMPBELL.

1777-1844.

Poet; literary man; editor. The Pleasures of Hope (1799); Poems (1803); Gertrude of Wyoming, Battle of the Baltic, Hohenlinden, etc. (1809). He also wrote some Historical Works. Encyclopædia Britannica founded in 1778.

HENRY HALLAM.

1778-1859.

Historian. View of Europe during the Middle Ages (1818); Constitutional History of England (1827); Introduction to the Literature of Europe (1839).

THOMAS MOORE.

1779-1852.



Poet; prose-writer. Odes and Epistles (1806); Lalla Rookh (1817); History of Ireland (1827); Life of Byron (1830); Irish Melodies (1834); and many prose works.

THOMAS DE QUINCEY.

1785-1859.

Essayist. Confessions of an English Opium-Eater (1821). He wrote also on many subjects—philosophy, poetry, classics, history, politics. His writings fill twenty volumes. He was one of the finest prose-writers of this century. French Revolution begun in 1789. 1780

LORD BYRON (GEORGE GORDON).

1788-1824.

Peer; poet; volunteer to Greece. Hours of Idleness (1807); English Bards and Scotch Reviewers (1809); Childe Harold's Pilgrimage (1812-1818); Hebrew Melodies (1815); and many Plays. His prose, which is full of vigour and animal spirits, is to be found chiefly in his Letters. Bastille overthrown, 1789.

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PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY.

1792-1822.

Poet. Queen Mab (1810); Prometheus Unbound—a Tragedy (1819); Ode to the Skylark, The Cloud (1820); Adonais (1821), and many other poems; and several prose works. Cape of Good Hope taken, 1795.

Bonaparte in Italy, 1796.

Battle of the Nile, 1798. 1790

JOHN KEATS.

1795-1821.

Poet. Poems (1817); Endymion (1818); Hyperion (1820). "Had Keats lived to the ordinary age of man, he would have been one of the greatest of all poets." Union of Great Britain and Ireland, 1801.

Trafalgar and Nelson, 1805. 1800

Peninsular War, 1808-14.

Napoleon's Invasion of Russia; Moscow burnt, 1812. 1810

THOMAS CARLYLE.

1795-1881.

Literary man; poet; translator; essayist; reviewer; political writer; historian. German Romances—a set of Translations (1827); Sartor Resartus—"The Tailor Repatched" (1834); The French Revolution (1837); Heroes and Hero-Worship (1840); Past and Present (1843); Cromwell's Letters and Speeches (1845); Life of Frederick the Great (1858-65). "With the gift of song, Carlyle would have been the greatest of epic poets since Homer." War with United States, 1812-14. Battle of Waterloo, 1815.

George IV. ascends the throne, 1820.

Greek War of Freedom, 1822-29.

Byron in Greece, 1823-24.

Catholic Emancipation, 1829. 1820

LORD MACAULAY (THOMAS BABINGTON).

1800-1859.

Barrister; Edinburgh Reviewer; M.P.; Member of the Supreme Council of India; Cabinet Minister; poet; essayist; historian; peer. Milton (in the 'Edinburgh Review,' 1825); Lays of Ancient Rome (1842); History of England—unfinished (1849-59). "His pictorial faculty is amazing." William IV. ascends the throne, 1830.

The Reform Bill, 1832.

Total Abolition of Slavery, 1834. 1830

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LORD LYTTON (EDWARD BULWER).

1805-1873.

Novelist; poet; dramatist; M.P.; Cabinet Minister; peer. Ismael and Other Poems (1825); Eugene Aram (1831); Last Days of Pompeii (1834); The Caxtons (1849); My Novel (1853); Poems (1865).

Queen Victoria ascends the throne, 1837.

Irish Famine, 1845. 1840

JOHN STUART MILL.

1806-1873.

Clerk in the East India House; philosopher; political writer; M.P.; Lord Rector of the University of St Andrews. System of Logic (1843); Principles of Political Economy (1848); Essay on Liberty (1858); Autobiography (1873); "For judicial calmness, elevation of tone, and freedom from personality, Mill is unrivalled among the writers of his time." Repeal of the Corn Laws, 1846.

Revolution in Paris, 1851.

Death of Wellington, 1852. 1850

HENRY W. LONGFELLOW.

1807-1882.

Professor of Modern Languages and Literature in Harvard University, U.S.; poet; prose-writer. Outre-Mer—a Story (1835); Hyperion—a Story (1839); Voices of the Night (1841); Evangeline (1848) Hiawatha (1855); Aftermath (1873). "His tact in the use of language is probably the chief cause of his success."

Napoleon III. Emperor of the French, 1852.

Russian War, 1854-56.

LORD TENNYSON (ALFRED TENNYSON).

1809—.

Poet; poet-laureate; peer. Poems (1830) In Memoriam (1850); Maud (1855); Idylls of the King (1859-73); Queen Mary—a Drama (1875); Becket—a Drama (1884). He is at present our greatest living poet.

Franco-Austrian War, 1859.

Emancipation of Russian serfs, 1861. 1860

ELIZABETH B. BARRETT (afterwards MRS BROWNING).

1809-1861.

Poet; prose-writer; translator. Prometheus Bound—translated from the Greek of Æschylus (1833); Poems (1844); Aurora Leigh (1856); and Essays contributed to various magazines. Austro-Prussian

"Seven Weeks' War", 1866.

Suez canal finished, 1869.

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WILLIAM MAKEPEACE THACKERAY.

1811-1863.

Novelist; writer in 'Punch'; artist. The Paris Sketch-Book (1840); Vanity Fair (1847); Esmond (1852); The Newcomes (1855); The Virginians (1857). The greatest novelist and one of the most perfect stylists of this century. "The classical English humorist and satirist of the reign of Queen Victoria." Franco-Prussian War 1870-71.

Third French Republic, 1870.

William I. of Prussia made Emperor of the Germans at Versailles, 1871. 1870

CHARLES DICKENS.

1812-1870.

Novelist. Sketches by Boz (1836); The Pickwick Papers (1837); Oliver Twist (1838); Nicholas Nickleby (1838); and many other novels and works; Great Expectations (1868). The most popular writer that ever lived. Rome the new capital of Italy, 1871.

Russo-Turkish War 1877-78.

ROBERT BROWNING.

1812—.

Poet. Pauline (1833); Paracelsus (1836); Poems (1865); The Ring and the Book (1869); and many other volumes of poetry. Berlin Congress and Treaty, 1878.

Leo XIII. made Pope in 1878.

JOHN RUSKIN.

1819—.

Art-critic; essayist; teacher; literary man. Modern Painters (1843-60); The Stones of Venice (1851-53); The Queen of the Air (1869); An Autobiography (1885); and very many other works. "He has a deep, serious, and almost fanatical reverence for art." Assassination of Alexander II., 1881

Arabi Pasha's Rebellion 1882-83.

War in the Soudan, 1884. 1880

GEORGE ELIOT.

1819-1880.

Novelist; poet; essayist. Scenes of Clerical Life (1858); Adam Bede (1859); and many other novels down to Daniel Deronda (1876); Spanish Gypsy (1868); Legend of Jubal (1874). Murder of Gordon, 1884.

New Reform Bill, 1885.

## George Saintsbury

*Essays in English Literature 1780-1860***PREFACE**

Of the essays in this volume, the introductory paper on "The Kinds of Criticism" has not before appeared in print. All the rest, with one exception (the Essay on Lockhart which appeared in the *National Review*), were originally published in *Macmillan's Magazine*. To the Editors and Publishers of both these periodicals I owe my best thanks for permission to reprint the articles. To the Editor of *Macmillan's Magazine* in particular (to whom, if dedications were not somewhat in ill odour, I should, in memory of friendship old and new, have dedicated the book), I am further indebted for suggesting several of the subjects as well as accepting the essays. These appear in the main as they appeared;{vi} but I have not scrupled to alter phrase or substance where it seemed desirable, and I have in a few places restored passages which had been sacrificed to the usual exigencies of space. In two cases, those of Lockhart and De Quincey, I have thought it best to discuss, in a brief appendix, some questions which have presented themselves since the original publications. In consequence of these alterations and additions as well as for other reasons, it may be convenient to give the dates and places of the original appearance of each essay. They are as follows:—

Lockhart, *National Review*, Aug. 1884. Borrow, *Macmillan's Magazine*, Jan. 1886. Peacock, do. April 1886. Wilson (under the title of "Christopher North"), do. July 1886. Hazlitt, do. March 1887. Jeffrey, do. August 1887. Moore, do. March 1888. Sydney Smith, do. May 1888. Praed, do. Sept. 1888. Leigh Hunt, do. April 1889. Crabbe, do. June 1889. Hogg, do. Sept. 1889. De Quincey, do. June 1890.

The present order is chronological, following the birth-years of the authors discussed.

**INTRODUCTION****THE KINDS OF CRITICISM**

It is probably unnecessary, and might possibly be impertinent, to renew here at any length the old debate between reviewers as reviewers, and reviewers as authors—the debate whether the reissue of work contributed to periodicals is desirable or not. The plea that half the best prose literature of this century would be inaccessible if the practice had been forbidden, and the retort that anything which can pretend to keep company with the best literature of the century will be readily relieved from the objection, at once sum up the whole quarrel, and leave it undecided. For my own part, I think that there is a sufficient connection of subject in the following chapters, and I hope that there is a sufficient uniformity of treatment. The former point, as the least important, may be dismissed first. All the literature here discussed is—with the exception of Crabbe's earliest poems, and the late aftermath of Peacock and Borrow—work of one and the same period,{x} the first half of the present century. The authors criticised were all contemporaries; with only one exception, if with one, they were all writing more or less busily within a single decade, that of 1820 to 1830. And they have the further connection (which has at least the reality of having been present to my mind in selecting them), that while every one of them was a man of great literary power, hardly one has been by general consent, or except by private crotchet would be, put among the very greatest. They stand not far below, but distinctly below, Scott, Byron, Wordsworth, Shelley, Coleridge, and Keats. Yet again, they agree in the fact that hardly one of them has yet been securely set in the literary niche which is his due, all having been at some time either unduly valued or unduly neglected, and one or two never having yet received even due appreciation. The greatest of all critics was accused, unjustly, of having a certain dislike of clear, undoubted supremacy. It would be far more fair to say that Sainte-Beuve had eminently, what perhaps all critics who are not mere carpens on the one hand, or mere splashers of superlatives on the other, have more or less—an affection for subjects possessing but qualified merit, and so giving to criticism a certain additional interest in the task of placing and appraising them.

This last sentence may not meet with universal assent, but it will bring me conveniently to the{xi} second part of my subject. I should not have republished these essays if I had not thought that, whatever may be

their faults (and a man who does not see the faults of his own writing on revising it a second time for the press after an interval, must be either a great genius or an intolerable fool), they possess a certain unity of critical method. Nor should I have republished them if it had seemed to me that this method was exactly identical with that of any other critic of the present day in England. I have at least endeavoured to wear my rue with a difference, and that not merely for the sake of differing.

Mr. Goldwin Smith, whose work is not likely to be impeached for defect either in form or in substance, wrote but a few months ago, in melancholy mood, that the province of criticism appeared to be now limited to the saying of fine things. I agree with him that this is one vicious extreme of the popular conception of the art; but in order to define correctly, we cannot be contented with one only. The other, as it seems to me, is fixed by the notion, now warmly championed by some younger critics both at home and abroad, that criticism must be of all things "scientific." For my own part, I have gravely and strenuously endeavoured to ascertain from the writings both of foreign critics (the chief of whom was the late M. Hennequin in France), and of their disciples at home, what "scientific" criticism means. In no case have{xii} I been able to obtain any clear conception of its connotation in the mouths or minds of those who use the phrase. The new heaven and the new earth which they promise are no doubt to be very different from our own old earth and heaven; of that they are sure, and their sureness does not fail to make itself plain. But what the flora and fauna, the biology and geology of the new heaven and earth are to be, I have never succeeded in ascertaining. The country would appear to be like that Land of Ignorance which, as Lord Brooke says, "none can describe until he be past it." Only I have perceived that when this "scientific" criticism sticks closest to its own formulas and ways, it appears to me to be very bad criticism; and that when, as sometimes happens, it is good criticism, its ways and formulas are not perceptibly distinguishable from those of criticism which is not "scientific." For the rest, it is all but demonstrable that "scientific" literary criticism is impossible, unless the word "scientific" is to have its meaning very illegitimately altered. For the essential qualities of literature, as of all art, are communicated by the individual, they depend upon idiosyncrasy: and this makes science in any proper sense powerless. She can deal only with classes, only with general laws; and so long as these classes are constantly reduced to "species of one," and these laws are set at nought by incalculable and singular influences, she must be constantly baffled and find all her{xiii} elaborate plant of formulas and generalisations useless. Of course, there are generalisations possible in literature, and to such I may return presently; but scientific criticism of literature must always be a contradiction in terms. You may to some considerable extent ascertain the general laws of language, of metre, of music, as applied to verbal rhythm and cadence; you may classify the subjects which appeal to the general, and further classify their particular manners of appeal; you may arrange the most ingenious "product-of-the-circumstances" theories about race, climate, religion. But always sooner or later, and much more often sooner than later, the mocking demon of the individual, or, if a different phrase be preferred, the great and splendid mystery of the idiosyncrasy of the artist, will meet and baffle you. You will find that on the showing of this science falsely so called, there is no reason why Chapelain should not be a poet, and none why Shakespeare is. You will ask science in vain to tell you why some dozen or sixteen of the simplest words in language arranged by one man or in one fashion, why a certain number of dabs of colour arranged by another man or in another fashion, make a permanent addition to the delight of the world, while other words and other dabs of colour, differently arranged by others, do not. To put the matter yet otherwise, the whole end, aim, and object of literature and the criticism of literature, as of all art, and{xiv} the criticism of all art, is beauty and the enjoyment of beauty. With beauty science has absolutely nothing to do.

It is no doubt the sense, conscious or unconscious, of this that has inclined men to that other conception of criticism as a saying of fine things, of which Mr. Goldwin Smith complains, and which certainly has many votaries, in most countries at the present day. These votaries have their various kinds. There is the critic who simply uses his subject as a sort of springboard or platform, on and from which to display his natural grace and agility, his urbane learning, his faculty of pleasant wit. This is perhaps the most popular of all critics, and no age has ever had better examples of him than this age. There is a more serious kind who founds on his subject (if indeed founding be not too solemn a term) elaborate descants, makes it the theme of complicated variations. There is a third, closely allied to him, who seeks in it apparently first of all, and sometimes with no further aim, an opportunity for the display of style. And lastly (though as usual all these kinds pervade and melt into one another, so that, while in any individual one may prevail, it is rare to find an individual in whom that one is alone present) there is the purely impressionist critic who endeavours in

his own way to show the impression which the subject has, or which he chooses to represent that it has, produced on him. This last is in a better case than the others; but still he, as it seems to me, misses the full and proper office of the critic, though he may have an agreeable and even useful function of his own.

For the full and proper office of the critic (again as it seems to me) can never be discharged except by those who remember that "critic" means "judge." Expressions of personal liking, though they can hardly be kept out of criticism, are not by themselves judgment. The famous "J'aime mieux Alfred de Musset," though it came from a man of extraordinary mental power and no small specially critical ability, is not criticism. Mere obiter dicta of any kind, though they may be most agreeable and even most legitimate sets-off to critical conversation, are not criticism. The most admirable discourses from the merely literary point of view on taste, Shakespeare, and the musical glasses, with some parenthetic reference to the matter in hand, are not criticism. There must be at least some attempt to take in and render the whole virtue of the subjects considered, some effort to compare them with their likes in other as well as the same languages, some endeavour to class and value them. And as a condition preliminary to this process, there must, I think, be a not inconsiderable study of widely differing periods, forms, manners, of literature itself. The test question, as I should put it, of the value of criticism is "What idea of the original would this critic give to a tolerably instructed person who did not know that original?" And again, "How far has this critic seen steadily and seen whole, the subject which he has set himself to consider? How far has he referred the main peculiarities of that subject to their proximate causes and effects? How far has he attempted to place, and succeeded in placing, the subject in the general history of literature, in the particular history of its own language, in the collection of authors of its own department?" How far, in short, has he applied what I may perhaps be excused for calling the comparative method in literature to the particular instance? I have read very famous and in their way very accomplished examples of literature ostensibly critical, in which few if any of these questions seem to have been even considered by the critic. He may have said many pretty things; he may have shown what a clever fellow he is; he may have in his own person contributed good literature to swell the literary sum. But has he done anything to aid the general grasp of that literary sum, to place his man under certain lights and in certain aspects, with due allowance for the possibility of other aspects and other lights? Very often, I think, it must be admitted that he has not. I should be the first to admit that my own attempts to do this are unsuccessful and faulty; and I only plead for them that they are such attempts, and that they have been made on the basis of tolerably wide and tolerably careful reading. For, after all, it is this reading which is the main and principal thing. It will not of course by itself make a critic; but few are the critics that will ever be made without it. We have at this moment an awful example of an exceedingly clever writer who has commenced critic, disdainingly this preparation. Some of my friends jeer or comminate at Mr. Howells; for my part I only shudder and echo the celebrated "There, but for the grace of God." Here is a clever man, a very clever man, an excellent though of late years slightly depraved practitioner in one branch of art, who, suddenly and without preparation, takes to another, and becomes a spectacle to men and angels. I hope that we shall one day have a collection of Mr. Howells's critical dicta on novels and other things; they will be one of the most valuable, one of the most terrible of books as showing what happens when a man speaks without knowledge. To read what Mr. Howells says of Mr. Thackeray is almost an illiberal education. The reason of the error is quite obvious. It is simply that the clever American does not know; he has not sufficient range of comparison. For my own part, I should not dare to continue criticising so much as a circulating library novel, if I did not perpetually pay my respects to the classics of many literatures: and I am not sure that I do not appreciate the classics of many literatures all the better from my not infrequent reading of circulating library novels.

The only objection of validity that I have ever seen taken to what I have ventured to call comparative criticism, is that it proceeds too much, as the most learned of living French critics once observed of an English writer, *par cases et par compartiments*, that is to say, as I understand M. Brunetière, with a rather too methodical classification. This, however, was written some seven or eight years ago, and since then I have found M. Brunetière speaking about critical method as distinguished from the science of criticism, and insisting on the necessity of comparison, not less positively, and no doubt with far more authority, than I have done myself. Yet I half think that M. Brunetière, like most of us, does not practise quite up to the level of his preaching; and I should say that on mediæval literature, on Romantic literature, and on some other things, his own excellent censorship might be further improved by a still more catholic sympathy, and a still more constant habit of looking at everything and every writer in conjunction with their analogues and their opposites in the same and other literatures. This constant reference of comparison may indeed stand in

the way of those flowing deliverances of personal opinion, in more or less agreeable language, which are perhaps, or rather certainly, what is most popular in criticism; I do not think that they will ever stand in the way of criticism proper. As I understand that long and difficult art, its end, as far as the individual{xix} is concerned, is to provide the mind with a sort of conspectus of literature, as a good atlas thoroughly conned provides a man with a conspectus of the orbis terrarum. To the man with a geographical head, the mention of a place at once suggests its bearings to other places, its history, its products, all its relations in short; to the man with a critical head, the mention of a book or an author should call up a similar mental picture. The picture, indeed, will never be as complete in the one instance as in the other, because the intellect and the artistic faculty of man are far vaster than this planet, far more diverse, far more intricately and perplexingly arranged than all its abundant material dispositions and products. The life of Methuselah and the mind of Shakespeare together could hardly take the whole of critical knowledge to be their joint province. But the area of survey may be constantly increased; the particularity of knowledge constantly made more minute.

Another objection, more fantastic in appearance but rather attractive in its way, is that the comparative critic becomes too much of a universal lover, and too little of an enthusiast, that he has an irritating and ungentlemanly habit of seeing blemishes in the greatest, a pottering and peddling fancy for discovering beauties in the most insignificant; that he lacks the exclusiveness and the fastidiousness of intellectual aristocracy, the fervour and rapture of æsthetic passion. To this, one can answer little more than, "It may be so." Certainly the critic of this kind will very rarely be able to indulge in the engouement which is the apparent delight of some of his class. He will deal very cautiously in superlatives, and his commendations, when he gives them, will sometimes have, to more gushing persons, the slightly ludicrous air which attached to the modest boast of somebody that he was "the third best authority in England on gray shirtings." On the other hand, the critic of this kind will not be able to neglect the uninteresting with the serene nonchalance of some of his fellows. He will sometimes have to look back on days and months and years of laborious reading and say to himself, "Were it not well for us, as others use, to take all this for granted?" But to say this is to say no more than that the thorough-going practice of any art and mystery involves a great deal of tedious, thankless, and even positively fruitless work, brushes away a good many illusions, and interferes a good deal with personal comfort. Cockaigne is a delightful country, and the Cockaigne of criticism is as agreeable as the other provinces. But none of these provinces has usually been accounted a wise man's paradise.

It may be asked, "What is the end which you propose for this comparative reading? A method must lead somewhere; whither does this method lead? or does it lead only to statistics and classifications?" Certainly it does not, or at least should not. It leads, like all method, to generalisations which, though as I have said I do not believe that they have attained or ever will attain the character of science, at least throw no small light and interest on the study of literature as a whole, and of its examples as particulars. It gives, I think (speaking as a fool), a constantly greater power of distinguishing good work from bad work, by giving constantly nearer approach (though perhaps it may never wholly and finally attain) to the knowledge of the exact characteristics which distinguish the two. And the way in which it does this is by a constant process of weakening or strengthening, as the case may be, the less or more correct generalisations with which the critic starts, or which he forms in the early days of his reading. There has often been brought against some great critics the charge that their critical standards have altered at different times of their career. This simply means that they have been constantly applying the comparative method, and profiting by the application. After all, there are few, though there are some, absolute truths in criticism; and a man will often be relatively right in condemning, from certain aspects and in certain combinations, work which, under other aspects and in other combinations, he has been relatively quite as right in admiring. Occasionally, no doubt, there will be an apparent exception to the rule of critical development, as in the case of Hazlitt: but that remarkable exception does not fail to justify the rule. For in truth, Hazlitt's critical range was not so wide as his penetration was deep; and he avows, almost exultingly, that after a comparatively early time of life, he practically left off reading. That is to say, he carefully avoided renewing his plant, and he usually eschewed new material—conditions which, no doubt, conduce to the uniformity, and, within obvious limits, are not prejudicial to the excellence of the product. It is possible that the title "The Kinds of Criticism" may have excited in some readers expectations of the discussion of a subject which has not yet been handled. We have recently seen revived the sempiternal argument between authors and critics—an argument in which it may be as well to say that the present writer has not yet taken part either anonymously or otherwise. The authors, or some of them, have remarked that they have never

personally benefited by criticism; and the critics, after their disagreeable way, have retorted that this was obvious. A critic of great ingenuity, my friend Mr. Andrew Lang, has, with his usual humour, suggested that critics and reviewers are two different kinds, and have nothing to do with each other essentially, though accidentally, and in the imperfect arrangements of the world, the discharge of their functions may happen to be combined in the same person. As a matter of practice, this is no doubt too often the case; as a matter{xxiii} of theory, nothing ought much less to be the case. I think that if I were dictator, one of the first non-political things that I should do, would be to make the order of reviewers as close a one, at least, as the bench of judges, or the staff of the Mint, or of any public establishment of a similar character. That any large amount of reviewing is determined by fear or favour is a general idea which has little more basis than a good many other general ideas. But that a very large amount of reviewing is determined by doubtless well-meaning incompetence, there is no doubt whatever. It is on the whole the most difficult kind of newspaper writing, and it is on the whole the most lightly assigned and the most irresponsibly performed. I have heard of newspapers where the reviews depended almost wholly on the accident of some of the staff taking a holiday, or being laid for a time on the shelf, or being considered not up to other work; of others, though this I own is scarcely credible, where the whole reviewing was farmed out to a manager, to be allotted to devils as good to him seemed; of many where the reviews were a sort of exercising-ground on which novices were trained, broken-down hacks turned out to grass, and invalids allowed a little gentle exercise. And I know of not a few papers and not a few reviewers in which and by whom, errors and accidents excepted, the best work possible is given to one of the most important kinds of work. Of common{xxiv} mistakes on the subject, which are not merely silly crazes, such as the log-rolling craze and the five-pound note craze and the like, the worst known to me, though it is shared by some who should know better, is that a specialist is the best reviewer. I do not say that he is always the worst; but that is about as far as my charity, informed by much experience, can go. Even if he has no special craze or megrim, and does not decide offhand that a man is hopeless because he calls Charles the Great Charlemagne, or vice versâ, he is constantly out of focus. The perfect reviewer would be (and the only reviewer whose reviews are worth reading is he who more or less approximates to this ideal) the Platonic or pseudo-Platonic philosopher who is "second best in everything," who has enough special knowledge not to miss merits or defects, and enough general knowledge to estimate the particular subject at, and not above, its relative value to the whole. There have been good critics who were unable to bring themselves down to the mere reading of ephemeral work, but I do not think they were the better for this; I am sure that there never was a good reviewer, even of the lowest trash, who was not in posse or in esse a good critic of the highest and most enduring literature. The writer of funny articles, and the "slater," and the intelligent compte-rendu man, and the person who writes six columns on the general theory of poetry when he professes to review Mr. Apollo's last book, may do all these things well and not be good critics; but then all these things may be done, and done well, and yet not be good reviews.

Whether the reviewer and the critic are valuable members of society or useless encumbrances, must be questions left to the decision of the world at large, which apparently is not in a hurry to decide either way. There are, no doubt, certain things that the critic, whether he be critic major or critic minor, Sainte-Beuve or Mr. Gall, cannot do. He cannot certainly, and for the present, sell or prevent the sale of a book. "You slated this and it has gone through twenty editions" is not a more uncommon remark than the other, "They slated that and you extol it to the skies." Both, as generally urged, rest on fallacy. In the first case, nothing was probably farther from the critic's intention than to say "this book is not popular"; the most that he intended was "this book is not good." In the second case, it has been discovered of late (it is one of the few things that we have discovered) that very rarely has any really good thing, even in the most famous or infamous attacks on it, been attacked, even with a shadow of success, for its goodness. The critics were severe on Byron's faults, on Keats's faults, and on the present Laureate's faults; they were seldom severe on their goodness, though they often failed to appreciate it fully.

This, however, is in one sense a digression, for there is no criticism of contemporary work in this{xxvi} volume. I think, however, as I have just endeavoured to point out, that criticism of contemporary work and criticism of classics should proceed on the same lines, and I think that both require the same qualities and the same outfit. Nor am I certain that if narrow inquiry were made, some of the best criticism in all times and in all languages would not be found in the merest casual reviewing. That in all cases the critic must start from a wide comparative study of different languages and literatures, is the first position to be laid down. In the next place he must, I think, constantly refer back his sensations of agreement and



disagreement, of liking and disliking, in the same comparative fashion. "Why do I like the Agamemnon and dislike Mr. Dash's five-act tragedy?" is a question to be constantly put, and to be answered only by a pretty close personal inquiry as to what "I" really do like in the Agamemnon and do dislike in Mr. Dash. And in answering it, it will hardly be possible to consider too large a number of instances of all degrees of merit, from Aeschylus himself to Mr. Dash himself, of all languages, of all times. Let Englishmen be compared with Englishmen of other times to bring out this set of differences, with foreigners of modern times to bring out that, with Greeks and Romans to bring out the other. Let poets of old days be compared with poets of new, classics with romantics, rhymed with unrhymed. Let the straitest doctrinaire criticism of men of talent like Boileau and simpletons like Rymer be compared with the fullest appreciations of Coleridge and Hazlitt, of Sainte-Beuve and Mr. Arnold. "Compare, always compare" is the first axiom of criticism. The second, I think, is "Always make sure, as far as you possibly can, that what you like and dislike is the literary and not the extra-literary character of the matter under examination." Make sure, that is to say, that admiration for the author is not due to his having taken care that the Whig dogs or the Tory dogs shall not have the best of it, to his having written as a gentleman for gentlemen, or as an uneasy anti-aristocrat for uneasy anti-aristocrats, as a believer (fervent or acquiescent) in the supernatural, or as a person{xxviii} who lays it down that miracles do not happen, as an Englishman or a Frenchman, a classic or a romantic. Very difficult indeed is the chase and discovery of these enemies: for extra-literary prejudices are as cunning as winter hares or leaf-insects, in disguising themselves by simulating literary forms.

Lastly, never be content without at least endeavouring to connect cause and effect in some way, without giving something like a reason for the faith that is in you. No doubt the critic will often be tempted, will sometimes be actually forced to say, "J'aime mieux Alfred de Musset," and there's an end of it." All the imperfect kinds, as they seem to me, of criticism are recommended by the fact that they are, unlike some other literary matter, not only easier writing but also easier reading. The agreeable exercises of style where adjectives meet substantives to whom they never thought they could possibly be introduced (as a certain naughty wit has it), the pleasant chatter about personal reminiscences, the flowers of rhetoric, the fruits of wit, may not be easy, but they are at any rate easier than fashioning some intelligent and intelligible response to the perpetual "Why?" the quare stans of criticism. In the following pages, I shall no doubt be found, like other people, to have come very far short of my own ideal, and my own precepts. I may even say that I have knowingly and intentionally come short of them to some extent. Biographical{xxix} and anecdotic detail has, I believe, much less to do with the real appreciation of the literary value of an author than is generally thought. In rare instances, it throws a light, but the examples in which we know practically nothing at all, as in that of Shakespeare, or only a few leading facts as in that of Dante, are not those in which criticism is least useful or least satisfactory. At the same time biographical and anecdotic details please most people, and if they are not allowed to shoulder out criticism altogether, there can be no harm in them. For myself, I should like to have the whole works of every author of merit, and I should care little to know anything whatever about his life; but that is a mere private opinion and possibly a private crotchet. Accordingly some space has been given in most of these Essays to a sketch of the life of the subject. Nor has it seemed advisable (except as a matter of necessity, but very occasional, digression) to argue at length upon abstract and general questions such as the definition of poetry, or the kinds and limits of the novel. Large as is the body of criticism so-called which the last hundred years have seen, it may be doubted whether there is even yet accumulated a sufficient corpus of really critical discussion of individuals. If I have in these Essays contributed even a very little to such an accumulation, I shall have done that which I purposed.

## **I CRABBE**

There is a certain small class of persons in the history of literature the members of which possess, at least for literary students, an interest peculiar to themselves. They are the writers who having attained, not merely popular vogue, but fame as solid as fame can ever be, in their own day, having been praised by the praised, and having as far as can be seen owed this praise to none of the merely external and irrelevant causes—politics, religion, fashion or what not—from which it sometimes arises, experience in a more or less short time after their death the fate of being, not exactly cast down from their high place, but left respectfully alone in it, unvisited, uncensured, unread. Among these writers, over the gate of whose division of the literary Elysium the famous, "Who now reads Bolingbroke?" might serve as motto, the

author of "The Village" and "Tales of the Hall" is one of the most remarkable. As for Crabbe's popularity in his own day there is no mistake about that. It was extraordinarily long, it was extremely wide, it included the select few as well as the vulgar, it was felt and more or less fully acquiesced in by persons of the most diverse tastes, habits, and literary standards. His was not the case, which occurs now and then, of a man who makes a great reputation in early life and long afterwards preserves it because, either by accident or prudence, he does not enter the lists with his younger rivals, and therefore these rivals can afford to show him a reverence which is at once graceful and cheap. Crabbe won his spurs in full eighteenth century, and might have boasted, altering Landor's words, that he had dined early and in the best of company, or have parodied Goldsmith, and said, "I have Johnson and Burke: all the wits have been here." But when his studious though barren manhood was passed, and he again began, as almost an old man, to write poetry, he entered into full competition with the giants of the new school, whose ideals and whose education were utterly different from his. While "The Library" and "The Village" came to a public which still had Johnson, which had but just lost Goldsmith, and which had no other poetical novelty before it than Cowper, "The Borough" and the later Tales entered the lists with "Marmion" and "Childe Harold," with "Christabel" and "The Excursion," even with "Endymion" and "The Revolt of Islam." Yet these later works of Crabbe met with the fullest recognition both from readers and from critics of the most opposite tendencies. Scott, the most generous, and Wordsworth, the most grudging, of all the poets of the day towards their fellows, united in praising Crabbe; and unromantic as the poet of "The Village" seems to us he was perhaps Sir Walter's favourite English bard. Scott read him constantly, he quotes him incessantly; and no one who has read it can ever forget how Crabbe figures in the most pathetic biographical pages ever written—Lockhart's account of the death at Abbotsford. Byron's criticism was as weak as his verse was powerful, but still Byron had no doubt about Crabbe. The utmost flight of memory or even of imagination can hardly get together three contemporary critics whose standards, tempers, and verdicts, were more different than those of Gifford, Jeffrey, and Wilson. Yet it is scarcely too much to say that they are all in a tale about Crabbe. In this unexampled chorus of eulogy there rose (for some others who can hardly have admired him much were simply silent) one single note, so far as I know, or rather one single rattling peal of thunder on the other side. It is true that this was significant enough, for it came from William Hazlitt.

Yet against this chorus, which was not, as has sometimes happened, the mere utterance of a loud-voiced few, but was echoed by a great multitude who eagerly bought and read Crabbe, must be set the almost total forgetfulness of his work which has followed. It is true that of living or lately living persons in the first rank of literature some great names can be cited on his side; and what is more, that these great names show the same curious diversity in agreement which has been already noticed as one of Crabbe's triumphs. The translator of Omar Khayyám, his friend the present Laureate, and the author of "The Dream of Gerontius," are men whose literary ideals are known to be different enough; yet they add a third trinity as remarkable as those others of Gifford, Jeffrey, and Wilson, of Wordsworth, Byron, and Scott. Much more recently Mr. Courthope has used Crabbe as a weapon in that battle of his with literary Liberalism which he has waged not always quite to the comprehension of his fellow-critics; Mr. Leslie Stephen has discussed him as one who knows and loves his eighteenth century. But who reads him? Who quotes him? Who likes him? I think I can venture to say, with all proper humility, that I know Crabbe pretty well; I think I may say with neither humility nor pride, but simply as a person whose business it has been for some years to read books, and articles, and debates, that I know what has been written and said in England lately. You will find hardly a note of Crabbe in these writings and sayings. He does not even survive, as "Matthew Green, who wrote "The Spleen,"" and others survive, by quotations which formerly made their mark, and are retained without a knowledge of their original. If anything is known about Crabbe to the general reader, it is the parody in "Rejected Addresses," an extraordinarily happy parody no doubt, in fact rather better Crabbe in Crabbe's weakest moments than Crabbe himself. But naturally there is nothing of his best there; and it is by his best things, let it be repeated over and over in face of all opposition, that a poet must be judged.

Although Crabbe's life, save for one dramatic revolution, was one of the least eventful in our literary history, it is by no means one of the least interesting. Mr. Kebbel's book gives a very fair summary of it; but the Life by Crabbe's son which is prefixed to the collected editions of the poems, and on which Mr. Kebbel's own is avowedly based, is perhaps the more interesting of the two. It is written with a curious mixture of the old literary state and formality, and of a feeling on the writer's part that he is not a literary man himself, and that not only his father, but Mr. Lockhart, Mr. Moore, Mr. Bowles and the other high literary persons who assisted him were august beings of another sphere. This is all the more agreeable, in

that Crabbe's sons had advantages of education and otherwise which were denied to their father, and might in the ordinary course of things have been expected to show towards him a lofty patronage rather than any filial reverence. The poet himself was born at Aldborough, a now tolerably well-known watering-place (the fortune of which was made by Mr. Wilkie Collins in *No Name*) on Christmas Eve, 1754. That not uncommon infirmity of noble minds which seeks to prove distinguished ancestry seems to have had no hold on the plain common sense of the Crabbe family, who maintained themselves to be at the best Norfolk yeomen, and though they possessed a coat-of-arms, avowed with much frankness that they did not know how they got it. A hundred and forty years ago they had apparently lost even the dignity of yeomanhood, and occupied stations quite in the lower rank of the middle class as tradesmen, non-commissioned officers in the navy or the merchant service, and so forth. George Crabbe, the grandfather, was collector of customs at Aldborough, but his son, also a George, was a parish schoolmaster and a parish clerk before he returned to the Suffolk port as deputy collector and then as salt-master, or collector of the salt duties. He seems to have had no kind of polish, and late in life was a mere rough drinking exciseman; but his education, especially in mathematics, appears to have been considerable, and his ability in business not small. The third George, his eldest son, was also fairly though very irregularly educated for a time, and his father, perceiving that he was "a fool about a boat," had the rather unusual common sense to destine him to a learned profession. Unluckily his will was better than his means, and while the profession which Crabbe chose or which was chosen for him—that of medicine—was not the best suited to his tastes or talents, the resources of the family were not equal to giving him a full education, even in that. He was still at intervals employed in the Customs warehouses at "piling up butter and cheese" even after he was apprenticed at fourteen to a country surgeon. The twelve years which he spent in this apprenticeship, in an abhorred return for a short time to the cheese and butter, in a brief visit to London, where he had no means to walk the hospitals, and in an attempt to practise with little or no qualification at Aldborough itself, present a rather dismal history of apprenticeship which taught nothing. But Love was, for once, most truly and literally Crabbe's solace and his salvation, his master and his patron. When he was barely eighteen, still an apprentice, and possessed, as far as can be made out, of neither manners nor prospects, he met a certain Miss Sarah Elmy. She was three or four years older than himself and much better connected, being the niece and eventual co-heiress of a wealthy yeoman squire. She was, it is said, pretty; she was evidently accomplished, and she seems to have had access to the country society of those days. But Mira, as Crabbe called her, perhaps merely in the fashion of the eighteenth century, perhaps in remembrance of Fulke Greville's heroine (for he knew his Elizabethans rather well for a man of those days), and no doubt also with a secret joy to think that the last syllables of her Christian name and surname in a way spelt the appellation, fell in love with the boy and made his fortune. But for her Crabbe would probably have subsided, not contentedly but stolidly, into the lot of a Doctor Slop of the time, consoling himself with snuff (which he always loved) and schnaps (to which we have hints that in his youth he was not averse). Mira was at once unalterably faithful to him and unalterably determined not to marry unless he could give her something like a position. Their long engagement (they were not married till he was twenty-nine and she was thirty-three) may, as we shall see, have carried with it some of the penalties of long engagements. But it is as certain as any such thing can be that but for it English literature would have lacked the name of Crabbe.

There is no space here to go through the sufferings of the novitiate. At last, at the extreme end of 1779, Crabbe made up his mind once more to seek his fortune, this time by aid of literature only, in London. His son too has printed rare scraps of a very interesting Journal to Mira which he kept during at least a part of the terrible year of struggle which he passed there. He saw the riots of '80; he canvassed, always more or less in vain, the booksellers and the peers; he spent three-and-sixpence of his last ten shillings on a copy of Dryden; he was much less disturbed about imminent starvation than by the delay of a letter from Mira ("my dearest Sally" she becomes with a pathetic lapse from convention, when the pinch is sorest) or by the doubt whether he had enough left to pay the postage of one. He writes prayers (but not for the public eye), abstracts of sermons for Mira, addresses (rather adulatory) to Lord Shelburne, which received no answer. All this has the most genuine note that ever man of letters put into his work, for whatever Crabbe was or was not, now or at any time, he was utterly sincere; and his sincerity makes his not very abundant letters and journals unusually interesting. At last, after a year, during which his means of subsistence are for the most part absolutely unknown, he, as he says himself, fixed "by some propitious influence, in some happy moment" on Edmund Burke as the subject of a last appeal.

Nothing in all literary history is, in a modest way and without pearls and gold, quite so like a fairy tale as the difference in Crabbe's fortunes which this propitious influence brought about. On the day when he wrote to Burke he was, as he said in the letter, "an outcast, without friends, without employment, without bread." In some twenty-four hours (the night-term of which he passed in ceaselessly pacing Westminster Bridge to cheat the agony of expectation) he was a made man. It was not merely that, directly or indirectly, Burke procured him a solid and an increasing income. He did much more than that. Crabbe, like most self-educated men, was quite uncritical of his own work: Burke took him into his own house for months, encouraged him to submit his poems, criticised them at once without mercy and with judgment, found him publishers, found him a public, turned him from a raw country boy into a man who at least had met society of the best kind. It is a platitude to say that for a hundred persons who will give money or patronage there is scarcely one who will take trouble of this kind; and if any devil's advocate objects the delight of producing a "lion," it may be answered that for Burke at least this delight would not have been delightful at all. The immediate form which the patronage of Burke and that, soon added, of Thurlow took, is one which rather shocks the present day. They made Crabbe turn to the Church, and got a complaisant bishop to ordain him. They sent him (a rather dangerous experiment) to be curate in his own native place, and finally Burke procured him the chaplaincy at Belvoir. The young Duke of Rutland, who had been made a strong Tory by Pitt, was fond of letters, and his Duchess Isabel, who was,—like her elder kinswoman, Dryden's Duchess of Ormond—

A daughter of the rose, whose cheeks unite  
The varying beauties of the red and white,  
in other words, a Somerset, was one of the most beautiful and gracious women in England. Crabbe, whose strictly literary fortunes I postpone for the present, was apparently treated with the greatest possible kindness by both; but he was not quite happy, and his ever-prudent Mira still would not marry him. At last Thurlow's patronage took the practical form (it had already taken that, equally practical, of a hundred pounds) of two small Chancellor's livings in Dorsetshire, residence at which was dispensed with by the easy fashions of the day. The Duke of Rutland, when he was appointed Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, did not take Crabbe with him, a circumstance which has excited some unnecessary discussion; but he gave him free quarters at Belvoir, where he and his wife lived for a time before they migrated to a neighbouring curacy—his wife, for even Mira's prudence had yielded at last to the Dorsetshire livings, and they were married in December 1783. They lived together for nearly thirty years, in, as it would seem, unbroken mutual devotion, but Mrs. Crabbe's health seems very early to have broken down, and a remarkable endorsement of Crabbe's on a letter of hers has been preserved. I do not think Mr. Keibel quotes it; it ends, "And yet happiness was denied"—a sentence fully encouraging to Mr. Browning and other good men who have denounced long engagements. The story of Crabbe's life after his marriage may be told very shortly. His first patron died in Ireland, but the duchess with some difficulty prevailed on Thurlow to exchange his former gifts for more convenient and rather better livings in the neighbourhood of Belvoir, at the chief of which, Muston, Crabbe long resided. The death of his wife's uncle made him leave his living and take up his abode for many years at Glemham, in Suffolk, only to find, when he returned, that (not unnaturally, though to his own great indignation) dissent had taken bodily possession of the parish. His wife died in 1813, and the continued kindness, after nearly a generation, of the house of Rutland, gave him the living of Trowbridge, in Wiltshire, with a small Leicestershire incumbency near Belvoir added, instead of Muston. At Trowbridge he lived nearly twenty years, revisiting London society, making the acquaintance personally (he had already known him by letter) of Sir Walter, paying a memorable visit to Edinburgh, flirting in an elderly and simple fashion with many ladies, writing much and being even more of a lion in the society of George the Fourth's reign than he had been in the days of George the Third. He died on 3rd February 1832.

Crabbe's character is not at all enigmatical, and emerges as clearly in those letters and diaries of his which have been published, as in anecdotes of him by others. Perhaps the famous story of his politely endeavouring to talk French to divers Highlanders, during George the Fourth's visit to Edinburgh, is slightly embroidered—Lockhart, who tells it, was a mystifier without peer. If he did gently but firmly extinguish a candle-snuff while<sup>{14}</sup> Wordsworth and Sir George Beaumont were indulging in poetic ecstasies over the beautiful undulations of the smoke, there may have been something to say for him as Anne Scott, to whom Wordsworth told the story, is said to have hinted, from the side of one of the senses. His life, no less than his work, speaks him a man of amiable though by no means wholly sweet temper, of more common sense than romance, and of more simplicity than common sense. His nature and his early trials made him not exactly sour, but shy, till age and prosperity mellowed him; but simplicity was his chief characteristic in age and youth alike. The mere facts of his strictly literary career are chiefly remarkable for

the enormous gap between his two periods of productiveness. In early youth he published some verses in the magazines and a poem called "Inebriety," which appeared at Ipswich in 1775. His year of struggle in London saw the publication of another short piece "The Candidate," but with the ill-luck which then pursued him, the bookseller who brought it out became bankrupt. His despairing resort to Burke ushered in "The Library," 1781, followed by "The Village," 1783, which Johnson revised and improved not a little. Two years later again came "The Newspaper," and then twenty-two years passed without anything appearing from Crabbe's pen. It was not that he was otherwise occupied, for he had little or nothing to do, and for the greater part of the time, lived away from his parish. It was not that he was idle, for we have his son's testimony that he was perpetually writing, and that holocausts of manuscripts in prose and verse used from time to time to be offered up in the open air, for fear of setting the house on fire by their mass. At last, in 1807, "The Parish Register" appeared, and three years later "The Borough"—perhaps the strongest division of his work. The miscellaneous Tales came in 1812, the "Tales of the Hall" in 1819. Meanwhile and afterwards, various collected editions appeared, the last and most complete being in 1829—a very comely little book in eight volumes. His death led to the issue of some "Posthumous Tales" and to the inclusion by his son of divers fragments both in the Life and in the Works. It is understood, however, that there are still considerable remains in manuscript; perhaps they might be published with less harm to the author's fame and with less fear of incurring a famous curse than in the case of almost any other poet.

For Crabbe, though by no means always at his best, is one of the most curiously equal of verse-writers. "Inebriety" and such other very youthful things are not to be counted; but between "The Village" of 1783 and the "Posthumous Tales" of more than fifty years later, the difference is surprisingly small. Such as it is, it rather reverses ordinary experience, for the later poems exhibit the greater play of fancy, the earlier the exacter graces of form and expression. Yet there is nothing really wonderful in this, for Crabbe's earliest poems were published under severe surveillance of himself and others, and at a time which still thought nothing of such value in literature as correctness, while his later were written under no particular censorship, and when the Romantic revival had already, for better or worse, emancipated the world. The change was in Crabbe's case not wholly for the better. He does not in his later verse become more prosaic, but he becomes considerably less intelligible. There is a passage in "The Old Bachelor," too long to quote but worth referring to, which, though it may be easy enough to understand it with a little goodwill, I defy anybody to understand in its literal and grammatical meaning. Such welters of words are very common in Crabbe, and Johnson saved him from one of them in the very first lines of "The Village." Yet Johnson could never have written the passages which earned Crabbe his fame. The great lexicographer knew man in general much better than Crabbe did; but he nowhere shows anything like Crabbe's power of seizing and reproducing man in particular. Crabbe is one of the first and certainly one of the greatest of the "realists" who, exactly reversing the old philosophical signification of the word, devote themselves to the particular only. Yet of the three small volumes by which he, after his introduction to Burke, made his reputation, and on which he lived for a quarter of a century, the first and the last display comparatively little of this peculiar quality. "The Library" and "The Newspaper" are characteristic pieces of the school of Pope, but not characteristic of their author. The first catalogues books as folio, quarto, octavo, and so forth, and then cross-catalogues them as law, physic, divinity, and the rest, but is otherwise written very much in the air. "The Newspaper" suited Crabbe a little better, because he pretty obviously took a particular newspaper and went through its contents—scandal, news, reviews, advertisements—in his own special fashion: but still the subject did not appeal to him. In "The Village," on the other hand, contemporaries and successors alike have agreed to recognise Crabbe in his true vein. The two famous passages which attracted the suffrages of judges so different as Scott and Wordsworth, are still, after more than a hundred years, fresh, distinct, and striking. Here they are once more:—

Theirs is yon House that holds the parish poor,  
Whose walls of mud scarce bear the broken door;  
There, where the putrid vapours, flagging, play,  
And the dull wheel hums doleful through the day;  
—There children dwell who know no parents' care;  
Parents who know no children's love dwell there!  
Heart-broken matrons on their joyless bed,  
Forsaken wives, and mothers never wed;  
Dejected widows, with unheeded tears,  
And crippled age with more than childhood fears;  
The lame, the blind, and, far the happiest they!  
The moping idiot and the madman gay.     •     •     •     •     •  
Anon, a figure enters, quaintly neat,  
All pride and business, bustle and conceit;  
With looks unaltered by these scenes of woe,  
With speed that, entering, speaks his haste to go,  
He bids the gazing throng around him fly,  
And carries fate and physic in his eye:  
A potent quack, long versed in human ills,  
Who first insults the victim whom he kills;  
Whose murderous hand a drowsy Bench protect,  
And whose most tender mercy is neglect.  
Paid by the parish for attendance here,  
He

wears contempt upon his sapient sneer; In haste he seeks the bed where Misery lies, Impatience marked in his averted eyes; And some habitual queries hurried o'er, Without reply he rushes on the door: His drooping patient, long inured to pain, And long unheeded, knows remonstrance vain, He ceases now the feeble help to crave Of man; and silent, sinks into the grave. The poet executed endless variations on this class of theme, but he never quite succeeded in discovering a new one, though in process of time he brought his narrow study of the Aldborough fishermen and townfolk down still more narrowly to individuals. His landscape is always marvellously exact, the strokes selected with extraordinary skill ad hoc so as to show autumn rather than spring, failure rather than hope, the riddle of the painful earth rather than any joy of living. Attempts have been made to vindicate Crabbe from the charge of being a gloomy poet, but I cannot think them successful; I can hardly think that they have been quite serious. Crabbe, our chief realist poet, has an altogether astonishing likeness to the chief prose realist of France, Gustave Flaubert, so far as his manner of view goes, for in point of style the two have small resemblance. One of the most striking things in Crabbe's biography is his remembrance of the gradual disillusion of a day of pleasure which, as a child, he enjoyed in a new boat of his father's. We all of us, except those who are gifted or cursed with the proverbial duck's back, have these experiences and these remembrances of them. But most men either simply grin and bear it, or carrying the grin a little farther, console themselves by regarding their own disappointments from the ironic and humorous point of view. Crabbe, though not destitute of humour, does not seem to have been able or disposed to employ it in this way. Perhaps he never quite got over the terrible and, for the most part unrecorded, year in London: perhaps the difference between the Mira of promise and the Mira of possession—the "happiness denied"—had something to do with it: perhaps it was a question of natural disposition with him. But when, years afterwards, as a prosperous middle-aged man, he began his series of published poems once more with "The Parish Register," the same manner of seeing is evident, though the minute elaboration of the views themselves is almost infinitely greater. Nor did he ever succeed in altering this manner, if he ever tried to do so.

With the exception of his few Lyrics, the most important of which, "Sir Eustace Grey" (one of his very best things), is itself a tale in different metre, and a few other occasional pieces of little importance, the entire work of Crabbe, voluminous as it is, is framed upon a single pattern, the vignettes of "The Village" being merely enlarged in size and altered in frame in the later books. The three parts of "The Parish Register," the twenty-four Letters of "The Borough," some of which have single and others grouped subjects, and the sixty or seventy pieces which make up the three divisions of Tales, consist almost exclusively of heroic couplets, shorter measures very rarely intervening. They are also almost wholly devoted to narratives, partly satirical, partly pathetic, of the lives of individuals of the lower and middle class chiefly. Jeffrey, who was a great champion of Crabbe and allotted several essays to him, takes delight in analysing the plots or stories of these tales; but it is a little amusing to notice that he does it for the most part exactly as if he were criticising a novelist or a dramatist. "The object," says he, in one place, "is to show that a man's fluency of speech depends very much upon his confidence in the approbation of his auditors": "In Squire Thomas we have the history of a mean, domineering spirit," and so forth. Gifford in one place actually discusses Crabbe as a novelist. I shall make some further reference to this curious attitude of Crabbe's admiring critics. For the moment I shall only remark that the singularly mean character of so much of Crabbe's style, the "style of drab stucco," as it has been unkindly called, which is familiar from the wicked wit that told how the youth at the theatre

Regained the felt and felt what he regained,

is by no means universal. The most powerful of all his pieces, the history of Peter Grimes, the tyrant of apprentices, is almost entirely free from it, and so are a few others. But it is common enough to be a very serious stumbling-block. In nine tales out of ten this is the staple:—

Of a fair town where Dr. Rack was guide, His only daughter was the boast and pride.

Now that is unexceptionable verse enough, but what is the good of putting it in verse at all? Here again:—

For he who makes me thus on business wait, Is not for business in a proper state.

It is obvious that you cannot trust a man who, unless he is intending a burlesque, can bring himself to write like that. Crabbe not only brings himself to it, but rejoices and luxuriates in the style. The tale from which that last luckless distich is taken, "The Elder Brother," is full of pathos and about equally full of false notes. If we turn to a far different subject, the very vigorously conceived "Natural Death of Love," we find a piece of strong and true satire, the best thing of its kind in the author, which is kept up throughout. Although, like all satire, it belongs at best but to the outer courts of poetry, it is so good that none can complain. Then the page is turned and one reads:—

"I met," said Richard, when returned to dine, "In my excursion with a friend of mine."

It may be childish, it may be uncritical, but I own that such verse as that excites in me an irritation which destroys all power of enjoyment, except the enjoyment of ridicule. Nor let any one say that pedestrian passages of the kind are inseparable from ordinary narrative in verse and from the adaptation of verse to miscellaneous themes. If it were so the argument would be fatal to such adaptation, but it is not. Pope seldom indulges in such passages, though he does sometimes: Dryden never does. He can praise, abuse, argue, tell stories, make questionable jests, do anything in verse that is still poetry, that has a throb and a quiver and a swell in it, and is not merely limp, rhythmized prose. In Crabbe, save in a few passages of feeling and a great many of mere description—the last an excellent setting for poetry but not necessarily poetical—this rhythmized prose is everywhere. The matter which it serves to convey is, with the limitations above given, varied, and it is excellent. No one except the greatest prose novelists has such a gallery of distinct, sharply etched characters, such another gallery of equally distinct scenes and manner-pieces, to set before the reader. Exasperating as Crabbe's style sometimes is, he seldom bores—never indeed except in his rare passages of digressive reflection. It has, I think, been observed, and if not the observation is obvious, that he has done with the pen for the neighbourhood of Aldborough and Glemham what Crome and Cotman have done for the neighbourhood of Norwich with the pencil. His observation of human nature, so far as it goes, is not less careful, true, and vivid. His pictures of manners, to those who read them at all, are perfectly fresh and in no respect grotesque or faded, dead as the manners themselves are. His pictures of motives and of facts, of vice and virtue, never can fade, because the subjects are perennial and are truly caught. Even his plays on words, which horrified Jeffrey—

Alas! your reverence, wanton thoughts I grant  
Were once my motive, now the thoughts of want,  
and the like—are not worse than Milton's jokes on the guns. He has immense talent, and he has the originality which sets talent to work in a way not tried by others, and may thus be very fairly said to turn it into genius. He is all this and more. But despite the warnings of a certain precedent, I cannot help stating the case which we {24} have discussed in the old form, and asking, was Crabbe a poet?

And thus putting the question, we may try to sum up. It is the gracious habit of a summing-up to introduce, if possible, a dictum of the famous men our fathers that were before us. I have already referred to Hazlitt's criticism on Crabbe in *The Spirit of the Age*, and I need not here urge at very great length the cautions which are always necessary in considering any judgment of Hazlitt's. Much that he says even in the brief space of six or eight pages which he allots to Crabbe is unjust; much is explicably, and not too creditably, unjust. Crabbe was a successful man, and Hazlitt did not like successful men: he was a clergyman of the Church of England, and Hazlitt did not love clergymen of the Church of England: he had been a duke's chaplain, and Hazlitt loathed dukes: he had been a Radical, and was still (though Hazlitt does not seem to have thought him so) a Liberal, but his Liberalism had been Torified into a tame variety. Again, Crabbe, though by no means squeamish, is the most unvoluptuous and dispassionate of all describers of inconvenient things; and Hazlitt was the author of *Liber Amoris*. Accordingly there is much that is untrue in the tissue of denunciation which the critic devotes to the poet. But there are two passages in this tirade which alone might show how great a critic Hazlitt himself was. Here in a couple of lines ("they turn, one and all, on the same sort of teasing, helpless, unimaginative distress") is the germ of one of the most famous and certainly of the best passages of the late Mr. Arnold; and here again is one of those critical taps of the finger which shivers by a touch of the weakest part a whole Rupert's drop of misapprehension. Crabbe justified himself by Pope's example. "Nothing," says Hazlitt, "can be more dissimilar. Pope describes what is striking: Crabbe would have described merely what was there.... In Pope there was an appeal to the imagination, you see what was passing in a poetical point of view." Even here (and I have not been able to quote the whole passage) there is one of the flaws, which Hazlitt rarely avoided, in the use of the word "striking"; for, Heaven knows, Crabbe is often striking enough. But the description of Pope as showing things "in a poetical point of view" hits the white at once, wounds Crabbe mortally, and demolishes realism, as we have been pleased to understand it for the last generation or two. Hazlitt, it is true, has not followed up the attack, as I shall hope to show in an instant; but he has indicated the right line of it. As far as mere treatment goes, the fault of Crabbe is that he is pictorial rather than poetic, and photographic rather than pictorial. He sees his subject steadily, and even in a way he sees it whole; but he does not see it in the poetical way. You are bound in the shallows and the miseries of the individual; never do you reach the large freedom of the poet who looks at the universal. The absence of selection, of the discarding of details that are not wanted, has no doubt a great deal to do with this—Hazlitt seems to have thought that it had everything to do. I do not quite agree with him there. Dante, I think, was sometimes quite as minute as Crabbe; and I do not know that any one less hardy than Hazlitt himself would single out,

as Hazlitt expressly does, the death-bed scene of Buckingham as a conquering instance in Pope to compare with Crabbe. We know that the bard of Twickenham grossly exaggerated this. But suppose he had not? Would it have been worse verse? I think not. Although the faculty of selecting instead of giving all, as Hazlitt himself justly contends, is one of the things which make poesis non ut pictura, it is not all, and I think myself that a poet, if he is a poet, could be almost absolutely literal. Shakespeare is so in the picture of Gloucester's corpse. Is that not poetry?

The defect of Crabbe, as it seems to me, is best indicated by reference to one of the truest of all dicta on poetry, the famous maxim of Joubert—that the lyre is a winged instrument and must transport. There is no wing in Crabbe, there is no transport, because, as I hold (and this is where I go beyond Hazlitt), there is no music. In all poetry, the very highest as well as the very lowest that is still poetry, there is something which transports, and that something in my view is always the music of the verse, of the words, of the cadence, of the rhythm, of the sounds superadded to the meaning. When you get the best music married to the best meaning, then you get, say, Shakespeare: when you get some music married to even moderate meaning, you get, say, Moore. Wordsworth can, as everybody but Wordsworthians holds, and as some even of Wordsworthians admit, write the most detestable doggerel and platitude. But when any one who knows what poetry is reads—

Our noisy years seem moments in the being  
Of the eternal silence,  
he sees that, quite independently of the meaning, which disturbs the soul of no less a person than Mr. John Morley, there is one note added to the articulate music of the world—a note that never will leave off resounding till the eternal silence itself gulfs it. He leaves Wordsworth, he goes straight into the middle of the eighteenth century, and he sees Thomson with his hands in his dressing-gown pockets biting at the peaches, and hears him between the mouthfuls murmuring—

So when the shepherd of the Hebrid Isles,  
Placed far amid the melancholy main,  
and there is another note, as different as possible in kind yet still alike, struck for ever. Yet again, to take example still from the less romantic poets, and in this case from a poet, whom Mr. Keibel specially and disadvantageously contrasts with Crabbe, when we read the old schoolboy's favourite {28}—

When the British warrior queen,  
Bleeding from the Roman rods,  
we hear the same quality of music informing words, though again in a kind somewhat lower, commoner, and less. In this matter, as in all matters that are worth handling at all, we come of course ad mysterium. Why certain combinations of letters, sounds, cadences, should almost without the aid of meaning, though no doubt immensely assisted by meaning, produce this effect of poetry on men no man can say. But they do; and the chief merit of criticism is that it enables us by much study of different times and different languages to recognise some part of the laws, though not the ultimate and complete causes, of the production.

Now I can only say that Crabbe does not produce, or only in the rarest instances produces, this effect on me, and what is more, that on ceasing to be a patient in search of poetical stimulant and becoming merely a gelid critic, I do not discover even in Crabbe's warmest admirers any evidence that he produced this effect on them. Both in the eulogies which Mr. Keibel quotes, and in those that he does not quote, I observe that the eulogists either discreetly avoid saying what they mean by poetry, or specify for praise something in Crabbe that is not distinctly poetical. Cardinal Newman said that Crabbe "pleased and touched him at thirty years' interval," and pleaded that this answers to the "accidental definition of a classic." Most certainly; but not necessarily to that of a poetical classic. Jeffrey thought him "original and powerful." Granted; but there are plenty of original and powerful writers who are not poets. Wilson gave him the superlative for "original and vivid painting." Perhaps; but is Hogarth a poet? Jane Austen "thought she could have married him." She had not read his biography; but even if she had would that prove him to be a poet? Lord Tennyson is said to single out the following passage, which is certainly one of Crabbe's best, if not his very best:—

Early he rose, and looked with many a sigh  
On the red light that filled the eastern sky;  
Oft had he stood before, alert and gay,  
To hail the glories of the new-born day;  
But now dejected, languid, listless, low,  
He saw the wind upon the water blow,  
And the cold stream curled onward as the gale  
From the pine-hill blew harshly down the vale;  
On the right side the youth a wood surveyed,  
With all its dark intensity of shade;  
Where the rough wind alone was heard to move  
In this, the pause of nature and of love  
When now the young are reared, and when the old,  
Lost to the tie, grow negligent and cold:  
Far to the left he saw the huts of men,  
Half hid in mist that hung upon the fen:  
Before him swallows gathering for the sea,  
Took their short flights and twittered o'er the lea;  
And near the bean-sheaf stood, the harvest done,  
And slowly blackened in the sickly sun;  
All these were sad in nature, or they took  
Sadness from him, the likeness of his look  
And of his mind—he pondered for a while,  
Then met his Fanny with a borrowed smile.



It is good: it is extraordinarily good: it could not be better of its kind. It is as nearly poetry as anything that Crabbe ever did—but is it quite? If it is (and I am not careful to deny it) the reason, as it seems to me, is that the verbal and rhythmical music here, with its special effect of "transporting" of "making the common as if it were uncommon," is infinitely better than is usual with Crabbe, that in fact there is music as well as meaning. Hardly anywhere else, not even in the best passages of the story of Peter Grimes, shall we find such music; and in its absence it may be said of Crabbe much more truly than of Dryden (who carries the true if not the finest poetical undertone with him even into the rant of Almanzor and Maximin, into the interminable arguments of "Religio Laici" and "The Hind and the Panther") that he is a classic of our prose. Yet the qualities which are so noteworthy in him are all qualities which are valuable to the poet, and which for the most part are present in good poets. And I cannot help thinking that this was what actually deceived some of his contemporaries and made others content for the most part to acquiesce in an exaggerated estimate of his poetical merits. It must be remembered that even the latest generation which, as a whole and unhesitatingly, admired Crabbe, had been brought up on the poets of the eighteenth century, in the very best of whom the qualities which Crabbe lacks had been but sparingly and not eminently present. It must be remembered too, that from the great vice of the poetry of the eighteenth century, its artificiality and convention, Crabbe is conspicuously free. The return to nature was not the only secret of the return to poetry; but it was part of it, and that Crabbe returned to nature no one could doubt. Moreover he came just between the school of prose fiction which practically ended with *Evelina* and the school of prose fiction which opened its different branches with *Waverley* and *Sense and Sensibility*. His contemporaries found nowhere else the narrative power, the faculty of character-drawing, the genius for description of places and manners, which they found in Crabbe; and they knew that in almost all, if not in all the great poets there is narrative power, faculty of character-drawing, genius for description. Yet again, Crabbe put these gifts into verse which at its best was excellent in its own way, and at its worst was a blessed contrast to Darwin or to Hayley. Some readers may have had an uncomfortable though only half-conscious feeling that if they had not a poet in Crabbe they had not a poet at all. At all events they made up their minds that they had a poet in him. But are we bound to follow their example? I think not. You could play on Crabbe that odd trick which used, it is said, to be actually played on some mediæval verse chroniclers and unrhyme{32} him—that is to say, put him into prose with the least possible changes—and his merits would, save in rare instances, remain very much as they are now. You could put other words in the place of his words, keeping the verse, and it would not as a rule be much the worse. You cannot do either of these things with poets who are poets. Therefore I shall conclude that save at the rarest moments, moments of some sudden gust of emotion, some happy accident, some special grace of the Muses to reward long and blameless toil in their service, Crabbe was not a poet. But I have not the least intention of denying that he was great, and all but of the greatest among English writers.

## II

### HOGG

"What on earth," it was once asked "will you make of Hogg?" I think that there is something to be made of Hogg, and that it is something worth the making. In the first place, it is hardly possible, without studying "the Shepherd" pretty close, fully to appreciate three other persons, all greater, and one infinitely greater, than himself; namely, Wilson, Lockhart, and Scott. To the two first he was a client in the Roman sense, a plaything, something of a butt, and an invaluable source of inspiration or at least suggestion. Towards the last he occupied a very curious position, never I think quite paralleled elsewhere—the position of a Boswell who would fain be a Boswell and is not allowed to be, who has wild notions that he is really a greater man than Johnson and occasionally blasphemes against his idol, but who in the intervals is truly Boswellian. In the second place, he has usually hitherto been not criticised at all, but either somewhat sneered at or else absurdly over-praised. In the third place, as both Scott and Byron recognised, he is probably the most remarkable example we have of absolute self-education, or of no education: for Burns was an academically instructed student in comparison with Hogg. In the fourth, he produced, amid a mass of rubbish, some charming verse and one prose-story which, though it is almost overlooked by the general, some good judges are, I believe, agreed with me in regarding as one of the very best things of its kind, while it is also a very curious literary puzzle.

The anecdotic history, more or less authentic, of the Ettrick Shepherd would fill volumes, and I must try to give some of the cream of it presently. The non-anecdotic part may be despatched in a few sentences. The exact date of his birth is not known, but he was baptized on 9th December 1770. His father was a good shepherd and a bad farmer—a combination of characteristics which Hogg himself inherited unimpaired and unimproved. If he had any early education at all, he forgot it so completely that he had, as a grown-up man, to teach himself writing if not reading a second time. He pursued his proper vocation for about thirty years, during the latter part of which time he became known as a composer of very good songs, "Donald Macdonald" being ranked as the best. He printed a few as a pamphlet in the first year of the century, but met with little success. Then he fell in with Scott, to whom he had been introduced as a purveyor of ballads, not a few of which his mother, Margaret Laidlaw, knew by heart. This old lady it was who gave Scott the true enough warning that the ballads were "made for singing and no for reading." Scott in his turn set Hogg on the track of making some money by his literary work, and Constable published *The Mountain Bard* together with a treatise called *Hogg on Sheep*, which I have not read, and of which I am not sure that I should be a good critic if I had. The two books brought Hogg three hundred pounds. This sum he poured into the usual Danaids' vessel of the Scotch peasant—the taking and stocking of a farm, which he had neither judgment to select, capital to work, nor skill to manage; and he went on doing very much the same thing for the rest of his life. The exact dates of that life are very sparsely given in his own *Autobiography*, in his daughter's *Memorials*, and in the other notices of him that I have seen. He would appear to have spent four or five years in the promising attempt to run, not one but two large stock-farms. Then he tried shepherding again, without much success; and finally in 1810, being forty years old and able to write, he went to Edinburgh and "commenced," as the good old academic phrase has it, literary man. He brought out a new book of songs called *The Forest Minstrel*, and then he started a periodical, *The Spy*. On this, as he tells us, Scott very wisely remonstrated with him, asking him whether he thought he could be more elegant than Addison or Mackenzie. Hogg replied with his usual modesty that at any rate he would be "mair original." The originality appears to have consisted in personality; for Hogg acknowledges one exceedingly insolent attack on Scott himself, which Scott seems, after at first resenting it (and yet Hogg tells us elsewhere that he never resented any such thing), to have forgiven. He had also some not clearly known employments of the factorship or surveyorship kind; he was much patronised by two worthy hatters, Messrs. Grieve and Scott, and in 1813 the book which contains all his best verse, *The Queen's Wake*, was published. It was deservedly successful; but, by a species of bad luck which pursued Hogg with extraordinary assiduity, the two first editions yielded nothing, as his publisher was not solvent. The third, which Blackwood issued, brought him in good profit. Two years later he became in a way a made man. He had very diligently sought the patronage of Harriet, Duchess of Buccleuch, and, his claims being warmly supported by Scott and specially recommended by the Duchess on her deathbed to her husband, Hogg received rent free, or at a peppercorn, the farm of Mossend, Eltrive or Altrive. It is agreed even by Hogg's least judicious admirers that if he had been satisfied with this endowment and had then devoted himself, as he actually did, to writing, he might have lived and died in comfort, even though his singular luck in not being paid continued to haunt him. But he must needs repeat his old mistake and take the adjacent farm of Mount Benger, which, with a certain reckless hospitable way of living for which he is not so blamable, kept him in difficulties all the rest of his life and made him die in them. He lived twenty years longer; married a good-looking girl much his superior in rank and twenty years his junior, who seems to have made him an excellent wife; engaged in infinite magazine- and book-writing, of which more presently; became the inspirer, model and butt of Blackwood's *Magazine*; constantly threatened to quarrel with it for traducing him, and once did so; loved Edinburgh convivialities more well than wisely; had the very ill luck to survive Scott and to commit the folly of writing a pamphlet (more silly than anything else) on the "domestic manners" of that great man, which estranged Lockhart, hitherto his fast friend; paid a visit to London in 1832, whereby hang tales; and died himself on 21st November 1835.

Such, briefly but not I think insufficiently given, is the Hogg of history. The Hogg of anecdote is a much more considerable and difficult person. He mixes himself up with or becomes by turns (whichever phrase may be preferred) the Shepherd of the Noctes and the Hogg who is revealed to us, say his panegyrists, with "uncalled-for malignity" in Lockhart's *Life of Scott*. But these panegyrists seem to forget that there are two documents which happen not to be signed either "John Gibson Lockhart" or "Christopher North," and that these documents are Hogg's *Autobiography*, published by himself, and the *Domestic Manners of Sir Walter Scott*, likewise authenticated. In these two we have the Hogg of the ana put forward pretty vividly. For instance, Hogg tells us how, late in Sir Walter's life, he and his wife called upon Scott. "In we went and were received with all the affection of old friends. But his whole discourse was addressed to my wife, while

I was left to shift for myself.... In order to attract his attention from my wife to one who I thought as well deserved it, I went close up to him with a scrutinising look and said, 'Gudeness guide us, Sir Walter, but ye hae gotten a braw gown.'" The rest of the story is not bad, but less characteristic. Immediately afterwards Hogg tells his own speech about being "not sae yelegant but mair original" than Addison. Then there is the other capital legend, also self-told, how he said to Scott, "Dear Sir Walter, ye can never suppose that I belong to your school of chivalry! Ye are the king of that school, but I'm the king of the mountain and fairy school, which is a far higher ane than yours!" "This," says Professor Veitch, a philosopher, a scholar, and a man of letters, "though put with an almost sublime egotism, is in the main true." Almost equally characteristic is the fact that, after beginning his pamphlet by calling Lockhart "the only man thoroughly qualified for the task" of writing Scott's life, Hogg elsewhere, in one of the extraordinary flings that distinguish him, writes: "Of Lockhart's genius and capabilities Sir Walter always spoke with the greatest enthusiasm: more than I thought he deserved. For I knew him a great deal better than Sir Walter did, and, whatever Lockhart may pretend, I knew Sir Walter a thousand times better than he did."

Now be it remembered that these passages are descriptive of Hogg's Hogg, to use the always useful classification of Dr. Holmes. To complete them (the actual texts are too long to give here) it is only necessary to compare the accounts of a certain dinner at Bowhill given respectively by Hogg in the *Domestic Manners* and by Lockhart in his biography, and also those given in the same places of the one-sided quarrel between Scott and Hogg, because the former, according to his almost invariable habit, refused to collaborate in Hogg's *Poetic Mirror*. In all this we have the man's own testimony about himself. It is not in the least incompatible with his having been, as his panegyrists contend, an affectionate friend, husband, and father; a very good fellow when his vanity or his whims were not touched; and inexhaustibly fertile in the kind of rough profusion of flower and weed that uncultivated soil frequently produces. But it most certainly is also not inconsistent, but on the contrary highly consistent, with the picture drawn by Lockhart in his great book; and it shows how, to say the least and mildest, the faults and foibles of the curious personage known as "the Shepherd of the Noctes" were not the parts of the character on which Wilson need have spent, or did spend, most of his invention. Even if the "boozing buffoon" had been a boozing buffoon and nothing more, Hogg, who confesses with a little affected remorse, but with evident pride, that he once got regularly drunk every night for some six weeks running, till "an inflammatory fever" kindly pulled him up, could not have greatly objected to this part of the matter. The wildest excesses of the *Eidolon-Shepherd's* vanity do not exceed that speech to Scott which Professor Veitch thinks so true; and the quaintest pranks played by the same shadow do not exceed in quaintness the immortal story of Hogg being introduced to Mrs. Scott for the first time, extending himself on a sofa at full length (on the excuse that he "thought he could never do wrong to copy the lady of the house," who happened at the time to be in a delicate state of health), and ending by addressing her as "Charlotte." This is the story that Mrs. Garden, Hogg's daughter, without attempting to contest its truth, describes as told by Lockhart with "uncalled-for malignity." Now when anybody who knows something of Lockhart comes across "malignant," "scorpion," or any term of the kind, he, if he is wise, merely shrugs his shoulders. All the literary copy-books have got it that Lockhart was malignant, and there is of course no more to be said. But something may be done by a little industrious clearing away of fiction in particulars. It may be most assuredly and confidently asserted that no one reading the *Life of Scott* without knowing what Hogg's friends have said of it would dream of seeing malignity in the notices which it contains of the Shepherd. Before writing this paper I gave myself the trouble, or indulged myself in the pleasure (for perhaps that is the more appropriate phrase in reference to the most delightful of biographies, if not of books), of marking with slips of paper all the passages in Lockhart referring to Hogg, and reading them consecutively. I am quite sure that any one who does this, even knowing little or nothing of the circumstances, will wonder where on earth the "ungenerous assaults," the "virulent detraction," the "bitter words," the "false friendship," and so forth, with which Lockhart has been charged, are to be found. But any one who knows that Hogg had, just before his own death, and while the sorrow of Sir Walter's end was fresh, published the possibly not ill-intentioned but certainly ill-mannered pamphlet referred to—a pamphlet which contains among other things, besides the grossest impertinences about Lady Scott's origin, at least one insinuation that Scott wrote Lockhart's books for him—if any one further knows (I think the late Mr. Scott Douglas was the first to point out the fact) that Hogg had calmly looted Lockhart's biography of Burns, then he will think that the "scorpion," instead of using his sting, showed most uncommon forbearance. This false friend, virulent detractor and ungenerous assailant describes Hogg as "a true son of nature and genius with a naturally kind and simple character." He does indeed remark that Hogg's "notions of literary honesty were exceedingly loose." But (not to mention

the Burns affair, which gave me some years ago a clue to this sentence) the remark is subjoined to a letter in which Hogg placidly suggests that he shall write an autobiographic sketch, and that Scott, transcribing it and substituting the third person for the first, shall father it as his own. The other offence I suppose was the remark that "the Shepherd's nerves were not heroically strung." This perhaps might have been left out, but if it was the fact (and Hogg's defenders never seem to have traversed it) it suggested itself naturally enough in the context, which deals with Hogg's extraordinary desire, when nearly forty, to enter the militia as an ensign. Moreover the same passage contains plenty of kindly description of the Shepherd. Perhaps there is "false friendship" in quoting a letter from Scott to Byron which describes Hogg as "a wonderful creature," or in describing the Shepherd's greeting to Wilkie, "Thank God for it! I did not know you were so young a man" as "graceful," or in the citation of Jeffrey's famous blunder in selecting for special praise a fabrication of Hogg's among the "Jacobite Ballads," or in the genial description, without a touch of ridicule, of Hogg at the St. Ronan's{43} Games. The sentence on Hogg's death is indeed severe: "It had been better for his memory had his end been of earlier date; for he did not follow his benefactor until he had insulted his dust." It is even perhaps a little too severe, considering Hogg's irresponsible and childlike nature. But Lockhart might justly have retorted that men of sixty-four have no business to be irresponsible children; and it is certainly true that in this unlucky pamphlet Hogg distinctly accuses Scott of anonymously puffing himself at his, Hogg's, expense, of being over and over again jealous of him, of plagiarising his plots, of sneering at him, and, if the passage has any meaning, of joining a conspiracy of "the whole of the aristocracy and literature of the country" to keep Hogg down and "crush him to a nonentity." Neither could Lockhart have been exactly pleased at the passage where Scott is represented as afraid to clear the character of an innocent friend to the boy Duke of Buccleuch.

He told me that which I never knew nor suspected before; that a certain gamekeeper, on whom he bestowed his maledictions without reserve, had prejudiced my best friend, the young Duke of Buccleuch, against me by a story; and though he himself knew it to be a malicious and invidious lie, yet seeing his grace so much irritated, he durst not open his lips on the subject, further than by saying, "But, my lord duke, you must always remember that Hogg is no ordinary man, although he may have shot a stray moorcock." And then turning to me he said, "Before you had ventured to give any saucy language to a low scoundrel of an English gamekeeper, you should have thought of Fielding's tale of Black George." "I never saw that tale," said I, "and dinna ken ought about it. But never trouble your head about that matter, Sir Walter, for it is awthegither out o' nature for our young chief to entertain ony animosity against me. The thing will never mair be heard of, an' the chap that tauld the lees on me will gang to hell, that's aye some comfort." Part of my reason for quoting this last passage is to recall to those who are familiar with the *Noctes Ambrosianæ* the extraordinary felicity of the imitation. This, which Hogg with his own pen represents himself as speaking with his own mouth, might be found textually in any page of the *Noctes* without seeming in the least out of keeping with the ideal Hogg.

And this brings me to the second charge of Hogg's friends, that Wilson wickedly caricatured his humble friend, if indeed he did not manufacture a Shepherd out of his own brain. This is as uncritical as the other, and even more surprising. That any one acquainted with Hogg's works, especially his autobiographic productions, should fail to recognise the resemblance is astonishing enough; but what is more astonishing is that any one interested in Hogg's fame should not perceive that the Shepherd of the *Noctes* is Hogg magnified and embellished in every way. He is not a better poet, for the simple reason that the verses put in his mouth are usually Hogg's own and not always his best. But out of the *Confessions*{45} of a Sinner, Hogg has never signed anything half so good as the best prose passages assigned to him in the *Noctes*. They are what he might have written if he had taken pains: they are in his key and vein; but they are much above him. Again, unless any reader is so extraordinarily devoid of humour as to be shocked by the mere horse-play, it must be clear to him that the Shepherd's manners are dressed up with extraordinary skill, so as to be just what he would have liked them to be. As for the drinking and so forth, it simply comes to this—that the habits which were fashionable when the century was not yet in its teens, or just in them, were getting to be looked on askance when it was entering or had entered on its thirties. But, instead of being annoyed at this Socrates-Falstaff, as somebody has called it, one might have thought that both Hogg himself and his admirers would have taken it as an immense compliment. The only really bad turn that Wilson seems to have done his friend was posthumous and pardonable. He undertook the task of writing the Shepherd's life and editing his *Remains* for the benefit of his family, who were left very badly off; and he not only did not do it but appears to have lost the documents with which he was entrusted. It is fair to

say that after the deaths, which came close together, of his wife, of Blackwood, and of Hogg himself, Wilson was never fully the same man; and that his strongly sentimental nature, joined to his now inveterate habit of writing rapidly as the fancy took him, would have made the task of hammering out a biography and of selecting and editing Remains so distasteful from different points of view as to be practically impossible. But in that case of course he should not have undertaken it, or should have relinquished it as soon as he found out the difficulties. Allan Cunningham, it is said, would have gladly done the business; and there were few men better qualified.

And now, having done a by no means unnecessary task in this preliminary clearance of rubbish, let us see what sort of a person in literature and life this Ettrick Shepherd really was—the Shepherd whom Scott not only befriended with unwearied and lifelong kindness, but ranked very high as an original talent, whom Byron thought Scott's only second worth speaking of, whom Southey, a very different person from either, esteemed highly, whom Wilson selected as the mouthpiece and model for one of the most singular and (I venture to say despite a certain passing wave of unpopularity) one of the most enduring of literary character-parts, and to whom Lockhart was, as Hogg himself late in life sets down, "a warm and disinterested friend." We have seen what Professor Veitch thinks of him—that he is the king of a higher school than Scott's. On the other hand, I fear the general English impression of him is rather that given by no Englishman, but by Thomas Carlyle, at the time of Hogg's visit to London in 1832. Carlyle describes him as talking and behaving like a "gomeril," and amusing the town by walking about in a huge gray plaid, which was supposed to be an advertisement, suggested by his publisher. The king of a school higher than Scott's and the veriest gomeril—these surely, though the judges be not quite of equal competence, are judgments of a singularly contradictory kind. Let us see what middle term we can find between them. The mighty volume (it has been Hogg's ill-fortune that the most accessible edition of his work is in two great double-columned royal octavos, heavy to the hand and not too grateful to the eye) which contains the Shepherd's collected poetical work is not for every reader. "Poets? where are they?" Wordsworth is said, on the authority of De Quincey, to have asked, with a want of graciousness of manners uncommon even in him and never forgiven by Hogg, when the latter used the plural in his presence, and in that of Wilson and Lloyd. It was unjust as well as rude, but endless allowance certainly has to be made for Hogg as a poet. I do not know to whom the epigram that "everything that is written in Scotch dialect is not necessarily poetry" is originally due, but there is certainly some justice in it. Scotch, as a language, has grand accommodations; it has richer vowels and a more varied and musical arrangement of consonants than English, while it falls not much short of English in freedom from {48} that mere monotony which besets the richly-vowelled continental languages. It has an almost unrivalled provision of poetical clichés (the sternest purist may admit a French word which has no English equivalent), that is to say, the stock phrases which Heaven knows who first minted and which will pass till they are worn out of all knowledge. It has two great poets—one in the vernacular, one in the literary language—who are rich enough to keep a bank for their inferiors almost to the end of time. The depreciation of it by "glaikit Englishers" (I am a glaikit Englisher who does not depreciate), simply because it is unfamiliar and rustic-looking, is silly enough. But its best practitioners are sometimes prone to forget that nothing ready-made will do as poetry, and that you can no more take a short cut to Parnassus by spelling good "guid" and liberally using "ava," than you can execute the same journey by calling a girl a nymph and a boy a swain. The reason why Burns is a great poet, and one of the greatest, is that he seldom or never does this in Scots. When he takes to the short cut, as he does sometimes, he usually "gets to his English." Of Hogg, who wrote some charming things and many good ones, the same cannot be said. No writer known to me, not even the eminent Dr. Young, who has the root of the poetical matter in him at all, is so utterly uncritical as Hogg. He does not seem even to have known when he borrowed and when he was original. We have seen that he told Scott that he was not of {49} his school. Now a great deal that he wrote, perhaps indeed actually the major part of his verse, is simply imitation and not often very good imitation of Scott. Here is a passage:—  
 Light on her airy steed she  
 sprung, Around with golden tassels hung.  
 No chieftain there rode half so free,  
 Or half so light and gracefully.  
 How sweet to see her ringlets pale  
 Wide-waving in the southland gale,  
 Which through the broom-  
 wood odorous flew  
 To fan her cheeks of rosy hue!  
 Whene'er it heaved her bosom's screen  
 What beauties in her form were seen!  
 And when her courser's mane it swung,  
 A thousand silver bells were rung.  
 A sight so fair, on Scottish plain,  
 A Scot shall never see again.

I think we know where this comes from. Indeed Hogg had a certain considerable faculty of conscious parody as well as of unconscious imitation, and his Poetic Mirror, which he wrote as a kind of humorous revenge on his brother bards for refusing to contribute, is a fair second to Rejected Addresses. The amusing

thing is that he often parodied where he did not mean parody in the least, and nowadays we do not want Scott-and-water. Another vein of Hogg's, which he worked mercilessly, is a similar imitation, not of Scott, but of the weakest echoes of Percy's *Reliques*:— O sad, sad, was young Mary's plight: She took the cup, no word she spake, She had even wished that very night To sleep and never more to wake. Sad, sad indeed is the plight of the poet who publishes verses like this, of which there are thousands of lines to be found in Hogg. And then one comes to "Kilmeny," and the note changes with a vengeance:— Bonny Kilmeny gaed up the glen; But it wasna to meet Duneira's men, Nor the rosy monk of the isle to see, For Kilmeny was pure as pure could be. It was only to hear the yorlin sing, And pu' the cress-flower round the spring, The scarlet hip and the hindberry, For Kilmeny was pure as pure could be. • • • • • Kilmeny looked up with a lovely grace, But nae smile was seen on Kilmeny's face; As still was her look and as still was her ee As the stillness that lay on the emeraut lea, Or the mist that sleeps on a waveless sea. For Kilmeny had been she kent not where, And Kilmeny had seen what she could not declare; Kilmeny had been where the cock never crew, Where the rain never fell and the wind never blew.

No matter that it is necessary even here to make a cento, that the untutored singer cannot keep up the song by natural force and has not skill enough to dissemble the lapses. "Kilmeny" at its best is poetry—such poetry as, to take Hogg's contemporaries only, there is none in Rogers or Crabbe, little I fear in Southey, and not very much in Moore. Then there is no doubt at all that he could write ballads. "The Witch of Fife" is long and is not improved by being{51} written (at least in one version) in a kind of Scots that never was on land or sea, but it is quite admirable of its class. "The Good Grey Cat," his own imitation of himself in the *Poetic Mirror*, comes perhaps second to it, and "The Abbot McKinnon" (which is rather close to the imitations of Scott) third. But there are plenty of others. As for his poems of the more ambitious kind, "Mador of the Moor," "Pilgrims of the Sun," and even "Queen Hynde," let blushing glory—the glory attached to the literary department—hide the days on which he produced those. She can very well afford it, for the hiding leaves untouched the division of Hogg's poetical work which furnishes his highest claims to fame except "Kilmeny," the division of the songs. These are numerous and unequal as a matter of course. Not a few of them are merely variations on older scraps and fragments of the kind which Burns had made popular; some of them are absolute rubbish; some of them are mere imitations of Burns himself. But this leaves abundance of precious remnants, as the Shepherd's covenanting friends would have said. The before-mentioned "Donald Macdonald" is a famous song of its kind: "I'll no wake wi' Annie" comes very little short of Burns's "Green grow the rashes O!" The piece on the lifting of the banner of Buccleuch, though a curious contrast with Scott's "Up with the Banner" does not suffer too much by the comparison: "Cam' ye by Athole" and "When{52} the kye comes hame" everybody knows, and I do not know whether it is a mere delusion, but there seems to me to be a rare and agreeable humour in "The Village of Balmaquhapple." D'ye ken the big village of Balmaquhapple? The great muckle village of Balmaquhapple? 'Tis steeped in iniquity up to the thrapple, An' what's to become o' poor Balmaquhapple? Whereafter follows an invocation to St. Andrew, with a characteristic suggestion that he may spare himself the trouble of intervening for certain persons such as Geordie, our deacon for want of a better, And Bess, wha delights in the sins that beset her— ending with the milder prayer: But as for the rest, for the women's sake save them, Their bodies at least, and their sauls if they have them.

And save, without word of confession auricular, The clerk's bonny daughters, and Bell in particular; For ye ken that their beauty's the pride and the stapple Of the great wicked village of Balmaquhapple! "Donald McGillavry," which deceived Jeffrey, is another of the half-inarticulate songs which have the gift of setting the blood coursing; Donald's gane up the hill hard an' hungry; Donald's come down the hill wild an' angry: Donald will clear the gowk's nest cleverly; Here's to the King and Donald McGillavry! • • • • • Donald has foughten wi' reif and roguery, Donald has dinnere wi' banes and beggary; {53} Better it war for Whigs an' Whiggery Meeting the deevil than Donald McGillavry. Come like a tailor, Donald McGillavry, Come like a tailor, Donald McGillavry, Push about, in an' out, thimble them cleverly. Here's to King James an' Donald McGillavry! "Love is Like a Dizziness," and the "Boys' Song," Where the pools are bright and deep, Where the grey trout lies asleep, Up the river and over the lea, That's the way for Billy and me—

and plenty more charming things will reward the explorer of the Shepherd's country. Only let that explorer be prepared for pages on pages of the most unreadable stuff, the kind of stuff which hardly any educated man, however great a "gomeril" he might be, would ever dream of putting to paper, much less of sending to press. It is fair to repeat that the educated man who thus refrained would probably be a very long time before he wrote "Kilmeny," or even "Donald McGillavry" and "The Village of Balmaquhapple."

Still (though to say it is enough to make him turn in his grave) if Hogg had been a verse-writer alone he would, except for "Kilmeny" and his songs, hardly be worth remembering, save by professed critics and literary free-selectors. A little better than Allan Cunningham, he is but for that single, sudden, and unsustained inspiration of "Kilmeny," and one or two of his songs, so far below Burns that Burns might enable us to pay<sup>{54}</sup> no attention to him and not lose much. As for Scott, "Proud Maisie" (an unapproachable thing), the fragments that Elspeth Cheyne sings, even the single stanza in Guy Mannering, "Are these the Links of Forth? she said," any one of a thousand snatches that Sir Walter has scattered about his books with a godlike carelessness will "ding" Hogg and all his works on their own field. But then it is not saying anything very serious against a man to say that he is not so great as Scott. With those who know what poetry is, Hogg will keep his corner ("not a polished corner," as Sydney Smith would say) of the temple of Apollo.

Hogg wrote prose even more freely than he wrote verse, and after the same fashion—a fashion which he describes with equal frankness and truth by the phrases, "dashing on," "writing as if in desperation," "mingling pathos and absurdity," and so forth. Tales, novels, sketches, all were the same to him; and he had the same queer mixture of confidence in their merits and doubt about the manner in which they were written. The Brownie of Bodsbeck, The Three Perils of Man (which appears refashioned in the modern editions of his works as The Siege of Roxburgh), The Three Perils of Woman, The Shepherd's Calendar and numerous other uncollected tales exhibit for the most part very much the same characteristics. Hogg knew the Scottish peasantry well, he had abundant stores of unpublished folklore,<sup>{55}</sup> he could invent more when wanted, he was not destitute of the true poetic knowledge of human nature, and at his best he could write strikingly and picturesquely. But he simply did not know what self-criticism was, he had no notion of the conduct or carpentry of a story, and though he was rather fond of choosing antique subjects, and prided himself on his knowledge of old Scots, he was quite as likely to put the baldest modern touches in the mouth of a heroine of the fourteenth or fifteenth century as not. If anybody takes pleasure in seeing how a good story can be spoilt, let him look at the sixth chapter of the Shepherd's Calendar, "The Souters of Selkirk;" and if any one wants to read a novel of antiquity which is not like Scott, let him read The Bridal of Polmood.

In the midst, however, of all this chaotic work, there is still to be found, though misnamed, one of the most remarkable stories of its kind ever written—a story which, as I have said before, is not only extraordinarily good of itself, but insists peremptorily that the reader shall wonder how the devil it got where it is. This is the book now called The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Fanatic, but by its proper and original title, The Confessions of a Justified Sinner. Hogg's reference to it in his Autobiography is sufficiently odd. "The next year (1824)," he says, "I published The Confessions of a Fanatic [Sinner], but, it being a story replete with horrors, after I had written it<sup>{56}</sup> I durst not venture to put my name to it, so it was published anonymously, and of course did not sell very well—so at least I believe, for I do not remember ever receiving anything for it, and I am sure if there had been a reversion [he means return] I should have had a moiety. However I never asked anything, so on that point there was no misunderstanding." And he says nothing more about it, except to inform us that his publishers, Messrs. Longman, who had given him for his two previous books a hundred and fifty pounds each "as soon as the volumes were put to press," and who had published the Confessions on half profits, observed, when his next book was offered to them, that "his last publication (the Confessions) had been found fault with in some very material points, and they begged leave to decline the present one until they consulted some other persons." That is all. But the Reverend Thomas Thomson, Hogg's editor, an industrious and not incompetent man of letters, while admitting that it is "in excellence of plot, concentration of language and vigorous language, one of the best and most interesting [he might have said the best without a second] of Hogg's tales," observes that it "alarmed the religious portion of the community who hastily thought that the author was assailing Christianity." "Nothing could be more unfounded," says the Reverend Thomas Thomson with much justice. He might have added that it would have been much more reasonable to suspect the author of practice with the Evil One in order to obtain the power of writing anything so much better than his usual work.

For, in truth, *The Confessions of a Justified Sinner*, while it has all Hogg's merits and more, is quite astoundingly free from his defects. His tales are generally innocent of the most rudimentary notions of construction: this goes closely ordered, with a few pardonable enough digressions, from beginning to end. He has usually little concentrated grasp of character: the few personages of the *Confessions* are consistent throughout. His dialogue is, as a rule, extraordinarily slipshod and unequal: here there is no fault to find with it. His greatest lack, in short, is the lack of form: and here, though the story might perhaps have been curtailed, or rather "cut" in the middle, with advantage, the form is excellent. As its original edition, though an agreeable volume, is rare, and its later ones are buried amidst discordant rubbish, it may not be improper to give some account of it. The time is pitched just about the Revolution and the years following, and, according to a common if not altogether praiseworthy custom, the story consists of an editor's narrative and of the *Confessions* proper imbedded therein. The narrative tells how a drinking Royalist laird married an exceedingly precise young woman, how the dissension which was probable broke out between them, how a certain divine, the Reverend Robert{58} Wringhim, endeavoured to convert the sinner at the instances of the saint, and perhaps succeeded in consoling the saint at the expense of the sinner; how the laird sought more congenial society with a certain cousin of his named Arabella Logan, and how, rather out of jealousy than forgiveness, such a union or quasi-union took place between husband and wife that they had two sons, George and Robert, the elder of whom was his father's favourite and like, while the younger was pretty much left to the care of Mr. Wringhim. The tale then tells how, after hardly seeing one another in boyhood, the brothers met as young men at Edinburgh, where on extreme provocation the elder was within an ace of killing the younger. The end of it was that, after Robert had brought against George a charge of assaulting him on Arthur's Seat, George himself was found mysteriously murdered in an Edinburgh close. His mother cared naught for it; his father soon died of grief; the obnoxious Robert succeeded to the estates, and only Arabella Logan was left to do what she could to clear up the mystery, which, after certain strange passages, she did. But when warrants were made out against Robert he had disappeared, and the whole thing remained wrapped in more mystery than ever.

To this narrative succeed the confessions of Robert himself. He takes of course the extreme side both of his mother and of her doctrines, but for some time, though an accomplished Pharisee,{59} he is not assured of salvation, till at last his adopted (if not real) father Wringhim announces that he has wrestled sufficiently in prayer and has received assurance.

Thereupon the young man sallies out in much exaltation of feeling and full of contempt for the unconverted. As he goes he meets another young man of mysterious appearance, who seems to be an exact double of himself. This wraith, however, presents himself as only a humble admirer of Robert's spiritual glory, and holds much converse with him. He meets this person repeatedly, but is never able to ascertain who he is. The stranger says that he may be called Gil Martin if Robert likes, but hints that he is some great one—perhaps the Czar Peter, who was then known to be travelling incognito about Europe. For a time Robert's Illustrious Friend (as he generally calls him) exaggerates the extremest doctrines of Calvinism, and slips easily from this into suggestions of positive crime. A minister named Blanchard, who has overheard his conversation, warns Robert against him, and Gil Martin in return points out Blanchard as an enemy to religion whom it is Robert's duty to take off. They lay wait for the minister and pistol him, the Illustrious Friend managing not only to avert all suspicion from themselves, but to throw it with capital consequences on a perfectly innocent person. After this initiation in blood Robert is fully reconciled to the "great work" and, going to Edinburgh, is led by his Illustrious Friend without difficulty into the series of plots against his brother which had to outsiders so strange an appearance, and which ended in a fresh murder. When Robert in the course of events above described becomes master of Dalchastel, the family estate, his Illustrious Friend accompanies him and the same process goes on. But now things turn less happily for Robert. He finds himself, without any consciousness of the acts charged, accused on apparently indubitable evidence, first of peccadillos, then of serious crimes. Seduction, forgery, murder, even matricide are hinted against him, and at last, under the impression that indisputable proofs of the last two crimes have been discovered, he flies from his house. After a short period of wandering, in which his Illustrious Friend alternately stirs up all men against him and tempts him to suicide, he finally in despair succumbs to the temptation and puts an end to his life. This of course ends the *Memoir*, or rather the *Memoir* ends just before the catastrophe. There is then a short postscript in which the editor tells a tale of a suicide found with some such legend attaching to him on a Border hillside, of an account given in *Blackwood* of the searching of the grave, and of a visit to it made by himself (the editor), his friend Mr. L——t of C——d [Lockhart of Chiefswood], Mr. L——w [Scott's Laidlaw] and others. The whole thing ends with a very well written bit of



rationalisation of the now familiar kind, discussing{61} the authenticity of the Memoirs, and concluding that they are probably the work of some one suffering from religious mania, or perhaps a sort of parable or allegory worked out with insufficient skill.

Although some such account as this was necessary, no such account, unless illustrated with the most copious citation, could do justice to the book. The first part or Narrative is not of extraordinary, though it is of considerable merit, and has some of Hogg's usual faults. The Memoirs proper are almost wholly free from these faults. In no book known to me is the grave treatment of the topsy-turvy and improbable better managed; although, by an old trick, it pleases the "editor" to depreciate his work in the passage just mentioned. The writer, whoever he was, was fully qualified for the task. The possibility of a young man of narrow intellect—his passion against his brother already excited, and his whole mind given to the theology of predestination—gliding into such ideas as are here described is undoubted; and it is made thoroughly credible to the reader. The story of the pretended Gil Martin, preposterous as it is, is told by the unlucky maniac exactly in the manner in which a man deluded, but with occasional suspicions of his delusion, would tell it. The gradual change from intended and successful rascality and crime into the incurring or the supposed incurring of the most hideous guilt without any actual consciousness of guilty action may seem an almost hopeless thing to treat probably. Yet it is so treated here. And the final gathering and blackening of the clouds of despair (though here again there is a very slight touch of Hogg's undue prolongation of things) exhibits literary power of the ghastly kind infinitely different from and far above the usual raw-head-and-bloody-bones story of the supernatural. Now, who wrote it?

No doubt, so far as I know, has been generally entertained of Hogg's authorship, though, since I myself entertained doubts on the subject, I have found some good judges not unwilling to agree with me. Although admitting that it appeared anonymously, Hogg claims it, as we have seen, not only without hesitation but apparently without any suspicion that it was a particularly valuable or meritorious thing to claim, and without any attempt to shift, divide, or in any way disclaim the responsibility, though the book had been a failure. His publishers do not seem to have doubted then that it was his; nor, I have been told, have their representatives any reason to doubt it now. His daughter, I think, does not so much as mention it in her Memorials, but his various biographers have never, so far as I know, hinted the least hesitation. At the same time I am absolutely unable to believe that it is Hogg's unadulterated and unassisted work. It is not one of those cases where a man once tries a particular style, and then from accident, disgust, or what not, relinquishes it. Hogg was always trying the supernatural, and he failed in it, except in this instance, as often as he tried it. Why should he on this particular occasion have been saved from himself? and who saved him?—for that great part of the book at least is his there can be no doubt.

By way of answer to these questions I can at least point out certain coincidences and probabilities. It has been seen that Lockhart's name actually figures in the postscript to the book. Now at this time and for long afterwards Lockhart was one of the closest of Hogg's literary allies; and Hogg, while admitting that the author of Peter's Letters hoaxed him as he hoaxed everybody, is warm in his praise. He describes him in his Autobiography as "a warm and disinterested friend." He tells us in the book on Scott how he had a plan, even later than this, that Lockhart should edit all his (the Shepherd's) works, for discouraging which plan he was very cross with Sir Walter. Further, the vein of the Confessions is very closely akin to, if not wholly identical with, a vein which Lockhart not only worked on his own account but worked at this very same time. It was in these very years of his residence at Chiefswood that Lockhart produced the little masterpiece of "Adam Blair" (where the terrors and temptations of a convinced Presbyterian minister are dwelt upon), and "Matthew Wald," which is itself the history of a lunatic as full of horrors, and those of no very different kind, as the{64} Confessions themselves. That editing, and perhaps something more than editing, on Lockhart's part would have been exactly the thing necessary to prune and train and direct the Shepherd's disorderly luxuriance into the methodical madness of the Justified Sinner—to give Hogg's loose though by no means vulgar style the dress of his own polished manner—to weed and shape and correct and straighten the faults of the Boar of the Forest—nobody who knows the undoubted writing of the two men will deny. And Lockhart, who was so careless of his work that to this day it is difficult, if not impossible, to ascertain what he did or did not write unassisted, would certainly not have been the man to claim a share in the book, even had it made more noise; though he may have thought of this as well as of other things when, in his wrath over the foolish blethering about Scott, he wrote that the Shepherd's views of literary morality were peculiar. As for Hogg himself, he would never have thought of acknowledging any such editing or

collaboration if it did take place; and that not nearly so much from vanity or dishonesty as from simple carelessness, dashed perhaps with something of the habit of literary supercherie which the society in which he lived affected, and which he carried as far at least as any one of its members.

It may seem rather hard after praising a man's ewe lamb so highly to question his right in her. But I do not think there is any real hardship. I should think that the actual imagination of the story is chiefly Hogg's, for Lockhart's forte was not that quality, and his own novels suffer rather for want of it. If this be the one specimen of what the Shepherd's genius could turn out when it submitted to correction and training, it gives us a useful and interesting explanation why the mass of his work, with such excellent flashes, is so flawed and formless as a whole. It explains why he wished Lockhart to edit the others. It explains at the same time why (for the Shepherd's vanity was never far off) he set apparently little store by the book. It is only a hypothesis of course, and a hypothesis which is very unlikely ever to be proved, while in the nature of things it is even less capable of disproof. But I think there is good critical reason for it.

At any rate, I confess for myself, that I should not take anything like the same interest in Hogg, if he were not the putative author of the Confessions. The book is in a style which wearies soon if it be overdone, and which is very difficult indeed to do well. But it is one of the very best things of its kind, and that is a claim which ought never to be overlooked. And if Hogg in some lucky moment did really "write it all by himself," as the children say, then we could make up for him a volume composed of it, of "Kilmeny," and of the best of the songs, which would be a very remarkable volume indeed. It would not represent a twentieth part of his collected work, and it would probably represent a still smaller fraction of what he wrote, while all the rest would be vastly inferior. But it would be a title to no inconsiderable place in literature, and we know that good judges did think Hogg, with all his personal weakness and all his literary shortcomings, entitled to such a place.

### III

#### SYDNEY SMITH

The hackneyed joke about biographers adding a new terror to death holds still as good as ever. But biography can sometimes make a good case against her persecutors; and one of the instances which she would certainly adduce would be the instance of Sydney Smith. I more than suspect that his actual works are less and less read as time goes on, and that the brilliant virulence of Peter Plymley, the even greater brilliance, not marred by virulence at all, of the Letters to Archdeacon Singleton, the inimitable quips of his articles in the Edinburgh Review, are familiar, if they are familiar at all, only to the professed readers of the literature of the past, and perhaps to some intelligent newspaper men who find Sydney to be what Fuseli pronounced Blake, "d——d good to steal from." But the Life which Lady Holland, with her mother's and Mrs. Austin's aid, produced more than thirty years ago has had a different fate; and a fresh lease of popularity seems to have been secured by another Life, published by Mr. Stuart Reid in 1883. This was partly abridged from the first, and partly supplied with fresh matter by a new sifting of the documents which Lady Holland had used. Nor do the authors of these works, however great must be our gratitude to them, take to themselves any such share of the credit as is due to Boswell in the case of Johnson, to Lockhart in the case of Scott, to Carlyle in the case of Sterling. Neither can lay claim to the highest literary merit of writing or arrangement; and the latter of the two contains digressions, not interesting to all readers, about the nobility of Sydney's cause. It is because both books let their subject reveal himself by familiar letters, scraps of journal, or conversation, and because the revelation of self is so full and so delightful, that Sydney Smith's immortality, now that the generation which actually heard him talk has all but disappeared, is still secured without the slightest fear of disturbance or decay. With a few exceptions (the Mrs. Partington business, the apologue of the dinners at the synod of Dort, "Noodle's Oration," and one or two more), the things by which Sydney is known to the general, all come, not from his works, but from his Life or Lives. No one with any sense of fun can read the Works without being delighted; but in the Life and the letters the same qualities of wit appear, with other qualities which in the Works hardly appear at all. A person absolutely ignorant of anything but the Works might possibly dismiss Sydney Smith as a brilliant but bitter and not too consistent partisan, who fought desperately against abuses when his party was out, and discovered that they were not abuses at all when his party was in. A reader of his Life and of his private utterances knows him better, likes him better, and certainly does not admire him less.

He was born in 1771, the son of an eccentric and apparently rather provoking person, who for no assigned reason left his wife at the church door in order to wander about the world, and who maintained his vagabond principles so well that, as his granddaughter ruefully records, he bought, spent money on, and sold at a loss, no less than nineteen different houses in England and Wales. Sydney was also the second of four clever brothers, the eldest and cleverest being the somewhat famous "Bobus," who co-operated in the Microcosm with Canning and Frere, survived his better known brother but a fortnight, founded a family, and has left one of those odd reputations of immense talent not justified by any producible work, to which our English life of public schools, universities, and Parliament gives peculiar facilities. Bobus and Cecil the third brother were sent to Eton: Sydney and Courtenay, the fourth, to Winchester, after a childhood spent in precocious reading and arguing among themselves. From Winchester Sydney (of whose school-days some trifling but only trifling anecdotes are recorded,) proceeded in regular course to New College, Oxford, and being elected of right to a Fellowship, then worth about a hundred pounds a year, was left by his father to "do for himself" on that not extensive revenue. He did for himself at Oxford during the space of nine years; and it is supposed that his straitened circumstances had something to do with his dislike for universities, which however was a kind of point of conscience among his Whig friends. It is at least singular that this residence of nearly a decade has left hardly a single story or recorded incident of any kind; and that though three generations of undergraduates passed through Oxford in his time, no one of them seems in later years to have had anything to say of not the least famous and one of the most sociable of Englishmen. At that time, it is true, and for long afterwards, the men of New College kept more to themselves than the men of any other college in Oxford; but still it is odd. Another little mystery is, Why did Sydney take orders? Although there is not the slightest reason to question his being, according to his own standard, a very sincere and sufficient divine, it obviously was not quite the profession for him. He is said to have wished for the Bar, but to have deferred to his father's wishes for the Church. That Sydney was an affectionate and dutiful son nobody need doubt: he was always affectionate, and in his own way dutiful. But he is about the last man one can think of as likely to undertake an uncongenial profession out of high-flown dutifulness to a father who had long left him to his own resources, and who had neither influence nor prospects in the Church to offer him. The Fellowship would have kept him, as it had kept him already, till briefs came. However, he did take orders; and the later Life gives more particulars than the first as to the incumbency which indirectly determined his career. It was the curacy of Netheravon on Salisbury Plain; and its almost complete seclusion was tempered by a kindly squire, Mr. Hicks-Beach, great-grandfather of the present Sir Michael Hicks-Beach. Mr. Hicks-Beach offered Sydney the post of tutor to his eldest son; Sydney accepted it, started for Germany with his pupil, but (as he picturesquely though rather vaguely expresses it) "put into Edinburgh under stress of war" and stayed there for five years.

The sojourn at Edinburgh began in June 1798: it ended in August 1803. It will thus be seen that Sydney was by no means a very young man even when he began reviewing, the year before leaving the Scotch capital. Indeed the aimless prolongation of his stay at Oxford, which brought him neither friends, money, nor professional experience of any kind, threw him considerably behindhand all his life; and this delay, much more than Tory persecution or Whig indifference, was the cause of the comparative slowness with which he made his way. His time at Edinburgh was, however, usefully spent even before that invention of the Review, over which there is an amicable and unimportant dispute between himself and Jeffrey. His tutorship was so successful that Mr. Hicks-Beach rewarded it with a cheque for a thousand pounds: he did duty in the Episcopal churches of Edinburgh: he made friends with all the Whigs and many of the Tories of the place: he laughed unceasingly at Scotchmen and liked them very much. Also, about the middle of his stay, he got married, but not to a Scotch girl. His wife was Miss Catherine Pybus, of Cheam, and the marriage was as harebrained a one, from the point of view of settlements, as Jeffrey's own.[9] Sydney's settlement on his wife is well known: it consisted of "six small silver teaspoons much worn," with which worldly goods he did her literally endow by throwing them into her lap. It would appear that there never was a happier marriage; but it certainly seemed for some years as if there might have been many more prosperous in point of money. When Sydney moved to London he had no very definite prospect of any income whatever; and had not Mrs. Smith sold her mother's jewels (which came to her just at the time), they would apparently have had some difficulty in furnishing their house in Doughty Street. But Horner, their friend (the "parish bull" of Scott's irreverent comparison), had gone to London before them, and impressed himself, apparently by sheer gravity, on the political world as a good young man. Introduced by him, Sydney Smith soon became one of the circle at Holland House. It is indeed not easy to live on invitations and your mother-in-law's pearls; but Sydney reviewed vigorously, preached occasionally, before

very long received a regular appointment at the Foundling Hospital, and made some money by lecturing very agreeably at the Royal Institution on Moral Philosophy—a subject of which he honestly admits that he knew, in the technical sense, nothing. But his hearers did not want technical ethics, and in Sydney Smith they had a moral philosopher of the practical kind who could hardly be excelled either in sense or in wit. One little incident of this time, however, throws some light on the complaints which have been made about the delay of his promotion. He applied to a London rector to license him to a vacant chapel, which had not hitherto been used for the services of the Church. The immediate answer has not been preserved; but from what followed it clearly was a civil and rather evasive but perfectly intelligible request to be excused. The man was of course quite within his right, and a dozen good reasons can be guessed for his conduct. He may really have objected, as he seems to have said he did, to take a step which his predecessors had refused to take, and which might inconvenience his successors. But Sydney would not take the refusal, and wrote another very logical, but extremely injudicious, letter pressing his request with much elaboration, and begging the worthy Doctor of Divinity to observe that he, the Doctor, was guilty of inconsistency and other faults. Naturally this put the Doctor's back up, and he now replied with a flat and very high and mighty refusal. We know from another instance that Sydney was indisposed to take "No" for an answer. However he obtained, besides his place at the Foundling, preacherships in two proprietary chapels, and seems to have had both business and pleasure enough on his hands during his London sojourn, which was about the same length as his Edinburgh one. It was, however, much more profitable, for in three years the ministry of "All the Talents" came in, the Holland House interest was exerted, and the Chancellor's living of Foston, near York, valued at five hundred pounds a year, was given to Sydney. He paid for it, after a fashion which in a less zealous and convinced Whig might seem a little dubious, by the famous lampoons of the Plymley Letters, advocating the claims of Catholic emancipation, and extolling Fox and Grenville at the expense of Perceval and Canning. Very edifying is it to find Sydney Smith objecting to this latter that he is a "diner out," a "maker of jokes and parodies," a trifler on important subjects—in fact each and all of the things which the Rev. Sydney Smith himself was, in a perfection only equalled by the object of his righteous wrath. But of Peter more presently.

Even his admiring biographers have noticed, with something of a chuckle, the revenge which Perceval, who was the chief object of Plymley's sarcasm, took, without in the least knowing it, on his lampooner. Had it not been for the Clergy Residence Bill, which that very respectable, if not very brilliant, statesman passed in 1808, and which put an end to perhaps the most flagrant of all then existing abuses, Sydney, the enemy of abuses, would no doubt have continued with a perfectly clear conscience to draw the revenues of Foston, and while serving it by a curate, to preach, lecture, dine out, and rebuke Canning for making jokes, in London. As it was he had to make up his mind, though he obtained a respite from the Archbishop, to resign (which in the recurring frost of Whig hopes was not to be thought of), to exchange, which he found impossible, or to bury himself in Yorkshire. This was a real hardship upon him, because Foston, as it was, was uninhabitable, and had had no resident clergyman since the seventeenth century. But whatever bad things could be said of Sydney (and I really do not know what they are, except that the combination of a sharp wit, a ready pen, and strong political prejudices sometimes made him abuse his talents), no one could say that he ever shirked either a difficulty or a duty. When his first three years' leave expired, he went down in 1809 with his family to York, and established himself at Heslington, a village near the city and not far from his parish. And when a second term of dispensation from actual residence was over, he set to work and built the snuggest if the ugliest parsonage in England, with farm-buildings and all complete, at the cost of some four thousand pounds. Of the details of that building his own inimitable account exists, and is or ought to be well known. The brick-pit and kiln on the property, which were going to save fortunes and resulted in nothing but the production of exactly a hundred and fifty thousand unusable bricks: the four oxen, Tug, Lug, Haul and Crawl, who were to be the instruments of another economy and proved to be, at least in Sydneian language, equal to nothing but the consumption of "buckets of sal volatile:" the entry of the distracted mother of the household on her new domains with a baby clutched in her arms and one shoe left in the circumambient mud: the great folks of the neighbourhood (Lord and Lady Carlisle) coming to call graciously on the strangers, and beingwhelmed, coach and four, outriders and all, in a ploughed field of despond: the "universal scratcher" in the meadows, inclined so as to let the brute creation of all heights enjoy that luxury: Bunch the butler, a female child of tender years but stout proportions: Annie Kay the factotum: the "Immortal," a chariot which was picked up at York in the last stage of decay, and carried the family for many years half over England—all these things and persons are told in divers delightful scraps

of autobiography and in innumerable letters, after a fashion impossible to better and at a length too long to quote.

Sydney Smith was for more than twenty years rector of Foston, and for fully fifteen actually resided there. During this time he made the acquaintance of Lord and Lady Grey, next to Lord and Lady Holland his most constant friends, visited a little, entertained in his own unostentatious but hearty fashion a great deal, wrote many articles for the *Edinburgh Review*, found himself in a minority of one or two among the clergy of Yorkshire on the subject of Emancipation and similar matters, but was on the most friendly terms possible with his diocesan, Archbishop Vernon Harcourt. Nor was he even without further preferment, for he held for some years (on the then not discredited understanding of resignation when one of the Howards was ready for it) the neighbouring and valuable living of Londesborough. Then the death of an aunt put an end to his monetary anxieties, which for years had been considerable, by the legacy of a small but sufficient fortune. And at last, when he was approaching sixty, the good things of the Church, which he never affected to despise, came in earnest. The Tory Chancellor Lyndhurst gave him a stall at Bristol, which carried with it a small Devonshire living, and soon afterwards he was able to exchange Foston (which he had greatly improved), for Combe Florey near Taunton. When his friend Lord Grey became Prime Minister, the stall at Bristol was exchanged for a much more valuable one at St. Paul's; Halberton, the Devonshire vicarage, and Combe Florey still remaining his. These made up an ecclesiastical revenue not far short of three thousand a year, which Sydney enjoyed for the last fifteen years of his life. He never got anything more, and it is certain that for a time he was very sore at not being made a bishop, or at least offered a bishopric. Lord Holland had rather rashly explained the whole difficulty years before, by reporting a conversation of his with Lord Grenville, in which they had hoped that when the Whigs came into power they would be more grateful to Sydney than the Tories had been to Swift. Sydney's acuteness must have made him wince at the omen. For my part I do not see why either Harley or Grey should have hesitated, as far as any scruples of their own went. But I think any fair-minded person must admit the possibility of a scruple, though he may not share it, about the effect of seeing either the *Tale of a Tub* or *Peter Plymley's Letters*, with "By the Right Rev. the Lord Bishop of——" on the title-page. The people who would have been shocked might in each case have been fools: there is nothing that I at least can see, in either book, inconsistent with sound religion and churchmanship. But they would have been honest fools, and of such a Prime Minister has to take heed. So Amen Corner (or rather, for he did not live there, certain streets near Grosvenor Square) in London, and Combe Florey in the country, were Sydney Smith's abodes till his death. In the former he gave his breakfasts and dinners in the season, being further enabled to do so by his share (some thirty thousand pounds) of his brother Courtenay's Indian fortune. The latter, after rebuilding it,—for he had either a fate or a passion for bricks and mortar,—he made on a small scale one of the most beautiful and hospitable houses in the West of England.

To Combe Florey, as to Foston, a sheaf of fantastic legends attaches itself; indeed, as Lady Holland was not very fond of dates, it is sometimes not clear to which of the two residences some of them apply. At both Sydney had a huge store-room, or rather grocer's and chemist's shop, from which he supplied the wants, not merely of his household, but of half the neighbourhood. It appears to have been at Combe Florey (for though no longer poor he still had a frugal mind), that he hit upon the device of "putting the cheapest soaps in the dearest papers," confident of the result upon the female temper. It was certainly there that he fitted up two favourite donkeys with a kind of holiday-dress of antlers, to meet the objection of one of his lady-visitors that he had no deer; and converted certain large bay-trees in boxes into the semblance of an orangery, by fastening some dozens of fine fruit to the branches. I like to think of the mixed astonishment and disgust of a great Russian, and a not very small Frenchman, both not long deceased, M. Tourguéniéff and M. Paul de Saint-Victor, if they had heard of these pleasing tomfooleries. But tomfoolery, though, when properly and not inordinately indulged, one of the best things in life, must, like the other good things of life, come to an end. After an illness of some months Sydney Smith died at his house in Green Street, of heart disease, on 22nd February 1845, in the seventy-fourth year of his age.

The memorials and evidences of his peculiar if not unique genius consist of three different kinds; reported or remembered conversations and jokes, letters, and formal literary work. He was once most famous as a talker; but conversation is necessarily the most perishable of all things, and its recorded fragments bear keeping less than any other relics. Some of the verbal jests assigned to him (notably the famous one about the tortoise, which, after being long known by the initiated not to be his, has at last been formally claimed

by its rightful owner), are certainly or probably borrowed or falsely attributed, as rich conversationalists always borrow or receive. And always the things have something of the mangled air which sayings detached from their context can hardly escape. It is otherwise with the letters. The best letters are always most like the actual conversation of their writers, and probably no one ever wrote more as he talked than Sydney Smith. The specially literary qualities of his writing for print are here too in great measure; and on the whole, though of course the importance of subject is nearly always less, and the interest of sustained work is wholly absent, nowhere can the entire Sydney be better seen. Of the three satirists of modern times with whom he may not unfairly claim to rank—Pascal, Swift, and Voltaire—he is most like Voltaire in his faculty of presenting a good thing with a preface which does not in the least prepare you for it, and then leaving it without the slightest attempt to go back on it, and elaborate it, and make sure that his hearer has duly appreciated it and laughed at it. And of the two, though the palm of concentration must be given to Voltaire, the palm of absolute simplicity must be given to Sydney. Hardly any of his letters are without these unforced flashes of wit, from almost his first epistle to Jeffrey (where, after rallying that great little man on being the "only male despondent he has met," he adds the postscript, "I beg to except the Tuxford waiter, who desponds exactly as you do") to his very last to Miss Harcourt, in which he mildly dismisses one of his brethren as "anything but a polished corner of the Temple." There is the "usual establishment for an eldest landed baby:" the proposition, advanced in the grave and chaste manner, that "the information of very plain women is so inconsiderable, that I agree with you in setting no store by it:" the plaintive expostulation with Lady Holland (who had asked him to dinner on the ninth of the month, after previously asking him to stay from the fifth to the twelfth), "it is like giving a gentleman an assignation for Wednesday when you are going to marry him on the previous Sunday—an attempt to combine the stimulus of gallantry with the security of connubial relations:" the simple and touching information that "Lord Tankerville has sent me a whole buck. This necessarily takes up a good deal of my time;" that "geranium-fed bacon is of a beautiful colour, but it takes so many plants to fatten one pig that such a system can never answer;" that "it is a mistake to think that Dr. Bond could be influenced by partridges. He is a man of very independent mind, with whom pheasants at least, or perhaps even turkeys, are necessary;" and scores more with references to which I find the fly-leaves of my copy of the letters covered. If any one wants to see how much solid there is with all this froth, let him turn to the passages showing the unconquerable manliness, fairness, and good sense with which Sydney treated the unhappy subject of Queen Caroline, out of which his friends were so ready to make political capital; or to the admirable epistle in which he takes seriously, and blunts once for all, the points of certain foolish witticisms as to the readiness with which he, a man about town, had taken to catechisms and cabbages in an almost uninhabited part of the despised country. In conversation he would seem sometimes to have a little, a very little, "forced the note." The Quaker baby, and the lady "with whom you might give an assembly or populate a parish," are instances in point. But he never does this in his letters. I take particular pleasure in the following passage written to Miss Georgiana Harcourt within two years of his death: "What a charming existence! To live in the midst of holy people; to know that nothing profane can approach you; to be certain that a Dissenter can no more be found in the Palace than a snake can exist in Ireland, or ripe fruit in Scotland! To have your society strong, and undiluted by the laity; to bid adieu to human learning; to feast on the Canons and revel in the Thirty-Nine Articles! Happy Georgiana!" Now if Sydney had been what some foolish people think him, merely a scoffer, there would be no fun{84} in this; it would be as impertinent and in as bad taste as the stale jokes of the eighteenth century about Christianity. But he was much else.

Of course, however, no rational man will contend that in estimating Sydney Smith's place in the general memory, his deliberate literary work, or at least that portion of it which he chose to present on reflection, acknowledged and endorsed, can be overlooked. His *Life* contains (what is infinitely desirable in all such *Lives* and by no means always or often furnished) a complete list of his contributions to the *Edinburgh Review*, and his works contain most of them. To these have to be added the pamphlets, of which the chief and incomparably the best are, at intervals of thirty years, *Peter Plymley* and the *Letters to Archdeacon Singleton*, together with sermons, speeches, and other miscellaneous matter. The whole, except the things which he did not himself care to reprint, can be obtained now in one volume; but the print is not to be recommended to aged or weakly sight. Sydney Smith had no false modesty, and in not a few letters to Jeffrey he speaks of his own contributions to the *Edinburgh* with the greatest freedom, combating and quite refusing to accept his editor's suggestion as to their flippancy and fantasticality, professing with much frankness that this is the way he can write and no other, and more than once telling Jeffrey that whatever they may think in solemn Scotland, his, Sydney's, articles are a great deal more read in England and

elsewhere than any others. Although there are maxims to the contrary effect, the judgment of a clever man, not very young and tolerably familiar with the world, on his own work, is very seldom far wrong. I should say myself that, putting aside the historic estimate, Sydney Smith's articles are by far the most interesting nowadays of those contributed by any one before the days of Macaulay, who began just as Sydney ceased to write anonymously in 1827, on his Bristol appointment. They are also by far the most distinct and original. Jeffrey, Brougham, and the rest wrote, for the most part, very much after the fashion of the ancients: if a very few changes were made for date, passages of Jeffrey's criticism might almost be passages of Dryden, certainly passages of the better critics of the eighteenth century, as far as manner goes. There is nobody at all like Sydney Smith before him in England, for Swift's style is wholly different. To begin with, Sydney had a strong prejudice in favour of writing very short articles, and a horror of reading long ones—the latter being perhaps less peculiar to himself than the former. Then he never made the slightest pretence at systematic or dogmatic criticism of anything whatever. In literature proper he seems indeed to have had no particular principles, and I cannot say that he had very good taste. He commits the almost unpardonable sin of not merely blaspheming Madame de Sévigné, but preferring to her that second-rate leader-writer in petticoats, Madame de Staël. On the other hand, if he had no literary principles, he had (except in rare cases where politics came in, and not often then) few literary prejudices, and his happily incorrigible good sense and good humour were proof against the frequent bias of his associates. Though he could not have been very sensible, from what he himself says, of their highest qualities, he championed Scott's novels incessantly against the Whigs and prigs of Holland House. He gives a most well-timed warning to Jeffrey that the constant running-down of Wordsworth had very much the look of persecution, though with his usual frankness he avows that he has not read the particular article in question, because the subject is "quite uninteresting to him." I think he would, if driven hard, have admitted with equal frankness that poetry, merely as poetry, was generally uninteresting. Still he had so many interests of various kinds, that few books failed to appeal to one or the other, and he, in his turn, has seldom failed to give a lively if not a very exact or critical account of his subject. But it is in his way of giving this account that the peculiarity, glanced at above as making a parallel between him and Voltaire, appears. It is, I have said, almost original, and what is more, endless as has been the periodical writing of the last eighty years, and sedulously as later writers have imitated earlier, I do not know that it has ever been successfully copied. It consists in giving rapid and apparently business-like summaries, packed, with apparent negligence and real art, full of the flashes of wit so often noticed and to be noticed. Such are, in the article on "The Island of Ceylon," the honey-bird "into whose body the soul of a common informer seems to have migrated," and "the chaplain of the garrison, all in black, the Rev. Mr. Somebody or other whose name we have forgotten," the discovery of whose body in a serpent his ruthless clerical brother pronounces to be "the best history of the kind he remembers." Very likely there may be people who can read this, even the "all in black," without laughing, and among them I should suppose must be the somebody or other, whose name we too have forgotten, who is said to have imagined that he had more than parried Sydney's unforgiven jest about the joke and the surgical operation, by retorting, "Yes! an English joke." I have always wept to think that Sydney did not live to hear this retort. The classical places for this kind of summary work are the article just named on Ceylon, and that on Waterton. But the most inimitable single example, if it is not too shocking to this very proper age, is the argument of Mat Lewis's tragedy: "Ottilia becomes quite furious from the conviction that Cæsario has been sleeping with a second lady called Estella; whereas he has really been sleeping with a third lady called Amelrosa."

Among the most important of these essays are the two famous ones on Methodism and on Indian missions, which gave far more offence to the religious public of evangelical persuasion than all Sydney's jokes on bishops, or his arguments for Catholic emancipation, and which (owing to the strong influence which then, as now, Nonconformists possessed in the counsels of the Liberal party) probably had as much to do as anything else with the reluctance of the Whig leaders, when they came into power, to give their friend the highest ecclesiastical preferment. These subjects are rather difficult to treat in a general literary essay, and it may perhaps be admitted that here, as in dealing with poetry and other subjects of the more transcendental kind, Sydney showed a touch of Philistinism, and a distinct inability to comprehend exaltation of sentiment and thought. But the general sense is admirably sound and perfectly orthodox; and the way in which so apparently light and careless a writer has laboriously supported every one of his charges, and almost every one of his flings, with chapter and verse from the writings of the incriminated societies, is very remarkable. Nor can it, I think, be doubted that the publication, in so widely read a periodical, of the nauseous follies of speech in which well-meaning persons indulged, had something to do

with the gradual disuse of a style than which nothing could be more prejudicial to religion, for the simple reason that nothing else could make religion ridiculous. The medicine did not of course operate at once, and silly people still write silly things. But I hardly think that the Wesleyan body or the Church Missionary Society would now officially publish such stuff as the passage about Brother Carey, who, while in the actual paroxysm of sea-sickness, was "wonderfully comforted by the contemplation of the goodness of God," or that about Brother Ward "in design clasping to his bosom" the magnanimous Captain Wickes, who subsequently "seemed very low," when a French privateer was in sight. Jeffrey was, it seems, a little afraid of these well-deserved exposures, which, from the necessity of abundant quotation, are an exception to the general shortness of Sydney's articles. Sydney's interest in certain subjects led him constantly to take up fresh books on them; and thus a series of series might be made out of his papers, with some advantage to the reader perhaps, if a new edition of his works were undertaken. The chief of such subjects is America, in dealing with which he pleased the Americans by descanting on their gradual emancipation from English prejudices and abuses, but infuriated them by constant denunciations of slavery, and by laughing at their lack of literature and cultivation. With India he also dealt often, his brothers' connection with it giving him an interest therein. Prisons were another favourite subject, though, in his zeal for making them uncomfortable, he committed himself to one really atrocious suggestion—that of dark cells for long periods of time. It is odd that the same person should make such a truly diabolical proposal, and yet be in a perpetual state of humanitarian rage about man-traps and spring-guns, which were certainly milder engines of torture. It is odd, too, that Sydney, who was never tired of arguing that prisons ought to be made uncomfortable, because nobody need go there unless he chose, should have been furiously wroth with poor Mr. Justice Best for suggesting much the same thing of spring-guns. The greatest political triumph of his manner is to be found no doubt in the article "Bentham on Fallacies," in which the unreadable diatribes of the apostle of utilitarianism are somehow spirited and crisped up into a series of brilliant arguments, and the whole is crowned by the famous "Noodle's Oration," the summary and storehouse of all that ever has been or can be said on the Liberal side in the lighter manner. It has not lost its point even from the fact that Noodle has now for a long time changed his party, and has elaborated for himself, after his manner, a similar stock of platitudes and absurdities in favour of the very things for which Sydney was fighting.

The qualities of these articles appear equally in the miscellaneous essays, in the speeches, and even in the sermons, though Sydney Smith, unlike Sterne, never condescended to buffoonery or theatrical tricks in the pulpit. In Peter Plymley's Letters they appear concentrated and acidulated: in the Letters to Archdeacon Singleton, in the Repudiation Letters, and the Letters on Railways which date from his very last days, concentrated and mellowed. More than one good judge has been of the opinion that Sydney's powers increased to the very end of his life, and it is not surprising that this should have been the case. Although he did plenty of work in his time, the literary part of it was never of an exhausting nature. Though one of the most original of commentators, he was a commentator pure and simple, and found, but did not supply, his matter. Thus there was no danger of running dry, and as his happiest style was not indignation but good-natured raillery, his increasing prosperity, not chequered, till quite the close of his life, by any serious bodily ailment, put him more and more in the right atmosphere and temper for indulging his genius. Plymley, though very amusing, and, except in the Canning matter above referred to, not glaringly unfair for a political lampoon, is distinctly acrimonious, and almost (as "almost" as Sydney could be) ill-tempered. It is possible to read between the lines that the writer is furious at his party being out of office, and is much more angry with Mr. Perceval for having the ear of the country than for being a respectable nonentity. The main argument, moreover, is bad in itself, and was refuted by facts. Sydney pretends to be, as his friend Jeffrey really was, in mortal terror lest the French should invade England, and, joined by rebellious Irishmen and wrathful Catholics generally, produce an English revolution. The Tories replied, "We will take good care that the French shall not land, and that Irishmen shall not rise." And they did take the said good care, and they beat the Frenchmen thorough and thorough while Sydney and his friends were pointing their epigrams. Therefore, though much of the contention is unanswerable enough, the thing is doubtfully successful as a whole. In the Letters to Archdeacon Singleton the tone is almost uniformly good-humoured, and the argument, whether quite consistent or not in the particular speaker's mouth, is absolutely sound, and has been practically admitted since by almost all the best friends of the Church. Here occurs that inimitable passage before referred to.

I met the other day, in an old Dutch chronicle, with a passage so apposite to this subject, that, though it is somewhat too light for the occasion, I cannot abstain from quoting it. There was a great meeting of all the



clergy at Dordrecht, and the chronicler thus describes it, which I give in the language of the translation: "And there was great store of Bishops in the town, in their robes goodly to behold, and all the great men of the State were there, and folks poured in in boats on the Meuse, the Merse, the Rhine, and the Linge, coming from the Isle of Beverlandt and Isselmond, and from all quarters in the Bailiwick of Dort; Arminians and Gomarists, with the friends of John Barneveldt and of Hugh Grote. And before my Lords the Bishops, Simon of Gloucester, who was a Bishop in those parts, disputed with Vorstius and Leoline the Monk, and many texts of Scripture were bandied to and fro; and when this was done, and many propositions made, and it waxed towards twelve of the clock, my Lords the Bishops prepared to set them down to a fair repast, in which was great store of good things—and among the rest a roasted peacock, having in lieu of a tail the arms and banners of the Archbishop, which was a goodly sight to all who favoured the Church—and then the Archbishop would say a grace, as was seemly to do, he being a very holy man; but ere he had finished, a great mob of townspeople and folks from the country, who were gathered under the windows, cried out Bread! bread! for there was a great famine, and wheat had risen to three times the ordinary price of the sleich; and when they had done crying Bread! bread! they called out No Bishops! and began to cast up stones at the windows. Whereat my Lords the Bishops were in a great fright, and cast their dinner out of the window to appease the mob, and so the men of that town were well pleased, and did devour the meats with a great appetite; and then you might have seen my Lords standing with empty plates, and looking wistfully at each other, till Simon of Gloucester, he who disputed with Leoline the Monk, stood up among them and said, Good my Lords, is it your pleasure to stand here fasting, and that those who count lower in the Church than you do should feast and fluster? Let us order to us the dinner of the Deans and Canons which is making ready for them in the chamber below. And this speech of Simon of Gloucester pleased the Bishops much; and so they sent for the host, one William of Ypres, and told him it was for the public good, and he, much fearing the Bishops, brought them the dinner of the Deans and Canons; and so the Deans and Canons went away without dinner, and were pelted by the men of the town, because they had not put any meat out of the windows like the Bishops; and when the Count came to hear of it, he said it was a pleasant conceit, and that the Bishops were right cunning men, and had ding'd the Canons well."

Even in the Singleton Letters, however, there{94} are some little lapses of the same kind (worse, indeed, because these letters were signed) as the attack on Canning in the Plymley Letters. Sydney Smith exclaiming against "derision and persiflage, the great principle by which the world is now governed," is again edifying. But in truth Sydney never had the weakness (for I have known it called a weakness) of looking too carefully to see what the enemy's advocate is going to say. Take even the famous, the immortal apologue of Mrs. Partington. It covered, we are usually told, the Upper House with ridicule, and did as much as anything else to carry the Reform Bill. And yet, though it is a watery apologue, it will not hold water for a moment. The implied conclusion is, that the Atlantic beat Mrs. Partington. Did it? It made, no doubt, a great mess in her house, it put her to flight, it put her to shame. But when I was last at Sidmouth the line of high-water mark was, I believe, much what it was before the great storm of 1824, and though the particular Mrs. Partington had no doubt been gathered to her fathers, the Mrs. Partington of the day was, equally without doubt, living very comfortably in the house which the Atlantic had threatened to swallow up.

It was, however, perhaps part of Sydney's strength that he never cared to consider too curiously, or on too many sides. Besides his inimitable felicity of expression (the Singleton Letters are simply crammed with epigram), he had the sturdiest possible common sense and the liveliest possible humour. I have known his claim to the title of "humourist" called in question by precisians: nobody could deny him the title of good-humourist. Except that the sentimental side of Toryism would never have appealed to him, it was chiefly an accident of time that he was a polemical Liberal. He would always and naturally have been on the side opposite to that on which most of the fools were. When he came into the world, as the straitest Tory will admit, there were in that world a great many abuses as they are called, that is to say, a great many things which, once useful and excellent, had either decayed into positive nuisances, or dried up into neutral and harmless but obstructive rubbish. There were also many silly and some mischievous people, as well as some wise and useful ones, who defended the abuses. Sydney Smith was an ideal soldier of reform for his time, and in his way. He was not extraordinarily long-sighted—indeed (as his famous and constantly-repeated advice to "take short views of life" shows) he had a distinct distrust of taking too anxious thought for political or any other morrows. But he had a most keen and, in many cases, a most just scent and sight

for the immediate inconveniences and injustices of the day, and for the shortest and most effective ways of mending them. He was perhaps more destitute of romance and of reverence (though he had too much good taste to be positively irreverent) than any man who ever lived. He never could have paralleled, he never could have even understood, Scott's feelings about the Regalia, or that ever-famous incident of Sir Walter's life, when returning with Jeffrey and other Whig friends from some public meeting, he protested against the innovations which, harmless or even beneficial individually and in themselves, would by degrees destroy every thing that made Scotland Scotland. I am afraid that his warmest admirers, even those of his own political complexion, must admit that he was, as has been said, more than a little of a Philistine; that he expressed, and expressed capitally in one way, that curious middle-class sentiment, or denial of sentiment, which won its first triumph in the first Reform Bill and its last in the Exhibition of twenty years later, which destroyed no doubt much that was absurd, and some things that were noxious, but which induced in England a reign of shoddy in politics, in philosophy, in art, in literature, and, when its own reign was over, left England weak and divided, instead of, as it had been under the reign of abuses, united and strong. The bombardment of Copenhagen may or may not have been a dreadful thing: it was at any rate better than the abandonment of Khartoum. Nor can Sydney any more than his friends be acquitted of having held the extraordinary notion that you can "rest and be thankful" in politics, that you can set Demos at bishops, but stave and tail him off when he comes to canons; that you can level beautifully down to a certain point, and then stop levelling for ever afterwards; that because you can laugh Brother Ringletub out of court, laughter will be equally effective with Cardinal Newman; and that though it is the height of "anility" (a favourite word of his) to believe in a country gentleman, it is the height of rational religion to believe in a ten-pound householder.

But however open to exception his principles may be, and that not merely from the point of view of highflying Toryism, his carrying out of them in life and in literature had the two abiding justifications of being infinitely amusing, and of being amusing always in thoroughly good temper. It is, as I have said, impossible to read Sydney Smith's Life, and still more impossible to read his letters, without liking him warmly and personally, without seeing that he was not only a man who liked to be comfortable (that is not very rare), that he was not only one who liked others to be comfortable (that is rarer), but one who in every situation in which he was thrown, did his utmost to make others as well as himself comfortable (which is rarest of all). If the references in Peter Plymley to Canning were unjustifiable from him, there is little or no reason to think that they were prompted by personal jealousy; and though, as has been said, he was undoubtedly sore, and unreasonably sore, at not receiving the preferment which he thought he had deserved, he does not seem to have been personally jealous of any man who had received it. The parson of Foston and Combe Florey may not have been (his latest biographer, admiring though he be, pathetically laments that he was not) a spiritually minded man. But happy beyond almost all other parishioners of the time were the parishioners of Combe Florey and Foston, though one of them did once throw a pair of scissors at his provoking pastor. He was a fast and affectionate friend; and though he was rather given to haunting rich men, he did it not only without servility, but without that alternative of bearishness and freaks which has sometimes been adopted. As a prince of talkers he might have been a bore to a generation which (I own I think in that perhaps single point), wiser than its fathers, is not so ambitious as they were to sit as a bucket and be pumped into. But in that infinitely happier system of conversation by books, which any one can enjoy as he likes and interrupt as he likes at his own fireside, Sydney is still a prince. There may be living somewhere some one who does not think so very badly of slavery, who is most emphatically of opinion that "the fools were right," in the matters of Catholic emancipation and Reform, who thinks well of public schools and universities, who even, though he may not like spring-guns much, thinks that John Jones had only himself to blame if, after ample warning and with no business except the business of supplying<sup>{99}</sup> a London poulterer with his landlord's game, he trespassed and came to the worst. Yet even this monster, if he happened to be possessed of the sense of fun and literature, (which is perhaps impossible), could not read even the most acrid of Sydney's political diatribes without shrieking with laughter, if, in his ogreish way, he were given to such violent demonstrations; could certainly not read the Life and the letters without admitting, in a moment of unwonted humanity, that here was a man who, for goodness as well as for cleverness, for sound practical wisdom as well as for fantastic verbal wit, has had hardly a superior and very few equals.

## IV

### JEFFREY

"Jeffrey and I," says Christopher North in one of his more malicious moments, "do nothing original; it's porter's work." A tolerably experienced student of human nature might almost, without knowing the facts, guess the amount of truth contained in this fling. North, as North, had done nothing that the world calls original: North, as Wilson, had done a by no means inconsiderable quantity of such work in verse and prose. But Jeffrey really did underlie the accusation contained in the words. A great name in literature, nothing stands to his credit in permanent literary record but a volume (a sufficiently big one, no doubt) of criticisms on the work of other men; and though this volume is only a selection from his actual writings, no further gleaning could be made of any different material. Even his celebrated, or once celebrated, "Treatise on Beauty" is but a review article, worked up into an encyclopædia article, and dealing almost wholly with pure criticism. Against him, if against any one, the famous and constantly repeated gibe about the fellows who have failed in literature and art, falls short and harmless. In another of its forms, "the corruption of a poet is the generation of a critic," it might be more appropriate. For Jeffrey, as we know from his boyish letters, once thought, like almost every boy who is not an idiot, that he might be a poet, and scribbled verses in plenty. But the distinguishing feature in this case was, that he waited for no failure, for no public ridicule or neglect, not even for any private nipping of the merciful, but so seldom effective, sort, to check those sterile growths. The critic was sufficiently early developed in him to prevent the corruption of the poet from presenting itself, in its usual disastrous fashion, to the senses of the world. Thus he lives (for his political and legal renown, though not inconsiderable, is comparatively unimportant) as a critic pure and simple.

His biographer, Lord Cockburn, tells us that "Francis Jeffrey, the greatest of British critics, was born in Edinburgh on 23d October 1773." It must be at the end, not the beginning, of this paper that we decide whether Jeffrey deserves the superlative. He seems certainly to have begun his critical practice very early. He was the son of a depute-clerk of the Court of Session, and respectably, though not brilliantly, connected. His father was a great Tory, and, though it would be uncharitable to say that this was the reason why Jeffrey was a great Liberal, the two facts were probably not unconnected in the line of causation. Francis went to the High School when he was eight, and to the College at Glasgow when he was fourteen. He does not appear to have been a prodigy at either; but he has an almost unequalled record for early work of the self-undertaken kind. He seems from his boyhood to have been addicted to filling reams of paper, and shelves full of note-books, with extracts, abstracts, critical annotations, criticisms of these criticisms, and all manner of writing of the same kind. I believe it is the general experience that this kind of thing does harm in nineteen cases, for one in which it does good; but Jeffrey was certainly a striking exception to the rule, though perhaps he might not have been so if his producing, or at least publishing, time had not been unusually delayed. Indeed, his whole mental history appears to have been of a curiously piecemeal character; and his scrappy and self-guided education may have conduced to the priggishness which he showed early, and never entirely lost, till fame, prosperity, and the approach of old age mellowed it out of him. He was not sixteen when his sojourn at Glasgow came to an end; and, for more than two years, he seems to have been left to a kind of studious independence, attending only a couple of law classes at Edinburgh University. Then his father insisted on his going to Oxford: a curious step, the reasons for which are anything but clear. For the paternal idea seems to have been that Jeffrey was to study not arts, but law; a study for which Oxford may present facilities now, but which most certainly was quite out of its way in Jeffrey's time, and especially in the case of a Scotch boy of ordinary freshman's age.

It is painful to have to say that Jeffrey hated Oxford, because there are few instances on record in which such hatred does not show the hater to have been a very bad man indeed. There are, however, some special excuses for the little Scotchman. His college (Queen's) was not perhaps very happily selected; he had been sent there in the teeth of his own will, which was a pretty strong will; he was horrified, after the free selection of Scotch classes, to find a regular curriculum which he had to take or leave as a whole; the priggishness of Oxford was not his priggishness, its amusements (for he hated sport of every kind) were not his amusements; and, in short, there was a general incompatibility. He came up in September and went down in July, having done nothing except having, according to a not ill-natured jest, "lost the broad Scotch, but gained only the narrow English,"—a peculiarity which sometimes brought a little mild ridicule on him both from Scotchmen and Englishmen.

Very soon after his return to Edinburgh, he seems to have settled down steadily to study for the Scotch bar, and during his studies distinguished himself as a member of the famous Speculative Society, both in essay-writing and in the debates. He was called on 16th December 1794. Although there have never been very quick returns at the bar, either of England or Scotland, the smaller numbers of the latter might be thought likely to bring young men of talent earlier to the front. This advantage, however, appears to have been counterbalanced partly by the strong family interests which made a kind of aristocracy among Scotch lawyers, and partly by the influence of politics and of Government patronage. Jeffrey was, comparatively speaking, a "kinless loon"; and, while he was steadily resolved not to put himself forward as a candidate for the Tory manna of which Dundas was the Moses, his filial reverence long prevented him from declaring himself a very violent Whig. Indeed, he gave an instance of this reverence which might serve as a pretty text for a casuistical discussion. Henry Erskine, Dean of the Faculty of Advocates, was in 1796 deprived by vote of that, the most honourable position of the Scotch bar, for having presided at a Whig meeting. Jeffrey, like Gibbon, sighed as a Whig, but obeyed as a son, and stayed away from the poll. His days were certainly long in the land; but I am inclined to think that, in a parallel case, some Tories at least would have taken the chance of shorter life with less speckled honour. However, it is hard to quarrel with a man for obeying his parents; and perhaps, after all, the Whigs did not think the matter of so much importance as they affected to do. It is certain that Jeffrey was a little dashed by the slowness of his success at the bar. Towards the end of 1798, he set out for London with a budget of letters of introduction, and thoughts of settling down to literature. But the editors and publishers to whom he was introduced did not know what a treasure lay underneath the scanty surface of this Scotch advocate, and they were either inaccessible or repulsive. He returned to Edinburgh, and, for another two years, waited for fortune philosophically enough, though with lingering thoughts of England, and growing ones of India. It was just at the turn of the century, that his fortunes began, in various ways, also to take a turn. For some years, though a person by no means given to miscellaneous acquaintances, he had been slowly forming the remarkable circle of friends from whose combined brains was soon to start the Edinburgh Review. He fell in love, and married his second cousin, Catherine Wilson, on 1st November 1801—a bold and by no means canny step, for his father was ill-off, the bride was tocherless, and he says that he had never earned a hundred pounds a year in fees. They did not, however, launch out greatly, and their house in Buccleuch Place (not the least famous locality in literature) was furnished on a scale which some modern colleges, conducted on the principles of enforced economy, would think Spartan for an undergraduate. Shortly afterwards, and very little before the appearance of the Blue and Yellow, Jeffrey made another innovation, which was perhaps not less profitable to him, by establishing a practice in ecclesiastical causes; though he met with a professional check in his rejection, on party principles, for the so-called collectorship, a kind of reporter's post of some emolument and not inconsiderable distinction.

The story of the Edinburgh Review and its foundation has been very often told on the humorous, if not exactly historical, authority of Sydney Smith. It is unnecessary to repeat it. It is undoubted that the idea was Sydney's. It is equally undoubted that, but for Jeffrey, the said idea might never have taken form at all, and would never have retained any form for more than a few months. It was only Jeffrey's long-established habit of critical writing, the untiring energy into which he whipped up his no doubt gifted but quite untrained contributors, and the skill which he almost at once developed in editing proper,—that is to say in selecting, arranging, adapting, and, even to some extent, re-writing contributions—which secured success. Very different opinions have been expressed at different times on the intrinsic merits of this celebrated production; and perhaps, on the whole, the principal feeling of explorers into the long and dusty ranges of its early volumes, has been one of disappointment. I believe myself that, in similar cases, a similar result is very common indeed, and that it is due to the operation of two familiar fallacies. The one is the delusion as to the products of former times being necessarily better than those of the present; a delusion which is not the less deluding because of its counterpart, the delusion about progress. The other is a more peculiar and subtle one. I shall not go so far as a very experienced journalist who once said to me commiseratingly, "My good sir, I won't exactly say that literary merit hurts a newspaper." But there is no doubt that all the great successes of journalism, for the last hundred years, have been much more due to the fact of the new venture being new, of its supplying something that the public wanted and had not got, than to the fact of the supply being extraordinarily good in kind. In nearly every case, the intrinsic merit has improved as the thing went on, but it has ceased to be a novel merit. Nothing would be easier than to show that the early Edinburgh articles were very far from perfect. Of Jeffrey we shall speak presently, and there is no doubt that Sydney at

his best was, and is always, delightful. But the blundering bluster of Brougham, the solemn ineffectiveness of Horner (of whom I can never think without also thinking of Scott's delightful Shandean jest on him), the respectable erudition of the Scotch professors, cannot for one single moment be compared with the work which, in Jeffrey's own later days, in those of Macvey Napier, and in the earlier ones of Empson, was contributed by Hazlitt, by Carlyle, by Stephen, and, above all, by Macaulay. The Review never had any one who could emulate the ornateness of De Quincey or Wilson, the pure and perfect English of Southey, or the inimitable insolence, so polished and so intangible, of Lockhart. But it may at least claim that it led the way, and that the very men who attacked its principles and surpassed its practice had, in some cases, been actually trained in its school, and were in all, imitating and following its model. To analyse, with chemical exactness, the constituents of a literary novelty is never easy, if it is ever possible. But some of the contrasts between the style of criticism most prevalent at the time, and the style of the new venture are obvious and important. The older rivals of the Edinburgh maintained for the most part a decent and amiable impartiality; the Edinburgh, whatever it pretended to be, was violently partisan, unhesitatingly personal, and more inclined to find fault, the more distinguished the subject was. The reviews of the time had got into the hands either of gentlemen and ladies who were happy to be thought literary, and only too glad to write for nothing, or else into those of the lowest booksellers' hacks, who praised or blamed according to orders, wrote without interest and without vigour, and were quite content to earn the smallest pittance. The Edinburgh started from the first on the principle that its contributors should be paid, and paid well, whether they liked it or not, thus establishing at once an inducement to do well and a check on personal eccentricity and irresponsibility; while whatever partisanship there might be in its pages, there was at any rate no mere literary puffery.

From being, but for his private studies, rather an idle person, Jeffrey became an extremely busy one. The Review gave him not a little occupation, and his practice increased rapidly. In 1803 the institution, at Scott's suggestion, of the famous Friday Club, in which, for the greater part of the first half of this century, the best men in Edinburgh, Johnstone and Maxwell, Whig and Tory alike, met in peaceable conviviality, did a good deal to console Jeffrey, who was now as much given to company as he had been in his early youth to solitude, for the partial breaking up of the circle of friends—Allen, Horner, Smith, Brougham, Lord Webb Seymour—in which he had previously mixed. In the same year he became a volunteer, an act of patriotism the more creditable, that he seems to have been sincerely convinced of the probability of an invasion, and of the certainty of its success if it occurred. But I have no room here for anything but a rapid review of the not very numerous or striking events of his life. Soon, however, after the date last mentioned, he met with two afflictions peculiarly trying to a man whose domestic affections were unusually strong. These were the deaths of his favourite sister in May 1804, and of his wife in October 1805. The last blow drove him nearly to despair; and the extreme and open-mouthed "sensibility" of his private letters, on this and similar occasions, is very valuable as an index of character, oddly as it contrasts, in the vulgar estimate, with the supposed cynicism and savagery of the critic. In yet another year occurred the somewhat ludicrous duel, or beginning of a duel, with Moore, in which several police constables did perform the friendly office which Mr. Winkle vainly deprecated, and in which Jeffrey's, not Moore's, pistol was discovered to be leadless. There is a sentence in a letter of Jeffrey's concerning the thing which is characteristic and amusing: "I am glad to have gone through this scene, both because it satisfies me that my nerves are good enough to enable me to act in conformity to my notions of propriety without any suffering, and because it also assures me that I am really as little in love with life as I have been for some time in the habit of professing." It is needless to say that this was an example of the excellence of beginning with a little aversion, for Jeffrey and Moore fraternised immediately afterwards and remained friends for life. The quarrel, or half quarrel, with Scott as to the review of "Marmion," the planning and producing of the Quarterly Review, English Bard and Scotch Reviewers, not a few other events of the same kind, must be passed over rapidly. About six years after the death of his first wife, Jeffrey met, and fell in love with, a certain Miss Charlotte Wilkes, great-niece of the patriot, and niece of a New York banker, and of a Monsieur and Madame Simond, who were travelling in Europe. He married her two years later, having gone through the very respectable probation of crossing and re-crossing the Atlantic (he was a very bad sailor) in a sailing ship, in winter, and in time of war, to fetch his bride. Nor had he long been married before he took the celebrated country house of Craigcrook, where, for more than thirty years, he spent all the spare time of an exceedingly happy life. Then we may jump some fifteen years to the great Reform contest which gave Jeffrey the reward, such as it was, of his long constancy in opposition, in the shape of the Lord Advocateship. He was not always successful as a debater; but he had the opportunity of adding a

third reputation to those which he had already gained in literature and in law. He had the historical duty of piloting the Scotch Reform Bill through Parliament, and he had the, in his case, pleasurable and honourable pain of taking the official steps in Parliament necessitated by the mental incapacity of Sir Walter Scott. Early in 1834 he was provided for by promotion to the Scotch Bench. He had five years before, on being appointed Dean of Faculty, given up the editorship of the Review, which he had held for seven-and-twenty years. For some time previous to his resignation, his own contributions, which in early days had run up to half a dozen in a single number, and had averaged two or three for more than twenty years, had become more and more intermittent. After that resignation he contributed two or three articles at very long intervals. He was perhaps more lavish of advice than he need have been to Macvey Napier, and after Napier's death it passed into the control of his own son-in-law, Empson. Long, however, before the reins passed from his own hands, a rival more galling if less formidable than the Quarterly had arisen in the shape of Blackwood's Magazine. The more ponderous and stately publication always affected, to some extent, to ignore its audacious junior; and Lord Cockburn (perhaps instigated not more by prudence than by regard for Lockhart and Wilson, both of whom were living) passes over in complete silence the establishment of the magazine, the publication of the Chaldee manuscript, and the still greater hubbub which arose around the supposed attacks of Lockhart on Playfair, and the Edinburgh reviewers generally, with regard to their religious opinions. How deep the feelings really excited were, may be seen from a letter of Jeffrey's, published, not by Cockburn, but by Wilson's daughter in the life of her father. In this Jeffrey practically{113} drums out a new and certainly most promising recruit for his supposed share in the business, and inveighs in the most passionate terms against the imputation. It is undesirable to enter at length into any such matters here. It need only be said that Allen, one of the founders of the Edinburgh, and always a kind of standing counsel to it, is now acknowledged to have been something uncommonly like an atheist, that Sydney Smith (as I believe most unjustly) was often, and is sometimes still, regarded as standing towards his profession very much in the attitude of a French abbé of the eighteenth century, that almost the whole staff of the Review, including Jeffrey, had, as every Edinburgh man of position knew, belonged to the so-called Academy of Physics, the first principle of which was that only three facts (the words are Lord Cockburn's) were to be admitted without proof: (1) Mind exists; (2) matter exists; (3) every change indicates a cause. Nowadays the most orthodox of metaphysicians would admit that this limitation of position by no means implied atheism. But seventy years ago it would have been the exception to find an orthodox metaphysician who did admit it; and Lockhart, or rather Baron von Lauerwinkel, was perfectly justified in taking the view which ordinary opinion took.

These jars, however, were long over when Jeffrey became Lord Jeffrey, and subsided upon the placid bench. He lived sixteen years longer, alternating between Edinburgh, Craigmockie, and divers houses which he hired from time to time, on Loch Lomond, on the Clyde, and latterly at some English watering-places in the west. His health was not particularly good, though hardly worse than any man who lives to nearly eighty, with constant sedentary and few out-of-door occupations, and with a cheerful devotion to the good things of this life, must expect. And he was on the whole singularly happy, being passionately devoted to his wife, his daughter, and his grandchildren; possessing ample means, and making a cheerful and sensible use of them; seeing the increasing triumph of the political principles to which he had attached himself; knowing that he was regarded by friends and foes alike, as the chief living English representative of an important branch of literature; and retaining to the last an almost unparalleled juvenility of tastes and interests. His letters to Dickens are well known, and, though I should be very sorry to stake his critical reputation upon them, there could not be better documents for his vivid enjoyment of life. He died on 26th January 1850, in his seventy-seventh year, having been in harness almost to the very last. He had written a letter the day before to Empson, describing one of those curious waking visions known to all sick folk, in which there had appeared part of a proof-sheet of a new edition of the Apocrypha, and a new political paper filled with discussions on Free Trade. In reading Jeffrey's work nowadays, the critical reader finds it considerably more difficult to gain and keep the author's own point of view than in the case of any other great English critic. With Hazlitt, with Coleridge, with Wilson, with Carlyle, with Macaulay, we very soon fall into step, so to speak, with our author. If we cannot exactly prophesy what he will say on any given subject, we can make a pretty shrewd guess at it; and when, as it seems to us, he stumbles and shies, we have a sort of feeling beforehand that he is going to do it, and a decided inkling of the reason. But my own experience is, that a modern reader of Jeffrey, who takes him systematically, and endeavours to trace cause and effect in him, is liable to be constantly thrown out before he finds the secret. For Jeffrey, in the most puzzling way, lies between the ancients and the moderns in matter of criticism, and we never quite know

where to have him. It is ten to one, for instance, that the novice approaches him with the idea that he is a "classic" of the old rock. Imagine the said novice's confusion, when he finds Jeffrey not merely exalting Shakespeare to the skies, but warmly praising Elizabethan poetry in general, anticipating Mr. Matthew Arnold almost literally, in the estimate of Dryden and Pope as classics of our prose, and hailing with tears of joy the herald of the emancipation in Cowper. Surely our novice may be excused if, despite certain misgiving memories of such reviews as that of "The Lay of the Last Minstrel," he concludes that Jeffrey has been maligned, and that he was really a Romantic before Romanticism. Unhappy novice! he will find his new conclusion not less rapidly and more completely staggered than his old. Indeed, until the clue is once gained, Jeffrey must appear to be one of the most incomprehensibly inconsistent of writers and of critics. On one page he declares that Campbell's extracts from Chamberlayne's "Pharonnida" have made him "quite impatient for an opportunity of perusing the whole poem,"—Romantic surely, quite Romantic. "The tameness and poorness of the serious style of Addison and Swift,"—Romantic again, quite Romantic. Yet when we come to Jeffrey's own contemporaries, he constantly appears as much bewigged and befogged with pseudo-classicism as M. de Jouy himself. He commits himself, in the year of grace 1829, to the statement that "the rich melodies of Keats and Shelley, and the fantastical emphasis of Wordsworth are melting fast from the field of our vision," while he contrasts with this "rapid withering of the laurel" the "comparative absence of marks of decay" on Rogers and Campbell. The poets of his own time whom he praises most heartily, and with least reserve, are Campbell and Crabbe; and he is quite as enthusiastic over "Theodric" and "Gertrude" as over the two great war-pieces of the same author, which are worth a hundred "Gertrudes" and about ten thousand "Theodrics." Reviewing Scott, not merely when they were personal friends (they were always that), but when Scott was a contributor to the Edinburgh, and giving general praise to "The Lay," he glances with an unmistakable meaning at the "dignity of the subject," regrets the "imitation and antiquarian researches," and criticises the versification in a way which shows that he had not in the least grasped its scheme. It is hardly necessary to quote his well-known attacks on Wordsworth; but, though I am myself anything but a Wordsworthian, and would willingly give up to chaos and old night nineteen-twentieths of the "extremely valuable chains of thought" which the good man used to forge, it is in the first place quite clear that the twentieth ought to have saved him from Jeffrey's claws; in the second, that the critic constantly selects the wrong things as well as the right for condemnation and ridicule; and in the third, that he would have praised, or at any rate not blamed, in another, the very things which he blames in Wordsworth. Even his praise of Crabbe, excessive as it may now appear, is diversified by curious patches of blame which seem to me at any rate, {118} singularly uncritical. There are, for instance, a very great many worse jests in poetry than,

Oh, had he learnt to make the wig he wears!

—which Jeffrey pronounces a misplaced piece of buffoonery. I cannot help thinking that if Campbell instead of Southey had written the lines,

To see brute nature scorn him and renounce  
Its homage to the human form divine,

Jeffrey would, to say the least, not have hinted that they were "little better than drivelling." But I do not think that when Jeffrey wrote these things, or when he actually perpetrated such almost unforgivable phrases as "stuff about dancing daffodils," he was speaking away from his sincere conviction. On the contrary, though partisanship may frequently have determined the suppression or the utterance, the emphasising or the softening, of his opinions, I do not think that he ever said anything but what he sincerely thought. The problem, therefore, is to discover and define, if possible, the critical standpoint of a man whose judgment was at once so acute and so purblind; who could write the admirable surveys of English poetry contained in the essays on Mme. de Staël and Campbell, and yet be guilty of the stuff (we thank him for the word) about the dancing daffodils; who could talk of "the splendid strains of Moore" (though I have myself a relatively high opinion of Moore) and pronounce "The White Doe of Rylstone" (though I am not very fond of that animal as a whole) "the very worst poem he ever saw printed in a quarto volume"; who could really appreciate parts even of Wordsworth himself, and yet sneer at the very finest passages of the poems he partly admired. It is unnecessary to multiply inconsistencies, because the reader who does not want the trouble of reading Jeffrey must be content to take them for granted, and the reader who does read Jeffrey will discover them in plenty for himself. But they are not limited, it should be said, to purely literary criticism; and they appear, if not quite so strongly, in his estimates of personal character, and even in his purely political arguments.

The explanation, as far as there is any, (and perhaps such explanations, as Hume says of another matter, only push ignorance a stage farther back), seems to me to lie in what I can only call the Gallicanism of

Jeffrey's mind and character. As Horace Walpole has been pronounced the most French of Englishmen, so may Francis Jeffrey be pronounced the most French of Scotchmen. The reader of his letters, no less than the reader of his essays, constantly comes across the most curious and multiform instances of this Frenchness. The early priggishness is French; the effusive domestic affection is French; the antipathy to dogmatic theology, combined with general recognition of the Supreme Being, is French; the talk (I had almost said the chatter) about virtue and sympathy, and so forth, is French; the Whig recognition of the rights of man, joined to a kind of bureaucratic distrust and terror of the common people (a combination almost unknown in England), is French. Everybody remembers the ingenious argument in Peter Simple that the French were quite as brave as the English, indeed more so, but that they were extraordinarily ticklish. Jeffrey, we have seen, was very far from being a coward, but he was very ticklish indeed. His private letters throw the most curious light possible on the secret, as far as he was concerned, of the earlier Whig opposition to the war, and of the later Whig advocacy of reform. Jeffrey by no means thought the cause of the Revolution divine, like the Friends of Liberty, or admired Napoleon like Hazlitt, or believed in the inherent right of Manchester and Birmingham to representation like the zealots of 1830. But he was always dreadfully afraid of invasion in the first place, and of popular insurrection in the second; and he wanted peace and reform to calm his fears. As a young man he was, with a lack of confidence in his countrymen probably unparalleled in a Scotchman, sure that a French corporal's guard might march from end to end of Scotland, and a French privateer's boat's crew carry off "the fattest cattle and the fairest women" (these are his very words) "of any Scotch seaboard county." The famous, or infamous, Cevallos article—an ungenerous and pusillanimous attack on the Spanish patriots, which practically founded the Quarterly Review, by finally disgusting all Tories and many Whigs with the Edinburgh—was, it seems, prompted merely by the conviction that the Spanish cause was hopeless, and that maintaining it, or assisting it, must lead to mere useless bloodshed. He felt profoundly the crime of Napoleon's rule; but he thought Napoleon unconquerable, and so did his best to prevent him being conquered. He was sure that the multitude would revolt if reform was not granted; and he was, therefore, eager for reform. Later, he got into his head the oddest crotchet of all his life, which was that a Conservative government, with a sort of approval from the people generally, and especially from the English peasantry, would scheme for a coup d'état, and (his own words again) "make mincemeat of their opponents in a single year." He may be said almost to have left the world in a state of despair over the probable results of the Revolutions of 1848-49; and it is impossible to guess what would have happened to him if he had survived to witness the Second of December. Never was there such a case, at least among Englishmen, of timorous pugnacity and plucky pessimism. But it would be by no means difficult to parallel the temperament in France; and, indeed, the comparative frequency of it there, may be thought to be no small cause of the political and military disasters of the country.

In literature, and especially in criticism, Jeffrey's characteristics were still more decidedly and unquestionably French. He came into the world almost too soon to feel the German impulse, even if he had been disposed to feel it. But, as a matter of fact, he was not at all disposed. The faults of taste of the German Romantic School, its alternate homeliness and extravagance, its abuse of the supernatural, its undoubted offences against order and proportion, scandalised him only a little less than they would have scandalised Voltaire and did scandalise the later Voltairians. Jeffrey was perfectly prepared to be Romantic up to a certain point,—the point which he had himself reached in his early course of independent reading and criticism. He was even a little inclined to sympathise with the reverend Mr. Bowles on the great question whether Pope was a poet; and, as I have said, he uses, about the older English literature, phrases which might almost satisfy a fanatic of the school of Hazlitt or of Lamb. He is, if anything, rather too severe on French as compared with English drama. Yet, when he comes to his own contemporaries, and sometimes even in reference to earlier writers, we find him slipping into those purely arbitrary severities of condemnation, those capricious stigmatisings of this as improper, and that as vulgar, and the other as unbecoming, which are the characteristics of the pseudo-correct and pseudo-classical school of criticism. He was a great admirer of Cowper, and yet he is shocked by Cowper's use, in his translation of Homer, of the phrases, "to entreat Achilles to a calm" (evidently he had forgotten Shakespeare's "pursue him and entreat him to a peace"), "this wrangler here," "like a fellow of no worth." He was certainly not likely to be unjust to Charles James Fox. So he is unhappy, rather than contemptuous, over such excellent phrases as "swearing away the lives," "crying injustice," "fond of ill-treating." These appear to Mr. Aristarchus Jeffrey too "homely and familiar," too "low and vapid"; while a harmless and rather agreeable Shakespearian parallel of Fox's seems to him downright impropriety. The fun of the thing is that the passage turns on the well-known misuse of "flat burglary"; and if Jeffrey had had a little more sense of humour (his deficiency



in which, for all his keen wit, is another Gallic note in him), he must have seen that the words were ludicrously applicable to his own condemnation and his own frame of mind. These settings-up of a wholly arbitrary canon of mere taste, these excommunicatings of such and such a thing as "low" and "improper," without assigned or assignable reason, are eminently Gallic. They may be found not merely in the older school before 1830, but in almost all French critics up to the present day: there is perhaps not one, with the single exception of Sainte-Beuve, who is habitually free from them. The critic may be quite unable to say why *tarte à la crème* is such a shocking expression, or even to produce any important authority for the shockingness of it. But he is quite certain that it is shocking. Jeffrey is but too much given to protesting against *tarte à la crème*; and the reasons for his error are almost exactly the same as in the case of the usual Frenchman; that is to say, a very just and wholesome preference for order, proportion, literary orthodoxy, freedom from will-worship and eccentric divagations, unfortunately distorted by a certain absence of catholicity, by a tendency to regard novelty as bad, merely because it is novelty, and by a curious reluctance, as Lamb has it of another great man of the same generation, to go shares with any newcomer in literary commerce.

But when these reservations have been made, when his standpoint has been clearly discovered and marked out, and when some little tricks, such as the affectation of delivering judgments without appeal, which is still kept up by a few, though very few, reviewers, have been further allowed for, Jeffrey is a most admirable essayist and critic. As an essayist, a writer of causeries, I do not think he has been surpassed among Englishmen in the art of interweaving quotation, abstract, and comment. The best proof of his felicity in this respect is that in almost all the books which he has reviewed, (and he has reviewed many of the most interesting books in literature) the passages [125] and traits, the anecdotes and phrases, which have made most mark in the general memory, and which are often remembered with very indistinct consciousness of their origin, are to be found in his reviews. Sometimes the very perfection of his skill in this respect makes it rather difficult to know where he is abstracting or paraphrasing, and where he is speaking outright and for himself; but that is a very small fault. Yet his merits as an essayist, though considerable, are not to be compared, even to the extent to which Hazlitt's are to be compared, with his merits as a critic, and especially as a literary critic. It would be interesting to criticise his political criticism; but it is always best to keep politics out where it can be managed. Besides, Jeffrey as a political critic is a subject of almost exclusively historical interest, while as a literary critic he is important at this very day, and perhaps more important than he was in his own. For the spirit of merely æsthetic criticism, which was in his day only in its infancy, has long been full grown and rampant; so that, good work as it has done in its time, it decidedly needs chastening by an admixture of the dogmatic criticism, which at least tries to keep its impressions together and in order, and to connect them into some coherent doctrine and creed. Of this dogmatic criticism Jeffrey, with all his shortcomings, is perhaps the very best example that we have in English. He had addressed himself more directly and theoretically to literary criticism than Lockhart. Prejudiced as he often was, he was not affected by the wild gusts of personal and political passion which frequently blew Hazlitt a thousand miles off the course of true criticism. He keeps his eye on the object, which De Quincey seldom does. He is not affected by that desire to preach on certain pet subjects which affects the admirable critical faculty of Carlyle. He never blusters and splashes at random like Wilson. And he never indulges in the mannered and rather superfluous graces which marred, to some tastes, the work of his successor in critical authority, if there has been any such, the author of *Essays in Criticism*.

Let us, as we just now looked through Jeffrey's work to pick out the less favourable characteristics which distinguish his position, look through it again to see those qualities which he shares, but in greater measure than most, with all good critics. The literary essay which stands first in his collected works is on *Madame de Staël*. Now that good lady, of whom some judges in these days do not think very much, was a kind of goddess on earth in literature, however much she might bore them in life, to the English Whig party in general; while Jeffrey's French tastes must have made her, or at least her books, specially attractive to him. Accordingly he has written a great deal about her, no less than three essays appearing in the collected works. Writing at least partly in her lifetime and under the influences just glanced at, he is of course profuse in compliments. But it is very amusing and highly instructive to observe how, in the intervals of these compliments, he contrives to take the good *Corinne* to pieces, to smash up her ingenious Perfectibilism, and to put in order her rather rash literary judgments. It is in connection also with her, that he gives one of the best of not a few general sketches of the history of literature which his work contains. Of course there are here, as always, isolated expressions as to which, however much we admit that Jeffrey

was a clever man, we cannot agree with Jeffrey. He thinks Aristophanes "coarse" and "vulgar" just as a living pundit thinks him "base," while (though nobody of course can deny the coarseness) Aristophanes and vulgarity are certainly many miles asunder. We may protest against the chronological, even more than against the critical, blunder which couples Cowley and Donne, putting Donne, moreover, who wrote long before Cowley was born, and differs from him in genius almost as the author of the Iliad does from the author of the Henriade, second. But hardly anything in English criticism is better than Jeffrey's discussion of the general French imputation of "want of taste and politeness" to English and German writers, especially English. It is a very general, and a very mistaken notion that the Romantic movement in France has done away with this imputation to a great extent. On the contrary, though it has long been a kind of fashion in France to admire Shakespeare, and though since the labours of MM. Taine and Montégut, the study of English literature generally has grown and flourished, it is, I believe, the very rarest thing to find a Frenchman who, in his heart of hearts, does not cling to the old "pearls in the dung-heap" idea, not merely in reference to Shakespeare, but to English writers, and especially English humorists, generally. Nothing can be more admirable than Jeffrey's comments on this matter. They are especially admirable because they are not made from the point of view of a Romantique à tous crins; because, as has been already pointed out, he himself is largely penetrated by the very preference for order and proportion which is at the bottom of the French mistake; and because he is, therefore, arguing in a tongue understood of those whom he censures. Another essay which may be read with especial advantage is that on Scott's edition of Swift. Here, again, there was a kind of test subject, and perhaps Jeffrey does not come quite scatheless out of the trial: to me, at any rate, his account of Swift's political and moral conduct and character seems both uncritical and unfair. But here, too, the value of his literary criticism shows itself. He might very easily have been tempted to extend his injustice from the writer to the writings, especially since, as has been elsewhere shown, he was by no means a fanatical admirer of the Augustan age, and thought the serious style of Addison and Swift tame and poor. It is possible of course, here also, to find things that seem to be errors, both in the general sketch which Jeffrey, according to his custom, prefixes, and in the particular remarks on Swift himself. For instance, to deny fancy to the author of the Tale of a Tub, of Gulliver, and of the Polite Conversation, is very odd indeed. But there are few instances of a greater triumph of sound literary judgment over political and personal prejudice than Jeffrey's description, not merely of the great works just mentioned (it is curious, and illustrates his defective appreciation of humour, that he likes the greatest least, and is positively unjust to the Tale of a Tub), but also of those wonderful pamphlets, articles, lampoons, skits (libels if any one likes), which proved too strong for the generalship of Marlborough and the administrative talents of Godolphin; and which are perhaps the only literary works that ever really changed, for a not inconsiderable period, the government of England. "Considered," he says, "with a view to the purposes for which they were intended, they have probably never been equalled in any period of the world." They certainly have not; but to find a Whig, and a Whig writing in the very moment of Tory triumph after Waterloo, ready to admit the fact, is not a trivial thing. Another excellent example of Jeffrey's strength, by no means unmixed with examples of his weakness, is to be found in his essays on Cowper. I have already given some of the weakness: the strength is to be found in his general description of Cowper's revolt, thought so daring at the time, now so apparently moderate, against poetic diction. These instances are to be found under miscellaneous sections, biographical, historical, and so forth; but the reader will naturally turn to the considerable divisions headed Poetry and Fiction. Here are the chief rocks of offence already indicated, and here also are many excellent things which deserve reading. Here is the remarkable essay, quoted above, on Campbell's Specimens. Here is the criticism of Weber's edition of Ford, and another of those critical surveys of the course of English literature which Jeffrey was so fond of doing, and which he did so well, together with some remarks on the magnificently spendthrift style of our Elizabethan dramatists which would deserve almost the first place in an anthology of his critical beauties. The paper on Hazlitt's Characters of Shakespeare (Hazlitt was an Edinburgh reviewer, and his biographer, not Jeffrey's, has chronicled a remarkable piece of generosity on Jeffrey's part towards his wayward contributor) is a little defaced by a patronising spirit, not, indeed, of that memorably mistaken kind which induced the famous and unlucky sentence to Macvey Napier about Carlyle, but something in the spirit of the {131} schoolmaster who observes, "See this clever boy of mine, and only think how much better I could do it myself." Yet it contains some admirable passages on Shakespeare, if not on Hazlitt; and it would be impossible to deny that its hinted condemnation of Hazlitt's "desultory and capricious acuteness" is just enough. On the other hand, how significant is it of Jeffrey's own limitations that he should protest against Hazlitt's sympathy with such "conceits and puerilities" as the immortal and unmatchable

Take him and cut him out in little stars, with the rest of the passage. But there you have the French spirit. I do not believe that there ever was a Frenchman since the seventeenth century (unless perchance it was Gérard de Nerval, and he was not quite sane), who could put his hand on his heart and deny that the little stars seemed to him puerile and conceited. Jeffrey's dealings with Byron (I do not now speak of the article on Hours of Idleness, which was simply a just rebuke of really puerile and conceited rubbish) are not, to me, very satisfactory. The critic seems, in the rather numerous articles which he has devoted to the "noble Poet," as they used to call him, to have felt his genius unduly rebuked by that of his subject. He spends a great deal, and surely an unnecessarily great deal, of time in solemnly, and no doubt quite sincerely, rebuking Byron's morality; and in doing so he is sometimes almost absurd. He calls him "not more obscene perhaps than Dryden or Prior," which is simply ludicrous, because it is very rare that this particular word can be applied to Byron at all, while even his staunchest champion must admit that it applies to glorious John and to dear Mat Prior. He helps, unconsciously no doubt, to spread the very contagion which he denounces, by talking about Byron's demoniacal power, going so far as actually to contrast Manfred with Marlowe to the advantage of the former. And he is so completely overcome by what he calls the "dreadful tone of sincerity" of this "puissant spirit," that he never seems to have had leisure or courage to apply the critical tests and solvents of which few men have had a greater command. Had he done so, it is impossible not to believe that, whether he did or did not pronounce Byron's sentiment to be as theatrical, as vulgar, and as false as it seems to some later critics, he would at any rate have substituted for his edifying but rather irrelevant moral denunciations some exposure of those gross faults in style and metre, in phrase and form, which now disgust us.

There are many essays remaining on which I should like to comment if there were room enough. But I have only space for a few more general remarks on his general characteristics, and especially those which, as Sainte-Beuve said to the {133} altered Jeffrey of our altered days, are "important to us." Let me repeat then that the peculiar value of Jeffrey is not, as is that of Coleridge, of Hazlitt, or of Lamb, in very subtle, very profound, or very original views of his subjects. He is neither a critical Columbus nor a critical Socrates; he neither opens up undiscovered countries, nor provokes and stimulates to the discovery of them. His strength lies in the combination of a fairly wide range of sympathy with an extraordinary shrewdness and good sense in applying that sympathy. Tested for range alone, or for subtlety alone, he will frequently be found wanting; but he almost invariably catches up those who have thus outstripped him, when the subject of the trial is shifted to soundness of estimate, intelligent connection of view, and absence of eccentricity. And it must be again and again repeated that Jeffrey is by no means justly chargeable with the Dryasdust failings so often attributed to academic criticism. They said that on the actual Bench he worried counsel a little too much, but that his decisions were almost invariably sound. Not quite so much perhaps can be said for his other exercise of the judicial function. But however much he may sometimes seem to carp and complain, however much we may sometimes wish for a little more equity and a little less law, it is astonishing how weighty Jeffrey's critical judgments are after three quarters of a century which has seen so many seeming heavy things grow light. There may be much that he does not see; there may be some things which he is physically unable to see; but what he does see, he sees with a clearness, and co-ordinates in its bearings on other things seen with a precision, which are hardly to be matched among the fluctuating and diverse race of critics.

## V

### HAZLITT

The following paper was in great part composed, when I came across some sentences on Hazlitt, written indeed before I was born, but practically unpublished until the other day. In a review of the late Mr. Horne's *New Spirit of the Age*, contributed to the *Morning Chronicle* in 1845 and but recently included in his collected works, Thackeray writes thus of the author of the book whose title Horne had rather rashly borrowed: The author of the *Spirit of the Age* was one of the keenest and brightest critics that ever lived. With partialities and prejudices innumerable, he had a wit so keen, a sensibility so exquisite, an appreciation of humour, or pathos, or even of the greatest art, so lively, quick, and cultivated, that it was always good to know what were the impressions made by books or men or pictures on such a mind; and that, as there were not probably a dozen men in England with powers so varied, all the rest of the world might be rejoiced to listen to the opinions of this accomplished critic. He was of so different a caste to the

people who gave authority in his day—the pompous big-wigs and schoolmen, who never could pardon him his familiarity of manner so unlike their own—his popular—too popular habits—and sympathies so much beneath their dignity; his loose, disorderly education gathered round those bookstalls or picture galleries where he laboured a penniless student, in lonely journeys over Europe tramped on foot (and not made, after the fashion of the regular critics of the day, by the side of a young nobleman in a postchaise), in every school of knowledge from St. Peter's at Rome to St. Giles's in London. In all his modes of life and thought, he was so different from the established authorities, with their degrees and white neck-cloths, that they hooted the man down with all the power of their lungs, and disdained to hear truth that came from such a ragged philosopher.

Some exceptions, no doubt, must be taken to this enthusiastic, and in the main just, verdict. Hazlitt himself denied himself wit, yet if this was mock humility, I am inclined to think that he spoke truth unwittingly. His appreciation of humour was fitful and anything but impartial, while, biographically speaking, the hardships of his apprenticeship are very considerably exaggerated. It was not, for instance, in a penniless or pedestrian manner that he visited St. Peter's at Rome; but journeying with comforts of wine, vetturini, and partridges, which his second wife's income paid for. But this does not matter much, and, on the whole, the estimate is as just as it is generous. Perhaps something of its inspiration may be set down to fellow-feeling, both in politics and in the unsuccessful cultivation of the arts of design. But as high an estimate of Hazlitt is quite compatible with the strongest political dissent from his opinions, and with a total freedom from the charge of wearing the willow for painting.

There is indeed no doubt that Hazlitt is one of the most absolutely unequal writers in English, if not in any, literature, Wilson being perhaps his only compeer. The term absolute is used with intention and precision. There may be others who, in different parts of their work, are more unequal than he is; but with him the inequality is pervading, and shows itself in his finest passages, in those where he is most at home, as much as in his haviest and most uncongenial taskwork. It could not, indeed, be otherwise, because the inequality itself is due less to an intellectual than to a moral defect. The clear sunshine of Hazlitt's admirably acute intellect is always there; but it is constantly obscured by driving clouds of furious prejudice. Even as the clouds pass, the light may still be seen on distant and scattered parts of the landscape; but wherever their influence extends, there is nothing but thick darkness, gusty wind and drenching rain. And the two phenomena, the abiding intellectual light, and the fits and squalls of moral darkness, appear to be totally independent of each other, or of any single will or cause of any kind. It would be perfectly easy, and may perhaps be in place later, to give a brief collection of some of the most absurd and outrageous sayings that any writer, not a mere fool, can be charged with: of sentences not representing quips and cranks of humour, or judgments temporary and one-sided, though having a certain relative validity, but containing blunders and calumnies so gross and palpable, that the man who set them down might seem to have forfeited all claim to the reputation either of an intelligent or a responsible being. And yet, side by side with these, are other passages (and fortunately a much greater number) which justify, and more than justify, Hazlitt's claims to be as Thackeray says, "one of the keenest and brightest critics that ever lived"; as Lamb had said earlier, "one of the wisest and finest spirits breathing."

The only exception to be taken to the well-known panegyric of Elia is, that it bestows this eulogy on Hazlitt "in his natural and healthy state." Unluckily, it would seem, by a concurrence of all testimony, even the most partial, that the unhealthy state was quite as natural as the healthy one. Lamb himself plaintively wishes that "he would not quarrel with the world at the rate he does"; and De Quincey, in his short, but very interesting, biographical notice of Hazlitt (a notice entirely free from the malignity with which De Quincey has been sometimes charged), declares with quite as much truth as point, that Hazlitt's guiding principle was, "Whatever is, is wrong." He was the very ideal of a literary Ishmael; and after the fullest admission of the almost incredible virulence and unfairness of his foes, it has to be admitted, likewise, that he was quite as ready to quarrel with his friends. He succeeded, at least once, in forcing a quarrel even upon Lamb. His relations with Leigh Hunt (who, whatever his faults were, was not unamiable) were constantly strained, and at least once actually broken by his infernal temper. Nor were his relations with women more fortunate or more creditable than those with men. That the fault was entirely on his side in the rupture with his first wife is, no doubt, not the case; for Mrs. Hazlitt's, or Miss Stoddart's, own friends admit that she was of a peculiar and rather trying disposition. It is indeed evident that she was the sort of person (most teasing of all others to a man of Hazlitt's temperament) who would put her head back as he was kissing her, to ask if he would

like another cup of tea, or interrupt a declaration to suggest shutting the window. As for the famous and almost legendary episode of Sarah Walker, the lodging-house keeper's daughter, and the *Liber Amoris*, the obvious and irresistible attack of something like erotic madness which it implies absolves Hazlitt partly—but only partly, for there is a kind of shabbiness about the affair which shuts it out from all reasonable claim to be regarded as a new act of the endless drama of *All for Love*, or *The World Well Lost!* Of his second marriage, the only persons who might be expected to give us some information either can or will say next to nothing. But when a man with such antecedents marries a woman of whom no one has anything bad to say, lives with her for a year, chiefly on her money, and is then quitted by her with the information that she will have nothing more to do with him, it is not, I think, uncharitable to conjecture that most of the fault is his.

It is not, however, only of Hazlitt's rather imperfectly known life, or of his pretty generally acknowledged character, that I wish to speak here. His strange mixture of manly common-sense and childish prejudice, the dislike of foreigners which accompanied his Liberalism and his Bonapartism, and other traits, are very much more English than Irish. But Irish, at least on the father's side, his family was, and had been for generations. He was himself the son of a Unitarian minister, was born at Maidstone in 1778, accompanied his parents as a very little boy to America, but passed the greater part of his youth at Wem in Shropshire, where the interview with Coleridge, which decided his fate, took place. Yet for some time after that, he was mainly occupied with studies, not of literature, but of art. He had been intended for his father's profession, but had early taken a disgust to it. At such schools as he had been able to frequent, he had gained the character of a boy rather insusceptible of ordinary teaching; and his letters (they are rare throughout his life) show him to us as something very like a juvenile prig. According to his own account, he "thought for at least eight years" without being able to pen a line, or at least a page; and the worst accusation that can truly be brought against him is that, by his own confession, he left off reading when he began to write. Those who (for their sins or for their good) are condemned to a life of writing for the press know that such an abstinence as this is almost fatal. Perhaps no man ever did good work in periodical writing, unless he had previously had a more or less prolonged period of reading, with no view to writing. Certainly no one ever did other than very faulty work if, not having such a store to draw on, when he began writing he left off reading.

The first really important event in Hazlitt's life, except the visit from Coleridge in 1798, was his own visit to Paris after the Peace of Amiens in 1802—a visit authorised and defrayed by certain commissions to copy pictures at the Louvre, which was then, in consequence of French conquests, the picture-gallery of Europe. The chief of these commissioners was a Mr. Railton, a person of some fortune at Liverpool, and the father of a daughter who, if she was anything like her portrait, had one of the most beautiful faces of modern times. Miss Railton was one of Hazlitt's many loves: it was, perhaps, fortunate for her that the course of the love did not run smooth. Almost immediately on his return, he made acquaintance with the Lambs, and, as Mr. W. C. Hazlitt, his grandson and biographer, thinks, with Miss Stoddart, his future wife. Miss Stoddart, there is no doubt, was an elderly coquette, though perfectly "proper." Besides the "William" of her early correspondence with Mary Lamb, we hear of three or four other lovers of hers between 1803 and 1808, when she married Hazlitt. It so happens that one, and only one, letter of his to her has been preserved. His biographer seems to think it in another sense unique; but it is, in effect, a very typical letter from a literary lover of a rather passionate temperament. The two were married, in defiance of superstition, on Sunday, the first of May; and certainly the superstition had not the worst of it.

At first, however, no evil results seemed likely. Miss Stoddart had a certain property settled on her at Winterslow, on the south-eastern border of Salisbury Plain, and for nearly four years the couple seem to have dwelt there (once, at least, entertaining the Lambs), and producing children, of whom only one lived. It was not till 1812 that they removed to London, and that Hazlitt engaged in writing for the newspapers. From this time till the end of his life, some eighteen years, he was never at a loss for employment—a succession of daily and weekly papers, with occasional employment on the *Edinburgh Review*, providing him, it would seem, with sufficiently abundant opportunities for copy. The *London*, the *New Monthly* (where Campbell's dislike did him no harm), and other magazines also employed him. For a time, he seems to have joined "the gallery," and written ordinary press-work. During this time, which was very short, and this time only, his friends admit a certain indulgence in drinking, which he gave up completely, but which was used against him with as much pitilessness as indecency in *Blackwood*; though heaven only knows

how the most Tory soul alive could see fitness of things in the accusation of gin-drinking brought against Hazlitt by the whiskey-drinkers of the Noctes. For the greater part of his literary life he seems to have been almost a total abstainer, indulging only in the very strongest of tea. He soon gave up miscellaneous press-work, as far as politics went; but his passion for the theatre retained him as a theatrical critic almost to the end of his life. He gradually drifted into the business really best suited to him, that of essay-writing, and occasionally lecturing on literary and miscellaneous subjects. During the greatest part of his early London life, he was resident in a famous house, now destroyed, in York Street, Westminster, next door to Bentham and reputed to have once been tenanted by Milton; and he was a constant attendant on Lamb's Wednesday evenings. The details of his life, it has been said, are not much known. The chief of them, besides the breaking out of his lifelong war with Blackwood and the Quarterly, was, perhaps, his unlucky participation in the duel which proved fatal to Scott, the editor of the London. It is impossible to imagine a{144} more deplorable muddle than this affair. Scott, after refusing the challenge of Lockhart,[12] with whom he had, according to the customs of those days, a sufficient ground of quarrel, accepted that of Christie, Lockhart's second, with whom he had no quarrel at all. Moreover, when his adversary had deliberately spared him in the first fire, he insisted (it is said owing to the stupid conduct of his own second) on another, and was mortally wounded. Hazlitt, who was more than indirectly concerned in the affair, had a professed objection to duelling, which would have been more creditable to him if he had not been avowedly of a timid temper. But, most unfortunately, he was said, and believed, to have spurred Scott on to the acceptance of the challenge, nor do his own champions deny it. The scandal is long bygone, but is, unluckily, a fair sample of the ugly stories which cluster round Hazlitt's name, and which have hitherto prevented that justice being done to him which his abilities deserve and demand.

This wretched affair occurred in February 1821, and, shortly afterwards, the crowning complications of Hazlitt's own life, the business of the *Liber Amoris* and the divorce with his first wife, took place. The first could only be properly described by an abundance of extracts, for which there is here no room. Of the second, which, it must be remembered, went on simultaneously with the first, it is sufficient to say that the circumstances are nearly incredible. It was conducted under the Scotch law with a blessed indifference to collusion: the direct means taken to effect it were, if report may be trusted, scandalous; and the parties met during the whole time, and placidly wrangled over money matters, with a callousness which is ineffably disgusting. I have hinted, in reference to Sarah Walker, that the tyranny of "Love unconquered in battle" may be taken by a very charitable person to be a sufficient excuse. In this other affair there is no such palliation; unless the very charitable person should hold that a wife, who could so forget her own dignity, justified any forgetfulness on the part of her husband; and that a husband, who could haggle and chaffer about the terms on which he should be disgracefully separated from his wife, justified any forgetfulness of dignity on the wife's part. Little has to be said about the rest of Hazlitt's life. Miss Sarah Walker would have nothing to say to him; and it has been already mentioned that the lady whom he afterwards married, a Mrs. Bridgewater, had enough of him after a year's experience. He did not outlive this last shock more than five years; and unfortunately his death was preceded by a complete financial break-down, though he was more industrious during these later years than at any other time, and though he had{146} abundance of well-paid work. The failure of the publishers, who were to have paid him five hundred pounds for his magnum opus, the partisan and almost valueless *Life of Napoleon*, had something to do with this, and the dishonesty of an agent is said to have had more, but details are not forthcoming. He died on the eighteenth of September 1830, saying, "Well, I have had a happy life"; and despite his son's assertion that, like Goldsmith, he had something on his mind, I believe this to have been not ironical but quite sincere. He was only fifty-two, so that the infirmities of age had not begun to press on him. Although, except during the brief duration of his second marriage, he had always lived by his wits, it does not appear that he was ever in any want, or that he had at any time to deny himself his favourite pleasures of wandering about and being idle when he chose. If he had not been completely happy in his life, he had lived it; if he had not seen the triumph of his opinions, he had been able always to hold to them. He was one of those men, such as an extreme devotion to literature now and then breeds, who, by the intensity of their enjoyment of quite commonplace delights—a face passed in the street, a sunset, a quiet hour of reflection, even a well-cooked meal—make up for the suffering of not wholly commonplace woes. I do not know whether even the joy of literary battle did not outweigh the pain of the dishonest wounds which he received from illiberal adversaries. I think that he had a happy life, and I am glad that he had. For he was in literature a great man. I am myself disposed to hold that, for all his accesses of hopelessly uncritical prejudice, he was the greatest critic that England has yet produced; and there are some who hold (though I do not agree with them) that he was even greater as a

miscellaneous essayist than as a critic. It is certainly upon his essays, critical and other, that his fame must rest; not on the frenzied outpourings of the *Liber Amoris* (full as these are of flashes of genius), or upon the one-sided and ill-planned *Life of Napoleon*; still less on his clever-boy essay on the *Principles of Human Action*, or on his attempts in grammar, in literary compilation and abridgment, and the like. Seven volumes of Bonn's *Standard Library*, with another published elsewhere containing his writings on *Art*, contain nearly all the documents of Hazlitt's fame: a few do not seem to have been yet collected from his *Remains* and from the publications in which they originally appeared.

These books—the *Spirit of the Age*, *Table Talk*, *The Plain Speaker*, *The Round Table* (including the *Conversations with Northcote* and *Characteristics*), *Lectures on the English Poets and Comic Writers*, *Elizabethan Literature and Characters of Shakespeare*, *Sketches and Essays* (including *Winterslow*)—represent the work, roughly speaking, of the last twenty years of Hazlitt's life; for in the earlier and longer period he wrote very little, and, indeed, declares that for a long time he had a difficulty in writing at all. They are all singularly homogeneous in general character, the lectures written as lectures differing very little from the essays written as essays, and even the frantic diatribes of the "Letter to Gifford" bearing a strong family likeness to the good-humoured reportage of "On going to a Fight," or the singularly picturesque and pathetic egotism of the "Farewell to Essay-writing." This family resemblance is the more curious because, independently of the diversity of subject, Hazlitt can hardly be said to possess a style or, at least, a manner—indeed, he somewhere or other distinctly disclaims the possession. Yet, irregular as he is in his fashion of writing, no less than in the merit of it, the germs of some of the most famous styles of this century may be discovered in his casual and haphazard work. Everybody knows Jeffrey's question to Macaulay, "Where the devil did you get that style?" If any one will read Hazlitt (who, be it remembered, was a contributor to the *Edinburgh*) carefully, he will see where Macaulay got that style, or at least the beginning of it, much as he improved on it afterwards. Nor is there any doubt that, in a very different way, Hazlitt served as a model to Thackeray, to Dickens, and to many not merely of the most popular, but of the greatest, writers of the middle of the century. Indeed, in the *Spirit of the Age* there are distinct anticipations of Carlyle. He had the not uncommon fate of producing work which, little noted by the public, struck very strongly those of his juniors who had any literary faculty. If he had been, just by a little, a greater man than he was, he would, no doubt, have elaborated an individual manner, and not have contented himself with the hints and germs of manners. As it was, he had more of seed than of fruit. And the secret of this is, undoubtedly, to be found in the obstinate individuality of thought which characterised him all through. Hazlitt may sometimes have adopted an opinion partly because other people did not hold it, but he never adopted an opinion because other people did hold it. And all his opinions, even those which seem to have been adopted simply to quarrel with the world, were genuine opinions. He has himself drawn a striking contrast in this point, between himself and Lamb, in one of the very best of all his essays, the beautiful "Farewell to Essay-writing" reprinted in *Winterslow*. The contrast is a remarkable one, and most men, probably, who take great interest in literature or politics, or indeed in any subject admitting of principles, will be able to furnish similar contrasts from their own experience.

In matters of taste and feeling, one proof that my conclusions have not been quite shallow and hasty, is the circumstance of their having been lasting. I have the same favourite books, pictures, passages that I ever had; I may therefore presume that they will last me my life—nay, I may indulge a hope that my thoughts will survive me. This continuity of impression is the only thing on which I pride myself. Even Lamb, whose relish of certain things is as keen and earnest as possible, takes a surfeit of admiration, and I should be afraid to ask about his select authors or particular friends after a lapse of ten years. As for myself, any one knows where to have me. What I have once made up my mind to, I abide by to the end of the chapter. This is quite true if we add a proviso to it—a proviso, to be sure, of no small importance. Hazlitt is always the same when he is not different, when his political or personal ails and angers do not obscure his critical judgment. His uniformity of principle extends only to the two subjects of literature and of art; unless a third may be added, to wit, the various good things of this life, as they are commonly called. He was not so great a metaphysician as he thought himself. He "shows to the utmost of his knowledge, and that not deep"; a want of depth not surprising when we find him confessing that he had to go to Taylor, the Platonist, to tell him something of Platonic ideas. It may be more than suspected that he had read little but the French and English philosophers of the eighteenth century; a very interesting class of persons, but, except Condillac, Hume, and Berkeley, scarcely metaphysicians. As for his politics, Hazlitt seems to me to have had no clear political creed at all. He hated something called "the hag legitimacy," but for the hag despotism, in the

person of Bonaparte, he had nothing but love. How any one possessed of brains could combine Liberty and the first Napoleon in one common worship is, I confess, a mystery too great for me; and I fear that any one who could call "Jupiter Scapin" "the greatest man who ever lived," must be entirely blind to such constituents of greatness as justice, mercy, chivalry, and all that makes a gentleman. Indeed, I am afraid that "gentleman" is exactly what cannot be predicated of Hazlitt. No gentleman could have published the *Liber Amoris*, not at all because of its so-called voluptuousness, but because of its shameless kissing and telling. But the most curious example of Hazlitt's weaknesses is the language he uses in regard to those men with whom he had both political and literary differences. That he had provocation in some cases (he had absolutely none from Sir Walter Scott) is perfectly true. But what provocation will excuse such things as the following, all taken from one book, the *Spirit of the Age*? He speaks of Scott's "zeal to restore the spirit of loyalty, of passive obedience, and of non-resistance," as an acknowledgment for his having been "created a baronet by a prince of the House of Brunswick." Alas for dates and circumstances, for times and seasons, when they stand in the way of a fling of Hazlitt's! In the character of Scott himself an entire page and a half is devoted to an elaborate peroration in one huge sentence, denouncing him in such terms as "pettifoggery," "littleness," "pique," "secret and envenomed blows," "slime of rankling malice and mercenary scorn," "trammels of servility," "lies," "garbage," etc. etc. The Duke of Wellington he always speaks of as a brainless noodle, forgetting apparently that the description does not make his idol's defeat more creditable to the vanquished. As for the character of Gifford, and the earlier "Letter to Gifford," I should have to print them entire to show the state of Hazlitt's mind in regard to this notorious, and certainly not very amiable person. His own words, "the dotage of age and the fury of a woman," form the best short description of both. He screams, he foams at the mouth, he gnashes and tears and kicks, rather than fights. Nor is it only on living authors and living persons (as some of his unfavourable critics have said) that he exercises his spleen. His remarks on Burke (*Round Table*, p. 150) suggest temporary insanity. Sir Philip Sidney (as Lamb, a perfectly impartial person who had no politics at all, pointed out) was a kind of representative of the courtly monarchist school in literature. So down must Sir Philip go; and not only the *Arcadia*, that "vain and amatorious poem" which Milton condemned, but the sonnets which one would have thought such a lover of poetry as Hazlitt must have spared, go down also before his remorseless bludgeon. But there is no need to say any more of these faults of his, and there is no need to say much of another and more purely literary fault with which he has been charged—the fault of excessive quotation. In him the error lies rather in the constant repetition of the same, than in a too great multitude of different borrowings. Almost priding himself on limited study, and (as he tells us) very rarely reading his own work after it was printed, he has certainly abused his right of press most damnably in some cases. "Dry as a remainder biscuit," and "of no mark or likelihood," occur to me as the most constantly recurrent tags; but there are many others.

These various drawbacks, however, only set off the merits which almost every lover of literature must perceive in him. In most writers, in all save the very greatest, we look for one or two, or for a few special faculties and capacities, and we know perfectly well that other (generally many other) capacities and faculties will not be found in them at all. We do not dream of finding rollicking mirth in Milton, or gorgeous embroidery of style in Swift, or unadorned simplicity in Browne. But in Hazlitt you may find something of almost everything, except the finer kinds of wit and humour; to which last, however, he makes a certain side-approach by dint of his appreciation of the irony of Nature and Fate. Almost every other grace of matter and form that can be found in prose may be found at times in his. He is generally thought of as, and for the most part is, a rather plain and straightforward writer, with few tricks and frounces of phrase and style. Yet most of the fine writing of these latter days is but as crumpled tarlatan or brocaded satin beside the passage on Coleridge in the *English Poets*, or the description of Winterslow and its neighbourhood in the "Farewell to Essay-writing," or "On a Landscape of Nicolas Poussin" in the *Table-Talk*. Read these pieces and nothing else, and an excusable impression might be given that the writer was nothing if not florid. But turn over a dozen pages, and the most admirable examples of the grave and simple manner occur. He is an inveterate quoter, yet few men are more original. No man is his superior in lively, gossiping description, yet he could, within his limits, reason closely and expound admirably. It is, indeed, almost always necessary, when he condemns anything, to inquire very carefully as to the reasons of the condemnation. But nothing that he likes (except Napoleon) is ever bad: everything that he praises will repay the right man who, at the right time, examines it to see for what Hazlitt likes it. I have, for my part, no doubt that Miss Sarah Walker was a very engaging young woman; but (though the witness is the same) I have the gravest doubts as to Hazlitt's charges against her.



We shall find this same curious difference everywhere in Hazlitt. He has been talking, for instance, with keen relish of the "Conversation of Authors" (it is he, be it remembered, who has handed down to us the immortal debate at one of Lamb's Wednesdays on "People one would Like to have Seen"), and saying excellent things about it. Then he changes the key, and tells us that the conversation of "Gentlemen and Men of Fashion" will not do. Perhaps not; but the wicked critic stops and asks himself whether Hazlitt had known much of the conversation of "Gentlemen and Men of Fashion"? We can find no record of any such experiences of his. In his youth he had no opportunity: in his middle age he was notoriously recalcitrant to all the usages of society, would not dress, and scarcely ever dined out except with a few cronies. This does not seem to be the best qualification for a pronouncement on the question. Yet this same essay is full of admirable things, the most admirable being, perhaps, the description of the man who "had you at an advantage by never understanding you." I find, indeed, in looking through my copies of his books, re-read for the purpose of this paper, an innumerable and bewildering multitude of essays, of passages, and of short phrases, marked for reference. In the seven volumes above referred to (to which, as has been said, not a little has to be added) there must be hundreds of separate articles and conversations; not counting as separate the short maxims and thoughts of the Characteristics, and one or two other similar collections, in which, indeed, several passages are duplicated from the Essays. At least two out of every three are characteristic of Hazlitt: not one in any twenty is not well worth reading and, if occasion served, commenting on. They are, indeed, as far from being consecutive as (according to the Yankee) was the conversation of Edgar Poe; and the multitude and diversity of their subjects fit them better for occasional than for continuous reading. Perhaps, if any single volume deserves to be recommended to a beginner in Hazlitt it had better be *The Plain Speaker*, where there is the greatest range of subject, and where the author is seen in an almost complete repertory of his numerous parts. But there is not much to choose between it and *The Round Table* (where, however, the papers are shorter as a rule), *Table-Talk*, and the volume called, though not by the author, *Sketches and Essays*. I myself care considerably less for the *Conversations with Northcote*, the personal element in which has often attracted readers; and the attempts referred to above as *Characteristics*, avowedly in the manner of *La Rochefoucauld*, are sometimes merely extracts from the essays, and rarely have the self-containedness, the exact and chiselled proportion, which distinguishes the true *pensée* as *La Rochefoucauld* and some other Frenchmen, and as *Hobbes* perhaps alone of Englishmen, wrote it. But to criticise these numerous papers is like sifting a cluster of motes, and the mere enumeration of their titles would fill up more than half the room which I have to spare. They must be criticised or characterised in two groups only, the strictly critical and the miscellaneous, the latter excluding politics. As for art, I do not pretend to be more than a connoisseur according to *Blake's* definition, that is to say, one who refuses to let himself be connoisseed out of his senses. I shall only, in reference to this last subject, observe that the singularly germinal character of Hazlitt's work is noticeable here also; for no one who reads the essay on *Nicolas Poussin* will fail to add *Mr. Ruskin* to Hazlitt's fair herd of literary children.

His criticism is scattered through all the volumes of general essays; but is found by itself in the series of lectures, or essays (they are rather the latter than the former), on the characters of *Shakespeare*, on *Elizabethan Literature*, on the *English Poets*, and on the *English Comic Writers*. I cannot myself help thinking that in these four Hazlitt is at his best; though there may be nothing so attractive to the general, and few such brilliant passages as may be found in the "Farewell to Essay-writing," in the paper on *Poussin*, in "Going to a Fight," in "Going a Journey," and others of the same class. The reason of the preference is by no means a greater interest in the subject of one class, than in the subject of another. It is that, from the very nature of the case, Hazlitt's unlucky prejudices interfere much more seldom with his literary work. They interfere sometimes, as in the case of *Sidney*, as in some remarks about *Coleridge* and *Wordsworth*, and elsewhere; but these instances are rare indeed compared with those that occur in the other division. On the other hand, there are always present Hazlitt's enthusiastic appreciation of what is good in letters, his combination of gusto with sound theory as to what is excellent in prose and verse, his felicitous method of expression, and the acuteness that kept him from that excessive and paradoxical admiration which both *Lamb* and *Coleridge* affected, and which has gained many more pupils than his own moderation. Nothing better has ever been written as a general view of the subject than his introduction to his *Lectures on Elizabethan Literature*; and almost all the faults to be found in it are due merely to occasional deficiency of information, not to error of judgment. He is a little paradoxical on *Jonson*; but not many critics could furnish a happier contrast than his enthusiastic praise of certain passages of *Beaumont* and *Fletcher*, and his cool toning down of *Lamb's* extravagant eulogy on *Ford*. He is a little unfair to the

Caroline poets; but here the great disturbing influence comes in. If his comparison of ancient and modern literature is rather weak, that is because Hazlitt was anything but widely acquainted with either; and, indeed, it may be said in general that wherever he goes wrong, it is not because he judges wrongly on known facts, but because he either does not know the facts, or is prevented from seeing them by distractions of prejudice. To go through his Characters of Shakespeare would be impossible, and besides, it is a point of honour for one student of Shakespeare to differ with all others. I can only say that I know no critic with whom on this point I differ so seldom as with Hazlitt. Even better, perhaps, are the two sets of lectures on the Poets and Comic Writers. The generalisations are not always sound, for, as must be constantly repeated, Hazlitt was not widely read in literatures other than his own, and his standpoint for comparison is therefore rather insufficient. But take him where his information is sufficient, and how good he is! Of the famous four treatments of the dramatists of the Restoration—Lamb's, Hazlitt's, Leigh Hunt's, and Macaulay's—his seems to me by far the best. In regard to Butler, his critical sense has for once triumphed over his political prejudice; unless some very unkind devil's advocate should suggest that the supposed ingratitude of the King to Butler reconciled Hazlitt to him. He is admirable on Burns; and nothing can be more unjust or sillier than to pretend, as has been pretended, that Burns's loose morality engaged Hazlitt on his side. De Quincey was often a very acute critic, but anything more uncritical than his attack on Hazlitt's comparison of Burns and Wordsworth in relation to passion, it would be difficult to find. Hazlitt "could forgive Swift for being a Tory," he tells us—which is at any rate more than some other people, who have a better reputation for impartiality than his, seem to have been able to do. No one has written better than he on Pope, who still seems to have the faculty of distorting some critical judgments. His chapter on the English novelists (that is to say, those of the last century) is perhaps the best thing ever written on the subject; and is particularly valuable nowadays when there is a certain tendency to undervalue Smollett in order to exalt Fielding, who certainly needs no such illegitimate and uncritical leverage. I do not think that he is, on the whole, unjust to Campbell; though his Gallican, or rather Napoleonic mania made him commit the literary crime of slighting "The Battle of the Baltic." But in all his criticism of English literature (and he has attempted little else, except by way of digression) he is, for the critic, a study never to be wearied of, always to be profited by. His very aberrations are often more instructive than other men's right-goings; and if he sometimes fails to detect or acknowledge a beauty, he never praises a defect.

It is less easy to sum up the merits of the miscellaneous pieces, for the very obvious reason that they can hardly be brought under any general form or illustrated by any small number of typical instances. Perhaps the best way of "sampling" this undisciplined multitude is to select a few papers by name, so as to show the variety of Hazlitt's interests. The one already mentioned, "On Going to a Fight," which shocked some proprietaries even in its own day, ranks almost first; but the reader should take care to accompany it with the official record of that celebrated contest between Neate and the Gasman. All fights are good reading; but this particular effort of Hazlitt's makes one sigh for a *Boxiana* or *Pugilistica* edited by him. Next, I think, must be ranked "On Going a Journey," with its fine appreciation of solitary travelling which does not exclude reminiscences of pleasant journeys in company. But these two, with the article on Poussin and the "Farewell to Essay-writing," have been so often mentioned that it may seem as if Hazlitt's store were otherwise poor. Nothing could be farther from the truth. The "Character of Cobbett" is the best thing the writer ever did of the kind, and the best thing known to me on Cobbett. "Of the Past and the Future" is perhaps the height of the popular metaphysical style—the style from which, as was noted, Hazlitt may never have got free as far as philosophising is concerned, but of which he is a master. "On the Indian Jugglers" is a capital example of what may be called improving a text; and it contains some of the most interesting and genial examples of Hazlitt's honest delight in games such as rackets and fives, a delight which (heaven help his critics) was frequently regarded at the time as "low." "On Paradox and Commonplace" is less remarkable for its contribution to the discussion of the subject, than as exhibiting one of Hazlitt's most curious critical megrims—his dislike of Shelley. I wish I could think that he had any better reason for this than the fact that Shelley was a gentleman by birth and his own contemporary. Most disappointing of all, perhaps, is "On Criticism," which the reader (as his prophetic soul, if he is a sensible reader, has probably warned him beforehand) soon finds to be little but an open or covert diatribe against the contemporary critics whom Hazlitt did not like, or who did not like Hazlitt. The apparently promising "On the Knowledge of Character" chiefly yields the remark that Hazlitt could not have admired Cæsar if he had resembled (in face) the Duke of Wellington. But "My first Acquaintance with Poets" is again a masterpiece; and to me, at least, "Merry England" is perfect. Hazlitt is almost the only person up to his own day who dared to vindicate the claims of nonsense, though he seems to have talked and written as little of it

as most men. The chapter "On Editors" is very amusing, though perhaps not entirely in the way in which Hazlitt meant it; but I cannot think him happy "On Footmen," or on "The Conversation of Lords," for reasons already sufficiently stated. A sun-dial is a much more promising subject than a broomstick, yet many essays might be written on sun-dials without there being any fear of Hazlitt's being surpassed. Better still is "On Taste," which, if the twenty or thirty best papers in Hazlitt were collected (and a most charming volume they would make), would rank among the very best. "On Reading New Books" contains excellent sense, but perhaps is, as Hazlitt not seldom is, a little deficient in humour; while the absence of any necessity for humour makes the discussion "Whether Belief is Voluntary" a capital one. Hazlitt is not wholly of the opinion of that Ebrew Jew who said to M. Renan, "On fait ce qu'on veut mais on croit ce qu'on peut."

The shorter papers of the Round Table yield perhaps a little less freely in the way of specially notable examples. They come closer to a certain kind of Addisonian essay, a short lay-sermon, without the charming divagation of the longer articles. To see how nearly Hazlitt can reach the level of a rather older and cleverer George Osborne, turn to the paper here on Classical Education. He is quite orthodox for a wonder: perhaps because opinion was beginning to veer a little to the side of Useful Knowledge; but he is as dry as his own favourite biscuit, and as guiltless of freshness. He is best in this volume where he notes particular points such as Kean's Iago, Milton's versification (here, however, he does not get quite to the heart of the matter), "John Bunche," and "The Excursion." In this last he far outsteps the scanty confines of the earlier papers of the Round Table, and allows himself that score of pages which seems to be with so many men the normal limit of a good essay. Of his shortest style one sample from "Trifles light as Air" is so characteristic, in more ways than one, that it must be quoted whole. I am by education and conviction inclined to Republicanism and Puritanism. In America they have both. But I confess I feel a little staggered as to the practical efficacy and saving grace of first principles, when I ask myself, Can they throughout the United States from Boston to Baltimore, produce a single head like one of Titian's Venetian Nobles, nurtured in all the pride of aristocracy and all the blindness of popery? Of all the branches of political economy the human face is perhaps the best criterion of value. If I were editing Hazlitt's works I should put these sentences on the title-page of every volume; for, dogmatist as he thought himself, it is certain that he was in reality purely æsthetic, though, I need hardly say, not in the absurd sense, or no-sense, which modern misuse of language has chosen to fix on the word. Therefore he is very good (where few are good at all) on Dreams; and, being a great observer of himself, singularly instructive on Application to Study. "On Londoners and Country People" is one of his liveliest efforts; and the pique at his own inclusion in the Cockney School fortunately evaporates in some delightful reminiscences, including one of the few classic passages on the great game of marbles. His remarks on the company at the Southampton coffee-house, which have been often and much praised, please me less: they are too much like attempts in the manner of the Queen Anne men, and Hazlitt is always best when he imitates nobody. "Hot and Cold" (which might have been more intelligibly called "North and South") is distinctly curious, bringing out again what may be called Hazlitt's fanciful observation; and it may generally be said that, however alarming and however suggestive of commonplace the titles "On Respectable People," "On People of Sense," "On Novelty and Familiarity," may be, Hazlitt may almost invariably be trusted to produce something that is not commonplace, that is not laboured paradox, that is eminently literature.

I know that a haphazard catalogue of the titles of essays (for it is little more) such as fills the last paragraph or two may not seem very succulent. But within moderate space there is really no other means of indicating the author's extraordinary range of subject, and at the same time the pervading excellence of his treatment. To exemplify a difference which has sometimes been thought to require explanation, his work as regards system, connection with anything else, immediate occasion (which with him was generally what his friend, Mr. Skimpole, would have called "pounds") is always Journalism: in result, it is almost always Literature. Its staple subjects, as far as there can be said to be any staple where the thread is so various, are very much those which the average newspaper-writer since his time has had to deal with—politics, book-reviewing, criticism on plays and pictures, social etceteras, the minor morals, the miscellaneous incidents of daily life. It is true that Hazlitt was only for a short time in the straitest shafts, the most galling traces, of periodical hack-work. His practice was rather that of George Warrington, who worked till he had filled his purse, and then lay idle till he had emptied it. He used (an indulgence agreeable in the mouth, but bitter in the belly) very frequently to receive money beforehand for work which was not yet done. Although anything but careful, he was never an extravagant man, his tastes being for the most part simple; and he never, even

during his first married life, seems to have been burdened by an expensive household. Moreover, he got rid of Mrs. Hazlitt on very easy terms. Still he must constantly have had on him the sensation that he lived by his work, and by that only. It seems to be (as far as one can make it out) this sensation which more than anything else jades and tires what some very metaphorical men of letters are pleased to call their Pegasus. But Hazlitt, though he served in the shafts, shows little trace of the harness. He has frequent small carelessnesses of style, but he would probably have had as many or more if he had been the easiest and gentlest of easy-writing gentlemen. He never seems to have allowed himself to be cramped in his choice of his subjects, and wrote for the editors, of whom he speaks so amusingly, with almost as much freedom of speech as if he had had a private press of his own, and had issued dainty little tractates on Dutch paper to be fought for by bibliophiles. His prejudices, his desultoriness, his occasional lack of correctness of fact (he speaks of "Fontaine's Translation" of Æsop, and makes use of the extraordinary phrase, "The whole Council of Trent with Father Paul at their head," than which a more curious blunder is hardly conceivable), his wayward inconsistencies, his freaks of bad taste, would in all probability have been aggravated rather than alleviated by the greater freedom and less responsibility of an independent or an endowed student. The fact is that he was a born man of letters, and that he could not help turning whatsoever he touched into literature, whether it was criticism on books or on pictures, a fight or a supper, a game at marbles, a political diatribe, or the report of a literary conversation. He doubtless had favourite subjects; but I do not know that it can be said that he treated one class of subjects better than another, with the exception that I must hold him to have been first of all a literary critic. He certainly could not write a work of great length; for the faults of his *Life of Napoleon* are grave even when its view of the subject is taken as undisputed, and it holds among his productions about the same place (that of longest and worst) which the book it was designed to counterwork holds among Scott's. Nor was he, as it seems to me, quite at home in very short papers—in papers of the length of the average newspaper article. What he could do, as hardly any other man has ever done it in England, was a causerie of about the same length as Sainte-Beuve's or a little shorter, less limited in range, but also less artfully proportioned than the great Frenchman's literary and historical studies, giving scope for considerable digression, but coming to an end before the author was wearied of his subject, or had exhausted the fresh thoughts and the happy borrowings and analogies which he had ready for it. Of what is rather affectedly called "architectonic," Hazlitt has nothing. No essay of his is ever an exhaustive or even a symmetrical treatment of its nominal, or of any, theme. He somewhere speaks of himself as finding it easy to go on stringing pearls when he has once got the string; but, for my part, I should say that the string was much more doubtful than the pearls. Except in a very few set pieces, his whole charm consists in the succession of irregular, half-connected, but unending and infinitely variegated thoughts, fancies, phrases, quotations, which he pours forth not merely at a particular "Open Sesame," but at "Open barley," "Open rye," or any other grain in the corn-chandler's list. No doubt the charm of these is increased by the fact that they are never quite haphazard, never absolutely promiscuous, despite their desultory arrangement; no doubt also a certain additional interest arises from the constant revelation which they make of Hazlitt's curious personality, his enthusiastic appreciation flecked with spots of grudging spite, his clear intellect clouded with prejudice, his admiration of greatness and nobility of character co-existing with the faculty of doing very mean and even disgraceful things, his abundant relish of life contrasted with almost constant repining. He must have been one of the most uncomfortable of all English men of letters, who can be called great, to know as a friend. He is certainly, to those who know him only as readers, one of the most fruitful both in instruction and in delight.

## VI

### MOORE

It would be interesting, though perhaps a little impertinent, to put to any given number of well-informed persons under the age of forty or fifty the sudden query, who was Thomas Brown the Younger? And it is very possible that a majority of them would answer that he had something to do with Rugby. It is certain that with respect to that part of his work in which he was pleased so to call himself, Moore is but little known. The considerable mass of his hack-work has gone whither all hack-work goes, fortunately enough for those of us who have to do it. The vast monument erected to him by his pupil, friend, and literary executor, Lord Russell, or rather Lord John Russell, is a monument of such a Cyclopean order of architecture, both in respect of bulk and in respect of style, that most honest biographers and critics

acknowledge themselves to have explored its recesses but cursorily. Less of him, even as a poet proper, is now read than of any of the brilliant group of poets of which he was one, with the possible exceptions of Crabbe and Rogers; while, more unfortunate than Crabbe, he has had no Mr. Courthope to come to his rescue. But he has recently had what is an unusual thing for an English poet, a French biographer. I shall not have very much to say of the details of M. Vallat's very creditable and useful monograph. It would be possible, if I were merely reviewing it, to pick out some of the curious errors of hasty deduction which are rarely wanting in a book of its nationality. If (and no shame to him) Moore's father sold cheese and whisky, le whisky d'Irlande was no doubt his staple commodity in the one branch, but scarcely le fromage de Stilton in the other. An English lawyer's studies are not even now, except at the universities and for purposes of perfunctory examination, very much in "Justinian," and in Moore's time they were still less so. And if Bromham Church is near Sloperton, then it will follow as the night the day that it is not dans le Bedfordshire. But these things matter very little. They are found, in their different kinds, in all books; and if we English bookmakers (at least some of us) are not likely to make a Bordeaux wine merchant sell Burgundy as his chief commodity, or say that a village near Amiens is dans le Béarn, we no doubt do other things quite as bad. On the whole, M. Vallat's sketch, though of moderate length, is quite the soberest and most trustworthy sketch of Moore's life and of his books, as books merely, that I know. In matters of pure criticism M. Vallat is less blameless. He quotes authorities with that apparent indifference to, or even ignorance of, their relative value which is so yawning a pit for the feet of the foreigner in all cases; and perhaps a wider knowledge of English poetry in general would have been a better preparation for the study of Moore's in particular. "Never," says M. Renan very wisely, "never does a foreigner satisfy the nation whose history he writes"; and this is as true of literary history as of history proper. But M. Vallat satisfies us in a very considerable degree; and even putting aside the question whether he is satisfactory altogether, he has given us quite sufficient text in the mere fact that he has bestowed upon Moore an amount of attention and competence which no compatriot of the author of "Lalla Rookh" has cared to bestow for many years.

I shall also here take the liberty of neglecting a very great—as far as bulk goes, by far the greatest—part of Moore's own performance. He has inserted so many interesting autobiographical particulars in the prefaces to his complete works, that visits to the great mausoleum of the Russell memoirs are rarely necessary, and still more rarely profitable. His work for the booksellers was done at a time when the best class of such work was much better done than the best class of it is now; but it was after all work for the booksellers. His History of Ireland, his Life of Lord Edward Fitzgerald, etc., may be pretty exactly gauged by saying that they are a good deal better than Scott's work of a merely similar kind (in which it is hardly necessary to say that I do not include the Tales of a Grandfather or the introductions to the Dryden, the Swift, and the Ballantyne novels), not nearly so good as Southey's, and not quite so good as Campbell's. The Life of Byron holds a different place. With the poems, or some of them, it forms the only part of Moore's literary work which is still read; and though it is read much more for its substance than for its execution, it is still a masterly performance of a very difficult task. The circumstances which brought it about are well known, and no discussion of them would be possible without plunging into the Byron controversy generally, which the present writer most distinctly declines to do. But these circumstances, with other things among which Moore's own comparative faculty for the business may be not unjustly mentioned, prevent it from taking rank at all approaching that of Boswell's or Lockhart's inimitable biographies. The chief thing to note in it as regards Moore himself, is the help it gives in a matter to which we shall have to refer again, his attitude towards those whom his time still called "the great."

And so we are left with the poems—not an inconsiderable companion seeing that its stature is some seven hundred small quarto pages closely packed with verses in double columns. Part of this volume is, however, devoted to the "Epicurean," a not unremarkable example of ornate prose in many respects resembling the author's verse. Indeed, as close readers of Moore know, there exists an unfinished verse form of it which, in style and general character, is not unlike a more serious "Lalla Rookh." As far as poetry goes, almost everything that will be said of "Lalla Rookh" might be said of "Alciphron": this latter, however, is a little more Byronic than its more famous sister, and in that respect not quite so successful. Moore's life, which is not uninteresting as a key to his personal character, is very fairly treated by M. Vallat, chiefly from the poet's own authority; but it need not detain us very long. He was born at Dublin on 28th May 1779. There is no mystery about his origin. His father, John Moore, was a small grocer and liquor-shop keeper who received later the place of barrack-master from a patron of his son. The mother, Anastasia Codd, was a

Wexford girl, and seems to have been well educated and somewhat above her husband in station. Thomas was sent to several private schools, where he appears to have attained to some scholarship and to have early practised composition in the tongue of the hated Saxon. When he was fourteen, the first measure of Catholic Emancipation opened Trinity College to him, and that establishment, "the intellectual eye of Ireland" as Sir William Harcourt has justly called it, received him a year later. The "silent sister" has fostered an always genial, if sometimes inexact, fashion of scholarship, in which Moore's talents were well suited to shine, and a pleasant social atmosphere wherein he was also not misplaced. But the time drew near to '98, and Moore, although he had always too much good sense to dip deeply into sedition, was, from his sentimental habits, likely to run some risk of being thought to have dipped in it. Although it is certain that he would have regarded what is called Nationalism in our days with disgust and horror, he cannot be acquitted of using, to the end of his life, the loosest of language on subjects where precision is particularly to be desired. Robert Emmet was his contemporary, and the action which the authorities took was but too well justified by the outbreak of the insurrection later. A Commission was named for purifying the college. Its head was Lord Clare, one of the greatest of Irishmen, the base or ignorant vilifying of whom by some persons in these days has been one of the worst results of the Home Rule movement. It had a rather comic assessor in Dr. Duigenan, the same, I believe, of whom it has been recorded that, at an earlier stage of his academic career and when a{176} junior Fellow, he threatened to "bulge the Provost's eye." The oath was tendered to each examinee, and on the day before Moore's appearance Emmet and others had gone by default, while it was at least whispered that there had been treachery in the camp. Moore's own performance was, by his own account, heroic and successful: by another, which he very fairly gives, a little less heroic but still successful. Both show clearly that Clare was nothing like the stage-tyrant which the imagination of the seditious has chosen to represent him as being. That M. Vallat should talk rather foolishly about Emmet was to be expected; for Emmet's rhetorical rubbish was sure to impose, and has always imposed, on Frenchmen. The truth of course is that this young person—though one of those whom every humane man would like to keep mewed up till they arrived, if they ever did arrive, which is improbable, at years of discretion—was one of the most mischievous of agitators. He was one of those who light a bonfire and then are shocked at its burning, who throw a kingdom into anarchy and misery and think that they are cleared by a reference to Harmodius and Aristogeiton. It is one of the most fearful delights of the educated Tory to remember what the grievance of Harmodius and Aristogeiton really was. Moore (who had something of the folly of Emmet, but none of his reckless conceit) escaped, and his family must have been exceedingly glad to send him over to the Isle of Britain. He entered at the Middle Temple in 1799, but hardly made even a pretence of reading law. His actual experience is one of those puzzles which continually meet the student of literary history in the days when society was much smaller, the makers of literature fewer, and the resources of patronage greater. Moore toiled not, neither did he spin. He slipped, apparently on the mere strength of an ordinary introduction, into the good graces of Lord Moira, who introduced him to the exiled Royal Family of France, and to the richest members of the Whig aristocracy—the Duke of Bedford, the Marquis of Lansdowne and others, not to mention the Prince of Wales himself. The young Irishman had indeed, as usual, his "proposals" in his pocket—proposals for a translation of Anacreon which appeared in May 1800. The thing which thus founded one of the easiest, if not the most wholly triumphant, of literary careers is not a bad thing. The original, now abandoned as a clever though late imitation, was known even in Moore's time to be in parts of very doubtful authenticity, but it still remains, as an original, a very pretty thing. Moore's version is not quite so pretty, and is bolstered out with paraphrase and amplification to a rather intolerable extent. But there was considerable fellow-feeling between the author, whoever he was, and the translator, and the result is not despicable. Still there is no doubt that work as good or better might appear now, and the author would be lucky if he cleared a hundred pounds and a favourable review or two by the transaction. Moore was made for life. These things happen at one time and do not happen at another. We are inclined to accept them as ultimate facts into which it is useless to inquire. There does not appear to be among the numerous fixed laws of the universe any one which regulates the proportion of literary desert to immediate reward, and it is on the whole well that it should be so. At any rate the publication increased Moore's claims as a "lion," and encouraged him to publish next year the Poems of the late Thomas Little (he always stuck to the Christian name), which put up his fame and rather put down his character.

In later editions Thomas Little has been so much subjected to the fig-leaf and knife that we have known readers who wondered why on earth any one should ever have objected to him. He was a good deal more uncastrated originally, but there never was much harm in him. It is true that the excuse made by Sterne for

Tristram Shandy, and often repeated for Moore, does not quite apply. There is not much guilt in Little, but there is certainly very little innocence. He knows that a certain amount of not too gross indecency will raise a snigger, and, like Voltaire and Sterne himself, he sets himself to raise it. But he does not do it very wickedly. The propriety of the nineteenth century, moreover, had not then made the surprisingly rapid strides of a few years later, and some time had to pass before Moore was to go out with Jeffrey, and nearly challenge Byron, for questioning his morality. The rewards of his harmless iniquity were at hand; and in the autumn of 1803 he was made Secretary of the Admiralty in Bermuda. Bermuda, it is said, is an exceedingly pleasant place; but either there is no Secretary of the Admiralty there now, or they do not give the post to young men four-and-twenty years old who have written two very thin volumes of light verses. The Bermoothes are not still vexed with that kind of Civil Servant. The appointment was not altogether fortunate for Moore, inasmuch as his deputy (for they not only gave nice berths to men of letters then, but let them have deputies) embezzled public and private moneys, with disastrous results to his easy-going principal. But for the time it was all, as most things were with Moore, plain sailing. He went out in a frigate, and was the delight of the gun-room. As soon as he got tired of the Bermudas, he appointed his deputy and went to travel in America, composing large numbers of easy poems. In October 1804 he was back in England, still voyaging at His Majesty's expense, and having achieved his fifteen months' trip wholly on those terms. Little is heard of him for the next two years, and then the publication of his American and other poems, with some free reflections on the American character, brought down on him the wrath of The Edinburgh, and provoked the famous leadless or half-leadless duel at Chalk Farm. It was rather hard on Moore, if the real cause of his castigation was that he had offended democratic principles, while the ostensible cause was that, as Thomas Little, he had five years before written loose and humorous verses. So thinks M. Vallat, with whom we are not wholly disposed to agree, for Jeffrey, though a Whig, was no Democrat, and he was a rather strict moralist. However, no harm came of the meeting in any sense, though its somewhat burlesque termination made the irreverent laugh. It was indeed not fated that Moore should smell serious powder, though his courage seems to have been fully equal to any such occasion. The same year brought him two unquestioned and unalloyed advantages, the friendship of Rogers and the beginning of the Irish Melodies, from which he reaped not a little solid benefit, and which contain by far his highest and most lasting poetry. It is curious, but by no means unexampled, that, at the very time at which he was thus showing that he had found his right way, he also diverged into one wholly wrong—that of the serious and very ineffective Satires, "Corruption," "Intolerance," and others. The year 1809 brought "English Bards and Scotch Reviewers" with a gibe from Byron and a challenge from Moore. But Moore's challenges were fated to have no other result than making the challenged his friends for life. All this time he had been more or less "about town." In 1811 he married Elizabeth Dyke ("Bessy"), an actress of virtue and beauty, and wrote the very inferior comic opera of "The Blue Stocking." Lord Moira gave the pair a home first in his own house, then at Kegworth near Donington, whence they moved to Ashbourne. Moore was busy now. The politics of "The Two-penny Postbag" are of course sometimes dead enough to us; but sometimes also they are not, and then the easy grace of the satire, which is always pungent and never venomous, is not much below Canning. Its author also did a good deal of other work of the same kind, besides beginning to review for The Edinburgh. Considering that he was in a way making his bread and butter by lampooning, however good-humouredly, the ruler of his country, he seems to have been a little unreasonable in feeling shocked that Lord Moira, on going as viceroy to India, did not provide for him. In the first place he was provided for already; and in the second place you cannot reasonably expect to enjoy the pleasures of independence and those of dependence at the same time. At the end of 1817 he left Mayfield (his cottage near Ashbourne) and Lord Moira, for Lord Lansdowne and Sloperton, a cottage near Bowood, the end of the one sojourn and the beginning of the other being distinguished by the appearance of his two best works, next to the Irish Melodies—"Lalla Rookh" and "The Fudge Family at Paris." His first and almost his only heavy stroke of ill-luck now came on him: his deputy at Bermuda levanted with some six thousand pounds, for which Moore was liable. Many friends came to his aid, and after some delay and negotiations, during which he had to go abroad, Lord Lansdowne paid what was necessary. But Moore afterwards paid Lord Lansdowne, which makes a decided distinction between his conduct and that of Theodore Hook in a similar case.

Although the days of Moore lasted for half an ordinary lifetime after this, they saw few important events save the imbroglio over the Byron memoirs. They saw also the composition of a great deal of literature and journalism, all very well paid, notwithstanding which, Moore seems to have been always in a rather unintelligible state of pecuniary distress. That he made his parents an allowance, as some allege in

explanation, will not in the least account for this; for, creditable as it was in him to make it, this allowance did not exceed one hundred pounds a year. He must have spent little in an ordinary way, for his Sloperon establishment was of the most modest character, while his wife was an excellent manager, and never went into society. Probably he might have endorsed, if he had been asked, the great principle which somebody or other has formulated, that the most expensive way of living is staying in other peoples houses. At any rate his condition was rather precarious till 1835, when Lord John Russell and Lord Lansdowne obtained for him a Civil List pension of three hundred pounds a year. In his very last days this was further increased by an additional hundred a year to his wife. His end was not happy. The softening of the brain, which set in about 1848, and which had been preceded for some time by premonitory symptoms, can hardly, as in the cases of Scott and Southey, be set down to overwork, for though Moore had not been idle, his literary life had been mere child's play to theirs. He died on 26th February 1852.

Of Moore's character not much need be said, nor need what is said be otherwise than favourable. Not only to modern tastes, but to the sturdier tastes of his own day, and even of the days immediately before his, there was a little too much of the parasite and the hanger-on about him. It is easy to say that a man of his talents, when he had once obtained a start, might surely have gone his own way and lived his own life, without taking up the position of a kind of superior gamekeeper or steward at rich men's gates. But race, fashion, and a good many other things have to be taken into account; and it is fair to Moore to remember that he was, as it were from the first, bound to the chariot-wheels of "the great," and could hardly liberate himself from them without churlishness and violence. Moreover, it cannot possibly be denied by any fair critic that if he accepted to some extent the awkward position of led-poet, he showed in it as much independence as was compatible with the function. Both in money matters, in his language to his patrons, and in a certain general but indefinable tone of behaviour, he contrasts not less favourably than remarkably, both with the ultra-Tory Hook, to whom we have already compared him, and with the ultra-Radical Leigh Hunt. Moore had as little of Wagg as he had of Skimpole about him; though he allowed his way of life to compare in some respects perilously with theirs. It is only necessary to look at his letters to Byron—always ready enough to treat as spaniels those of his inferiors in station who appeared to be of the spaniel kind—to appreciate his general attitude, and his behaviour in this instance is by no means different from his behaviour in others. As a politician there is no doubt that he at least thought himself to be quite sincere. It may be that, if he had been, his political satires would have galled Tories more than they did then, and could hardly be read by persons of that persuasion with such complete enjoyment as they can now. But the insincerity was quite unconscious, and indeed can hardly be said to have been insincerity at all. Moore had not a political head, and in English as in Irish politics his beliefs were probably not founded on any clearly comprehended principles. But such as they were he held to them firmly. Against his domestic character nobody has ever said anything; and it is sufficient to observe that not a few of the best as well as of the greatest men of his time, Scott as well as Byron, Lord John Russell as well as Lord Moira, appear not only to have admired his abilities and liked his social qualities, but to have sincerely respected his character. And so we may at last find ourselves alone with the plump volume of poems in which we shall hardly discover with the amiable M. Vallat "the greatest lyric poet of England," but in which we shall find a poet certainly, and if not a very great poet, at any rate a poet who has done many things well, and one particular thing better than anybody else.

The volume opens with "Lalla Rookh," a proceeding which, if not justified by chronology, is completely justified by the facts that Moore was to his contemporaries the author of that poem chiefly, and that it is by far the most considerable thing not only in mere bulk, but in arrangement, plan, and style, that he ever did. Perhaps I am not quite a fair judge of "Lalla Rookh." I was brought up in what is called a strict household where, though the rule was not, as far as I can remember, enforced by any penalties, it was a point of honour that in the nursery and school-room none but "Sunday books" should be read on Sunday. But this severity was tempered by one of the easements often occurring in a world which, if not the best, is certainly not the worst of all possible worlds. For the convenience of servants, or for some other reason, the children were much more in the drawing-room on Sundays than on any other day, and it was an unwritten rule that any book that lived in the drawing-room was fit Sunday-reading. The consequence was that from the time I could read, till childish things were put away, I used to spend a considerable part of the first day of the week in reading and re-reading a collection of books, four of which were Scott's poems, "Lalla Rookh," The Essays of Elia (First Edition,—I have got it now), and Southey's Doctor. Therefore it may be that I rank "Lalla Rookh" rather too high. At the same time, I confess that it still seems to me a very respectable



poem indeed of the second rank. Of course it is artificial. The parade of second, or third, or twentieth-hand learning in the notes makes one smile, and the whole reminds one (as I daresay it has reminded many others before) of a harp of the period with the gilt a little tarnished, the ribbons more than a little faded, and the silk stool on which the young woman in ringlets used to sit much worn. All this is easy metaphorical criticism, if it is criticism at all. For I am not sure that, when the last age has got a little farther off from our descendants, they will see anything more ludicrous in such a harp than we see in the faded spinets of a generation earlier still. But much remains to Lalla if not to Feramorz. The prose interludes have lost none of their airy grace. Even Mr. Burnand has not been able to make Mokanna ridiculous, nor have the recent accounts of the actual waste of desert and felt huts banished at least the poetical beauty of "Merou's bright palaces and groves." There are those who laugh at the bower of roses by Bendemeer's stream: I do not. "Paradise and the Peri" is perhaps the prettiest purely sentimental poem that English or any other language can show. "The Fire Worshippers" are rather long, but there is a famous fight—more than one indeed—in them to relieve the monotony. For "The Light of the Harem" alone I have never been able to get up much enthusiasm; but even "The Light of the Harem" is a great deal better than Moore's subsequent attempt in the style of "Lalla Rookh," or something like it, "The Loves of the Angels." There is only one good thing that I can find to say of that: it is not so bad as the poem which similarity of title makes one think of in connection with it—Lamartine's disastrous "Chute d'un Ange."

As "Lalla Rookh" is far the most important of Moore's serious poems, so "The Fudge Family in Paris" is far the best of his humorous poems. I do not forget "The Two-penny Postbag," nor many capital later verses of the same kind, the best of which perhaps is the Epistle from Henry of Exeter to John of Tchume. But "The Fudge Family" has all the merits of these, with a scheme and framework of dramatic character which they lack. Miss Bidy and her vanities, Master Bob and his guttling, the eminent turncoat Phil Fudge, Esq. himself and his politics, are all excellent. But I avow that Phelim Connor is to me the most delightful, though he has always been rather a puzzle. If he is intended to be a satire on the class now represented by the O'Briens and the McCarthys he is exquisite, and it is small wonder that Young Ireland has never loved Moore much. But I do not think that Thomas Brown the Younger meant it, or at least wholly meant it, as satire, and this is perhaps the best proof of his unpractical way of looking at politics. For Phelim Connor is a much more damning sketch than any of the Fudges. Vanity, gluttony, the scheming intrigues of eld, may not be nice things, but they are common to the whole human race. The hollow rant which enjoys the advantages of liberty and declaims against the excesses of tyranny is in its perfection Irish alone. However this may be, these lighter poems of Moore are great fun, and it is no small misfortune that the younger generation of readers pays so little attention to them. For they are full of acute observation of manners, politics, and society by an accomplished man of the world, put into pointed and notable form by an accomplished man of letters. Our fathers knew them well, and many a quotation familiar enough at second hand is due originally to the Fudge Family in their second appearance (not so good, but still good) many years later, to "The Two-penny Postbag" and to the long list of miscellaneous satires and skits. The last sentence is however to be taken as most strictly excluding "Corruption," "Intolerance," and "The Sceptic." "Rhymes on the Road," travel-pieces out of Moore's line, may also be mercifully left aside: and "Evenings in Greece;" and "The Summer Fête" (any universal provider would have supplied as good a poem with the supper and the rout-seats) need not delay the critic and will not extraordinarily delight the reader. Not here is Moore's spur of Parnassus to be found.

For that domain of his we must go to the songs which, in extraordinary numbers, make up the whole of the divisions headed Irish Melodies, National Airs, Sacred Songs, Ballads and Songs, and some of the finest of which are found outside these divisions in the longer poems from "Lalla Rookh" downwards. The singular musical melody of these pieces has never been seriously denied by any one, but it seems to be thought, especially nowadays, that because they are musically melodious they are not poetical. It is probably useless to protest against a prejudice which, where it is not due to simple thoughtlessness or to blind following of fashion, argues a certain constitutional defect of the understanding powers. But it may be just necessary to repeat pretty firmly that any one who regards, even with a tincture of contempt, such work (to take various characteristic examples) as Dryden's lyrics, as Shenstone's, as Moore's, as Macaulay's Lays, because he thinks that, if he did not condemn them, his worship of Shakespeare, of Shelley, of Wordsworth would be suspect, is most emphatically not a critic of poetry and not even a catholic lover of it. Which said, let us betake ourselves to seeing what Moore's special virtue is. It is acknowledged that it consists partly in marrying music most happily to verse; but what is not so fully acknowledged as it ought to be is, that it also

consists in marrying music not merely to verse, but to poetry. Among the more abstract questions of poetical criticism few are more interesting than this, the connection of what may be called musical music with poetical music; and it is one which has not been much discussed. Let us take the two greatest of Moore's own contemporaries in lyric, the two greatest lyrists as some think (I give no opinion on this) in English, and compare their work with his. Shelley has the poetical music in an unsurpassable and sometimes in an almost unapproached degree, but his verse is admittedly very difficult to set to music. I should myself go farther and say that it has in it some indefinable quality antagonistic to such setting. Except the famous Indian Serenade, I do not know any poem of Shelley's that has been set with anything approaching to success, and in the best setting that I know of this the honeymoon of the marriage turns into a "red moon" before long. That this is not merely due to the fact that Shelley likes intricate metres any one who examines Moore can see. That it is due merely to the fact that Shelley, as we know from Peacock, was almost destitute of any ear for music is the obvious and common explanation. But neither will this serve, for we happen also to know that Burns, whose lyric, of a higher quality than Moore's, assorts with music as naturally as Moore's own, was quite as deficient as Shelley in this respect. So was Scott, who could yet write admirable songs to be sung. It seems therefore almost impossible, on the comparison of these three instances, to deny the existence of some peculiar musical music in poetry, which is distinct from poetical music, though it may coexist with it or may be separated from it, and which is independent both of technical musical training and even of what is commonly called "ear" in the poet. That Moore possessed it in probably the highest degree, will I think, hardly be denied. It never seems to have mattered to him whether he wrote the words for the air or altered the air to suit the words. The two fit like a glove, and if, as is sometimes the case, the same or a similar poetical measure is heard set to another air than Moore's, this other always seems intrusive and wrong. He draws attention in one case to the extraordinary irregularity of his own metre (an irregularity to which the average pindaric is a mere jog-trot), yet the air fits it exactly. Of course the two feet which most naturally go to music, the anapæst and the trochee, are commonest with him; but the point is that he seems to find no more difficulty, if he does not take so much pleasure, in setting combinations of a very different kind. Nor is this peculiar gift by any means unimportant from the purely poetical side, the side on which the verse is looked at without any regard to air or accompaniment. For the great drawback to "songs to be sung" in general since Elizabethan days (when, as Mr. Arber and Mr. Bullen have shown, it was very different) has been the constant tendency of the verse-writer to sacrifice to his musical necessities either meaning or poetic sound or both. The climax of this is of course reached in the ineffable balderdash which usually does duty for the libretto of an opera, but it is quite as noticeable in the ordinary songs of the drawing-room. Now Moore is quite free from this blame. He may not have the highest and rarest strokes of poetic expression; but at any rate he seldom or never sins against either reason or poetry for the sake of rhythm and rhyme. He is always themaster not the servant, the artist not the clumsy craftsman. And this I say not by any means as one likely to pardon poetical shortcomings in consideration of musical merit, for, shameful as the confession may be, a little music goes a long way with me; and what music I do like, is rather of the kind opposite to Moore's facile styles. Yet it is easy, even from the musical view, to exaggerate his facility. Berlioz is not generally thought a barrel-organ composer, and he bestowed early and particular pains on Moore.

To many persons, however, the results are more interesting than the analysis of their qualities and principles; so let us go to the songs themselves. To my fancy the three best of Moore's songs, and three of the finest songs in any language, are "Oft in the stilly Night," "When in Death I shall calm recline," and "I saw from the Beach." They all exemplify what has been pointed out above, the complete adaptation of words to music and music to words, coupled with a decidedly high quality of poetical merit in the verse, quite apart from the mere music. It can hardly be necessary to quote them, for they are or ought to be familiar to everybody; but in selecting these three I have no intention of distinguishing them in point of general excellence from scores, nay hundreds of others. "Go where Glory waits thee" is the first of the Irish melodies, and one of those most hackneyed by the enthusiasm of bygone Pogsons. But its merit ought in no way to suffer on that account with persons who are not Pogsons. It ought to be possible for the reader, it is certainly possible for the critic, to dismiss Pogson altogether, to wave Pogson off, and to read anything as if it had never been read before. If this be done we shall hardly wonder at the delight which our fathers, who will not compare altogether badly with ourselves, took in Thomas Moore. "When he who adores thee" is supposed on pretty good evidence to have been inspired by the most hollow and senseless of all pseudo-patriotic delusions, a delusion of which the best thing that can be said is that "the pride of thus dying for" it has been about the last thing that it ever did inspire, and that most persons who have suffered from it have

usually had the good sense to take lucrative places from the tyrant as soon as they could get them, and to live happily ever after. But the basest, the most brutal, and the bloodiest of Saxons may recognise in Moore's poem the expression of a possible, if not a real, feeling given with infinite grace and pathos. The same string reverberates even in the thrice and thousand times hackneyed Harp of Tara. "Rich and rare were the Gems she wore" is chiefly comic opera, but it is very pretty comic opera; and the two pieces "There is not in the wide world" and "How dear to me" exemplify, for the first but by no means for the last time, Moore's extraordinary command of the last phase of that curious thing called by the century that gave him birth Sensibility. We have turned Sensibility out of doors; but he would be a rash man who should say that we have not let in seven worse devils of the gushing kind in her comparatively innocent room.

Then we may skip not a few pieces, only referring once more to "The Legacy" ("When in Death I shall calm recline"), an anacreontic quite unsurpassable in its own kind. We need dwell but briefly on such pieces as "Believe me if all those endearing young Charms," which is typical of much that Moore wrote, but does not reach the true devil-may-care note of Suckling, or as "By the Hope within us springing," for Moore's war-like pieces are seldom or never good. But with "Love's Young Dream" we come back to the style of which it is impossible to say less than that it is quite admirable in its kind. Then after a page or two we come to the chief cruces of Moore's pathetic and of his comic manner, "The Last Rose of Summer," "The Young May Moon," and "The Minstrel Boy." I cannot say very much for the last, which is tainted with the unreality of all Moore's Tyrtean efforts; but "The Young May Moon" could not be better, and I am not going to abandon the Rose, for all her perfume be something musty—a pot-pourri rose rather than a fresh one. The song of O'Ruark with its altogether fatal climax —  
On our side is virtue and Erin, On theirs is the Saxon and guilt—  
(which carries with it the delightful reflection that it was an Irishman running away with an Irishwoman that occasioned this sweeping moral contrast) must be given up; but surely not so "Oh had we some bright little Isle of our own." For indeed if one only had some bright little isle of that kind, some rive fidèle où l'on aime toujours, and where things in general are adjusted to such a state, then would Thomas Moore be the Laureate of that bright and tight little island.

But it is alarming to find that we have not yet got through twenty-five pages out of some hundred or two, and that the Irish Melodies are not yet nearly exhausted. Not a few of the best known of Moore's songs, including "Oft in the stilly Night," are to be found in the division of National Airs, which is as a whole a triumph of that extraordinary genius for setting which has been already noticed. Here is "Flow on thou shining River," here the capital "When I touch the String," on which Thackeray loved to make variations. But "Oft in the stilly Night" itself is far above the others. We do not say "stilly" now: we have been taught by Coleridge (who used to use it freely himself before he laughed at it) to laugh at "stilly" and "paly" and so forth. But the most acrimonious critic may be challenged to point out another weakness of the same kind, and on the whole the straightforward simplicity of the phrase equals the melody of the rhythm.

The Sacred Songs need not delay us long; for they are not better than sacred songs in general, which is saying remarkably little. Perhaps the most interesting thing in them is the well-known couplet,

This world is but a fleeting show  
For man's illusion given—

which, as has justly been observed, contains one of the most singular estimates of the divine purpose anywhere to be found. But Moore might, like Mr. Midshipman Easy, have excused himself by remarking, "Ah! well, I don't understand these things." The miscellaneous division of Ballads, Songs, etc., is much more fruitful. "The Leaf and the Fountain," beginning "Tell me, kind seer, I pray thee," though rather long, is singularly good of its kind—the kind of half-narrative ballad. So in a lighter strain is "The Indian Bark." Nor is Moore less at home after his own fashion in the songs from the Anthology. It is true that the same fault which has been found with his Anacreon may be found here, and that it is all the more sensible because at least in some cases the originals are much higher poetry than the pseudo-Teian. To the form and style of Meleager Moore could not pretend; but as these are rather songs on Greek motives than translations from the Greek, the slackness and dilution matter less. But the strictly miscellaneous division holds some of the best work. We could no doubt dispense with the well-known ditty (for once very nearly the "rubbish" with which Moore is so often and so unjustly charged) where Posada rhymes of necessity to Granada, and where, quite against the author's habit, the ridiculous term "Sultana" is fished out to do similar duty in reference to the Dulcinea, or rather to the Maritornes, of a muleteer. But this is quite an exception, and as a rule the facile verse is as felicitous as it is facile. Perhaps no one stands out very far above the rest; perhaps all have more or less the mark of easy variations on a few well-known themes. The old comparison that they are as numerous as motes, as bright, as fleeting, and as individually insignificant, comes naturally

enough to the mind. But then they are very numerous, they are very bright, and if they are fleeting, their number provides plenty more to take the place of that which passes away. Nor is it by any means true that they lack individual significance.

This enumeration of a few out of many ornaments of Moore's muse will of course irritate those who object to the "brick-of-the-house" mode of criticism; while it may not be minute enough, or sufficiently bolstered by actual quotation, to please those who hold that simple extract is the best, if not the only tolerable form of criticism. But the critic is not alone in finding that, whether he carry his ass or ride upon it, he cannot please all his public. What has been said is probably enough, in the case of a writer whose work, though as a whole rather unjustly forgotten, survives in parts more securely even than the work of greater men, to remind readers of at least the outlines and bases of his claim to esteem. And the more those outlines are followed up, and the structure founded on those bases is examined, the more certain, I think, is Moore of recovering, not the position which M. Vallat would assign to him of the greatest lyricist of England (a position which he never held and never could hold except with very prejudiced or very incompetent judges), not that of the equal of Scott or Byron or Shelley or Wordsworth, but still a position high enough and singularly isolated at its height. Viewed from the point of strictly poetical criticism, he no doubt ranks only with those poets who have expressed easily and acceptably the likings and passions and thoughts and fancies of the average man, and who have expressed these with no extraordinary cunning or witchery. To go further in limitation, the average man, of whom he is thus the bard, is a rather sophisticated average man, without very deep thoughts or feelings, without a very fertile or fresh imagination or fancy, with even a touch—a little touch—of cant and "gush" and other defects incident to average and sophisticated humanity. But this humanity is at any time and every time no small portion of humanity at large, and it is to Moore's credit that he sings its feelings and its thoughts so as always to get the human and durable element in them visible and audible through the "trappings of convention." Again, he has that all-saving touch of humour which enables him, sentimentalist as he is, to be an admirable comedian as well. Yet again, he has at least something of the two qualities which one must demand of a poet who is a poet, and not a mere maker of rhymes. His note of feeling, if not full or deep, is true and real. His faculty of expression is not only considerable, but it is also distinguished; it is a faculty which in the same measure and degree nobody else has possessed. On one side he had the gift of singing those admirable songs of which we have been talking. On the other, he had the gift of right satiric verse to a degree which only three others of the great dead men of this century in England—Canning, Praed, and Thackeray—have reached. Besides all this, he was a "considerable man of letters." But your considerable men of letters, after flourishing, turn to dust in their season, and other considerable or inconsiderable men of letters spring out of it. The true poets and even the true satirists abide, and both as a poet and a satirist Thomas Moore abides and will abide with them.

## VII

### LEIGH HUNT

To compare the peaceful and home-keeping art of criticism to the adventurous one of lighthouse-building may seem an excursion into the heroi-comic, if not into the tragic-burlesque. Neither is it in the least my intention to dwell on a tolerably obvious metaphorical resemblance between the two. It is certainly the business of the critic to warn others off from the mistakes which have been committed by his forerunners, and perhaps (for let us anticipate the crushing wit) from his own. But that is not my reason for the suggestion. There is a story of I forget what lighthouse which Smeaton, or Stevenson, or somebody else, had unusual difficulty in establishing. The rock was too near the surface for it to be safe or practicable to moor barges over it; and it was uncovered for too short a time to enable any solid foundations to be laid or even begun during one tide. So the engineer, with other adventurous persons, got himself landed on it, succeeded after a vain attempt or two in working an iron rod into the middle, and then hung on bodily while the tide was up, that he and his men might begin again as soon as it receded. In a mild and unexciting fashion, that is what the critic has to do—to dig about till he makes a lodgment in his author, hang on to it, and then begin to build. It is not always very easy work, and it is never less easy than in the case of the author whom somebody has kindly called "the Ariel of criticism." Leigh Hunt is an extremely difficult person upon whom to make any critical lodgment, for the reason that (I do not intend any disrespect by the

comparison) he has much less of the rock about him than of the shifting sand. I do not now speak of the great Skimpole problem—we shall come to that presently—but merely of the writer as shown in his works. The works themselves are not particularly easy to get together in any complete form, some of them being almost inextricably entangled in defunct periodicals, and others reappearing in different guises in the author's many published volumes. Mr. Kent's bibliography gives forty-six different entries; Mr. Alexander Ireland's (to which he refers) gives, I think, over eighty. Some years ago I remember receiving the catalogue of a second-hand bookseller who offered what he very frankly confessed to be far from a complete collection of the first editions, at the price of a score or two of pounds; and here at least the first are in some cases the only issues. Probably this is one reason why selections from Leigh Hunt, of which Mr. Kent's is the latest and best, have been frequent. I have seen two certainly, and I think three, within as many years. Luckily, however, quite enough for the reader's if not for the critic's purpose is easily obtainable. The poems can be bought in more forms than one; Messrs. Smith and Elder have reprinted cheaply the "Autobiography," "Men, Women, and Books," "Imagination and Fancy," "The Town," "Wit and Humour," "Table Talk," and "A Jar of Honey." Other reprints of "One Hundred Romances of Real Life" (one of his merest pieces of book-making) and of his "Stories from the Italian Poets," one of his worst pieces of criticism, but agreeably reproduced in every respect save the hideous American spelling, have recently appeared. The complete and uniform issue, the want of which to some lovers of books (I own myself among them) is never quite made up by a scratch company of volumes of all dates, sizes, and prints, is indeed wanting. But still you can get a working Leigh Hunt together.

It is when you have got him that your trouble begins; and before it is done the critic, if he be one of those who are not satisfied with a mere *compte rendu*, is likely to acknowledge that Leigh Hunt, if "Ariel" be in some respects too complimentary a name for him, is at any rate a most tricky spirit. The finest taste in some ways, contrasting with what can only be called the most horrible vulgarity in others; a light hand tediously boring again and again at obviously miscomprehended questions of religion, philosophy, and politics; a keen appetite for humour condescending to thin and repeated jests; a reviler of kings going out of his way laboriously to beslave royalty; a man of letters, of talent almost touching genius, who seldom writes a dozen consecutive good pages:—these are only some of the inconsistencies that meet us in Leigh Hunt. He has related the history of his immediate and remoter forbears with considerable minuteness—with more minuteness indeed by far than he has bestowed upon all but a few passages of his own life. For the general reader, however, it is quite sufficient to know that his father, the Reverend Isaac Hunt, who belonged to a clerical family in Barbados, went for his education to the still British Provinces of North America, married a Philadelphia girl, Mary Shewell, practised as a lawyer till the Revolution broke out, and then being driven from his adopted country as a loyalist, settled in England, took orders, drifted into Unitarianism or anythingarianism, and ended his days, after not infrequent visits to the King's Bench, comfortably enough, but hanging rather loose on society, his friends, and a pension. Leigh Hunt (his godfathers and godmothers gave him also the names of James Henry, which he dropped) was the youngest son, and was born on 19th October 1784. His best youthful remembrance, and one of the most really humorous things he ever said, was that he used, after a childish indulgence in bad language, to think to himself with a shudder when he received any mark of favour, "Ah! they little suspect I'm the boy who said 'd——n.'" But at seven years old he went to Christ's Hospital, and continued there for another seven. His reminiscences of that seminary, put down pretty early, and afterwards embodied in the "Autobiography," are even better known from the fact that they served as a text, and as the occasion of a little gentle raillery, to Elia's famous essay than in themselves. For some years after leaving school he did nothing definite but write verses, which his father (who seems to have been gifted with a plentiful lack of judgment in most incidents and relations of life) published when the boy was but sixteen. They are as nearly as possible valueless, but they went through three editions in a very short time. It ought to be remembered that except Cowper, who was just dead, and Crabbe, who had for years intermitted writing, the public had only Rogers and Southey for poets, for it would none of the "Lyrical Ballads," and the "Lay of the Last Minstrel" had not yet been published. So that it did not make one of its worst mistakes in taking up Leigh Hunt, who certainly had poetry in him, if he did not put it forth quite so early as this. He was made a kind of lion, but, fortunately or unfortunately for him, only in middle-class circles where there were no patrons. He was quite an old man—nearly twenty—when he made regular entry into the periodical writing which kept him (with the aid of his friends) for nearly sixty years. "Mr. Town, Junior" (altered from an old signature of Colman's) contributed theatrical criticisms, which do not seem to have been paid for, to an evening paper, the Traveller, now surviving as a second title to the Globe. His bent in this direction was assisted by the fact

that his elder brother John had been apprenticed to a printer, and had desires to be a publisher. In January 1808 the two brothers started the *Examiner*, and Leigh Hunt edited it with a great deal of courage for fourteen years. He threw away for this the only piece of solid preferment that he ever had, a clerkship in the War Office which Addington gave him. The references to this act of recklessness or self-sacrifice in the *Autobiography* are rather enigmatical. His two functions were no doubt incompatible at best, especially considering the violent Opposition tone which the *Examiner* took. But Leigh Hunt, whatever faults he had, was not quite a hypocrite; and he hints pretty broadly that if he had not resigned he might have been asked to do so, not from any political reasons, but simply because he did his work very badly. He was much more at home in the *Examiner* (with which for a short time was joined the quarterly *Reflector*), though his warmest admirers candidly admit that he knew nothing about politics. In 1809 he married a Miss Marianne Kent, whose station was not very exalted, and whose son admits with unusual frankness that she was "the reverse of handsome, and without accomplishments," adding rather whimsically that this person, "the reverse of handsome," had "a pretty figure, beautiful black hair and magnificent eyes," and though "without accomplishments" had "a very strong natural turn for plastic art." At any rate she seems to have suited Leigh Hunt admirably. The *Examiner* soon became ill-noted with Government, but it was not till the end of 1812 that a grip could be got of it. Leigh Hunt's offence is in the ordinary books rather undervalued. That he (or his contributor) called the Prince Regent, as is commonly said, "a fat Adonis of fifty" (the exact words are, "this Adonis in loveliness is a corpulent man of fifty") may have been the chief sting, but was certainly not the chief legal offence. Leigh Hunt called the ruler of his country "a violator of his word, a libertine over head and ears in disgrace, a despiser of domestic ties, the companion of demi-reps, a man who had just closed half a century without one single claim on the gratitude of his country or the respect of posterity." It might be true or it might be false; but certainly there was then not a country in Europe where it would have been allowed to be said of the chief of the state. And I am not sure that it could be said now anywhere but in Ireland, where considerably worse things were said with impunity of Lord Spencer and Sir George Trevelyan. At any rate the brothers were prosecuted and fined five hundred pounds each, with two years' imprisonment. The sentence was carried out; but Leigh Hunt's imprisonment in Horsemonger Lane Gaol was the merest farce of incarceration. He could not indeed go beyond the prison walls. But he had a comfortable suite of rooms which he was permitted to furnish and decorate just as he liked; he was allowed to have his wife and family with him; he had a tiny garden of his own, and free access to that of the prison; there was no restriction on visitors, who brought him presents just as they chose; and he became a kind of fashion with the Opposition. Jeremy Bentham came and played at battledore and shuttlecock with him—an almost appalling idea, for it will not do to trust too implicitly to Leigh Hunt's declaration that Jeremy's object was to suggest "an improvement in the constitution of shuttlecocks." The *Examiner* itself continued undisturbed, and except for the "I can't get out" feeling, which even of itself cannot be compared for one moment to that of a modern prisoner condemned to his cell and the exercising-ground, it is rather difficult to see much reason for Leigh Hunt's complaints. The imprisonment may have affected his health, but it certainly brought him troops of friends, and gave him leisure to do not only his journalist's work, but things much more serious. Here he wrote and published his first poem since the *Juvenilia*, "A Feast of the Poets" (not much of a thing), and here he wrote, though he did not publish it till his liberation, the "Story of Rimini," by far his most important poem, both for intrinsic character and for influence on others. He had known Lamb from boyhood, and Shelley some years; he now made the acquaintance of Keats, Hazlitt, and Byron.

In the next five years after his liberation he did a great deal of work, the best by far being the periodical called the *Indicator*, a weekly paper which ran for sixty-six numbers. The *Indicator* was the first thing that I ever read of Hunt's, and, by no means for that reason only, I think it the best. Its buttonholing papers, of a kind since widely imitated, were the most popular; but there are romantic things in it, such as "The Daughter of Hippocrates" (paraphrased and expanded from Sir John Mandeville with Hunt's peculiar skill), which seem to me better. It was at the end of these five years that Leigh Hunt resolved upon the second adventure (his imprisonment being the first and involuntary) of his otherwise easy-going life—an adventure the immediate consequences of which were unfortunate in many ways, but which supplied him with a good deal of literary material. This was his visit to Italy as a kind of literary attaché to Lord Byron, and editor of a quarterly magazine, the *Liberal*. The idea was Shelley's, and if Shelley had lived, it might not have resulted quite so disastrously, for Shelley was absolutely untiring as a helper of lame dogs over stiles. As it was, the excursion distinctly contradicted the saying (condemned by some as immoral) that a bad beginning makes a good ending. The Hunt family, which now included several children, embarked, in November of

all months in the year, on a small ship bound for Italy. They were something like a month getting down the Channel in tremendous weather, and at last when their ship had to turn tail from near Scilly and run into Dartmouth, Hunt, whose wife was extremely ill of lung-disease, made up his mind to stay for the winter in Devonshire. He passed the time pleasantly enough at Plymouth, which they left once more in May 1822, reaching Leghorn at the end of June. Shelley's death happened within ten days of their arrival, and Byron and Leigh Hunt were left to get on together. How badly they got on is pretty generally known, might have been foreseen from the beginning, and is not very profitable to dwell on. Leigh Hunt's mixture of familiarity and "airs" could not have been worse mixed to suit the taste of Byron. The "noble poet" too was not a person who liked to be spunged upon; and his coolest admirers may sympathise with his disgust when he found that he had upon his hands a man of letters with a large family whom he was literally expected to keep, whose society was disagreeable to him, who lampooned his friends, who differed with him on every point of taste, and who did not think it necessary to be grateful. For Leigh Hunt, somewhat on Lamb's system of compensation for coming late by going away early, combined his readiness to receive favours with a practice of not acknowledging the slightest obligation for them. Byron's departure for Greece was in its way lucky, but it left Hunt stranded. He remained in Italy for rather more than three years and then returned home across the Continent. The *Liberal*, which contains work of his, of Byron's, of Shelley's, and of Hazlitt's, is interesting enough and worth buying in its original form, but it did not pay. Of the unlucky book on his relations with Byron which followed—the worst act by far of his life—I shall not say much. No one has attempted to defend it, and he himself apologises for it frankly and fully in his *Autobiography*. It is impossible, however, not to remark that the offence was much aggravated by its deliberate character. For the book was not published in the heat of the moment, but three years after Hunt's return to England and four after Byron's death.

The remaining thirty years of Hunt's life were wholly literary. As for residences, he hovered about London, living successively at Highgate, Epsom, Brompton, Chelsea, Kensington, and divers other places. At Chelsea he was very intimate with the Carlyles, and, while he was perhaps of all living men of letters most leniently judged by those not particularly lenient judges, we have nowhere such vivid glimpses of Hunt's peculiar weaknesses as in the memoirs of Carlyle and his wife. Why Leigh Hunt was always in such difficulties is not at first obvious, for he was the reverse of an idle man; he seems, though thriftless, to have been by no means very sumptuous in his way of living; everybody helped him, and his writing was always popular. He appears to have felt not a little sore that nothing was done for him when his political friends came into power after the Reform Bill—and remained there for almost the whole of the rest of his life. He had certainly in some senses borne the burden and heat of the day for Liberalism. But he was one of those reckless people who, without meaning to offend anybody in particular, offend friends as well as foes; the days of sinecures were even then passing or passed; and it is very difficult to conceive any office, even with the lightest duties, in which Leigh Hunt would not have come to grief. As for his writing, his son's earnest plea as to his not being an idle man is no doubt true enough, but he never seems to have reconciled himself to the regular drudgery of miscellaneous article writing for newspapers which is almost the only kind of journalism that really pays, and his books did not sell very largely. In his latter days, however, things became easier for him. The unfailing kindness of the Shelley family gave him (in 1844 when Sir Percy Shelley came into his property) a regular annuity of £120; two royal gifts of £200 each and in 1847 a pension of the same amount were added; and two benefit nights of Dickens's famous amateur company brought him in something like a cool thousand, as Dickens himself would have said. Of his last years Mr. Kent, who was intimate with him, gives much the pleasantest account known to me. He died on 28th August 1859, surviving his wife only two years.

I can imagine some one, at the name of Dickens in the preceding paragraph, thinking or saying, that if the author of *Bleak House* raised a thousand pounds for his old friend, he took the value of it and infinitely more out of him. It is impossible to shirk the Skimpole affair in any really critical notice of Leigh Hunt. To put unpleasant things briefly, that famous character was at once recognised by every one as a caricature, perhaps ill-natured but certainly brilliant, of what an enemy might have said of the author of "*Rimini*." Thornton Hunt, the eldest of Leigh Hunt's children, and a writer of no small power, took the matter up and forced from Dickens a contradiction, or disavowal, {214} with which I am afraid the recording angel must have had some little difficulty. Strangely enough the last words of Macaulay's that we have concern this affair; and they may be quoted as Sir George Trevelyan gives them, written by his uncle in those days at Holly Lodge when the shadow of death was heavy on him.

December 23, 1859. An odd declaration by Dickens that he did not mean Leigh Hunt by Harold Skimpole. Yet he owns that he took the light externals of the character from Leigh Hunt, and surely it is by those light externals that the bulk of mankind will always recognise character. Besides, it is to be observed that the vices of H. S. are vices to which L. H. had, to say the least, some little leaning, and which the world generally attributed to him most unsparingly. That he had loose notions of meum and tuum; that he had no high feeling of independence; that he had no sense of obligation; that he took money wherever he could get it; that he felt no gratitude for it; that he was just as ready to defame a person who had relieved his distress as a person who had refused him relief—these were things which, as Dickens must have known, were said, truly or falsely, about L. H., and had made a deep impression on the public mind.

Now Macaulay has not always been leniently judged; but I do not think that, with the single exception of Croker's case, he can be accused of having borne hardly on the moral character of any one of his contemporaries. He had befriended Leigh Hunt in every way; he had got him into the Edinburgh; he had lent (that is to say given) him money freely, and I do not think that his fiercest enemy can seriously think that he bore Hunt a grudge for having told him, as he himself records, that the "Lays" were not so good as Spenser, whom Macaulay in one of the rare lapses of his memory had unjustly blasphemed, and whom Leigh Hunt adored. To my mind, if there were any doubt about Dickens's intention, or about the fitting in a certain sense of the cap, this testimony of Macaulay's would settle it. But I cannot conceive any doubt remaining in the mind of any person who has read Leigh Hunt's works, who has even read the Autobiography. Of the grossest faults in Skimpole's character, such as the selling of Jo's secret, Leigh Hunt was indeed incapable, and the insertion of these is at once a blot on Dickens's memory and a kind of excuse for his disclaimer; but as regards the lighter touches the likeness is unmistakable. Skimpole's most elaborate jests about "pounds" are hardly an exaggeration of the man who gravely and more than once tells us that his difficulties and irregularities with money came from a congenital incapacity to appreciate arithmetic, and who admits that Shelley (whose affairs he knew very well) once gave him no less than fourteen hundred pounds (that is to say some sixteen months of Shelley's income at his wealthiest) to clear him, and that he was not cleared, though apparently he gave Shelley to understand that he was. There are many excuses for him which Skimpole had not. His own pleas of tropical blood and so forth will not greatly avail. But the old patron-theory and its more subtle transformation (the influence of which is sometimes shown even by Thackeray in the act of denouncing it), to the effect that the State or the public, or somebody, is bound to look after your man of genius, had bitten deep into the being of the literary man of our grandfathers' time. Anybody who has read Thomas Poole and his Friends must have seen how not merely Coleridge, of whose known liability to the weakness the book furnished new proofs, but even, to some extent and vicariously, the austere Wordsworth, cherished the idea. But for the most part, men kept it to themselves. Leigh Hunt never could keep anything to himself, and he has left record on record of the easy manner in which he acted on his beliefs.

For this I own that I care little, especially since he never borrowed money of me. There is a Statute of Limitations for all such things in letters as well as in law. What is much harder to forgive is the ill-bred pertness, often if not always innocent enough in intention, but rather the worse than the better for that, which mars so much of his actual literary work. When almost an old man he wrote—when a very old man he quotes, with childlike surprise that any one should see anything objectionable in them—the following lines: Perhaps you have known what it is to feel longings, To pat buxom shoulders at routs and mad throngings—Well—think what it was at a vision like that! A grace after dinner! a Venus grown fat! It would be almost unbelievable of any man but Leigh Hunt that he placidly remarks in reference to this impertinence that "he had not the pleasure of Lady Blessington's acquaintance," as if that did not make things ten times worse. He had laid the foundation of not a few of the literary enmities he suffered from, by writing, thirty years earlier, a "Feast of the Poets," on the pattern of Suckling, in which he took, though much more excusably, the same kind of ill-bred liberties; and similar things abound in his works. It is scarcely surprising that the good Macvey Napier (rather awkwardly, and giving Macaulay much trouble to patch things up) should have said that he would like a "gentleman-like" article from Mr. Hunt for the Edinburgh; and the taunt about the Cockney School undoubtedly derived its venom from this weakness of his. Lamb was not descended from the kings that long the Tuscan sceptre swayed, and had some homely ways; Keats had to do with livery-stables, Hazlitt with shady lodging-houses and lodging-house keepers. But Keats might have been, whatever his weaknesses, his own and Spenser's Sir Calidore for gentle feeling and conduct; the man who called Lamb vulgar would only prove his own vulgarity; and Hazlitt, though he



had some darker stains on his character than any that rest on Hunt, was far too potent a spirit for the fire within him not to burn out mere vulgarity. Leigh Hunt I fear must be allowed to be now and then merely vulgar—a Pogson of talent, of genius, of immense amiability, of rather hard luck, but still of the Pogsons, Pogsonic.

As I shall have plenty of good to say of him, I may as well despatch at once whatever else I have to say that is bad, which is little. The faults of taste which have just been noticed passed easily into occasional, though only occasional, faults of criticism. I do not recommend anybody who has not the faculty of critical adjustment, and who wants to like Leigh Hunt, to read his essay on Dante in the Italian Poets. For flashes of crass insensibility to great poetry it is difficult to match anywhere, and impossible to match in Leigh Hunt. His favourite theological doctrine, like that of Béranger's hero, was, *Ne damnons personne*. He did not like monarchy, and he did not understand metaphysics. So the great poet, who, more than any other great poet except Shakespeare, grows on those who read him, receives from Leigh Hunt not an honest confession, like Sir Walter's, that he does not like him, which is perhaps the first honest impression of the majority of Dante's readers, but tirade upon tirade of abuse and bad criticism. Further, Leigh Hunt's unfortunate necessity of preserving his own journalism has made him keep a thousand things that he ought to have left to the kindly shade of the newspaper files—a cemetery where, thank Heaven, the tombs are not open as in the other city of Dis. The book called *Table Talk*, for instance, contains, with a little better matter, chiefly mere rubbish like this section:

#### BEAUMARCHAIS

Beaumarchais, author of the celebrated comedy of "*Figaro*," an abridgment of which has been rendered more famous by the music of Mozart, made a large fortune by supplying the American republicans with arms and ammunition, and lost it by speculations in salt and printing. His comedy is one of those productions which are accounted dangerous, from developing the spirit of intrigue and gallantry with more gaiety than objection; and they would be more unanimously so, if the good humour and self-examination to which they excite did not suggest a spirit of charity and inquiry beyond themselves. Leigh Hunt tried almost every conceivable kind of literature, including a historical novel, *Sir Ralph Esher*, several dramas (one or two of which, the "*Legend of Florence*" being the chief, got acted), and at nearly the beginning and nearly the end of his career two religious works, or works on religion, an attack on Methodism and "*The Religion of the Heart*." All this we may not unkindly brush away, and consider him first as a poet, secondly as a critic, and thirdly as what can be best, though rather unphilosophically, called a miscellanist.

Few good judges nowadays, I think, would deny that Leigh Hunt had a certain faculty for poetry, and fewer still would rank it very high. To something like, but less than, the tunefulness of Moore, he joined a very much better taste in models and an infinitely wider and deeper study of them. There is no doubt that his versification in "*Rimini*" (which may be described as Chaucerian in basis with a strong admixture of Dryden, further crossed and dashed slightly with the peculiar music of the followers of Spenser, especially Browne and Wither) had a very strong influence both on Keats and on Shelley, and that it drew from them music much better than itself. This fluent, musical, many-coloured verse was a capital medium for tale-telling, and Leigh Hunt is always at his best when he employs it. The more varied measures and the more ambitious aim of "*Captain Sword and Captain Pen*" seem to me very much less successful. Not only was Leigh Hunt far from strong enough for a serious argument, but the cheery, sentimental optimism of which he was one of the most persevering exponents—the kind of thing which vehemently protests that in the good time coming nobody shall be damned, or starved, or put in prison, or subjected to the perils of villainous saltpetre, or prevented from doing just what he likes, and that all existence ought to be and shortly will be a vaguely refined beer and skittles—did not lend itself very well to verse. Nor are Hunt's lyrics particularly strong. His best thing by far is the charming trifle (the heroine being, it has been said and also denied, Mrs. Carlyle) which he called a "*rondeau*," though it is not one.

Jenny kissed me when we met,  
Jumping from the chair she sat in:  
Time, you thief, who love to get  
Sweets into your list, put that in!  
Say I'm weary, say I'm sad,  
Say that health and wealth have missed me,  
Say I'm growing old—but add,  
Jenny kissed me. Even here it may be noticed that though the last four lines could hardly be bettered, the second couplet is rather weak. Some of Leigh Hunt's sonnets, especially that which he wrote on the Nile in rivalry with Shelley and Keats, are very good.

It flows through old hushed Egypt and its sands,  
 Like some grave mighty thought threading a dream;  
 And times and things, as in that vision, seem  
 Keeping along it their eternal stands;—  
 Caves, pillars, pyramids, the shepherd-bands  
 That roamed through the young earth, the glory extreme  
 Of high Sesostris, and that southern beam,  
 The laughing queen that caught the world's great hands.  
 Then comes a mightier silence, stern and strong,  
 As of a world left empty of its throng,  
 And the void weighs on us; and then we wake,  
 And hear the fruitful stream lapsing along  
 Twixt villages, and think how we shall take  
 Our own calm journey on for human sake.

This was written in 1818, and I think it will be admitted that the italicised line is a rediscovery of a cadence which had been lost for centuries, and which has been constantly borrowed and imitated since. Every now and then he had touches of something much above his usual style, as in the concluding lines of the whimsical "flyting," as the Scotch poets of the fifteenth century would have called it, between the Man and the Fish:

Man's life is warm, glad, sad, 'twixt loves and graves,  
 Boundless in hope, honoured with pangs  
 austere, Heaven-gazing; and his angel-wings he craves:  
 The fish is swift, small-needing, vague yet clear,  
 A cold, sweet, silver life, wrapped in round waves,  
 Quickened with touches of transporting fear.

As a rule, however, his poetry has little or nothing of this kind, and he will hold his place in the English corpus poetarum, first, because he was an associate of better poets than himself; secondly, because he invented a medium for the poetic tale which was as poetical as Crabbe's was prosaic; thirdly, because of all persons perhaps who have ever attempted English verse on their own account, he had the most genuine affection for, and the most intimate and extensive acquaintance with, the triumphs of his predecessors in poetry. Of prose he was a much less trustworthy judge, as may be instanced once for all by his pronouncing Gibbon's style to be bad; but of poetry he could tell with an extraordinary mixture of sympathy and discretion. And this will introduce us to his second faculty, the faculty of literary criticism, in which he is, with all his drawbacks, on a level with Coleridge, with Lamb, and with Hazlitt, his defects as compared with them being in each case made up by compensatory, or more than compensatory, merits.

How considerable a critic Leigh Hunt was, may be judged from the fact that he himself confesses the great critical fault of his principal poem—the selection, for amplification and paraphrase, of a subject which has once for all been treated with imperial and immortal brevity by a great poet. With equal ingenuousness and equal truth he further confesses that, at the time, he not only did not see this fault, but was critically incapable of seeing it. For there is that one comfort about this discomfortable and discredited art of ours, that age at any rate does not impair it. The first sprightly runnings of criticism are never the best; and in the case of all really great critics, from Dryden to Sainte-Beuve, the critical faculty has gone on constantly increasing. The chief examples of Leigh Hunt's critical accomplishment are to be found in the two books called respectively, *Wit and Humour*, and *Imagination and Fancy*, both being selections from the English poets, with critical remarks interspersed as a sort of running commentary. But hardly any book of his is quite barren of such examples; for he neither would, nor indeed apparently could, restrain his desultory fancy from this as from other indulgences. His criticism is very distinct in kind. It is almost purely and in the strict and proper sense æsthetic—that is to say, it does hardly anything but reproduce the sensations produced upon Hunt himself by the reading of his favourite passages. As his sense of poetry was extraordinarily keen and accurate, there is perhaps no body of "beauties" of English poetry to be found anywhere in the language which is selected with such uniform and unerring judgment as this or these. Even Lamb, in his own favourite subjects and authors, misses treasure-trove which Leigh Hunt unfailingly discovers, as in the now pretty generally acknowledged case of the character of De Flores in Middleton's "Changeling." And Lamb had a much less wide and a much more crotchety system of admissions and exclusions. Macaulay was perfectly right in fixing, at the beginning of his essay on the dramatists of the Restoration, upon this catholicity of Hunt's taste as the main merit in it; and it is really a great pity that the two volumes referred to were not, as they were intended to be, followed up by others respectively devoted to Action and Passion, Contemplation, and Song. But Leigh Hunt was sixty when he planned them, and age, infirmity, perhaps also the less pressing need which the comparative affluence of his later years brought, prevented the completion. It has also to be remarked that Hunt is much better as a taster than as a professor or expounder. He says indeed many happy things about his favourite passages, but they evidently represent rather afterthought than forethought. He is not good at generalities, and when he tries them is apt, instead of flying (as an Ariel of criticism should do), to sprawl. Yet it was impossible for a man who was so almost invariably right in particulars, to go very wrong in general; and the worst that can be said of Leigh Hunt's general critical axioms and conclusions is that they are much better than the reasons that support them. For instance, he is probably right in calling the famous "intellectual" and "henpecked you all" in

"Don Juan," "the happiest triple rhyme ever written." But when he goes on to say that "the sweepingness of the assumption completes the flowing breadth of the effect," he goes very near to talking nonsense. For most people, however, a true opinion persuasively stated is of much more consequence than the most elaborate logical justification of it; and it is this that makes Leigh Hunt's criticism such excellent good reading. It is impossible not to feel that when a guide (which after all a critic should be) is recommended with cautions that, though an invaluable fellow for the most part, he is not unlikely in certain places to lead the traveller over a precipice, it is a very dubious kind of recommendation. Yet this is the way in which one has to speak of Jeffrey and Hazlitt, of Wilson and De Quincey. Of Leigh Hunt it need hardly ever be said; for in the unlucky diatribes on Dante above cited, the most unwary reader can see that his author has lost his temper and with it his head. As a rule he avoids the things that he is not qualified to judge, such as the rougher and sublimer parts of poetry. Of its sweetness and its music, of its grace and its wit, of its tenderness and its fancy, no better judge ever existed than Leigh Hunt. He jumped at such things, when he came near them, almost as involuntarily as a needle to a magnet.

He was, however, perhaps most popular in his own time, and certainly he gained most of the not excessive share of pecuniary profit which fell to his lot, as what I have called a miscellanist. One of the things which have not yet been sufficiently done in the criticism of English literary history, is a careful review of the successive steps by which the periodical essay of Addison and his followers during the eighteenth century passed into the magazine-paper of our own days. The later examples of the eighteenth century, the "Observers" and "Connoisseurs," the "Loungers" and "Mirrors" and "Lookers-On," are fairly well worth reading in themselves, especially as the little volumes of the "British Essayists" go capitially in a travelling-bag; but the gap between them and the productions of Leigh Hunt, of Lamb, and of the Blackwood men, with Praed's schoolboy attempts not left out, is a very considerable one. Leigh Hunt is himself entitled to a high place in the new school so far as mere priority goes, and to one not low in actual merit. He relates himself, more than once, with the childishness which is the good side of his Skimpolism, how not merely his literary friends but persons of quality had special favourites among the miscellaneous papers of the Indicator, like (he would certainly have used the parallel himself if he had known it or thought of it) the Court of France with Marot's Psalms. This miscellaneous work of his extends, as it ought to do, to all manner of subjects. The pleasantest example to my fancy is the book called *The Town*, a gossiping description of London from St. Paul's to St. James's, which he afterwards followed up with books on the West End and Kensington, and which, though of course second-hand as to its facts, is by no means uncritical, and by far the best reading of any book of its kind. Even the Autobiography might take rank in this class; and the same kind of stuff made up the staple of the numerous periodicals which Leigh Hunt edited or wrote, and of the still more numerous books which he compounded out of the dead periodicals. It may be that a severe criticism will declare that, here as well as elsewhere, he was more original than accomplished; and that his way of treating subjects was pursued with better success by his imitators than by himself. Such a paper, for instance, as "On Beds and Bedrooms" suggests (and is dwarfed by the suggestion) Lamb's "Convalescent" and other similar work. "Jack Abbott's Breakfast," which is, or was, exceedingly popular with Hunt's admirers, is an account of the misfortunes of a luckless young man who goes to breakfast with an absent-minded pedagogue, and, being turned away empty, orders successive refreshments at different coffee-houses, each of which proves a feast of Tantalus. The idea is not bad; but the carrying out suits the stage better than the study, and is certainly far below such things as Maginn's adventures of Jack Ginger and his friends, with the tale untold that Humphries told Harlow. "A Few Remarks on the Rare Vice called Lying" is a most promising title; he must be a very good-natured judge who finds appended to it a performing article. "The Old Lady" and "The Old Gentleman" were once great favourites; they seem to have been studied from Earle's *Microcosmography*, not the least excellent of the books that have proceeded from foster-children of Walter de Merton, but they are over-laboured in particulars. So too are "The Adventures of Carfington Blundell" and "Inside of an Omnibus." Leigh Hunt's humour is so devoid of bitterness that it sometimes becomes insipid; his narrative so fluent and gossiping that it sometimes becomes insignificant. His enemies called him immoral, which appears to have been a gross calumny so far as his private life was concerned, and is certainly a gross exaggeration as regards his writing. But he was rather too much given to dally about voluptuous subjects with a sort of chuckling epicene triviality. He is so far from being passionate that he sometimes becomes almost offensive. He is terribly apt to labour a conceit or a prettiness till it becomes vapid; and his "Criticism on Female Beauty," though it contains some extremely sensible remarks, also contains much which is suggestive of Mr. Tupman. Yet his miscellaneous writing has one great merit (besides its gentle playfulness and its untiring

variety) which might procure pardon for worse faults. With no one perhaps are those literary memories which transform and vivify life so constantly present as with Leigh Hunt. Although the world was a perfectly real thing to him, and not by any means seen only through the windows of a library, he took everywhere with him the remembrances of what he had read, and they helped him to clothe and colour what he saw and what he wrote. Between him, therefore, and readers who themselves have read a good deal, and loved what they have read not a little, there is always something in common; and yet probably no bookish writer has been less resented by his unbookish readers as a thruster of the abominable things—superior knowledge and superior scholarship—upon them. Some vices of the snob Leigh Hunt undoubtedly had, but he was never in the least a pretentious snob. He quotes his books not in the spirit of a man who is looking down on his fellows from a proper elevation, but in the spirit of a kindly host who is anxious that his guests should enjoy the good things on his table.

It is this sincere and unostentatious love of letters, and anxiety to spread the love of letters, that is the redeeming point of Leigh Hunt throughout: he is saved *quia multum amavit*. It was this which prompted that rather grandiose but still admirable palinode of Christopher North, in August 1834,—“the Animosities are mortal: but the Humanities live for ever,”—an apology which naturally enough pleased Hunt very much. He is one of those persons with whom it is impossible to be angry, or at least to be angry long. “The bailiff who took him was fond of him,” it is recorded of Captain Costigan; and in milder moments the same may be said of the critical bailiffs who are compelled to “take” Leigh Hunt. Even in his least happy books (such as the “Jar of Honey from Mount Hybla,” where all sorts of matter, some of it by no means well known to the writer, have been hastily cobbled together) this love, and for the most part intelligent and animated love, for literature appears. If in another of his least happy attempts, the critical parts of the already mentioned *Stories from the Italian Poets*, he is miles below the great argument of Dante, and if he is even guilty to some extent of vulgarising the lesser but still great poets with whom he deals, he never comes, even in Dante, to any passage he can understand without exhibiting such a warmth of enthusiasm and enjoyment that it softens the stoniest readers. He can gravely call Dante’s Hell “geologically speaking a most fantastical formation” (which it certainly is), and joke clumsily about the poet’s putting Cunizza and Rahab in Paradise. He can write, in the true spirit of vulgarising, that “the Florentine is thought to have been less strict in his conduct in regard to the sex than might be supposed from his platonical aspirations,” heedless of the great confessions implied in the swoon at Francesca’s story, and the passage through the fire at the end of the seventh circle of Purgatory. But when he comes to things like “*Dolce color d’oriental zaffiro*,” and “*Era già l’ora*,” it is hardly possible to do more justice to the subject. The whole description of his Italian sojourn in the *Autobiography* is an example of the best kind of such writing. Again, of all the people who have rejoiced in Samuel Pepys, Leigh Hunt “does it most natural,” being indeed a kind of nineteenth-century Pepys himself, whom the gods had made less comfortable in worldly circumstances and no man of business, but to whom as a compensation they had given the feeling for poetry which Samuel lacked. At different times Dryden, Spenser, and Chaucer were respectively his favourite English poets; and as there was nothing faithless in his inconstancy, he took up his new loves without ceasing to love the old. It is perhaps rather more surprising that he should have liked Spenser than that he should have liked the other two; and we must suppose that the profusion of beautiful pictures in the “*Faerie Queen*” enabled him, not to appreciate (for he never could have done that), but to tolerate or pass over the deep melancholy and the occasional philosophisings of the poet. But the attraction of Dryden and Chaucer for him is very easily understood. Both are eminently cheerful poets, Dryden with the cheerfulness born of manly sense, Chaucer with that of youth and abounding animal spirits. Leigh Hunt seems to have found this cheerfulness as akin to his own, as the vigour of both was complementary and satisfactory to his own, I shall not say weakness, but fragility. Add yet again to this that Hunt seems—a thing very rarely to be said of critics—never to have disliked a thing simply because he could not understand it. If he sometimes abused Dante, it was not merely because he could not understand him, though he certainly could not, but because Dante trod (and when Dante treads he treads heavily) on his most cherished prejudices. Now he had not very many prejudices, and so he had an advantage here also.

Lastly, as he may be read with pleasure, so he may be skipped without shame. There are some writers whom to skip may seem to a conscientious devotee of letters both wicked and unwise—wicked because it is disrespectful to them, unwise because it is quite likely to inflict loss on the reader. Now nobody can ever think of respecting Leigh Hunt; he is not unfrequently amiable, but never in the least venerable. Even at his best he seldom or never affects the reader with admiration, only with a mild pleasure. It is at once a penalty

for his sins and a compliment to his good qualities, that to make any kind of fuss over him would be absurd. Nor is there any selfish risk run by treating him, in the literary sense, in an unceremonious manner. His writing of all kinds carries desultoriness to the height, and may be begun at the beginning, or at the end, or in the middle, and left off at any place, without the least risk of serious loss. He is excellent good company for half an hour, sometimes for much longer; but the reader rarely thinks very much of what he has said when the interview is over, and never experiences any violent hunger or thirst for its renewal, though such renewal is agreeable enough in its way. Such an author is a convenient possession on the shelves: a possession so convenient that occasionally a blush of shame may suggest itself at the thought that he should be treated so cavalierly. But this is quixotic. The very best things that he has done hardly deserve more respectful treatment, for they are little more than a faithful and fairly lively description of his own enjoyments; the worst things deserve treatment much less respectful. Yet let us not leave him with a harsh mouth; for, as has been said, he loved the good literature of others very much, and he wrote not a little that was good literature of his own.

### VIII

#### PEACOCK

In the year 1875 Mr. Bentley conferred no small favour upon lovers of English literature by reprinting, in compact form and good print, the works of Thomas Love Peacock, up to that time scattered and in some cases not easily obtainable. So far as the publisher was concerned, nothing more could reasonably have been demanded; it is not easy to say quite so much of the editor, the late Sir Henry Cole. His editorial labours were indeed considerably lightened by assistance from other hands. Lord Houghton contributed a critical preface, which has the ease, point, and grasp of all his critical monographs. Miss Edith Nicolls, the novelist's granddaughter, supplied a short biography, written with much simplicity and excellent good taste. But as to editing in the proper sense—introduction, comment, illustration, explanation—there is next to none of it in the book. The principal thing, however, was to have Peacock's delightful work conveniently accessible, and that the issue of 1875 accomplished. The author is still by no means universally or even generally known; though he has been something of a critic's favourite. Almost the only dissenter, as far as I know, among critics, is Mrs. Oliphant, who has not merely confessed herself, in her book on the literary history of Peacock's time, unable to comprehend the admiration expressed by certain critics for Headlong Hall and its fellows, but is even, if I do not mistake her, somewhat sceptical of the complete sincerity of that admiration. There is no need to argue the point with this agreeable practitioner of Peacock's own art. A certain well-known passage of Thackeray, about ladies and Jonathan Wild, will sufficiently explain her own inability to taste Peacock's persiflage. As for the genuineness of the relish of those who can taste him there is no way that I know to convince sceptics. For my own part I can only say that, putting aside scattered readings of his work in earlier days, I think I have read the novels through on an average once a year ever since their combined appearance. Indeed, with Scott, Thackeray, Borrow, and Christopher North, Peacock composes my own private Paradise of Dainty Devices, wherein I walk continually when I have need of rest and refreshment. This is a fact of no public importance, and is only mentioned as a kind of justification for recommending him to others.

Peacock was born at Weymouth on 18th October 1785. His father (who died a year or two after his birth) was a London merchant; his mother was the daughter of a naval officer. He seems during his childhood to have done very much what he pleased, though, as it happened, study always pleased him; and his gibes in later life at public schools and universities lose something of their point when it is remembered that he was at no university, at no school save a private one, and that he left even that private school when he was thirteen. He seems, however, to have been very well grounded there, and on leaving it he conducted his education and his life at his own pleasure for many years. He published poems before he was twenty, and he fell in love shortly after he was twenty-two. The course of this love did not run smooth, and the lady, marrying some one else, died shortly afterwards. She lived in Peacock's memory till his death, sixty years later, which event is said to have been heralded (in accordance with not the least poetical of the many poetical superstitions of dreaming) by frequent visions of this shadowy love of the past. Probably to distract himself, Peacock, who had hitherto attempted no profession, accepted the rather unpromising post of under-secretary to Admiral Sir Home Popham on board ship. His mother, in her widowhood, and he himself had lived much with his sailor grandfather, and he was always fond of naval matters. But it is not surprising to

find that his occupation, though he kept it for something like a year, was not to his taste. He gave it up in the spring of 1809, and returned to leisure, poetry, and pedestrianism. The "Genius of the Thames," a sufficiently remarkable poem, was the result of the two latter fancies. A year later he went to Wales and met his future wife, Jane Griffith, though he did not marry her for ten years more. He returned frequently to the principality, and in 1812 made, at Nant Gwillt, the acquaintance of Shelley and his wife Harriet. This was the foundation of a well-known friendship, which has supplied by far the most solid and trustworthy materials existing for the poet's biography. It was Wales, too, that furnished the scene of his first and far from worst novel *Headlong Hall*, which was published in 1816. From 1815 to 1819 Peacock lived at Marlow, where his intercourse with Shelley was resumed, and where he produced not merely *Headlong Hall* but *Melincourt* (the most unequal, notwithstanding many charming sketches, of his works), the delightful *Nightmare Abbey* (with a caricature, as genius caricatures, of Shelley for the hero), and the long and remarkable poem of "Rhododaphne."

During the whole of this long time, that is to say up to his thirty-fourth year, with the exception of his year of secretaryship, Peacock had been his own master. He now, in 1819, owed curtailment{238} of his liberty but considerable increase of fortune to a long-disused practice on the part of the managers of public institutions, of which Sir Henry Taylor gave another interesting example. The directors of the East India Company offered him a clerkship because he was a clever novelist and a good Greek scholar. He retained his place ("a precious good place too," as Thackeray with good-humoured envy says of it in "The Hoggarty Diamond") with due promotion for thirty-seven years, and retired from it in 1856 with a large pension. He had married Miss Griffith very shortly after his appointment; in 1822 *Maid Marian* appeared, and in 1823 Peacock took a cottage, which became after a time his chief and latterly his only residence, at Halliford, near his beloved river. For some years he published nothing, but 1829 and 1831 saw the production of perhaps his two best books, *The Misfortunes of Elphin* and *Crotchet Castle*. After *Crotchet Castle*, official duties and perhaps domestic troubles (for his wife was a helpless invalid) interrupted his literary work for more than twenty years, an almost unexampled break in the literary activity of a man so fond of letters. In 1852 he began to write again as a contributor to *Fraser's Magazine*. It is rather unfortunate that no complete republication, nor even any complete list of these articles, has been made. The papers on Shelley and the charming story of *Gryll Grange* were the chief of them. The author was an old man when he wrote this last, but he survived it six years, and died on 23d January 1866, having latterly lived very much alone. Indeed, after Shelley's death he seems never to have had any very intimate friend except Lord Broughton, with whose papers most of Peacock's correspondence is for the present locked up. There is a passage in Shelley's "Letter to Maria Gisborne" which has been often quoted before, but which must necessarily be quoted again whenever Peacock's life and literary character are discussed:—

And there is English P——, with his mountain Fair  
Turned into a flamingo, that shy bird  
That gleams i' the Indian air. Have you not heard  
When a man marries, dies, or turns Hindoo,  
His best friends hear no more of him? But you  
Will see him, and will like him too, I hope,  
With his milk-white Snowdonian Antelope  
Matched with his Camelopard. His fine wit  
Makes such a wound, the knife is lost in it;  
A strain too learned for a shallow age,  
Too wise for selfish bigots; let his page  
Which charms the chosen spirits of his time,  
Fold itself up for a serene clime  
Of years to come, and find its recompense  
In that just expectation.

The enigmas in this passage (where it is undisputed that "English P——" is Peacock) have much exercised the commentators. That Miss Griffith, after her marriage, while still remaining a{240} Snowdonian antelope, should also have been a flamingo, is odd enough; but this as well as the "camelopard" (probably turning on some private jest then intelligible enough to the persons concerned, but dark to others) is not particularly worth illuminating. The italicised words describing Peacock's wit are more legitimate subjects of discussion. They seem to me, though not perhaps literally explicable after the fashion of the duller kind of commentator, to contain both a very happy description of Peacock's peculiar humour, and a very sufficient explanation of the causes which have, both then and since, made that humour palatable rather to the few than to the many. Not only is Peacock peculiarly liable to the charge of being too clever, but he uses his cleverness in a way peculiarly bewildering to those who like to have "This is a horse" writ large under the presentation of the animal. His "rascally comparative" fancy, and the abundant stores of material with which his reading provided it, lead him perpetually to widen "the wound," till it is not surprising that "the knife" (the particular satirical or polemical point that he is urging) gets "lost in it." This weakness, if it be one, has in its different ways of operation all sorts of curious results. One is, that his personal portraits are perhaps farther removed from faithful representations of the originals than the personal sketches of any

other writer, even among the most deliberate misrepresenters. There is, indeed, a droll topsy-turvy resemblance to Shelley throughout the *Scythrop of Nightmare Abbey*, but there Peacock was hardly using the knife at all. When he satirises persons, he goes so far away from their real personalities that the libel ceases to be libellous. It is difficult to say whether Mr. Mystic, Mr. Flosky, or Mr. Skionar is least like Coleridge; and Southey, intensely sensitive as he was to criticism, need not have lost his equanimity over Mr. Feathernest. A single point suggested itself to Peacock, that point suggested another, and so on and so on, till he was miles away from the start. The inconsistency of his political views has been justly, if somewhat plaintively, reflected on by Lord Houghton in the words, "the intimate friends of Mr. Peacock may have understood his political sentiments, but it is extremely difficult to discover them from his works." I should, however, myself say that, though it may be extremely difficult to deduce any definite political sentiments from Peacock's works, it is very easy to see in them a general and not inconsistent political attitude—that of intolerance of the vulgar and the stupid. Stupidity and vulgarity not being (fortunately or unfortunately) monopolised by any political party, and being (no doubt unfortunately) often condescended to by both, it is not surprising to find Peacock—especially with his noble disregard of apparent consistency and the inveterate habit of pillar-to-post joking, which has been commented on—distributing his shafts with great impartiality on Trojan and Greek; on the opponents of reform in his earlier manhood, and on the believers in progress during his later; on virtual representation and the telegraph; on barouche-driving as a gentleman's profession, and lecturing as a gentleman's profession. But this impartiality (or, if anybody prefers it, inconsistency) has naturally added to the difficulties of some readers with his works. It is time, however, to endeavour to give some idea of the gay variety of those works themselves.

Although there are few novelists who observe plot less than Peacock, there are few also who are more regular in the particular fashion in which they disdain plot. Peacock is in fiction what the dramatists of the school of Ben Jonson down to Shadwell are in comedy—he works in "humours." It ought not to be, but perhaps is, necessary to remind the reader that this is by no means the same thing in essence, though accidentally it very often is the same, as being a humourist. The dealer in humours takes some fad or craze in his characters, some minor ruling passion, and makes his profit out of it. Generally (and almost always in Peacock's case) he takes if he can one or more of these humours as a central point, and lets the others play and revolve in a more or less eccentric fashion round it. In almost every book of Peacock's there is a host who is possessed by the cheerful mania for collecting other maniacs round him. Harry Headlong of Headlong Hall, Esquire, a young Welsh gentleman of means, and of generous though rather unchastened taste, finding, as Peacock says, in the earliest of his gibes at the universities, that there are no such things as men of taste and philosophy in Oxford, assembles a motley host in London, and asks them down to his place at Llanberis. The adventures of the visit (ending up with several weddings) form the scheme of the book, as indeed repetitions of something very little different form the scheme of all the other books, with the exception of *The Misfortunes of Elphin*, and perhaps *Maid Marian*. Of books so simple in one way, and so complex in others, it is impossible and unnecessary to give any detailed analysis. But each contains characteristics which contribute too much to the knowledge of Peacock's idiosyncrasy to pass altogether unnoticed. The contrasts in *Headlong Hall* between the pessimist Mr. Escot, the optimist Mr. Foster, and the happy-mean man Mr. Jenkison (who inclines to both in turn, but on the whole rather to optimism), are much less amusing than the sketches of Welsh scenery and habits, the passages of arms with representatives of the Edinburgh and Quarterly Reviews (which Peacock always hated), and the satire on "improving," craniology, and other passing fancies of the day. The book also contains the first and most unfriendly of those sketches of clergymen of the Church of England which Peacock gradually softened till, in *Dr. Folllott* and *Dr. Opimian*, his curses became blessings altogether. The Reverend Dr. Gaster is an ignoble brute, though not quite life-like enough to be really offensive. But the most charming part of the book by far (for its women are mere lay figures) is to be found in the convivial scenes. *Headlong Hall* contains, besides other occasional verse of merit, two drinking-songs—"Hail to the Headlong," and the still better "A Heel-tap! a heel-tap! I never could bear it"—songs not quite so good as those in the subsequent books, but good enough to make any reader think with a gentle sigh of the departure of good fellowship from the earth. *Undergraduates and Scotchmen* (and even in their case the fashion is said to be dying) alone practise at the present day the full rites of Comus.

*Melincourt*, published, and indeed written, very soon after *Headlong Hall*, is a much more ambitious attempt. It is some three times the length of its predecessor, and is, though not much longer than a single volume of some three-volume novels, the longest book that Peacock ever wrote. It is also much more

ambitiously planned; the twice attempted abduction of the heiress, Anthelia Melincourt, giving something like a regular plot, while the introduction of Sir Oran Haut-ton (an orang-outang whom the eccentric hero, Forester, has domesticated and intends to introduce to parliamentary life) can only be understood as aiming at a regular satire on the whole of human life, conceived in a milder spirit than "Gulliver," but belonging in some degree to the same class. Forester himself, a disciple of Rousseau, a fervent anti-slavery man who goes to the length of refusing his guests sugar, and an ideologist in many other ways, is also an ambitious sketch; and Peacock has introduced episodes after the fashion of eighteenth-century fiction, besides a great number of satirical excursions dealing with his enemies of the Lake school, with paper money, and with many other things and persons. The whole, as a whole, has a certain heaviness. The enthusiastic Forester is a little of a prig, and a little of a bore; his friend the professorial Mr. Fax proses dreadfully; the Oran Haut-ton scenes, amusing enough of themselves, are overloaded (as is the whole book) with justificative selections from Buffon, Lord Monboddo, and other authorities. The portraits of Southey, Coleridge, Wordsworth, Canning, and others, are neither like, nor in themselves very happy, and the heroine Anthelia is sufficiently uninteresting to make us extremely indifferent whether the virtuous Forester or the roué Lord Anophel Achthar gets her. On the other hand, detached passages are in the author's very best vein; and there is a truly delightful scene between Lord Anophel and his chaplain Grovelgrub, when the athletic Sir Oran has not only foiled their attempt on Anthelia, but has mast-headed them on{246} the top of a rock perpendicular. But the gem of the book is the election for the borough of One-Vote—a very amusing farce on the subject of rotten boroughs. Mr. Forester has bought one of the One-Vote seats for his friend the Orang, and, going to introduce him to the constituency, falls in with the purchaser of the other seat, Mr. Sarcastic, who is a practical humorist of the most accomplished kind. The satirical arguments with which Sarcastic combats Forester's enthusiastic views of life and politics, the elaborate spectacle which he gets up on the day of nomination, and the free fight which follows, are recounted with extraordinary spirit. Nor is the least of the attractions of the book an admirable drinking-song, superior to either of those in Headlong Hall, though perhaps better known to most people by certain Thackerayan reminiscences of it than in itself:—

### THE GHOSTS

In life three ghostly friars were we, And now three friendly ghosts we be. Around our shadowy table placed,  
The spectral bowl before us floats: With wine that none but ghosts can taste  
We wash our unsubstantial throats. Three merry ghosts—three merry ghosts—three merry ghosts are we:  
Let the ocean be port and we'll think it good sport To be laid in that Red Sea.

With songs that jovial spectres chaunt, Our old refectory still we haunt. The traveller hears our midnight mirth: "Oh list," he cries, "the haunted choir! The merriest ghost that walks the earth  
Is now the ghost of a ghostly friar." Three merry ghosts—three merry ghosts—three merry ghosts are we:  
Let the ocean be port and we'll think it good sport To be laid in that Red Sea. In the preface to a new edition of Melincourt, which Peacock wrote nearly thirty years later, and which contains a sort of promise of Gryll Grange, there is no sign of any dissatisfaction on the author's part with the plan of the earlier book; but in his next, which came quickly, he changed that plan very decidedly. Nightmare Abbey is the shortest, as Melincourt is the longest, of his tales; and as Melincourt is the most unequal and the most clogged with heavy matter, so Nightmare Abbey contains the most unbroken tissue of farcical, though not in the least coarsely farcical, incidents and conversations. The misanthropic Scythrop (whose habit of Madeira-drinking has made some exceedingly literal people sure that he really could not be intended for the water-drinking Shelley); his yet gloomier father, Mr. Glowry; his intricate entanglements with the lovely Marionetta and the still more beautiful Celinda; his fall between the two stools; his resolve to commit suicide; the solution of that awkward resolve—are all simply delightful. Extravagant as the thing is, its brevity and the throng of incidents and jokes prevent it from{248} becoming in the least tedious. The pessimist-fatalist Mr. Toobad, with his "innumerable proofs of the temporary supremacy of the devil," and his catchword "the devil has come among us, having great wrath," appears just enough, and not too much. The introduced sketch of Byron as Mr. Cypress would be the least happy thing of the piece if it did not give occasion for a capital serious burlesque of Byronic verse, the lines, "There is a fever of the spirit," which, as better known than most of Peacock's verse, need not be quoted. Mr. Flosky, a fresh caricature of Coleridge, is even less like the original than Mr. Mystic, but he is much more like a human being, and in himself is great fun. An approach to a more charitable view of the clergy is discoverable in the curate Mr. Larynx, who, if not extremely ghostly, is neither a sot nor a sloven. But the quarrels and reconciliations between Scythrop and Marionetta,



his invincible inability to make up his mind, the mysterious advent of Marionetta's rival, and her residence in hidden chambers, the alternate sympathy and repulsion between Scythrop and those elder disciples of pessimism, his father and Mr. Toobad—all the contradictions of Shelley's character, in short, with a suspicion of the incidents of his life brought into the most ludicrous relief, must always form the great charm of the book. A tolerably rapid reader may get through it in an hour or so, and there is hardly a more delightful hour's reading of anything like the same kind in the English language, either for the incidental strokes of wit and humour, or for the easy mastery with which the whole is hit off. It contains, moreover, another drinking-catch, "Seamen Three," which, though it is, like its companion, better known than most of Peacock's songs, may perhaps find a place:—

Seamen three! What men be ye?Gotham's three wise men we be.Whither in your bowl so free?To rake the moon from out the sea.The bowl goes trim, the moon doth shine,And our ballast is old wine;And your ballast is old wine. Who art thou so fast adrift?I am he they call Old Care.Here on board we will thee lift.No: I may not enter there.Wherefore so? 'Tis Jove's decreeIn a bowl Care may not be;In a bowl Care may not be. Fear ye not the waves that roll? No: in charmèd bowl we swim.What the charm that floats the bowl? Water may not pass the brim.The bowl goes trim, the moon doth shine,And our ballast is old wine;And your ballast is old wine. A third song sung by Marionetta, "Why are thy looks so blank, Grey Friar?" is as good in another way; nor should it be forgotten that the said Marionetta, who has been thought to have some features of the luckless Harriet Shelley, is Peacock's first lifelike study of a girl, and one of his pleasantest. The book which came out four years after, *Maid Marian*, has, I believe, been much the most popular and the best known of Peacock's short romances. It owed this popularity, in great part, doubtless, to the fact that the author has altered little in the well-known and delightful old story, and has not added very much to its facts, contenting himself with illustrating the whole in his own satirical fashion. But there is also no doubt that the dramatisation of *Maid Marian* by Planché and Bishop as an operetta helped, if it did not make, its fame. The snatches of song through the novel are more frequent than in any other of the books, so that Mr. Planché must have had but little trouble with it. Some of these snatches are among Peacock's best verse, such as the famous "Bramble Song," the great hit of the operetta, the equally well-known "Oh, bold Robin Hood," and the charming snatch:—

For the tender beech and the sapling oak,That grow by the shadowy rill,You may cut down both at a single stroke,You may cut down which you will;

But this you must know, that as long as they grow,Whatever change may be,You never can teach either oak or beechTo be aught but a greenwood tree.

This snatch, which, in its mixture of sentiment, truth, and what may be excusably called "rollick," is very characteristic of its author, and is put in the mouth of Brother Michael, practically the hero of the piece, and the happiest of the various workings up of Friar Tuck, despite his considerable indebtedness to a certain older friar, whom we must not call "of the funnels." That Peacock was a Pantagrueist to the heart's core is evident in all his work; but his following of Master Francis is nowhere clearer than in *Maid Marian*, and it no doubt helps us to understand why those who cannot relish Rabelais should look askance at Peacock. For the rest, no book of Peacock's requires such brief comment as this charming pastoral, which was probably little less in Thackeray's mind than *Ivanhoe* itself when he wrote *Rebecca* and *Rowena*. The author draws in (it would be hardly fair to say drags in) some of his stock satire on courts, the clergy, the landed gentry, and so forth; but the very nature of the subject excludes the somewhat tedious digressions which mar Melincourt, and which once or twice menace, though they never actually succeed in spoiling, the unbroken fun of *Nightmare Abbey*.

The *Misfortunes of Elphin*, which followed after an interval of seven years, is, I believe, the least generally popular of Peacock's works, though (not at all for that reason) it happens to be my own favourite. The most curious instance of this general unpopularity is the entire omission, as far as I am aware, of any reference to it in any of the popular guide-books to Wales. One piece of verse, indeed, the "War-song of Dinas Vawr," a triumph of easy verse and covert sarcasm, has had some vogue, but the rest is only known to Peacockians. The abundance of Welsh lore which, at any rate in appearance, it contains, may have had something to do with this; though the translations or adaptations, whether faithful or not, are the best literary renderings of Welsh known to me. Something also, and probably more, is due to the saturation of the whole from beginning to end with Peacock's driest humour. Not only is the account of the sapping and destruction of the embankment of Gwaelod an open and continuous satire on the opposition to Reform, but the whole book is written in the spirit and manner of *Candide*—a spirit and manner which Englishmen have generally been readier to relish, when they relish them at all, in another language than in their own. The respectable domestic virtues of Elphin and his wife Angharad, the blameless loves of Taliesin and the Princess

Melanghel, hardly serve even as a foil to the satiric treatment of the other characters. The careless incompetence of the poetical King Gwythno, the coarser vices of other Welsh princes, the marital toleration or blindness of Arthur, the cynical frankness of the robber King Melvas, above all, the drunkenness of the immortal Seitheny, give the humorist themes which he caresses with inexhaustible affection, but in a manner no doubt very puzzling, if not shocking, to matter-of-fact readers. Seitheny, the drunken prince and dyke-warden, whose carelessness lets in the inundation, is by far Peacock's most original creation (for Scythrop, as has been said, is rather a humorous distortion of the actual than a creation). His complete self-satisfaction, his utter fearlessness of consequences, his ready adaptation to whatever part, be it prince or butler, presents itself to him, and above all, the splendid topsy-turviness of his fashion of argument, make Seitheny one of the happiest, if not one of the greatest, results of whimsical imagination and study of human nature. "They have not"—says the sometime prince, now King Melvas's butler, when Taliesin discovers him twenty years after his supposed death—"they have not made it [his death] known to me, for the best of all reasons, that one can only know the truth. For if that which we think we know is not truth, it is something which we do not know. A man cannot know his own death. For while he knows anything he is alive; at least, I never heard of a dead man who knew anything, or pretended to know anything: if he had so pretended I should have told him to his face that he was no dead man." How nobly consistent is this with his other argument in the days of his principedom and his neglect of the embankment! Elphin has just reproached him with the proverb, "Wine speaks in the silence of reason." "I am very sorry," said Seitheny, "that you see things in a wrong light. But we will not quarrel, for three reasons: first, because you are the son of the king, and may do and say what you please without any one having a right to be displeased; second, because I never quarrel with a guest, even if he grows riotous in his cups; third, because there is nothing to quarrel about. And perhaps that is the best reason of the three; or rather the first is the best, because you are the son of the king; and the third is the second, that is the second best, because there is nothing to quarrel about; and the second is nothing to the purpose, because, though guests will grow riotous in their cups in spite of my good orderly example, God forbid that I should say that is the case with you. And I completely agree in the truth of your remark that reason speaks in the silence of wine."

Crotchet Castle, the last but one of the series, which was published two years after Elphin and nearly thirty before Gryll Grange, has been already called the best; and the statement is not inconsistent with the description already given of Nightmare Abbey and of Elphin. For Nightmare Abbey is chiefly farce, and The Misfortunes of Elphin is chiefly sardonic persiflage. Crotchet Castle is comedy of a high and varied kind. Peacock has returned in it to the machinery of a country house with its visitors, each of whom is more or less of a crotcheteer; and has thrown in a little romantic interest in the suit of a certain unmoneyed{255} Captain Fitzchrome to a noble damsel who is expected to marry money, as well as in the desertion and subsequent rescue of Susannah Touchandgo, daughter of a levanting financier. The charm of the book, however, which distinguishes it from all its predecessors, is the introduction of characters neither ridiculous nor simply good in the persons of the Rev. Dr. Folliot and Lady Clarinda Bossnowl, Fitzchrome's beloved. "Lady Clarinda," says the captain, when the said Lady Clarinda has been playing off a certain not unladylike practical joke on him, "is a very pleasant young lady;" and most assuredly she is, a young lady (in the nineteenth century and in prose) of the tribe of Beatrice, if not even of Rosalind. As for Dr. Folliot, the author is said to have described him as his amends for his earlier clerical sketches, and the amends are ample. A stout Tory, a fellow of infinite jest, a lover of good living, an inveterate paradoxer, a pitiless exposé of current cants and fallacies, and, lastly, a tall man of his hands, Dr. Folliot is always delightful, whether he is knocking down thieves, or annihilating, in a rather Johnsonian manner, the economist, Mr. McQuedy, and the journalist, Mr. Eavesdrop, or laying down the law as to the composition of breakfast and supper, or using strong language as to "the learned friend" (Brougham), or bringing out, partly by opposition and partly by irony, the follies of the transcendentalists, the fops, the doctrinaires, and the mediævalists of the party. The book, moreover, contains the last and not the least of Peacock's admirable drinking-songs:—

If I drink water while this doth last,  
 May I never again drink wine;  
 For how can a man, in his life of a span,  
 Do anything better than dine?  
 We'll dine and drink, and say if we think  
 That anything better can be;  
 And when we have dined, wish all mankind  
 May dine as well as we. And though a good wish will fill no dish,  
 And brim no cup with sack,  
 Yet thoughts will spring as the glasses ring  
 To illumine our studious track.  
 O'er the brilliant dreams of our hopeful schemes  
 The light of the flask shall shine;  
 And we'll sit till day,  
 but we'll find the way  
 To drench the world with wine. The song is good in itself, but it is even more interesting as being the last product of Peacock's Anacreontic vein. Almost a generation passed before the appearance of his next and last novel, and though there is plenty of good eating and drinking in Gryll

Grange, the old fine rapture had disappeared in society meanwhile, and Peacock obediently took note of the disappearance. It is considered, I believe, a mark of barbarian tastes to lament the change. But I am not certain that the Age of Apollinaris and lectures has yet produced anything that can vie as literature with the products of the ages of Wine and Song.

Gryll Grange, however, in no way deserves the name of a dry stick. It is, next to Melincourt, the longest of Peacock's novels, and it is entirely free from the drawbacks of the forty-years-older book. Mr. Falconer, the hero, who lives in a tower alone with seven lovely and discreet foster-sisters, has some resemblances to Mr. Forester, but he is much less of a prig. The life and the conversation bear, instead of the marks of a young man's writing, the marks of the writing of one who has seen the manners and cities of many other men, and the personages throughout are singularly lifelike. The loves of the second hero and heroine, Lord Curryfin and Miss Niphet, are much more interesting than their names would suggest. And the most loquacious person of the book, the Rev. Dr. Opimian, if he is somewhat less racy than Dr. Folliott, is not less agreeable. One main charm of the novel lies in its vigorous criticism of modern society in phases which have not yet passed away. "Progress" is attacked with curious ardour; and the battle between literature and science, which in our days even Mr. Matthew Arnold waged but as one *cauponans bellum*, is fought with a vigour that is a joy to see. It would be rather interesting to know whether Peacock, in planning the central incident of the play (an "Aristophanic comedy," satirising modern ways), was aware of the existence of Mansel's delightful parody of the "Clouds." But "Phrontisterion" has never been widely known out of Oxford, and the bearing of Peacock's own performance is rather social than political. Not the least noteworthy thing in the book is the practical apology which is made in it to Scotchmen and political economists (two classes whom Peacock had earlier persecuted) in the personage of Mr. McBorrowdale, a candid friend of Liberalism, who is extremely refreshing. And besides the Aristophanic comedy, Gryll Grange contains some of Peacock's most delightful verse, notably the really exquisite stanzas on "Love and Age."

The book is the more valuable because of the material it supplies, in this and other places, for rebutting the charges that Peacock was a mere Epicurean, or a mere carper. Independently of the verses just named, and the hardly less perfect "Death of Philemon," the prose conversation shows how delicately and with how much feeling he could think on those points of life where satire and jollification are out of place. For the purely modern man, indeed, it might be well to begin the reading of Peacock with Gryll Grange, in order that he may not be set out of harmony with his author by the robust but less familiar tones, as well as by the rawer though not less vigorous workmanship, of Headlong Hall and its immediate successors. The happy mean between the heart on the sleeve and the absence of heart has scarcely been better shown than in this latest novel. I have no space here to go through the miscellaneous work which completes Peacock's literary baggage. His regular poems, all early, are very much better than the work of many men who have won a place among British poets. His criticism, though not great in amount, is good; and he is especially happy in the kind of miscellaneous trifle (such as his trilingual poem on a whitebait dinner), which is generally thought appropriate to "university wits." But the characteristics of these miscellanies are not very different from the characteristics of his prose fiction, and, for purposes of discussion, may be included with them.

Lord Houghton has defined and explained Peacock's literary idiosyncrasy as that of a man of the eighteenth century belated and strayed in the nineteenth. It is always easy to improve on a given pattern, but I certainly think that this definition of Lord Houghton's (which, it should be said, is not given in his own words) needs a little improvement. For the differences which strike us in Peacock—the easy joviality, the satirical view of life, the contempt of formulas and of science—though they certainly distinguish many chief literary men of the eighteenth century from most chief literary men of the nineteenth, are not specially characteristic of the eighteenth century itself. They are found in the seventeenth, in the Renaissance, in classical antiquity—wherever, in short, the art of letters and the art of life have had comparatively free play. The chief differentia of Peacock is a differentia common among men of letters; that is to say, among men of letters who are accustomed to society, who take no sacerdotal or singing-robe view of literature, who appreciate the distinction which literary cultivation gives them over the herd of mankind, but who by no means take that distinction too seriously. Aristophanes, Horace, Lucian, Rabelais, Montaigne, Saint-Evremond, these are all Peacock's literary ancestors, each, of course, with his own difference in especial and in addition. Aristophanes was more of a politician and a patriot, Lucian more of a freethinker, Horace more of a simple

pocourante. Rabelais may have had a little inclination to science itself (he would soon have found it out if he had lived a little later), Montaigne may have been more of a pure egotist, Saint-Evremond more of a man of society, and of the verse and prose of society. But they all had the same ethos, the same love of letters as letters, the same contempt of mere progress as progress, the same relish for the simpler and more human pleasures, the same good fellowship, the same tendency to escape from the labyrinth of life's riddles by what has been called the humour-gate, the same irreconcilable hatred of stupidity and vulgarity and cant. The eighteenth century has, no doubt, had its claim to be regarded as the special flourishing time of this mental state urged by many others besides Lord Houghton; but I doubt whether the claim can be sustained, at any rate to the detriment of other times, and the men of other times. That century took itself too seriously—a fault fatal to the claim at once. Indeed, the truth is that while this attitude has in some periods been very rare, it cannot be said to be the peculiar, still less the universal, characteristic of any period. It is a personal not a periodic distinction; and there are persons who might make out a fair claim to it even in the depths of the Middle Ages or of the nineteenth century.

However this may be, Peacock certainly held the theory of those who take life easily, who do not love anything very much except old books, old wine, and a few other things, not all of which perhaps need be old, who are rather inclined to see the folly of it than the pity of it, and who have an invincible tendency, if they tilt at anything at all, to tilt at the prevailing cants and arrogances of the time. These cants and arrogances of course vary. The position occupied by monkery at one time may be occupied by physical science at another; and a belief in graven images may supply in the third century the target, which is supplied by a belief in the supreme wisdom of majorities in the nineteenth. But the general principles—the cult of the Muses and the Graces for their own sake, and the practice of satiric archery at the follies of the day—appear in all the elect of this particular election, and they certainly appear in Peacock. The results no doubt are distasteful, not to say shocking, to some excellent people. It is impossible to avoid a slight chuckle when one thinks of the horror with which some such people must read Peacock's calm statement, repeated I think more than once, that one of his most perfect heroes "found, as he had often found before, that the more his mind was troubled, the more madeira he could drink without disordering his head." I have no doubt that the United Kingdom Alliance, if it knew this dreadful sentence (but probably the study of the United Kingdom Alliance is not much in Peacock), would like to burn all the copies of *Gryll Grange* by the hands of Mr. Berry, and make the reprinting of it a misdemeanour, if not a felony. But it is not necessary to follow Sir Wilfrid Lawson, or to be a believer in education, or in telegraphs, or in majorities, in order to feel the repulsion which some people evidently feel for the manner of Peacock. With one sense absent and another strongly present it is impossible for any one to like him. The present sense is that which has been rather grandiosely called the sense of moral responsibility in literature. The absent sense is that sixth, seventh, or eighth sense, called a sense of humour, and about this there is no arguing. Those who have it, instead of being quietly and humbly thankful, are perhaps a little too apt to celebrate their joy in the face of the afflicted ones who have it not; the afflicted ones, who have it not, only follow a general law in protesting that the sense of humour is a very worthless thing, if not a complete humbug. But there are others of whom it would be absurd to say that they have no sense of humour, and yet who cannot place themselves at the Peacockian point of view, or at the point of view of those who like Peacock. His humour is not their humour; his wit not their wit. Like one of his own characters (who did not show his usual wisdom in the remark), they "must take pleasure in the thing represented before they can take pleasure in the representation." And in the things that Peacock represents they do not take pleasure. That gentlemen should drink a great deal of burgundy and sing songs during the process, appears to them at the best childish, at the worst horribly wrong. The prince-butler Seithenyn is a reprobate old man, who was unfaithful to his trust and shamelessly given to sensual indulgence. Dr. Folliot, as a parish priest, should not have drunk so much wine; and it would have been much more satisfactory to hear more of Dr. Opimian's sermons and district visiting, and less of his dinners with Squire Gryll and Mr. Falconer. Peacock's irony on social and political arrangements is all sterile, all destructive, and the sentiment that "most opinions that have anything to be said for them are about two thousand years old" is a libel on mankind. They feel, in short, for Peacock the animosity, mingled with contempt, which the late M. Amiel felt for "clever mockers."

It is probably useless to argue with any such. It might, indeed, be urged in all seriousness that the Peacockian attitude is not in the least identical with the Mephistophelian; that it is based simply on the very sober and arguable ground that human nature is always very much the same, liable to the same delusions

and the same weaknesses; and that the oldest things are likely to be best, not for any intrinsic or mystical virtue of antiquity, but because they have had most time to be found out in, and have not been found out. It may further be argued, as it has often been argued before, that the use of ridicule as a general criterion can do no harm, and may do much good. If the thing ridiculed be of God, it will stand; if it be not, the sooner it is laughed off the face of the earth the better. But there is probably little good in urging all this. Just as a lover of the greatest of Greek dramatists must recognise at once that it would be perfectly useless to attempt to argue Lord Coleridge out of the idea that Aristophanes, though a genius, was vulgar and base of soul, so to go a good deal lower in the scale of years, and somewhat lower in the scale of genius, everybody who rejoices in the author of "Aristophanes in London" must see that he has no chance of converting Mrs. Oliphant, or any other person who does not like Peacock. The middle term is not present, the disputants do not in fact use the same language. The only thing to do is to recommend this particular pleasure to those who are capable of being pleased by it, and to whom, as no doubt it is to a great number, it is pleasure yet untried.

It is well to go about enjoying it with a certain caution. The reader must not expect always to agree with Peacock, who not only did not always agree with himself, but was also a man of almost ludicrously strong prejudices. He hated paper money; whereas the only feeling that most of us have on that subject is that we have not always as much of it as we should like. He hated Scotchmen, and there are many of his readers who without any claim to Scotch blood, but knowing the place and the people, will say,

That better wine and better men  
We shall not meet in May,

or for the matter of that in any other month. Partly because he hated Scotchmen, and partly because in his earlier days Sir Walter was a pillar of Toryism, he hated Scott, and has been guilty not merely of an absurd and no doubt partly humorous comparison of the Waverley novels to pantomimes, but of more definite criticisms which will bear the test of examination as badly. His strictures on a famous verse of "The Dream of Fair Women" are indefensible, though there is perhaps more to be said for the accompanying gibe at Sir John Millais's endeavour to carry out the description of Cleopatra in black (chiefly black) and white. The reader of Peacock must never mind his author trampling on his, the reader's, favourite corns; or rather he must lay his account with the agreeable certainty that Peacock will shortly afterwards trample on other corns which are not at all his favourites. For my part I am quite willing to accept these conditions. And I do not find that my admiration for Coleridge, and my sympathy with those who opposed the first Reform Bill, and my inclination to dispute the fact that Oxford is only a place of "unread books," make me like Peacock one whit the less. It is the law of the game, and those who play the game must put up with its laws. And it must be remembered that, at any rate in his later and best books, Peacock never wholly "took a side." He has always provided some personage or other who reduces all the whimsies and prejudices of his characters, even including his own, under a kind of dry light. Such is Lady Clarinda, who regards all the crotcheteers of Crotchet Castle with the same benevolent amusement; such Mr. McBorrowdale, who, when he is requested to settle the question of the superiority or inferiority of Greek harmony and perspective to modern, replies, "I think ye may just buz that bottle before you." (Alas! to think that if a man used the word "buz" nowadays some wiseacre would accuse him of vulgarity or of false English.) The general criticism in his work is always sane and vigorous, even though there may be flaws in the particular censures; and it is very seldom that even in his utterances of most flagrant prejudice anything really illiberal can be found. He had read much too widely and with too much discrimination for that. His reading had been corrected by too much of the cheerful give-and-take of social discussion, his dry light was softened and coloured by too frequent rainbows, the Apollonian rays being reflected on Bacchic dew. Anything that might otherwise seem hard and harsh in Peacock's perpetual ridicule is softened and mellowed by this pervading good fellowship which, as it is never pushed to the somewhat extravagant limits of the *Noctes Ambrosianæ*, so it distinguishes Peacock himself from the authors to whom in pure style he is most akin, and to whom Lord Houghton has already compared him—the French tale-tellers from Anthony Hamilton to Voltaire. In these, perfect as their form often is, there is constantly a slight want of geniality, a perpetual clatter and glitter of intellectual rapier and dagger which sometimes becomes rather irritating and teasing to ear and eye. Even the objects of Peacock's severest sarcasm, his Galls and Vamps and Eavesdrops, are allowed to join in the choruses and the bumpers of his easy-going symposia. The sole nexus is not cash payment but something much more agreeable, and it is allowed that even Mr. Mystic had "some super-excellent madeira." Yet how far the wine is from getting above the wit in these merry books is not likely to escape even the most unsympathetic reader. The mark may be selected recklessly or unjustly, but the arrows always fly straight to it.

Peacock, in short, has eminently that quality of literature which may be called recreation. It may be that he is not extraordinarily instructive, though there is a good deal of quaint and not despicable erudition wrapped up in his apparently careless pages. It may be that he does not prove much; that he has, in fact, very little concern to prove anything. But in one of the only two modes of refreshment and distraction possible in literature, he is a very great master. The first of these modes is that of creation—that in which the writer spirits his readers away into some scene and manner of life quite different from that with which they are ordinarily conversant. With this Peacock, even in his professed poetical work, has not very much to do; and in his novels, even in *Maid Marian*, he hardly attempts it. The other is the mode of satirical presentment of well-known and familiar things, and this is all his own. Even his remotest subjects are near enough to be in a manner familiar, and *Gryll Grange*, with a few insignificant changes of names and current follies, might have been written yesterday. He is, therefore, not likely for a long time to lose the freshness and point which, at any rate for the ordinary reader, are required in satirical handlings of ordinary life; while his purely literary merits, especially his grasp of the perennial follies and characters of humanity, of the *ludicrum humani generis* which never varies much in substance under its ever-varying dress, are such as to assure him life even after the immediate peculiarities which he satirised have ceased to be anything but history.

## IX

### WILSON

Among those judgments of his contemporaries which make a sort of *Inferno* of the posthumous writings of Thomas Carlyle, that passed upon "Christopher North" has always seemed to me the most interesting, and perhaps on the whole the fairest. There is enough and to spare of onesidedness in it, and of the harshness which comes from onesidedness. But it is hardly at all sour, and, when allowance is made for the point of view, by no means unjust. The whole is interesting from the literary side, but as it fills two large pages it is much too long to quote. The personal description, "the broad-shouldered stately bulk of the man struck me: his flashing eye, copious dishevelled head of hair, and rapid unconcerned progress like that of a plough through stubble," is characteristically graphic, and far the best of the numerous pen sketches of "the Professor." As for the criticism, the following is the kernel passage of it:—

Wilson had much nobleness of heart and many traits of noble genius, but the central tie-beam seemed wanting always; very long ago I perceived in him the most irreconcilable contradictions: Toryism with sansculottism; Methodism of a sort with total incredulity; a noble loyal and religious nature not strong enough to vanquish the perverse element it is born into. Hence a being all split into precipitous chasms and the wildest volcanic tumults; rocks over-grown indeed with tropical luxuriance of leaf and flower but knit together at the bottom—that was my old figure of speech—only by an ocean of whisky punch. On these terms nothing can be done. Wilson seems to me always by far the most gifted of our literary men either then or still. And yet intrinsically he has written nothing that can endure. The central gift was wanting.

Something in the unfavourable part of this must no doubt be set down to the critic's usual forgetfulness of his own admirable dictum, "he is not thou, but himself; other than thou." John was quite other than Thomas, and Thomas judged him somewhat summarily as if he were a failure of a Thomas. Yet the criticism, if partly harsh and as a whole somewhat incomplete, is true enough. Wilson has written "intrinsically nothing that can endure," if it be judged by any severe test. An English Diderot, he must bear a harder version of the judgment on Diderot, that he had written good pages but no good book. Only very rarely has he even written good pages, in the sense of pages good throughout. The almost inconceivable haste with which he wrote (he is credited with having on one occasion actually written fifty-six pages of print for Blackwood in two days, and in the years of its double numbers he often contributed from a hundred to a hundred and fifty pages in a single month)—this prodigious haste would not of itself account for the puerilities, the touches of bad taste, the false pathos, the tedious burlesque, the more tedious jactation which disfigure his work. A man writing against time may be driven to dulness, or commonplace, or inelegance of style; but he need never commit any of the faults just noticed. They were due beyond doubt, in Wilson's case, to a natural idiosyncrasy, the great characteristic of which Carlyle has happily hit off in the phrase, "want of a tie-beam," whether he has or has not been charitable in suggesting that the missing link was supplied by whisky punch. The least attractive point about Wilson's work is undoubtedly what his censor elsewhere

describes as his habit of "giving a kick" to many men and things. There is no more unpleasant feature of the *Noctes* than the apparent inability of the writer to refrain from sly "kicks" even at the objects of his greatest veneration. A kind of mania of detraction seizes him at times, a mania which some of his admirers have more kindly than wisely endeavoured to shuffle off as a humorous dramatic touch intentionally administered to him by his *Eidolon North*. The most disgraceful, perhaps the only really disgraceful, instance of this is the carping and offensive criticism of Scott's *Demonology*, written and published at a time when Sir Walter's known state of health and fortunes might have protected him even from an enemy, much more from a friend, and a deeply obliged friend such as Wilson. Nor is this the only fling at Scott. Wordsworth, much more vulnerable, is also much more frequently assailed; and even Shakespeare does not come off scot-free when Wilson is in his ugly moods.

It need hardly be said that I have no intention of saying that Scott or Wordsworth or Shakespeare may not be criticised. It is the way in which the criticism is done which is the crime; and for these acts of literary high treason, or at least leasing-making, as well as for all Wilson's other faults, nothing seems to me so much responsible as the want of bottom which Carlyle notes. I do not think that Wilson had any solid fund of principles, putting morals and religion aside, either in politics or in literature. He liked and he hated much and strongly, and being a healthy creature he on the whole liked the right things and hated the wrong ones; but it was for the most part a merely instinctive liking and hatred, quite un-coördinated, and by no means unlikely to pass the next moment into hatred or liking as the case might be. These are grave faults. But for the purpose of providing that pleasure which is to be got from literature (and this, like one or two other chapters here, is partly an effort in literary hedonism) Wilson stands very high, indeed so high that he can be ranked only below the highest. He who will enjoy him must be an intelligent voluptuary, and especially well versed in the art of skipping. When Wilson begins to talk fine, when he begins to wax pathetic, and when he gets into many others of his numerous altitudes, it will behove the reader, according to his own tastes, to skip with discretion and vigour. If he cannot do this, if his eye is not wary enough, or if his conscience forbids him to obey his eyes' warnings, Wilson is not for him. It is true that Mr. Skelton has tried to make a "*Comedy of the Noctes Ambrosianæ*," in which the skipping is done ready to hand. But, with all the respect due to the author of *Thalatta*, the process is not, at least speaking according to my judgment, successful. No one can really taste that eccentric book unless he reads it as a whole; its humours arbitrarily separated and cut-and-dried are nearly unintelligible. Indeed Professor Ferrier's original attempt to give Wilson's work only, and not all of that work when it happened to be mixed with others, seems to me to have been a mistake. But of that further, when we come to speak of the *Noctes* themselves.

Wilson's life, for more than two-thirds of it a very happy one and not devoid of a certain eventfulness, can be summarised pretty briefly, especially as a full account of it is available in the very delightful work of his daughter Mrs. Gordon. Born in 1785, the son of a rich manufacturer of Paisley and a mother who boasted gentle blood, he was brought up first in the house of a country minister (whose parish he has made famous in several sketches), then at the University of Glasgow, and then at Magdalen College, Oxford. He was early left possessor of a considerable fortune, and his first love, a certain "Margaret," having proved unkind, he established himself at Elleray on Windermere and entered into all the Lake society. Before very long (he was twenty-six at the time) he married Miss Jane Penny, daughter of a Liverpool merchant, and kept open house at Elleray for some years. Then his fortune disappeared in the keeping of a dishonest relation, and he had, in a way, his livelihood to make. I say "in a way," because the wind appears to have been considerably tempered to this shorn but robust lamb. He had not even to give up Elleray, though he could not live there in his old style. He had a mother who was able and willing to entertain him at Edinburgh, on the sole understanding that he did not "turn Whig," of which there was very little danger. He was enabled to keep not too exhausting or anxious terms as an advocate at the Scottish bar; and before long he was endowed, against the infinitely superior claims of Sir William Hamilton, and by sheer force of personal and political influence, with the lucrative Professorship of Moral Philosophy in the University of Edinburgh. But even before this he had been exempted from the necessity of cultivating literature on a little oatmeal by his connexion with Blackwood's Magazine. The story of that magazine has often been told; never perhaps quite fully, but sufficiently. Wilson was not at any time, strictly speaking, editor; and a statement under his own hand avers that he never received any editorial pay, and was sometimes subject to that criticism which the publisher, as all men know from a famous letter of Scott's, was sometimes in the habit of exercising rather indiscreetly. But for a very great number of years, there is no doubt that he held a kind of quasi-editorial position, which included the censorship of other men's work and an almost, if not

quite, unlimited right of printing his own. For some time the even more masterful spirit of Lockhart (against whom by the way Mrs. Gordon seems to have had a rather unreasonable prejudice) qualified his control over "Maga." But Lockhart's promotion to the Quarterly removed this influence, and from 1825 (speaking roughly) to 1835 Wilson was supreme. The death of William Blackwood and of the Ettrick Shepherd in the last-named year, and of his own wife in 1837 (the latter a blow from which he never recovered), strongly affected not his control over the publication but his desire to control it; and after 1839 his contributions (save in the years 1845 and 1848) were very few. Ill health and broken spirits disabled him, and in 1852 he had to resign his professorship, dying two years later after some months of almost total prostration. Of the rest of the deeds of Christopher, and of his pugilism, and of his learning, and of his pedestrian exploits, and of his fishing, and of his cock-fighting, and of his hearty enjoyment of life generally, the books of the chronicles of Mrs. Gordon, and still more the twelve volumes of his works and the unprinted contributions to Blackwood, shall tell.

It is with those works that our principal business is, and some of them I shall take the liberty of at once dismissing. His poems are now matters of interest to very few mortals. It is not that they are bad, for they are not; but that they are almost wholly without distinction. He came just late enough to have got the seed of the great romantic revival; and his verse work is rarely more than the work of a clever man who has partly learnt and partly divined the manner of Burns, Scott, Campbell, Coleridge, Wordsworth, Byron, and the rest. Nor, to my fancy, are his prose tales of much more value. I read them many years ago and cared little for them. I re-read, or attempted to re-read, them the other day and cared less. There seems, from the original prospectus of the edition of his works, to have been an intention of editing the course of moral philosophy which, with more or fewer variations, obtained him the agreeable income of a thousand a year or so for thirty years. But whether (as Mrs. Gordon seems to hint) the notes were in too dilapidated and chaotic a condition for use, or whether Professor Ferrier, his son-in-law and editor (himself, with Dean Mansel, the last of the exact philosophers of Britain), revolted at the idea of printing anything so merely literary, or what it was, I know not—at any rate they do not now figure in the list. This leaves us ten volumes of collected works, to wit, four of the *Noctes Ambrosianæ*, four of *Essays Critical and Imaginative*, and two of *The Recreations of Christopher North*, all with a very few exceptions reprinted from Blackwood. Mrs. Gordon filially groans because the reprint was not more extensive, and without endorsing her own very high opinion of her father's work, it is possible to agree with her. It is especially noteworthy that from the essays are excluded three out of the four chief critical series which Wilson wrote—that on Spenser, praised by a writer so little given to reckless praise as Hallam, the *Specimens of British Critics*, and the *Dies Boreales*,—leaving only the series on Homer with its quasi-Appendix on the Greek dramatists, and the *Noctes* themselves.

It must be confessed that the *Noctes Ambrosianæ* are not easy things to commend to the modern reader, if I may use the word commend in its proper sense and with no air of patronage. Even Scotchmen (perhaps, indeed, Scotchmen most of all) are wont nowadays to praise them rather apologetically, as may be seen in the case of their editor and abridger Mr. Skelton. Like most other very original things they drew after them a flock of imbecile imitations; and up to the present day those who have lived in the remoter parts of Scotland must know, or recently remember, dreary compositions in corrupt following of the *Noctes*, with exaggerated attempts at Christopher's worst mannerisms, and invariably including a ghastly caricature of the Shepherd. Even in themselves they abound in stumbling-blocks, which are perhaps multiplied, at least at the threshold, by the arbitrary separation in Ferrier's edition of Wilson's part, and not all his part, from the whole series; eighteen numbers being excluded bodily to begin with, while many more and parts of more are omitted subsequently. The critical mistake of this is evident, for much of the machinery and all the characters of the *Noctes* were given to, not by, Wilson, and in all probability he accepted them not too willingly. The origin of the fantastic personages, the creation of which was a perfect mania with the early contributors to Blackwood, and who are, it is to be feared, too often a nuisance to modern readers, is rather dubious. Maginn's friends have claimed the origination of the *Noctes* proper, and of its well-known motto paraphrased from Phocylides, for "The Doctor," or, if his chief Blackwood designation be preferred, for the *Ensign*—*Ensign O'Doherty*. Professor Ferrier, on the other hand, has shown a not unnatural but by no means critical or exact desire to hint that Wilson invented the whole. There is no doubt that the real original is to be found in the actual suppers at "Ambrose's." These Lockhart had described, in *Peter's Letters*, before the appearance of the first *Noctes* (the reader must not be shocked, the false concord is invariable in the book itself) and not long after the establishment of "Maga." As was the case with the magazine generally,



the early numbers were extremely local and extremely personal. Wilson's glory is that he to a great extent, though not wholly, lifted them out of this rut, when he became the chief if not the sole writer after Lockhart's removal to London, and, with rare exceptions, reduced the personages to three strongly marked and very dramatic characters, Christopher North himself, the Ettrick Shepherd, and "Tickler." All these three were in a manner portraits, but no one is a mere photograph from a single person. On the whole, however, I suspect that Christopher North is a much closer likeness, if not of what Wilson himself was, yet at any rate of what he would have liked to be, than some of his apologists maintain. These charitable souls excuse the egotism, the personality, the violence, the inconsistency, the absurd assumption of omniscience and Admirable-Crichtonism, on the plea that "Christopher" is only the ideal Editor and not the actual Professor. It is quite true that Wilson, who, like all men of humour, must have known his own foibles, not unfrequently satirises them; but it is clear from his other work and from his private letters that they were his foibles. The figure of the Shepherd, who is the chief speaker and on the whole the most interesting, is a more debatable one. It is certain that many of Hogg's friends, and, in his touchy moments he himself, considered that great liberty was taken with him, if not that (as the Quarterly put it in a phrase which evidently made Wilson very angry) he was represented as a mere "boozing buffoon." On the other hand it is equally certain that the Shepherd never did anything that exhibited half the power over thought and language which is shown in the best passages of his *Noctes* eidolon. Some of the adventures described as having happened to him are historically known as having happened to Wilson himself, and his sentiments are much more the writer's than the speaker's. At the same time the admirably imitated patois and the subtle rendering of Hogg's very well known foibles—his inordinate and stupendous vanity, his proneness to take liberties with his betters, his irritable temper, and the rest—give a false air of identity which is very noteworthy. The third portrait is said to have been the farthest from life, except in some physical peculiarities, of the three. "Tickler," whose original was Wilson's maternal uncle Robert Sym, an Edinburgh "writer," and something of a humorist in the flesh, is very skilfully made to hold the position of common-sense intermediary between the two originals, North and the Shepherd. He has his own peculiarities, but he has also a habit of bringing his friends down from their altitudes in a Voltairian fashion which is of great benefit to the dialogues, and may be compared to Peacock's similar use of some of his characters. The few occasional interlocutors are of little moment, with one exception; and the only female characters, Mrs. and Miss Gentle, would have been very much better away. They are not in the least lifelike, and usually exhibit the namby-pamby into which Wilson too often fell when he wished to be refined and pathetic. The "English" or half-English characters, who come in sometimes as foils, are also rather of the stick, sticky. On the other hand, the interruptions of Ambrose, the host, and his household, though a little farcical, are well judged. And of the one exception above mentioned, the live Thomas De Quincey, who is brought in without disguise or excuse in some of the very best of the series, it can only be said that the imitation of his written style is extraordinary, and that men who knew his conversation say that the rendering of that is more extraordinary still.

The same designed exaggeration which some uncritical persons have called Rabelaisian (not noticing that the very fault of the *Noctes* is that, unlike Rabelais, their author mixes up probabilities and improbabilities so that there is a perpetual jarring) is maintained throughout the scenery and etceteras. The comfortable but modest accommodations of Ambrose's hotels in Gabriel's Road and Picardy Place are turned into abodes of not particularly tasteful luxury which put Lord Beaconsfield's famous upholstery to shame, and remind one of what they probably suggested, Edgar Poe's equally famous and much more terrible sketch of a model drawing-room. All the plate is carefully described as "silver"; if it had been gold there might have been some humour in it. The "wax" candles and "silken" curtains (if they had been Arabian Nights lamps and oriental drapery the same might be said) are always insisted on. If there is any joke here it seems to lie in the contrast with Wilson's actual habits, which were very simple. For instance, he gives us a gorgeous description of the apparatus of North's solitary confinement when writing for Blackwood; his daughter's unvarnished account of the same process agrees exactly as to time, rate of production, and so forth, but substitutes water for the old hock and "Scots pint" (magnum) of claret, a dirty little terra-cotta inkstand for the silver utensil of the *Noctes*, and a single large tallow candle for Christopher's "floods of light." He carried the whim so far as to construct for himself—his *Noctes* self—an imaginary hall-by-the-sea on the Firth of Forth, which in the same way seems to have had an actual resemblance, half of likeness, half of contrast, to the actual Elleray, and to enlarge his own comfortable town house in Gloucester Place to a sort of fairy palace in Moray Place. But that which has most puzzled and shocked readers are the specially Gargantuan passages relating to eating and drinking. The comments made on this seem (he was anything

but patient of criticism) to have annoyed Wilson very much; and in some of the later *Noctes* he drops hints that the whole is mere Barmecide business. Unfortunately the same criticism applies to this as to the upholstery—the exaggeration is "done too natural." The Shepherd's consumption of oysters not by dozens but by fifties, the allowance of "six common kettles-full of water" for the night's toddy ration of the three, North's above-mentioned bottle of old hock at dinner and magnum of claret after, the dinners and suppers and "whets" which appear so often;—all these stop short of the actually incredible, and are nothing more than extremely convivial men of the time, who were also large eaters, would have actually consumed. Lord Alvanley's three hearty suppers, the exploits of the old member of Parliament in Boz's sketch of Bellamy's (I forget his real name, but he was not a myth), and other things might be quoted to show that there is a fatal verisimilitude in the Ambrosian feasts which may, or may not, make them shocking (they don't shock me), but which certainly takes them out of the category of merely humorous exaggeration. The Shepherd's "jugs" numerous as they are (and by the way the Shepherd propounds two absolutely contradictory theories of toddy-making, one of which, according to the instructions of my preceptors in that art, who lived within sight of the hills that look down on Glenlivet, is a damnable heresy) are not in the least like the *seize muiz*, *deux bussars*, et six *tupins* of tripe that Gargamelle so rashly devoured. There are men now living, and honoured members of society in Scotland, who admit the soft impeachment of having drunk in their youth twelve or fourteen "double" tumblers at a sitting. Now a double tumbler, be it known to the Southron, is a jorum of toddy to which there go two wineglasses (of course of the old-fashioned size, not our modern goblets) of whisky. "Indeed," said a humorous and indulgent lady correspondent of Wilson's, "indeed, I really think you eat too many oysters at the *Noctes*;" and any one who believes in distributive justice must admit that they did.

If, therefore, the reader is of the modern cutlet-and-cup-of-coffee school of feeding, he will no doubt find the *Noctes* most grossly and palpably gluttonous. If he be a very superior person he will smile at the upholstery. If he objects to horseplay he will be horrified at finding the characters on one occasion engaging in a regular "mill," on more than one corking each other's faces during slumber, sometimes playing at pyramids like the bounding brothers of acrobatic fame, at others indulging in leap-frog with the servants, permitting themselves practical jokes of all kinds, affecting to be drowned by an explosive haggis, and so forth. Every now and then he will come to a passage at which, without being superfine at all, he may find his gorge rise; though there is nothing quite so bad in the *Noctes* as the picture of the ravens eating a dead Quaker in the *Recreations*, a picture for which Wilson offers a very lame defence elsewhere. He must put all sorts of prejudice, literary, political, and other, in his pocket. He must be prepared not only for constant and very scurrilous flings at "Cockneys" (Wilson extends the term far beyond the Hunt and Hazlitt school, an extension which to this day seems to give a strange delight to Edinburgh journalists), but for the wildest heterodoxies and inconsistencies of political, literary, and miscellaneous judgment, for much bastard verse-prose, for a good many quite uninteresting local and ephemeral allusions, and, of course, for any quantity of Scotch dialect. If all these allowances and provisos are too many for him to make, it is probably useless for him to attempt the *Noctes* at all. He will pretty certainly, with the Quarterly reviewer, set their characters down as boozing buffoons, and decline the honour of an invitation to Ambrose's or The Lodge, to Southside or the tent in Etrick Forest.

But any one who can accommodate himself to these little matters, much more any one who can enter into the spirit of days merrier, more leisurely, and if not less straitlaced than our own, yet lacing their laces in a different fashion, will find the *Noctes* very delightful indeed. The mere high jinks, when the secret of being in the vein with them has been mastered, are seldom unamusing, and sometimes (notably in the long swim out to sea of Tickler and the Shepherd) are quite admirable fooling. No one who has an eye for the literary-dramatic can help, after a few *Noctes* have been read, admiring the skill with which the characters are at once typified and individualised, the substance which they acquire in the reader's mind, the personal interest in them which is excited. And to all this, peculiarly suited for an alterative in these solemn days, has to be added the abundance of scattered and incomplete but remarkable gems of expression and thought that come at every few pages, sometimes at every page, of the series. Some of the burlesque narratives (such as the Shepherd's Mazeppa-like ride on the Bonassus) are inimitably good, though they are too often spoiled by Wilson's great faults of prolixity and uncertainty of touch. The criticisms, of which there are many, are also extremely unequal, but not a few very fine passages may be found among them. The politics, it must be owned, are not good for much, even from the Tory point of view. But the greatest attraction of the whole, next to its sunshiny heartiness and humour, is to be found in innumerable and

indescribable bits, phrases, sentences, short paragraphs, which have, more than anything out of the dialogues of the very best novels, the character and charm of actual conversation. To read a *Noctes* has, for those who have the happy gift of realising literature, not much less than the effect of actually taking part in one, with no danger of headache or indigestion after, and without the risk of being playfully corked, or required to leap the table for a wager, or forced to extemporise sixteen stanzas standing on the mantelpiece. There must be some peculiar virtue in this, for, as is very well known, the usual dialogue leaves the reader more outside of it than almost any other kind of literature.

This peculiar charm is of necessity wanting to the rest of Wilson's works, and in so far they are inferior to the *Noctes*; but they have compensatory merits of their own, while, considered merely as literature, there are better things in them than anything that is to be found in the colloquies of those men of great gormandising abilities—Christopher North, James Hogg, and Timothy Tickler. Of the four volumes of *Essays Critical and Imaginative*, the fourth, on Homer and his translators, with an unfinished companion piece on the Greek drama, stands by itself, and has indeed, I believe, been separately published. It is well worth reading through at a sitting, which cannot be said of every volume of criticism. What is more, it may, I think, be put almost first in its own division of the art, though whether that division of the art is a high or low one is another question. I should not myself rank it very high. With Wilson, criticism, at least here, is little more than the eloquent expression of likes and dislikes. The long passages in which he deals with the wrath of Achilles and with the love of Calypso, though subject to the general stricture already more than once passed, are really beautiful specimens of literary enthusiasm; nor is there anything in English more calculated to initiate the reader, especially the young reader, in the love at least, if not the understanding, of Homer. The same enthusiastic and obviously quite genuine appreciation appears in the essay on the "Agamemnon." But of criticism as criticism—of what has been called tracing of literary cause and effect, of any coherent and co-ordinated theory of the good and bad in verse and prose, and the reasons of their goodness or badness, it must be said of this, as of Wilson's other critical work, that it is to be found *nusquam nullibi nullimodis*. He can preach (though with too great volubility, and with occasional faults of taste) delightful sermons about what he likes at the moment—for it is by no means always the same; and he can make formidable onslaughts with various weapons on what he dislikes at the moment—which again is not always the same. But a man so certain to go off at score whenever his likes or dislikes are excited, and so absolutely unable to check himself whenever he feels tempted thus to go off, lacks the very first qualifications of the critic:—lacks them, indeed, almost as much as the mere word-grinder who looks to see whether a plural substantive has a singular verb, and is satisfied if it has not, and horrified if it has. His most famous sentence "The Animosities are mortal, but the Humanities live for ever" is certainly noble. But it would have been better if the Humanities had oftener choked the Animosities at their birth.

Wilson's criticism is to be found more or less everywhere in his collected writings. I have said that I think it a pity that, of his longest critical attempts, only one has been republished; and the reason is simple. For with an unequal writer (and Wilson is a writer unequalled in his inequality) his best work is as likely to be found in his worst book as his worst work in his best book; while the constant contemplation for a considerable period of one subject is more likely than anything else to dispel his habits of digression and padding. But the ubiquity of his criticism through the ten volumes was, in the circumstances of their editing, simply unavoidable. He had himself superintended a selection of all kinds, which he called *The Recreations of Christopher North*, and this had to be reprinted entire. It followed that, in the *Essays Critical and Imaginative*, an equally miscellaneous character should be observed. Almost everything given, and much not given, in the *Works* is worth consideration, but for critical purposes a choice is necessary. Let us take the consolidated essay on Wordsworth (most of which dates before 1822), the famous paper on Lord, then Mr., Tennyson's poems in 1832, and the generous palinode on Macaulay's "Lays" of 1842. No three papers could better show Wilson in his three literary stages, that of rather cautious tentative (for though he was not a very young man in 1818, the date of the earliest of the Wordsworth papers, he was a young writer), that of practised and unrestrained vigour (for 1832 represents about his literary zenith), and that of reflective decadence, for by 1842 he had ceased to write habitually, and was already bowed down by mental sorrows and physical ailments.

In the first paper, or set of papers, it is evident that he is ambitiously groping after a more systematic style of criticism than he found in practice to be possible for him. Although he elsewhere scoffs at definitions, he tries to formulate very precisely the genius of Scott, of Byron, and of Wordsworth; he does his best to

connect his individual judgments with these formulas; he shuns mere verbal criticism, and (to some extent) mere exaltation or depreciation of particular passages. But it is quite evident that he is ill at ease; and I do not think that any one now reading the essay can call it a successful one, or can attempt to rank it with those which, from different points of view, Hazlitt and De Quincey (Hazlitt nearly at the same time) wrote about Wordsworth. Indeed, Hazlitt is the most valuable of all examples for a critical comparison with Wilson; both being violent partisans and crotcheteers, both being animated with the truest love of poetry, but the one possessing and the other lacking the "tie-beam" of a consistent critical theory.

A dozen years later Wilson had cast his slough, and had become the autocratic, freespoken, self-constituted dictator, Christopher North. He was confronted with the very difficult problem of Mr. Tennyson's poems. He knew they were poetry; that he could not help seeing and knowing. But they seemed to him to be the work of a "cockney" (it would be interesting to know whether there ever was any one less of a cockney than the author of "Mariana"), and he was irritated by some silly praise which had been given to them. So he set to work, and perpetrated the queerest jumble of sound and unsound criticism that exists in the archives of that art, so far as a humble but laborious student and practitioner thereof knoweth. He could not for the life of him help admiring "Adeline," "Oriana," "Mariana," "The Ode to Memory." Yet he had nothing but scorn for the scarcely less exquisite "Mermaid" and "Sea Fairies"—though the first few lines of the latter, excluded by this and other pseudo-criticism from the knowledge of half a generation of English readers, equal almost anything that the poet has ever done. And only the lucky memory of a remark of Hartley Coleridge's (who never went wrong in criticism, whatever he did in life) saved him from explicitly damning "The Dying Swan," which stands at the very head of a whole class of poetry. In all this essay, to borrow one of his own favourite words, he simply "plouters"—splashes and flounders about without any guidance of critical theory. Compare, to keep up the comparative method, the paper with the still more famous and far more deadly attack which Lockhart made a little later in the Quarterly. There one finds little, if any, generosity; an infinitely more cold-blooded and deliberate determination to "cut up." But the critic (and how quaint and pathetic it is to think that the said critic was the author of "I ride from land to land" and "When youthful hope is fled") sees his theory of poetry straight before him, and never takes his eye off it. The individual censures may be just or unjust, but they fit together like the propositions of a masterpiece of legal judgment. The poet is condemned under the statute,—so much the worse for the statute perhaps, but that does not matter—and he can only plead No jurisdiction; whereas with Christopher it is quite different. If he does not exactly blunder right (and he sometimes does that), he constantly blunders wrong—goes wrong, that is to say, without any excuse of theory or general view. That is not criticism.

We shall not find matters much mended from the strictly critical point of view, when we come, ten years later, to the article on the "Lays." Here Christopher, as I hold with all respect to persons of distinction, is absolutely right. He does not say one word too much of the fire and life of those wonderful verses, of that fight of all fights—as far as English verse goes, except Drayton's "Agincourt" and the last canto of "Marmion"; as far as English prose goes, except some passages of Mallory and two or three pages of Kingsley's—the Battle of the Lake Regillus. The subject and the swing attracted him; he liked the fight, and he liked the ring as of Sir Walter at his very best. But he goes appallingly wrong all through on general critical points. Yet, according to his own perverse fashion, he never goes wrong without going right. Throughout his critical work there are scattered the most intelligent ideas, the neatest phrases, the most appreciative judgments. How good is it to say that "the battle of Trafalgar, though in some sort{295} it neither began nor ended anything, was a kind of consummation of national prowess." How good again in its very straightforwardness and simplicity is the dictum "it is not necessary that we should understand fine poetry in order to feel and enjoy it, any more than fine music." Hundreds and thousands of these things lie about the pages. And in the next page to each the critic probably goes and says something which shows that he had entirely forgotten them. An intelligent man may be angry with Christopher—I should doubt whether any one who is not occasionally both angry and disgusted with him can be an intelligent man. But it is impossible to dislike him or fail to admire him as a whole.

There is a third and very extensive division of Wilson's work which may not improbably be more popular, or might be if it were accessible separately, with the public of to-day, than either of those which have been surveyed. His "drunken Noctes," as Carlyle unkindly calls them, require a certain peculiar attitude of mind to appreciate them. As for his criticisms, it is frequently said, and it certainly would not become me to deny

it, that nobody reads criticism but critics. But Wilson's renown as an athlete, a sportsman, and a lover of nature, who had a singular gift in expressing his love, has not yet died; and there is an ample audience now for men who can write about athletics, about sport, and about scenery. Nor is it questionable that on these subjects he is seen, on the whole, at his best. True, his faults pursue him even here, and are aggravated by a sort of fashion of the time which made him elaborately digress into politics, into literature, even (God rest his soul!) into a kind of quasi-professional and professorial sermonising on morals and theology, in the midst of his sporting articles. But the metal more attractive of the main subject would probably recommend these papers widely, if they were not scattered pell-mell about the *Essays Critical and Imaginative*, and the *Recreations of Christopher North*. Speaking generally they fall into three divisions—essays on sport in general, essays on the English Lakes, and essays on the Scottish Highlands. The best of the first class are the famous papers called "Christopher North in his Sporting Jacket," and the scattered reviews and articles redacted in the *Recreations* under the general title of "Anglimania." In the second class all are good; and a volume composed of "Christopher at the Lakes," "A Day at Windermere," "Christopher on Colonsay" (a wild extravaganza which had a sort of basis of fact in a trotting-match won on a pony which Wilson afterwards sold for four pounds), and "A Saunter at Grasmere," with one or two more, would be a thing of price. The best of the third class beyond all question is the collection, also redacted by the author for the *Recreations*, entitled "The Moors." This last is perhaps the best of all the sporting and descriptive pieces, though not the least exemplary of its authors vagaries; for before he can get to the Moors, he gives us heaven knows how many pages of a criticism on Wordsworth, which, in that place at any rate, we do not in the least want; and in the very middle of his wonderful and sanguinary exploits on and near Ben Cruachan, he "interrupts the muffins" in order to deliver to a most farcical and impertinent assemblage a quite serious and still more impertinent sermon. But all these papers are more or less delightful. For the glowing description of, and the sneaking apology for, cat-worrying which the "Sporting Jacket" contains, nothing can be said. Wilson deliberately overlooks the fact that the whole fun of that nefarious amusement consists in the pitting of a plucky but weak animal against something much more strongly built and armed than itself. One may regret the P.R., and indulge in a not wholly sneaking affection for cock-fighting, dog-fighting, and anything in which there is a fair match, without having the slightest weakness for this kind of brutality. But, generally speaking, Wilson is a thoroughly fair sportsman, and how enthusiastic he is, no one who has read him can fail to know. Of the scenery of loch or lake, of hill or mountain, he was at once an ardent lover and a describer who has never been equalled. His accustomed exaggeration and false emphasis are nowhere so little perceptible as when he deals with Ben Cruachan or the Old Man of Coniston, with the Four Great Lakes of Britain, East and West (one of his finest passages), or with the glens of Etive and Borrowdale. The accursed influence of an unchastened taste is indeed observable in the before-mentioned "Dead Quaker of Helvellyn," a piece of unrelieved nastiness which he has in vain tried to excuse. But the whole of the series from which this is taken ("Christopher in his Aviary") is in his least happy style, alternately grandiose and low, relieved indeed by touches of observation and feeling, as all his work is, but hardly redeemed by them. The depths of his possible fall may also be seen from a short piece which Professor Ferrier, obligingly describing it as "too lively to be omitted," has adjoined to "Christopher at the Lakes." But, on the whole, all the articles mentioned in the list at the beginning of this paragraph, with the capital "Streams" as an addition, with the soliloquies on "The Seasons," and with part (not the narrative part) of "Highland Storms," are delightful reading. The progress of the sportsman has never been better given than in "Christopher North in his Sporting Jacket." In "The Moors" the actual sporting part is perhaps a little spoilt by the affectation of infallibility, qualified it is true by an aside or two, which so often mars the Christopherian utterances. But Wilson's description has never been bettered. The thunderstorm on the hill, the rough conviviality at the illicit distillery, the evening voyage on the loch, match, if they do not beat, anything of the kind in much more recent books far better known to the present generation. A special favourite of mine is the rather unceremonious review of Sir Humphry Davy's strangely over-praised "Salmonia." The passage of utter scorn and indignation at the preposterous statement of the chief personage in the dialogues, that after an exceptionally hard day's walking and fishing "half a pint of claret per man is enough," is sublime. Nearly the earliest, and certainly the best, protest against some modern fashions in shooting is to be found in "The Moors." In the same series, the visit to the hill cottage, preceding that to the still, has what it has since become the fashion to call the idyllic flavour, without too much of the rather mawkish pathos with which, in imitation of Mackenzie and the sensibility-writers of the last century, Wilson is apt to daub his pictures of rural and humble life. The passages on Oxford, to go to a slightly different but allied subject, in "Old North and Young North" (a paper not yet mentioned), may have full appeal to Oxford men, but I can hardly be mistaken in thinking

that outsiders must see at least some of the beauty of them. But the list of specially desirable things in these articles is endless; hardly one of them can be taken up without discovering{300} many such, not one of them without discovering some.

And, throughout the whole collection, there is the additional satisfaction that the author is writing only of what he thoroughly knows and understands. At the Lakes Wilson lived for years, and was familiar with every cranny of the hills, from the Pillar to Hawes Water, and from Newby Bridge to Saddleback. He began marching and fishing through the Highlands when he was a boy, enticed even his wife into perilous pedestrian enterprises with him, and, though the extent of his knowledge was perhaps not quite so large as he pretends, he certainly knew great tracts as well as he knew Edinburgh. Nor were his qualifications as a sportsman less authentic, despite the somewhat Munchausenish appearance which some of the feats narrated in the *Noctes* and the *Recreations* wear, and are indeed intended to wear. His enormous baskets of trout seem to have been, if not quite so regular as he sometimes makes them out, at any rate fully historical as occasional feats. As has been hinted, he really did win the trotting-match on the pony, Colonsay, against a thoroughbred, though it was only on the technical point of the thoroughbred breaking his pace. His walk from London to Oxford in a night seems to have been a fact, and indeed there is nothing at all impossible in it, for the distance through Wycombe is not more than fifty-three miles; while the less certainly authenticated feat of walking from Liverpool to Elleray (eighty miles at least), without more than a short rest, also appears to be genuine. Like the heroes of a song that he loved, though he seems to have sung it in a corrupt text, he could wrestle and fight and jump out anywhere; and, until he was thoroughly broken by illness, he appears to have made the very most of the not inconsiderable spare time of a Scotch professor who has once got his long series of lectures committed to paper, and has nothing to do for the rest of his life but collect bundles of pound notes at the beginning of each session. All this, joined to his literary gifts, gives a reality to his out-of-door papers which is hardly to be found elsewhere except in some passages of Kingsley, between whom and Wilson there are many and most curious resemblances, chequered by national and personal differences only less curious.

I do not think he was a good reviewer, even after making allowance for the prejudices and partisanship of the time, and for the monkey tricks of mannerism, which, at any rate in his earlier days, were incumbent on a reviewer in "Maga." He is too prone to the besetting sins of reviewing—the right hand defections and left hand fallings off, which, being interpreted, consist first in expressing agreement or disagreement with the author's views, and secondly in digressing into personal statements of one's own views of things connected with them instead of expounding more or less clearly what the book is, and addressing oneself to the great question, Is it a good or a bad piece of work according to the standard which the author himself strove to reach? I have said that I do not think he was on the whole a good critic (for a man may be a good critic and a bad reviewer, though the reverse will hardly stand), and I have given my reasons. That he was neither a great, nor even a very good poet or tale-teller, I have no doubt whatever. But this leaves untouched the attraction of his miscellaneous work, and its suitability for the purpose of recreation. For that purpose I think it to be among the very best work in all literature. Its unfailing life and vigour, its vast variety, the healthy and inspiring character of the subjects with which in the main it deals, are the characteristics which make its volumes easy-chair books of the best order. Its beauty no doubt is irregular, faulty, engaging rather than exquisite, attractive rather than artistically or scientifically perfect. I do not know that there is even any reason to join in the general lament over Wilson as being a gigantic failure, a monument of wasted energies and half-developed faculty. I do not at all think that there was anything in him much better than he actually did, or{303} that he ever could have polished and sand-papered the faults out of his work. It would pretty certainly have lost freshness and vigour; it would quite certainly have been less in bulk, and bulk is a very important point in literature that is to serve as recreation. It is to me not much less certain that it never would have attained the first rank in symmetry and order. I am quite content with it as it is, and I only wish that still more of it were easily accessible.

X

DE QUINCEY

In not a few respects the literary lot of Thomas De Quincey, both during his life and after it, has been exceedingly peculiar. In one respect it has been unique. I do not know that any other author of anything like his merit, during our time, has had a piece of work published for fully twenty years as his, only for it to be excluded as somebody else's at the end of that time. Certainly *The Traditions of the Rabbins* was very De Quinceyish; indeed, it was so De Quinceyish that the discovery, after such a length of time, that it was not De Quincey's at all, but "Salathiel" Croly's, must have given unpleasant qualms to more than one critic accustomed to be positive on internal evidence. But if De Quincey had thus attributed to him work that was not his, he has also had the utmost difficulty in getting attributed to him, in any accessible form, work that was his own. Three, or nominally four, editions—one in the decade of his death, superintended for the most part by himself; another in 1862, whose blue coat and white labels dwell in the fond memory; and another in 1878 (reprinted in 1880) a little altered and enlarged, with the Rabbins turned out and more soberly clad, but identical in the main—put before the British public for some thirty-five years a certain portion of his strange, long-delayed, but voluminous work. This work had occupied him for about the same period, that is to say for the last and shorter half of his extraordinary and yet uneventful life. Now, after much praying of readers, and grumbling of critics, we have a fifth and definitive edition from the English critic who has given most attention to De Quincey, Professor Masson. I may say, with hearty acknowledgment of Mr. Masson's services to English literature, that I do not very much like this last edition. De Quincey, never much favoured by the mechanical producers of books, has had his sizings, as Byron would say, still further stinted in the matter of print, margins, and the like; and what I cannot but regard as a rather unceremonious tampering with his own arrangement has taken place, the new matter being not added in supplementary volumes or in appendices to the reprinted volumes, but thrust into or between the separate essays, sometimes to the destruction of De Quincey's "redaction" altogether, and always to the confusion and dislocation of his arrangement, which has also been neglected in other ways. Still the actual generation of readers will undoubtedly have before them a fuller and completer edition of De Quincey than even Americans have yet had; and they will have it edited by an accomplished scholar who has taken a great deal of pains to acquaint himself thoroughly with the subject.

Will they form a different estimate from that which those of us who have known the older editions for a quarter of a century have formed, and will that estimate, if it is different, be higher or lower? To answer such questions is always difficult; but it is especially difficult here, for a certain reason which I had chiefly in mind when I said just now that De Quincey's literary lot has been very peculiar. I believe that I am not speaking for myself only; I am quite sure that I am speaking my own deliberate opinion when I say that on scarcely any English writer is it so hard to strike a critical balance—to get a clear definite opinion that you can put on the shelf and need merely take down now and then to be dusted and polished up by a fresh reading—as on De Quincey. This is partly due to the fact that his merits are of the class that appeals to, while his faults are of the class that is excused by, the average boy who has some interest in literature. To read the *Essay on Murder*, the *English Mail Coach*, *The Spanish Nun*, *The Cæsars*, and half a score other things at the age of about fifteen or sixteen is, or ought to be, to fall in love with them. And there is nothing more unpleasant for *les âmes bien nées*, as the famous distich has it, than to find fault in after life with that with which you have fallen in love at fifteen or sixteen. Yet most unfortunately, just as De Quincey's merits, or some of them, appeal specially to youth, and his defects specially escape the notice of youth, so age with stealing steps especially claws those merits into his clutch and leaves the defects exposed to derision. The most gracious state of authors is that they shall charm at all ages those whom they do charm. There are others—Dante, Cervantes, Goethe are instances—as to whom you may even begin with a little aversion, and go on to love them more and more. De Quincey, I fear, belongs to a third class, with whom it is difficult to keep up the first love, or rather whose defects begin before long to urge themselves upon the critical lover (some would say there are no critical lovers, but that I deny) with an even less happy result than is recorded in one of Catullus's finest lines. This kind of discovery  
*Cogit amare minus, nec bene velle magis.*

How and to what extent this is the case, it must be the business of this paper to attempt to show. But first it is desirable to give, as usual, a brief sketch of De Quincey's life. It need only be a brief one, for the external events of that life were few and meagre; nor can they be said to be, even after the researches of Mr. Page and Professor Masson, very accurately or exhaustively known. Before those researches "all was mist and myth" about De Quincey. I remember as a boy, a year or two after his death, hearing a piece of scandal about his domestic relations, which seems to have had no foundation whatever, but which pretty evidently

was an echo of the "libel" (published in a short-lived newspaper of the kind which after many years has again risen to infest London) whereof he complains with perhaps more acrimony than dignity in a paper for the first time exhumed and reprinted in Professor Masson's edition. Many of the details of the Confessions and the Autobiography have a singular unbelievableness as one reads them; and though the tendency of recent biographers has been to accept them as on the whole genuine, I own that I am rather sceptical about many of them still. Was the ever-famous Malay a real Malay, or a thing of shreds and patches? Did De Quincey actually call upon the awful Dean Cyril Jackson and affably discuss with him the propriety of entering himself at Christ-church? Did he really journey pennilessly down to Eton on the chance of finding a casual peer of the realm of tender years who would back a bill for him? These are but a few out of a large number of questions which in idle moods (for the answer to hardly one of them is of the least importance) suggest themselves; and which have been very partially answered hitherto even of late years, though they have been much discussed. The plain and tolerably certain facts which are important in connection with his work may be pretty rapidly summed up.

Thomas de Quincey, or Quincey, was born in Manchester—but apparently not, as he himself thought, at the country house of Greenhay which his parents afterwards inhabited—on 15th August 1785. His father was a merchant, well to do but of weak health, who died when Thomas was seven years old. Of his childhood he has left very copious reminiscences, and there is no doubt that reminiscences of childhood do linger long after later memories have disappeared. But to what extent De Quincey gave "cocked hats and canes" to his childish thoughts and to his relations with his brothers and sisters, individual judgment must decide. I should say, for my part, that the extent was considerable. It seems, however, pretty clear that he was as a child, very much what he was all his life—emphatically "old-fashioned," retiring without being exactly shy, full of far-brought fancies and yet intensely concentrated upon himself. In 1796 his mother moved to Bath, and Thomas was educated first at the Grammar School there and then at a private school in Wiltshire. It was at Bath, his headquarters being there, that he met various persons of distinction—Lord Westport, Lord and Lady Carbery, and others—who figure largely in the Autobiography, but are never heard of afterwards. It was with Lord Westport, a boy somewhat younger than himself, that he took a trip to Ireland, the only country beyond Great Britain that he visited. In 1800 he was sent by his guardians to the Manchester Grammar School in order to obtain, by three years' boarding there, one of the Somerset Exhibitions to Brasenose. As a separate income of £150 had been left by De Quincey's father to each of his sons, as this income, or part of it, must have been accumulating, and as the mother was very well off, this roundabout way of securing for him a miserable forty or fifty pounds a year seems strange enough. But it has to be remembered that for all these details we have little security but De Quincey himself. However, that he did go to Manchester, and did, after rather more than two of his three years' probation, run away is indisputable. His mother was living at Chester, and the calf was not killed for this prodigal son; but he had liberty given him to wander about Wales on an allowance of a guinea a week. That there is some mystery, or mystification, about all this is nearly certain. If things really went as he represents them, his mother ought to have been ashamed of herself, and his guardians ought to have had, to say the least, an experience of the roughest side of Lord Eldon's tongue. The wanderings in Wales were followed by the famous sojourn in Soho, with its waitings at money-lenders' doors, and its perambulations of Oxford Street. Then, by another sudden revolution, we find De Quincey with two-thirds of his allowance handed over to him and permission to go to Oxford as he wished, but abandoned to his own devices by his mother and his guardians, as surely no mother and no guardians ever abandoned an exceptionally unworldly boy of eighteen before. They seem to have put fifty guineas in his pocket and sent him up to Oxford, without even recommending him a college, and with an income which made it practically certain that he would once more seek the Jews. When he had spent so much of his fifty guineas that there was not enough left to pay caution-money at most colleges, he went to Worcester, where it happened to be low. He seems to have stayed there, on and off, for nearly six years. But he took no degree, his eternal caprices making him shun *vivâ voce* (then a much more important part of the examination than it is now) after sending in unusually good written papers. Instead of taking a degree, he began to take opium, and to make acquaintance with the "Lakers" in both their haunts of Somerset and Westmoreland. He entered himself at the Middle Temple, he may have eaten some dinners, and somehow or other he "came into his property," though there are dire surmises that it was by the Hebrew door. At any rate in November 1809 he gave up both Oxford and London (which he had frequented a good deal, chiefly, he says, for the sake of the opera of which he was very fond), and established himself at Grasmere. One of the most singular things about his singular life—an oddity due, no doubt, in part to the fact that he outlived his more literary associates instead of being



outlived by them—is that though we hear much from De Quincey of other people we hear extremely little from other people about De Quincey. Indeed what we do so hear dates almost entirely from the last days of his life.

As for the autobiographic details in his *Confessions* and elsewhere, anybody who chooses may put those Sibylline leaves together for himself. It would only appear certain that for ten years he led the life of a recluse student and a hard laudanum-drinker, varied by a little society now and then; that in 1816 he married Margaret Simpson, a dalesman's daughter, of whom we have hardly any personal notices save to the effect that she was very beautiful, and who seems to have been almost the most exemplary of wives to almost the most eccentric of husbands; that for most of the time he was in more or less ease and affluence (ease and affluence still, it would seem, of a treacherous Hebraic origin); and that about 1819 he found himself in great pecuniary difficulties. Then at length he turned to literature, started as editor of a little Tory paper at Kendal, went to London, and took rank, never to be cancelled, as a man of letters by the first part of *The Confessions of an Opium-Eater*, published in the *London Magazine* for 1821. He began as a magazine-writer, and he continued as such till the end of his life; his publications in book-form being, till he was induced to collect his articles, quite insignificant. Between 1821 and 1825 he seems to have been chiefly in London, though sometimes at Grasmere; between 1825 and 1830 chiefly at Grasmere, but much in Edinburgh, where Wilson (whose friendship he had secured, not at Oxford, though they were contemporaries, but at the Lakes) was now residing, and where he was introduced to Blackwood. In 1830 he moved his household to the Scotch capital, and lived there, and (after his wife's death in 1837) at Lasswade, or rather Polton, for the rest of his life. His affairs had come to their worst before he lost his wife, and it is now known that for some considerable time he lived, like Mr. Chrystal Croftangry, in the sanctuary of Holyrood. But De Quincey's way of "living" at any place was as mysterious as most of his other ways; and, though he seems to have been very fond of his family and not at all put out by them, it was his constant habit to establish himself in separate lodgings. These he as constantly shifted (sometimes as far as Glasgow) for no intelligible reason that has ever been discovered or surmised, his pecuniary troubles having long ceased. It was in the latest and most permanent of these lodgings, 42 Lothian Street, Edinburgh, not at Lasswade, that he died on the 8th of December 1859. He had latterly written mainly, though not solely, for *Tait's Magazine* and *Hogg's Instructor*. But his chief literary employment for at least seven years before this, had been the arrangement of the authorised edition of his works, the last or fourteenth volume of which was in the press at the time of his death.

So meagre are the known facts in a life of seventy-four years, during nearly forty of which De Quincey, though never popular, was still recognised as a great name in English letters, while during the same period he knew, and was known to, not a few distinguished men. But little as is recorded of the facts of his life, even less is recorded of his character, and for once it is almost impossible to discover that character from his works. The few persons who met him all agree as to his impenetrability,—an impenetrability not in the least due to posing, but apparently natural and fated. De Quincey was at once egotistic and impersonal, at once delighted to talk and resolutely shunning society. To him, one is tempted to say, reading and writing did come by nature, and nothing else was natural at all. With books he is always at home. A De Quincey in a world where there was neither reading nor writing of books, would certainly either have committed suicide or gone mad. Pope's theory of the master-passion, so often abused, justified itself here. The quantity of work produced during this singular existence, from the time when De Quincey first began, unusually late, to write for publication, was very large. As collected by the author, it filled fourteen volumes; the collection was subsequently enlarged to sixteen, and though the new edition promises to restrict itself to the older and lesser number, the contents of each volume have been very considerably increased. But this printed and reprinted total, so far as can be judged from De Quincey's own assertions and from the observations of those who were acquainted with him during his later years, must have been but the smaller part of what he actually wrote. He was always writing, and always leaving deposits of his manuscripts in the various lodgings where it was his habit to bestow himself. The greater part of De Quincey's writing was of a kind almost as easily written by so full a reader and so logical a thinker as an ordinary newspaper article by an ordinary man; and except when he was sleeping, wandering about, or reading, he was always writing. It is, of course, true that he spent a great deal of time, especially in his last years of all, in re-writing and re-fashioning previously executed work; and also that illness and opium made considerable inroads on his leisure. But I should imagine that if we had all that he actually wrote during these nearly forty years, forty or sixty printed volumes would more nearly express its amount than fourteen or sixteen.

Still what we have is no mean bulk of work for any man to have accomplished, especially when it is considered how extraordinarily good much of it is. To classify it is not particularly easy; and I doubt, myself, whether any classification is necessary. De Quincey himself tried, and made rather a muddle of it. Professor Masson is trying also. But, in truth, except those wonderful purple patches of "numerous" prose, which are stuck all about the work, and perhaps in strictness not excepting them, everything that De Quincey wrote, whether it was dream or reminiscence, literary criticism or historical study, politics or political economy, had one characteristic so strongly impressed on it as to dwarf and obscure the differences of subject. It is not very easy to find a description at once accurate and fair, brief and adequate, of this peculiarity; it is best hinted at in a remark on De Quincey's conversation which I have seen quoted somewhere (whether by Professor Masson or not I hardly know), that it was, with many interesting and delightful qualities, a kind of "rigmarole." So far as I remember, the remark was not applied in any unfriendly spirit, nor is it adduced here in any such. But both in the printed works, in the remembrances of De Quincey's conversation which have been printed, in his letters which are exactly like his articles, and in those astonishing imaginary conversations attributed to him in the *Noctes Ambrosianæ*, which are said, by good authorities, exactly to represent his way of talk, this quality of rigmarole appears. It is absolutely impossible for him to keep to his subject, or any subject. It is as impossible for him to pull himself up briefly in any digression from that subject. In his finest passages, as in his most trivial, he is at the mercy of the will-o'-the-wisp of divagation. In his later re-handlings of his work, he did to some extent limit his followings of this will-o'-the-wisp to notes, but by no means always; and both in his later and in his earlier work, as it was written for the first time, he indulged them freely in the text.

For pure rigmarole, for stories, as Mr. Chadband has it, "of a cock and of a bull, and of a lady and of a half-crown," few things, even in De Quincey, can exceed, and nothing out of De Quincey can approach, the passages about the woman he met on the "cop" at Chester, and about the Greek letter that he did not send to the Bishop of Bangor, in the preliminary part of the *Confessions*. The first is the more teasing, because with a quite elvish superfluity of naughtiness he has here indulged in a kind of double rigmarole about the woman and the "bore" in the river, and flits from one to the other, and from the other to the one (his main story standing still the while), for half a dozen pages, till the reader feels as Coleridge's auditors must have felt when he talked about "Ball and Bell, Bell and Ball." But the Greek letter episode, or rather, the episode about the Greek letter which never was written, is, if possible, more flagrantly rigmarolish. The-cop-and-bore-and-woman digression contains some remarkable description as a kind of solace to the Puck-led traveller; the other is bare of any such comfort. The Bishop's old housekeeper, who was De Quincey's landlady, told him, it seems, that the Bishop had cautioned her against taking in lodgers whom she did not know, and De Quincey was very angry. As he thought he could write Greek much better than the Bishop, he meditated expostulation in that language. He did not expostulate, but he proceeds instead to consider the possible effect on the Bishop if he had. There was a contemporary writer whom we can imagine struck by a similar whimsy: but Charles Lamb would have given us the Bishop and himself "quite natural and distinct" in a dozen lines, and then have dropped the subject, leaving our sides aching with laughter, and our appetites longing for more. De Quincey tells us at great length who the Bishop was, and how he was the Head of Brasenose, with some remarks on the relative status of Oxford Colleges. Then he debates the pros and cons on the question whether the Bishop would have answered the letter or not, with some remarks on the difference between strict scholarship and the power of composing in a dead language. He rises to real humour in the remark, that as "Methodists swarmed in Carnarvonshire," he "could in no case have found pleasure in causing mortification" to the Bishop, even if he had vanquished him. By this time we have had some three pages of it, and could well, especially with this lively touch to finish, accept them, though they be something tedious, supposing the incident to be closed. The treacherous author leads us to suppose that it is closed; telling us how he left Bangor, and went to Carnarvon, which change gradually drew his thoughts away from the Bishop. So far is this from being the case, that he goes back to that Reverend Father, and for two mortal pages more, speculates further what would happen if he had written to the Bishop, what the Bishop would have said, whether he would not have asked him (De Quincey) to the Palace, whether, in his capacity of Head of a House, he would not have welcomed him to that seat of learning, and finally smoothed his way to a fellowship. By which time, one is perfectly sick of the Bishop, and of these speculations on the might-have-been, which are indeed by no means unnatural, being exactly what every man indulges in now and then in his own case, which, in conversation, would not be unpleasant,

but which, gradually and diffusely set down in a book, and interrupting a narrative, are most certainly "rigmarole."

Rigmarole, however, can be a very agreeable thing in its way, and De Quincey has carried it to a point of perfection never reached by any other rigmaroler. Despite his undoubted possession of a kind of humour, it is a very remarkable thing that he rigmaroles, so far as can be made out by the application of the most sensitive tests, quite seriously, and almost, if not quite, unconsciously. These digressions or deviations are studded with quips and jests, good, bad, and indifferent. But the writer never seems to suspect that his own general attitude is at least susceptible of being made fun of. It is said, and we can very well believe it, that he was excessively annoyed at Lamb's delightful parody of his Letters to a Young Man whose Education has been Neglected; and, on the whole, I should say that no great man of letters in this century, except Balzac and Victor Hugo, was so insensible to the ludicrous aspect of his own performances. This in the author of the Essay on Murder may seem surprising, but, in fact, there are few things of which there are so many subdivisions, or in which the subdivisions are marked off from each other by such apparently impermeable lines, as humour. If I may refine a little I should say that there was very frequently, if not generally, a humorous basis for these divagations of De Quincey's; but that he almost invariably lost sight of that basis, and proceeded to reason quite gravely away from it, in what is (not entirely with justice) called the scholastic manner. How much of this was due to the influence of Jean Paul and the other German humorists of the last century, with whom he became acquainted very early, I should not like to say. I confess that my own enjoyment of Richter, which has nevertheless been considerable, has always been lessened by the presence in him, to a still greater degree, of this same habit of quasi-serious divagation. To appreciate the mistake of it, it is only necessary to compare the manner of Swift. The Tale of a Tub is in appearance as daringly discursive as anything can be, but the author in the first place never loses his way, and in the second never fails to keep a watchful eye on himself, lest he should be getting too serious or too tedious. That is what Richter and De Quincey fail to do.

Yet though these drawbacks are grave, and though they are (to judge from my own experience) felt more seriously at each successive reading, most assuredly no man who loves English literature could spare De Quincey from it; most assuredly all who love English literature would sooner spare some much more faultless writers. Even that quality of his which has been already noted, his extraordinary attraction for youth, is a singular and priceless one. The Master of the Court of the Gentiles, or the Instructor of the Sons of the Prophets, he might be called in a fantastic nomenclature, which he would have himself appreciated, if it had been applied to any one but himself. What he somewhere calls his "extraordinary ignorance of daily life" does not revolt youth. His little pedantries, which to the day of his death were like those of a clever schoolboy, appeal directly to it. His best fun is quite intelligible; his worst not wholly uncongenial. His habit (a certain most respected professor in a northern university may recognise the words) of "getting into logical coaches and letting himself be carried on without minding where he is going" is anything but repugnant to brisk minds of seventeen. They are quite able to comprehend the great if mannered beauty of his finest style—the style, to quote his own words once more, as of "an elaborate and pompous sunset." Such a schoolmaster to bring youths of promise, not merely to good literature but to the best, nowhere else exists. But he is much more than a mere schoolmaster, and in order that we may see what he is, it is desirable first of all to despatch two other objections made to him from different quarters, and on different lines of thought. The one objection (I should say that I do not fully espouse either of them) is that he is an untrustworthy critic of books; the other is that he is a very spiteful commentator on men.

This latter charge has found wide acceptance and has been practically corroborated and endorsed by persons as different as Southey and Carlyle. It would not in any case concern us much, for when a man is once dead it matters uncommonly little whether he was personally unamiable or not. But I think that De Quincey has in this respect been hardly treated. He led such a wholly unnatural life, he was at all times and in all places so thoroughly excluded from the natural contact and friction of society, that his utterances hardly partake of the ordinary character of men's speech. In the "vacant interlunar caves" where he hid himself, he could hardly feel the restraints that press on those who move within ear-shot and jostle of their fellows on this actual earth. This is not a triumphant defence, no doubt; but I think it is a defence. And further, it has yet to be proved that De Quincey set down anything in malice. He called his literary idol, Wordsworth, "inhumanly arrogant." Does anybody—not being a Wordsworthian and therefore out of reach of reason—doubt that Wordsworth's arrogance was inhuman? He, not unprovoked by scant gratitude on

Coleridge's part for very solid services, and by a doubtless sincere but rather unctuous protest of his brother in opium-eating against the Confessions, told some home truths against that magnificent genius but most unsatisfactory man. A sort of foolish folk has recently arisen which tells us that because Coleridge wrote "The Ancient Mariner" and "Kubla Khan," he was quite entitled to leave his wife and children to be looked after by anybody who chose, to take stipends from casual benefactors, and to scold, by himself or by his next friend Mr. Wordsworth, other benefactors, like Thomas Poole, who were not prepared at a moment's notice to give him a hundred pounds for a trip to the Azores. The rest of us, though we may feel no call to denounce Coleridge for these proceedings, may surely hold that "The Ancient Mariner" and "Kubla Khan" are no defence to the particular charges. I do not see that De Quincey said anything worse of Coleridge than any man who knew the then little, but now well-known facts of Coleridge's life, was entitled to say if he chose. And so in other cases. That he was what is called a thoughtful person—that is to say that he ever said to himself, "Will what I am writing give pain, and ought I to give that pain?"—I do not allege. In fact, the very excuse which has been made for him above is inconsistent with it. He always wrote far too much as one in another planet for anything of the kind to occur to him, and he was perhaps for a very similar reason rather too fond of the "personal talk" which Wordsworth wisely disdained. But that he was in any proper sense spiteful, that is to say that he ever wrote either with a deliberate intention to wound or with a deliberate indifference whether he wounded or not, I do not believe.

The other charge, that he was a bad or rather a very untrustworthy critic of books, cannot be met quite so directly. He is indeed responsible for a singularly large number of singularly grave critical blunders—by which I mean of course not critical opinions disagreeing with my own, but critical opinions which the general consent of competent critics, on the whole, negatives. The minor classical writers are not much read now, but there must be a sufficient jury to whom I can appeal to know what is to be done with a professed critic of style—at least asserting himself to be no mean classical scholar—who declares that "Paganism had no more brilliant master of composition to show than"—Velleius Paterculus! Suppose this to be a mere fling or freak, what is to be thought of a man who evidently sets Cicero, as a writer, if not as a thinker, above Plato? It would be not only possible but easy to follow this up with a long list of critical enormities on De Quincey's part, enormities due not to accidental and casual crotchet or prejudice, as in Hazlitt's case, but apparently to some perverse idiosyncrasy. I doubt very much, though the doubt may seem horribly heretical to some people, whether De Quincey really cared much for poetry as poetry. He liked philosophical poets:—Milton, Wordsworth, Shakespeare (inasmuch as he perceived Shakespeare to be the greatest of philosophical poets), Pope even in a certain way. But read the interesting paper which late in life he devoted to Shelley. He treats Shelley as a man admirably, with freedom alike from the maudlin sentiment of our modern chatters and from Puritanical preciseness. He is not too hard on him in any way, he thinks him a pleasing personality and a thinker distorted but interesting. Of Shelley's strictly poetical quality he says nothing, if he knew or felt anything. In fact, of lyrical poetry generally, that is to say of poetry in its most purely poetical condition, he speaks very little in all his extensive critical dissertations. His want of appreciation of it may supply explanation of his unpardonable treatment of Goethe. That he should have maltreated Wilhelm Meister is quite excusable. There are fervent admirers of Goethe at his best who acknowledge most fully the presence in Wilhelm of the two worst characteristics of German life and literature, bad taste and tediousness. But it is not excusable that much later, and indeed at the very height of his literary powers and practice, he should have written the article in the *Encyclopædia Britannica* on the author of *Faust*, of *Egmont*, and above all of the shorter poems. Here he deliberately assents to the opinion that *Werther* is "superior to everything that came after it, and for mere power, Goethe's paramount work," dismisses *Faust* as something that "no two people have ever agreed about," sentences *Egmont* as "violating the historic truth of character," and mentions not a single one of those lyrics, unmatched, or rather only matched by Heine, in the language, by which Goethe first gave German rank with the great poetic tongues. His severity on Swift is connected with his special "will-worship" of ornate style, of which more presently, and in general it may be said that De Quincey's extremely logical disposition of mind was rather a snare to him in his criticism. He was constantly constructing general principles and then arguing downwards from them; in which case woe to any individual fact or person that happened to get in the way. Where Wilson, the "only intimate male friend I have had" (as he somewhere says with a half-pathetic touch of self-illumination more instructive than reams of imaginative autobiography), went wrong from not having enough of general principle, where Hazlitt went wrong from letting prejudices unconnected with the literary side of the matter blind his otherwise piercing literary sight, De Quincey fell through an

unswervingness of deduction more French than English. Your ornate writer must be better than your plain one, ergo, let us say, Cicero must be better than Swift.

One other curious weakness of his (which has been glanced at already) remains to be noticed. This is the altogether deplorable notion of jocularly which he only too often exhibits. Mr. Masson, trying to propitiate the enemy, admits that "to address the historian Josephus as 'Joe,' through a whole article, and give him a black eye into the bargain, is positively profane." I am not sure as to the profanity, knowing nothing particularly sacred about Josephus. But if Mr. Masson had called it excessively silly, I should have agreed heartily; and if any one else denounced it as a breach of good literary manners, I do not know that I should protest. The habit is the more curious in that all authorities agree as to the exceptional combination of scholarliness and courtliness which marked De Quincey's colloquial style and expression. Wilson's daughter, Mrs. Gordon, says that he used to address her father's cook "as if she had been a duchess"; and that the cook, though much flattered, was somewhat aghast at his punctilio. That a man of this kind should think it both allowable and funny to talk of Josephus as "Joe," and of Magliabecchi as "Mag," may be only a new example of that odd law of human nature which constantly prompts people in various relations of life, and not least in literature, to assume most the particular qualities (not always virtues or graces) that they have not. Yet it is fair to remember that Wilson and the Blackwood set, together with not a few writers in the *London Magazine*—the two literary coteries in connexion with whom De Quincey started as a writer—had deliberately imported this element of horse-play into literature, that it at least did not seem to interfere with their popularity, and that De Quincey himself, after 1830, lived too little in touch with actual life to be aware that the style was becoming as unfashionable as it had always, save on very exceptional subjects, been ungraceful. Even on Wilson, who was to the manner born of riotous spirits, it often sits awkwardly; in De Quincey's case it is, to borrow Sir Walter's admirable simile in another case, like "the forced impudence of a bashful man." Grim humour he can manage admirably, and he also—as in the passage about the fate which waited upon all who possessed anything which might be convenient to Wordsworth, if they died—can manage a certain kind of sly humour not much less admirably. But "Joe" and "Mag," and, to take another example, the stuff about Catalina's "crocodile papa" in *The Spanish Nun*, are neither grim nor sly, they are only puerile. His stanchest defender asks, "why De Quincey should not have the same license as Swift and Thackeray?" The answer is quick and crushing. Swift and Thackeray justify their license by their use of it; De Quincey does not. After which it is hardly necessary to add, though this is almost final in itself, that neither Swift nor Thackeray interlard perfectly and unaffectedly serious work with mere fooling of the "Joe" and "Mag" kind. Swift did not put mollis abuti in the *Four* last years of Queen Anne, nor Thackeray his *Punch* jokes in the death-scene of Colonel Newcome. I can quite conceive De Quincey doing both.

And now I have done enough in the fault-finding way, and nothing shall induce me to say another word of De Quincey in this article save in praise. For praise he himself gives the amplest occasion; he might almost remain unblamed altogether if his praisers had not been frequently unwise, and if his exemplar were not specially vitiis imitabile. Few English writers have touched so large a number of subjects with such competence both in information and in power of handling. Still fewer have exhibited such remarkable logical faculty. One main reason why one is sometimes tempted to quarrel with him is that his play of fence is so excellent that one longs to cross swords. For this and for other reasons no writer has a more stimulating effect, or is more likely to lead his readers on to explore and to think for themselves. In none is that incurable curiosity, that infinite variety of desire for knowledge and for argument which age cannot quench, more observable. Few if any have the indefinable quality of freshness in so large a measure. You never quite know, though you may have a shrewd suspicion, what De Quincey will say on any subject; his gift of sighting and approaching new facets of it is so immense. Whether he was in truth as accomplished a classical scholar as he claimed to be I do not know; he has left few positive documents to tell us. But I should think that he was, for he has all the characteristics of a scholar of the best and rarest kind—the scholar who is exact as to language without failing to comprehend literature, and competent in literature without being slipshod as to language. His historical insight, of which the famous *Cæsars* is the best example, was, though sometimes coloured by his fancy, and at other times distorted by a slight tendency to supercherie as in *The Tartars* and *The Spanish Nun*, wonderfully powerful and acute. He was not exactly as Southey was, "omnilegent"; but in his own departments, and they were numerous, he went farther below the surface and connected his readings together better than Southey did. Of the two classes of severer study to which he specially addicted himself, his political economy suffered perhaps a little, acute as his views in it often are, from the fact that in his time it was practically a new study, and that he had neither sufficient

facts nor sufficient literature to go upon. In metaphysics, to which he gave himself up for years, and in which he seems really to have known whatever there was to know, I fear that the opium fiend cheated the world of something like masterpieces. Only three men during De Quincey's lifetime had anything like his powers in this department. Of these three men, Sir William Hamilton either could not or would not write English. Ferrier could and did write English; but he could not, as De Quincey could, throw upon philosophy the play of literary and miscellaneous illustration which of all the sciences it most requires, and which all its really supreme exponents have been able to give it. Mansel could do both these things; but he was somewhat indolent, and had many avocations. De Quincey could write perfect English, he had every resource of illustration and relief at command, he was in his way as "brazen-bowelled" at work as he was "golden-mouthed" at expression, and he had ample leisure. But the inability to undertake sustained labour, which he himself recognises as the one unquestionable curse of opium, deprived us of an English philosopher who would have stood as far above Kant in exoteric graces, as he would have stood above Bacon in esoteric value. It was not entirely De Quincey's fault. It seems to be generally recognised now that whatever occasional excesses he may have committed, opium was really required in his case, and gave us what we have as much as it took away what we have not. But if any one chose to write in the antique style a debate between Philosophy, Tar-water, and Laudanum, it would be almost enough to put in the mouth of Philosophy, "This gave me Berkeley and that deprived me of De Quincey."

De Quincey is, however, first of all a writer of ornate English, which was never, with him, a mere cover to bare thought. Overpraise and mispraise him as anybody may, he cannot be overpraised for this. Mistake as he chose to do, and as others have chosen to do, the relative value of his gift, the absolute value of it is unmistakable. What other Englishman, from Sir Thomas Browne downwards, has written a sentence surpassing in melody that on *Our Lady of Sighs*: "And her eyes, if they were ever seen, would be neither sweet nor subtle; no man could read their story; they would be found filled with perishing dreams and with wrecks of forgotten delirium"? Compare that with the masterpieces of some later practitioners. There are no out-of-the-way words; there is no needless expense of adjectives; the sense is quite adequate to the sound; the sound is only what is required as accompaniment to the sense. And though I do not know that in a single instance of equal length—even in the still more famous, and as a whole justly more famous, *tour de force* on *Our Lady of Darkness*—De Quincey ever quite equalled the combined simplicity and majesty of this phrase, he has constantly come close to it. The *Suspiria* are full of such passages—there are even some who prefer *Savannah la Mar* to the *Ladies of Sorrow*. Beautiful as it is I do not, because the accursed superfluous adjective appears there. The famous passages of the *Confessions* are in every one's memory; and so I suppose is the *Vision of Sudden Death*. Many passages in *The Cæsars*, though somewhat less florid, are hardly less good; and the close of *Joan of Arc* is as famous as the most ambitious attempts of the *Confessions* and the *Mail Coach*. Moreover, in all the sixteen volumes, specimens of the same kind may be found here and there, alternating with very different matter; so much so, that it has no doubt often occurred to readers that the author's occasional divergence into questionable quips and cranks is a deliberate attempt to set off his rhetoric, as dramatists of the noblest school have often set off their tragedy, with comedy, if not with farce. That such a principle would imply confusion of the study and the stage is arguable enough, but it does not follow that it was not present. At any rate the contrast, deliberate or not, is very strong indeed in De Quincey—stronger than in any other prose author except his friend, and pupil rather than master, Wilson.

The great advantage that De Quincey has, not only over this friend of his but over all practitioners of the ornate style in this century, lies in his sureness of hand in the first place, and secondly in the comparative frugality of means which perhaps is an inseparable accompaniment of sureness of hand. To mention living persons would be invidious; but Wilson and Landor are within the most scrupulous critic's right of comparison. All three were contemporaries; all three were Oxford men—Landor about ten years senior to the other two—and all three in their different ways set themselves deliberately to reverse the practice of English prose for nearly a century and a half. They did great things, but De Quincey did, I think, the greatest and certainly the most classical in the proper sense, for all Landor's superior air of Hellenism. Voluble as De Quincey often is, he seems always to have felt that when you are in your altitudes it is well not to stay there too long. And his flights, while they are far more uniformly high than Wilson's, which alternately soar and drag, are much more merciful in regard of length than Landor's, as well as for the most part much more closely connected with the sense of his subjects. There is scarcely one of the *Imaginary Conversations* which would not be the better for very considerable thinning, while, with the exception

perhaps of *The English Mail Coach*, De Quincey's surplusage, obvious enough in many cases, is scarcely ever found in his most elaborate and ornate passages. The total amount of such passages in the *Confessions* is by no means large, and the more ambitious parts of the *Suspiria* do not much exceed a dozen pages. De Quincey was certainly justified by his own practice in adopting and urging as he did the distinction, due, he says, to Wordsworth, between the common and erroneous idea of style as the dress of thought, and the true definition of it as the incarnation of thought. The most wizened of coxcombs may spend days and years in dressing up his meagre and ugly carcass; but few are the sons of men who have sufficient thought to provide the soul of any considerable series of avatars. De Quincey had; and therefore, though the manner (with certain exceptions heretofore taken) in him is always worth attention, it never need or should divert attention from the matter. And thus he was not driven to make a little thought do tyrannous duty as lay-figure for an infinite amount of dress, or to hang out frippery on a clothes-line with not so much as a lay-figure inside it. Even when he is most conspicuously "fighting a prize," there is always solid stuff in him.

Few indeed are the writers of whom so much can be said, and fewer still the miscellaneous writers, among whom De Quincey must be classed. On almost any subject that interested him—and the number of such subjects was astonishing, curious as are the gaps between the different groups of them—what he has to say is pretty sure, even if it be the wildest paradox in appearance, to be worth attending to. And in regard to most things that he has to say, the reader may be pretty sure also that he will not find them better said elsewhere. It has sometimes been complained by students, both of De Quincey the man and of De Quincey the writer, that there is something not exactly human in him. There is certainly much in him of the dæmonic, to use a word which was a very good word and really required in the language, and which ought not to be exiled because it has been foolishly abused. Sometimes, as has also been complained, the demon is a mere familiar with the tricksiness of Puck rather than the lightness of Ariel. But far oftener he is a more potent spirit than any Robin Goodfellow, and as powerful as Ariel and Ariel's master. Trust him wholly you may not; a characteristic often noted in intelligences that are neither exactly human, nor exactly diabolic, nor exactly divine. But he will do great things for you, and a little wit and courage on your part will prevent his doing anything serious against you. To him, with much greater justice than to Hogg, might Wilson have applied the nickname of Brownie, which he was so fond of bestowing upon the author of "*Kilmeny*." He will do solid work, conjure up a concert of aerial music, play a shrewd trick now and then, and all this with a curious air of irresponsibility and of remoteness of nature. In ancient days when kings played experiments to ascertain the universal or original language, some monarch might have been tempted to take a very clever child, interest him so far as possible in nothing but books and opium, and see whether he would turn out anything like De Quincey. But it is in the highest degree improbable that he would. Therefore let us rejoice, though according to the precepts of wisdom and not too indiscriminately, in our De Quincey as we once, and probably once for all, received him.

## XI

### LOCKHART

In every age there are certain writers who seem to miss their due meed of fame, and this is most naturally and unavoidably the case in ages which see a great deal of what may be called occasional literature. There is, as it seems to me, a special example of this general proposition in the present century, and that example is the writer whose name stands at the head of this chapter. No one, perhaps, who speaks with any competence either of knowledge or judgment, would say that Lockhart made an inconsiderable figure in English literature. He wrote what some men consider the best biography on a large scale, and what almost every one considers the second best biography on a large scale, in English. His *Spanish Ballads* are admitted, by those who know the originals, to have done them almost more than justice; and by those who do not know those originals, to be charming in themselves. His novels, if not masterpieces, have kept the field better than most: I saw a very badly printed and flaringly-covered copy of *Reginald Dalton* for sale at the bookstall at Victoria Station the day before writing these words. He was a pillar of the *Quarterly*, of *Blackwood*, of *Fraser*, at a time when quarterly and monthly magazines played a greater part in literature than they have played since or are likely to play again. He edited one of these periodicals for thirty years. "Nobody," as Mr. Browning has it, "calls him a dunce." Yet there is no collected edition of his works; his sober, sound, scholarly, admirably witty, and, with some very few exceptions, admirably catholic literary criticism, is rarely quoted; and to add to this, there is a curious prepossession against him, which, though

nearly a generation has passed since his death, has by no means disappeared. Some years ago, in a periodical where I was, for the most part, allowed to say exactly what I liked in matters literary, I found a sentence laudatory of Lockhart, from the purely literary point of view, omitted between proof and publication. It so happened that the editor of this periodical could not even have known Lockhart personally, or have been offended by his management of the Quarterly, much less by his early fredaines in Blackwood and Fraser. It was this circumstance that first suggested to me the notion of trying to supply something like a criticism of this remarkable critic, which nobody has yet (1884) done, and which seems worth doing. For while the work of many of Lockhart's contemporaries, famous at the time, distinctly loses by re-reading, his for the most part does not; and it happens to display exactly the characteristics which are most wanting in criticism, biographical and literary, at the present day. If any one at the outset desires a definition, or at least an enumeration of those characteristics, I should say that they are sobriety of style and reserve of feeling, coupled with delicacy of intellectual appreciation and æsthetic sympathy, a strong and firm creed in matters political and literary, not excluding that catholicity of judgment which men of strong belief frequently lack, and, above all, the faculty of writing like a gentleman without writing like a mere gentleman. No one can charge Lockhart with dilettantism: no one certainly can charge him with febleness of intellect, or insufficient equipment of culture, or lack of humour and wit.

His life was, except for the domestic misfortunes which marked its close, by no means eventful; and the present writer, if he had access to any special sources of information (which he has not), would abstain very carefully from using them. John Gibson Lockhart was born at the Manse of Cambusnethan on 14th July 1794, went to school early, was matriculated at Glasgow at twelve years old, transferred himself by means of a Snell exhibition to Balliol at fifteen, and took a first class in 1813. They said he caricatured the examiners: this was, perhaps, not the unparalleled audacity which admiring commentators have described it as being. Very many very odd things have been done in the Schools. But if there was nothing extraordinary in his Oxford life except what was, even for those days, the early age at which he began it, his next step was something out of the common; for he went to Germany, was introduced to Goethe, and spent some time there. An odd coincidence in the literary history of the nineteenth century is that both Lockhart and Quinet practically began literature by translating a German book, and that both had the remarkably good luck to find publishers who paid them beforehand. There are few such publishers now. Lockhart's book was Schlegel's Lectures on History, and his publisher was Mr. Blackwood. Then he came back to Scotland and to Edinburgh, and was called to the bar, and "swept the outer house with his gown," after the fashion admirably described in Peter's Letters, and referred to by Scott in not the least delightful though one of the most melancholy of his works, the Introduction to the Chronicles of the Canongate. Lockhart, one of whose distinguishing characteristics throughout life was shyness and reserve, was no speaker. Indeed, as he happily enough remarked in reply to the toast of his health at the farewell dinner given to celebrate his removal to London, "I cannot speak; if I could, I should not have left you." But if he could not speak he could write, and the establishment of Blackwood's Magazine, after its first abortive numbers, gave him scope. "The scorpion which delighteth to sting the faces of men," as he or Wilson describes himself in the Chaldee Manuscript (for the passage is beyond Hogg's part), certainly justified the description. As to this famous Manuscript, the late Professor Ferrier undoubtedly made a blunder (in the same key as those that he made in describing the Noctes, in company with which he reprinted it) as "in its way as good as The Battle of the Books." The Battle of the Books, full of mistakes as it is, is literature, and the Chaldee Manuscript is only capital journalism. But it is capital journalism; and the exuberance of its wit, if it be only wit of the undergraduate kind (and Lockhart at least was still but an undergraduate in years), is refreshing enough. The dreadful manner in which it fluttered the dovescotes of Edinburgh Whiggism need not be further commented on, till Lockhart's next work (this time an almost though not quite independent one) has been noticed. This was Peter's Letters to his Kinsfolk, an elaborate book, half lampoon, half mystification, which appeared in 1819. This book, which derived its title from Scott's account of his journey to Paris, and in its plan followed to some extent Humphrey Clinker, is one of the most careful examples of literary hoaxing to be found. It purported to be the work of a certain Dr. Peter Morris, a Welshman, and it is hardly necessary to say that there was no such person. It had a handsome frontispiece depicting this Peter Morris, and displaying not, like the portrait in Southey's Doctor, the occiput merely, but the full face and features. This portrait was described, and as far as that went it seems truly described, as "an interesting example of a new style of engraving by Lizars." Mr. Bates, who probably knows, says that there was no first edition, but that it was published with "second edition" on the title-page. My copy has the same date, 1819, but is styled the third edition, and has a postscript commenting on the to-do the book made. However all this may be, it is a



very handsome book, excellently printed and containing capital portraits and vignettes, while the matter is worthy of the get-up. The descriptions of the Outer-House, of Craigcrook and its high jinks, of Abbotsford, of the finding of "Ambrose's," of the manufacture of Glasgow punch, and of many other things, are admirable; and there is a charming sketch of Oxford undergraduate life, less exaggerated than that in Reginald Dalton, probably because the subject was fresher in the author's memory.

Lockhart modestly speaks of this book in his *Life of Scott* as one that "none but a very young and thoughtless person would have written." It may safely be said that no one but a very clever person, whether young or old, could have written it, though it is too long and has occasional faults of a specially youthful kind. But it made, coming as it did upon the heels of the *Chaldee Manuscript*, a terrible commotion in Edinburgh. The impartial observer of men and things may, indeed, have noticed in the records of the ages, that a libelled Liberal is the man in all the world who utters the loudest cries. The examples of the Reformers, and of the eighteenth-century Philosophes, are notorious and hackneyed; but I can supply (without, I trust, violating the sanctity of private life) a fresh and pleasing example. Once upon a time, a person whom we shall call A. paid a visit to a person whom we shall call B. "How sad," said A., "are those personal attacks of the — on Mr. Gladstone."—"Personality," said B., "is always disgusting; and I am very sorry to hear that the — has followed the bad example of the personal attacks on Lord Beaconsfield."—"Oh! but," quoth A., "that was quite a different thing." Now B. went out to dinner that night, and sitting next to a distinguished Liberal member of Parliament, told him this tale, expecting that he would laugh. "Ah! yes," said he with much gravity, "it is very different, you know." In the same way the good Whig folk of Edinburgh regarded it as very different that the *Edinburgh Review* should scoff at Tories, and that Blackwood and Peter should scoff at Whigs. The scorpion which delighted to sting the faces of men, probably at this time founded a reputation which has stuck to him for more than seventy years after Dr. Peter Morris drove his shandrydan through{346} Scotland. Sir Walter (then Mr.) Scott held wisely aloof from the extremely exuberant Toryism of Blackwood, and, indeed, had had some quarrels with its publisher and virtual editor. But he could not fail to be introduced to a man whose tastes and principles were so closely allied to his own. A year after the appearance of Peter's Letters, Lockhart married, on 29th April 1820 (a perilous approximation to the unlucky month of May), Sophia Scott, the Duke of Buccleuch's "Little Jacobite," the most like her father of all his children. Every reader of the *Life* knows the delightful pictures, enough for interest and not enough for vulgar obtusion, given by Lockhart of life at Chiefswood, the cottage near Abbotsford which he and his wife inhabited for nearly six years. They were very busy years for Lockhart. He was still active in contributing to Blackwood; he wrote all his four novels, and he published the *Spanish Ballads*. Valerius and Adam Blair appeared in 1821, Reginald Dalton and the *Ballads* in 1823, Matthew Wald in 1824.

The novels, though containing much that is very remarkable, are not his strongest work; indeed, any critic who speaks with knowledge must admit that Lockhart had every faculty for writing novels, except the faculty of novel-writing. Valerius, a classical story of the visit of a Roman-Briton to Rome, and the persecution of the Christians in the days of Trajan, is, like everything of its author's, admirably written, but, like every classical novel without exception, save only *Hypatia* (which makes its interests and its personages daringly modern), it somehow rings false and faint, though not, perhaps, so faint or so false as most of its fellows. Adam Blair, the story of the sudden succumbing to natural temptation of a pious minister of the kirk, is unquestionably Lockhart's masterpiece in this kind. It is full of passion, full of force, and the characters of Charlotte Campbell and Adam Blair himself are perfectly conceived. But the story-gift is still wanting. The reader finds himself outside: wondering why the people do these things, and whether in real life they would have done them, instead of following the story with absorption, and asking himself no questions at all. The same, in a different way, is the case with Lockhart's longest book, *Reginald Dalton*; and this has the additional disadvantage that neither hero nor heroine are much more than lay-figures, while in Adam Blair both are flesh and blood. The Oxford scenes are amusing but exaggerated—the obvious work of a man who supplies the defects of a ten years' memory by deepening the strokes where he does remember. *Matthew Wald*, which is a novel of madness, has excellent passages, but is conventional and wooden as a whole. Nothing was more natural than that Lockhart, with the example of Scott immediately before him, should try novel-writing; not many things are more indicative of his literary ability than that, after a bare three years' practice, he left a field which certainly was not his.

In the early autumn of 1825, just before the great collapse of his affairs, Scott went to Ireland with Lockhart in his company. But very early in the following year, before the collapse was decided, Lockhart and his family moved to London, on his appointment as editor of the *Quarterly*, in succession to Gifford. Probably there never was a better appointment of the kind. Lockhart was a born critic: he had both the faculty and the will to work up the papers of his contributors to the proper level; he was firm and decided in his literary and political views, without going to the extreme Giffordian acerbity in both; and his intelligence and erudition were very wide. "He could write," says a phrase in some article I have somewhere seen quoted, "on any subject from poetry to dry-rot;" and there is no doubt that an editor, if he cannot exactly write on any subject from poetry to dry-rot, should be able to take an interest in any subject between and, if necessary, beyond those poles. Otherwise he has the choice of two undesirables; either he frowns unduly on the dry-rot articles, which probably interest large sections of the public (itself very subject to dry-rot), or he lets the dry-rot contributor inflict his hobby, without mercy and unedited, on a reluctant audience. But Lockhart, though he is said (for his contributions are not, as far as I know, anywhere exactly indicated) to have contributed fully a hundred articles to the *Quarterly*, that is to say one to nearly every number during the twenty-eight years of his editorship, by no means confined himself to this work. It was, indeed, during its progress that he composed not merely the *Life of Napoleon*, which was little more than an abridgment, though a very clever abridgment, of Scott's book, but the *Lives of Burns* and of Scott himself. Before, however, dealing with these, his Spanish Ballads and other poetical work may be conveniently disposed of. Lockhart's verse is in the same scattered condition as his prose; but it is evident that he had very considerable poetical faculty. The charming piece, "When youthful hope is fled," attributed to him on Mrs. Norton's authority; the well-known "Captain Paton's Lament," which has been republished in the *Tales from Blackwood*; and the mono-rhymed epitaph on "Bright broken Maginn," in which some wisecracks have seen ill-nature, but which really is a masterpiece of humorous pathos, are all in very different styles, and are all excellent each in its style. But these things are mere waifs, separated from each other in widely different publications; and until they are put together no general impression of the author's poetical talent, except a vaguely favourable one, can be derived from them. The Spanish Ballads form something like a substantive work, and one of nearly as great merit as is possible to poetical translations of {350} poetry. I believe opinions differ as to their fidelity to the original. Here and there, it is said, the author has exchanged a vivid and characteristic touch for a conventional and feeble one. Thus, my friend Mr. Hannay points out to me that in the original of "The Lord of Butrago" the reason given by Montanez for not accompanying the King's flight is not the somewhat fade one that

Castile's proud dames shall never point the finger of disdain,

but the nobler argument, showing the best side of feudal sentiment, that the widows of his tenants shall never say that he fled and left their husbands to fight and fall. Lockhart's master, Sir Walter, would certainly not have missed this touch, and it is odd that Lockhart himself did. But such things will happen to translators. On the other hand, it is, I believe, admitted (and the same very capable authority in Spanish is my warranty) that on the whole the originals have rather gained than lost; and certainly no one can fail to enjoy the Ballads as they stand in English. The "Wandering Knight's Song" has always seemed to me a gem without flaw, especially the last stanza. Few men, again, manage the long "fourteener" with middle rhyme better than Lockhart, though he is less happy with the anapaest, and has not fully mastered the very difficult trochaic measure of "The Death of Don Pedro." In "The Count Arnaldos," wherein, indeed, the subject lends itself better to that cadence, the result is more satisfactory. The merits, however, of these Ballads are not technical merely, or rather, the technical merits are well subordinated to the production of the general effect. About the nature of that effect much ink has been shed. It is produced equally by Greek hexameters, by old French assonanced tirades, by English "eights and sixes," and by not a few other measures. But in itself it is more or less the same—the stirring of the blood as by the sound of a trumpet, or else the melting of the mood into or close to tears. The ballad effect is thus the simplest and most primitive of all poetical effects; it is Lockhart's merit that he seldom fails to produce it. The simplicity and spontaneity of his verse may, to some people, be surprising in a writer so thoroughly and intensely literary; but Lockhart's character was as complex as his verse is simple, and the verse itself is not the least valuable guide to it.

It has been said that his removal to London and his responsible office by no means reduced his general literary activity. Whether he continued to contribute to *Blackwood* I am not sure; some phrases in the *Noctes* seem to argue the contrary. But he not only, as has been said, wrote for the *Quarterly* assiduously,

but after a short time joined the new venture of Fraser, and showed in that rollicking periodical that the sting of the "scorpion" had by no means been extracted. He produced, moreover, in 1828, his *Life of Burns*, and in 1836-37 his *Life of Scott*. These, with the sketch of Theodore Hook written for the *Quarterly* in 1843, and separately published later, make three very remarkable examples of literary biography on very different scales, dealing with very different subjects, and, by comparison of their uniform excellence, showing that the author had an almost unique genius for this kind of composition. The *Life of Scott* fills seven capacious volumes; the *Life of Burns* goes easily into one; the *Life of Hook* does not reach a hundred smallish pages. But they are all equally well-proportioned in themselves and to their subjects; they all exhibit the same complete grasp of the secret of biography; and they all have the peculiarity of being full of facts without presenting an undigested appearance. They thus stand at an equal distance from biography of the fashion of the old academic Eloges of the last century, which makes an elegant discourse about a man, but either deliberately or by accident gives precise information about hardly any of the facts of the man's life; and from modern biography, which tumbles upon the devoted reader a cataract of letters, documents, and facts of all sorts, uncombined and undigested by any exercise of narrative or critical skill on the part of the author. Lockhart's biographies, therefore, belong equally (to borrow De Quincey's useful, though, as far as terminology goes, not very happy distinction) to the literature of knowledge and the literature of power. They are storehouses of information; but they are, at the same time, works of art, and of very great art. The earliest of the three, the *Life of Burns*, is to this day by far the best book on the subject; indeed, with its few errors and defects of fact corrected and supplemented as they have been by the late Mr. Douglas, it makes all other *Lives* quite superfluous. Yet it was much more difficult, especially for a Scotchman, to write a good book about Burns then than now; though I am told that, for a Scotchman, there is still a considerable difficulty in the matter. Lockhart was familiar with Edinburgh society—indeed, he had long formed a part of it—and Edinburgh society was still, when he wrote, very sore at the charge of having by turns patronised and neglected Burns. Lockhart was a decided Tory, and Burns, during the later part of his life at any rate, had permitted himself manifestations of political opinion which Whigs themselves admitted to be imprudent freaks, and which even a good-natured Tory might be excused for regarding as something very much worse. But the biographer's treatment of both these subjects is perfectly tolerant, judicious, and fair, and the same may be said of his whole account of Burns. Indeed, the main characteristic of Lockhart's criticism, a robust and quiet sanity, fitted him admirably for the task of biography. He is never in extremes, {354} and he never avoids extremes by the common expedient of see-sawing between two sides, two parties, or two views of a man's character. He holds aloof equally from engouement and from depreciation, and if, as a necessary consequence, he failed, and fails, to please fanatics on either side, he cannot fail to please those who know what criticism really means.

These good qualities were shown even to better advantage in a pleasanter but, at the same time, far more difficult task, the famous *Life of Scott*. The extraordinary interest of the subject, and the fashion, no less skilful than modest, in which the biographer keeps himself in the background, and seems constantly to be merely editing Scott's words, have perhaps obscured the literary value of the book to some readers. Of the perpetual comparison with Boswell, it may be said, once for all, that it is a comparison of matter merely; and that from the properly literary point of view, the point of view of workmanship and form, it does not exist. Perhaps the most surprising thing is that, even in moments of personal irritation, any one should have been found to accuse Lockhart of softening Scott's faults. The other charge, of malice to Scott, is indeed more extraordinary still in a certain way; but, being merely imbecile, it need not be taken into account. A delightful document informs us that, in the opinion of the Hon. Charles Sumner, Fenimore Cooper (who, stung by some references to him in the book, attacked it) administered "a proper castigation to the vulgar minds of Scott and Lockhart." This is a jest so pleasing that it almost puts one in good temper with the whole affair. But, in fact, Lockhart, considering his relationship to Scott, and considering Scott's greatness, could hardly have spoken more plainly as to the grave fault of judgment which made a man of letters and a member of a learned profession mix himself up secretly, and almost clandestinely, with commercial speculations. On this point the biographer does not attempt to mince matters; and on no other point was it necessary for him to be equally candid, for this, grave as it is, is almost the only fault to be found with Scott's character. This candour, however, is only one of the merits of the book. The wonderfully skilful arrangement of so vast and heterogeneous a mass of materials, the way in which the writer's own work and his quoted matter dovetail into one another, the completeness of the picture given of Scott's character and life, have never been equalled in any similar book. Not a few minor touches, moreover, which are very apt to escape notice, enhance its merit. Lockhart was a man of all men least given to wear his heart upon his

sleeve, yet no one has dealt with such pitiful subjects as his later volumes involve, at once with such total absence of "gush" and with such noble and pathetic appreciation. For Scott's misfortunes were by no means the only matters which touched him nearly, in and in connection with the chronicle. The constant illness and sufferings of his own child form part of it; his wife died during its composition and publication, and all these things are mentioned with as little parade of stoicism as of sentiment. I do not think that, as an example of absolute and perfect good taste, the account of Scott's death can be surpassed in literature. The same quality exhibits itself in another matter. No biographer can be less anxious to display his own personality than Lockhart; and though for six years he was a constant, and for much longer an occasional, spectator of the events he describes, he never introduces himself except when it is necessary. Yet, on the other hand, when Scott himself makes complimentary references to him (as when he speaks of his party "having Lockhart to say clever things"), he neither omits the passage nor stoops to the missish minauderie, too common in such cases, of translating "spare my blushes" into some kind of annotation. Lockhart will not talk about Lockhart; but if others, whom the public likes to hear, talk about him, Lockhart does not put his fan before his face.

This admirable book, however, is both well enough known (if not so well known as it deserves) and large enough to make it both unnecessary and impossible to criticise it at length here. The third work noticed above, the sketch of the life of Theodore Hook, though it has been reprinted more than once, and is still, I believe, kept in print and on sale, is probably less familiar to most readers. It is, however, almost as striking an example, though of course an example in miniature only, of Lockhart's aptitude for the great and difficult art of literary biography as either of the two books just mentioned. Here the difficulty was of a different kind. A great many people liked Theodore Hook, but it was nearly impossible for any one to respect him; yet it was quite impossible for Lockhart, a political sympathiser and a personal friend, to treat him harshly in an obituary notice. There was no danger of his setting down aught in malice; but there might be thought to be a considerable danger of over-extenuation. The danger was the greater, inasmuch as Lockhart himself had certainly not escaped, and had perhaps to some extent deserved, one of Hook's reproaches. No man questioned his integrity; he was not a reckless spendthrift; he was not given to excesses in living, or to hanging about great houses; nor was he careless of moral and social rules. But the scorpion which had delighted to sting the faces of men might have had some awkwardness in dealing with the editor of *John Bull*. The result, however, victoriously surmounts all difficulties without evading one. Nothing that is the truth about Hook is omitted, or even blinked; and from reading Lockhart alone, any intelligent reader might know the worst that is to be said about him. Neither are any of his faults, in the unfair sense, extenuated. His malicious and vulgar practical jokes; his carelessness at Mauritius; the worse than carelessness which allowed him to shirk, when he had ample means of discharging it by degrees, a debt which he acknowledged that he justly owed; the folly and vanity which led him to waste his time, his wit, and his money in playing the hanger-on at country houses and town dinner-tables; his hard living, and the laxity which induced him not merely to form irregular connections, but prevented him from taking the only step which could, in some measure, repair his fault, are all fairly put, and blamed frankly. Even in that more delicate matter of the personal journalism, Lockhart's procedure is as ingenuous as it is ingenious; and the passage of the sketch which deals with "the blazing audacity of invective, the curious delicacy of persiflage, the strong caustic satire" (expressions, by the way, which suit Lockhart himself much better than Hook, though Lockhart had not Hook's broad humour), in fact, admits that the application of these things was not justifiable, nor to be justified. Yet with all this, the impression left by the sketch is distinctly favourable on the whole, which, in the circumstances, must be admitted to be a triumph of advocacy obtained not at the expense of truth, but by the art of the advocate in making the best of it.

The facts of Lockhart's life between his removal to London and his death may be rapidly summarised, the purpose of this notice being rather critical than biographical. He had hardly settled in town when, as he himself tells, he had to attempt, fruitlessly enough, the task of mediator in the financial disasters of Constable and Scott; and his own share of domestic troubles began early. His eldest son, after repeated escapes, died in 1831; Scott followed shortly; Miss Anne Scott, after her father's death, came in broken health to Lockhart's house, and died there only a year later; and in the spring of 1837 his wife likewise died. Then Fortune let him alone for a little, to return in no better humour some years later. It is, however, from the early "thirties" that one of the best known memorials of Lockhart dates; that is to say, the portrait, or rather the two portraits, in the Fraser Gallery. In the general group of the Frasers he sits between Fraser himself and Theodore Hook, with the diminutive figure of Crofton Croker half intercepted beyond him; and

his image forms the third plate in Mr. Bates's republication of the gallery. It is said to be the most faithful of the whole series, and it is certainly the handsomest, giving even a more flattering representation than the full-face portrait by Pickersgill which serves as frontispiece to the modern editions of the Ballads. In this latter the curious towzled mop of hair, in which our fathers delighted, rather mars the effect; while in Maclise's sketch (which is in profile) it is less obtrusive. In this latter, too, there is clearly perceivable what the Shepherd in the Noctes calls "a sort of laugh about the screwed-up mouth of him that fules ca'd no canny, for they couldna thole the meaning o't." There is not much doubt that Lockhart aided and abetted Maginn in much of the mischief that distinguished the early days of Fraser, though his fastidious taste is never likely to have stooped to the coarseness which was too natural to Maginn. It is believed that to him is due the wicked wresting of Alaric Watts' second initial into "Attila," which gave the victim so much grief, and he probably did many other things of the same kind. But Lockhart was never vulgar, and Fraser in those days very often was.

In 1843 Lockhart received his first and last piece of political preferment, being appointed, says one of the authorities before me, Chancellor of the Duchy of Cornwall, and (says another) Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster. Such are biographers; but the matter is not of the slightest importance, though I do not myself quite see how it could have been Lancaster. A third and more trustworthy writer gives the post as "Auditorship" of the Duchy of Lancaster, which is possible enough. In 1847, the death of Sir Walter Scott's last surviving son brought the title and estate to Lockhart's son Walter, but he died in 1853. Lockhart's only other child had married Mr. Hope—called, after his brother-in-law's death, Mr. Hope Scott, of whom an elaborate biography has been published. Little in it concerns Lockhart, but the admirable letter which he wrote to Mr. Hope on his conversion to the Roman Church. This step, followed as it was by Mrs. Hope, could not but be, and in this letter is delicately hinted to be, no small grief to Lockhart, who saw Abbotsford fall under influences for which certainly neither he nor its founder had any respect. His repeated domestic losses, and many years of constant work and excitement, appear to have told on him, and very shortly after his son's death in April 1853 he resigned the editorship of the Quarterly. He then visited Italy, a visit from which, if he had been a superstitious man, the ominous precedent of Scott might have deterred him. His journey did him no good, and he died at Abbotsford on the 25th of November. December, says another authority, for so it is that history gets written, even in thirty years.

The comparatively brief notices which are all that have been published about Lockhart, uniformly mention the unpopularity (to use a mild word) which pursued him, and which, as I have remarked, does not seem to have exhausted itself even yet. It is not very difficult to account for the origin of this; and the neglect to supply any collection of his work, and any authoritative account of his life and character, will quite explain its continuance. In the first place, Lockhart was well known as a most sarcastic writer; in the second, he was for nearly a lifetime editor of one of the chief organs of party politics and literary criticism in England. He might have survived the Chaldee Manuscript, and Peter's Letters, and the lampoons in Fraser: he might even have got the better of the youthful imprudence which led him to fix upon himself a description which was sure to be used and abused against him by the "fules," if he had not succeeded to the chair of the Quarterly. Individual and, to a great extent, anonymous indulgence of the luxury of scorn never gave any man a very bad character, even if he were, as Lockhart was, personally shy and reserved, unable to make up for written sarcasm with verbal flummery, and, in virtue of an incapacity for gushing, deprived of the easiest and, by public personages, most commonly practised means of proving that a man has "a good heart after all." But when he complicated his sins by editing the Quarterly at a time when everybody attacked everybody else in exactly such terms as pleased them, the sins of his youth were pretty sure to be visited on him. In the first place, there was the great army of the criticised, who always consider that the editor of the paper which dissects them is really responsible. The luckless Harriet Martineau, who, if I remember rightly, gives in her autobiography a lurid picture of Lockhart "going down at night to the printer's" and inserting dreadful things about her, and who, I believe, took the feminine plan of revenging herself in an obituary article, was only one of a great multitude.

Lockhart does not seem to have taken over from Gifford quite such a troublesome crew of helpers as Macvey Napier inherited from Jeffrey, and he was also free from the monitions of his predecessor. But in Croker he had a first lieutenant who could not very well be checked, and who (though he, too, has had rather hard measure) had no equal in the art of making himself offensive. Besides, those were the days when the famous "Scum condensed of Irish bog" lines appeared in a great daily newspaper about

O'Connell. Imagine the Times addressing Mr. Parnell as "Scum condensed of Irish bog," with the other amenities that follow, in this year of grace! But Lockhart had not only his authors, he had his contributors. "A' contributors," says the before-quoted Shepherd, in a moment of such preternatural wisdom that he must have been "fou," "are in a manner fierce." They are—it is the nature and essence of the animal to be so. The contributor who is not allowed to contribute is fierce, as a matter of course; but not less fierce is the contributor who thinks himself too much edited, and the contributor who imperatively insists that his article on Chinese metaphysics shall go in at once, and the contributor who, being an excellent hand at articles on the currency, wants to be allowed to write on dancing; and, in short, as the Shepherd says, all contributors. Now it does not appear (for, as I must repeat, I have no kind of private information on the subject) that Lockhart was by any means an easy-going editor, or one of that kind which allows a certain number of privileged writers to send in what they like. We are told in many places that he "greatly improved" his contributors' articles; and I should say that if there is one thing which drives a contributor to the verge of madness, it is to have his articles "greatly improved." A hint in the *Noctes* (and it may be observed that though the references to Lockhart in the *Noctes* are not very numerous, they are valuable, for Wilson's friendship seems to have been mixed with a small grain of jealousy which preserves them from being commonplace) suggests that his friends did not consider him as by any means too ready to accept their papers. All this, added to his early character of scoffer at Whig dignities, and his position as leader en titre of Tory journalism, was quite sufficient to create a reputation partly exaggerated, partly quite false, which has endured simply because no trouble has been taken to sift and prove it.

The head and front of Lockhart's offending, in a purely literary view, seems to be the famous Quarterly article on Lord Tennyson's volume of 1832. That article is sometimes spoken of as Croker's, but there can be no manner of doubt that it is Lockhart's; and, indeed, it is quoted as his by Professor Ferrier, who, through Wilson, must have known the facts. Now I do not think I yield to any man living in admiration of the Laureate, but I am unable to think much the worse, or, indeed, any the worse, of Lockhart because of this article. In the first place, it is extremely clever, being, perhaps, the very best example of politely cruel criticism in existence. In the second, most, if not all, of the criticism is perfectly just. If Lord Tennyson himself, at this safe distance of time, can think of the famous strawberry story and its application without laughing, he must be an extremely sensitive Peer. And nobody, I suppose, would now defend the wondrous stanza which was paralleled from the Groves of Blarney. The fact is that criticism of criticism after some time is apt to be doubly unjust. It is wont to assume, or rather to imagine, that the critic must have known what the author was going to do, as well as what he had actually done; and it is wont to forget that the work criticised was very often, as it presented itself to the critic, very different from what it is when it presents itself to the critic's critic. The best justification of Lockhart's verdict on the volume of 1832 is what Lord Tennyson himself has done with the volume of 1832. Far more than half the passages objected to have since been excised or altered. But there are other excuses. In the first place, Mr. Tennyson, as he then was, represented a further development of schools of poetry against which the Quarterly had always, rightly or wrongly, set its face, and a certain loyalty to the principles of his paper is, after all, not the worst fault of a critic. In the second, no one can fairly deny that some points in Mr. Tennyson's early, if not in his later, manner must have been highly and rightly disgusting to a critic who, like Lockhart, was above all things masculine and abhorrent of "gush." In the third, it is, unfortunately, not given to all critics to admire all styles alike. Let those to whom it is given thank God therefor; but let them, at the same time, remember that they are as much bound to accept whatever is good in all kinds of critics as whatever is good in all kinds of poets.

Now Lockhart, within his own range, and it was for the time a very wide one, was certainly not a narrow critic, just as he certainly was not a feeble one. In the before-mentioned Peter's Letters (which, with all its faults, is one of his best, and particularly one of his most spontaneous and characteristic works) the denunciation of the "facetious and rejoicing ignorance" which enabled contemporary critics to pooh-pooh Wordsworth, Charles Lamb, and Coleridge is excellent. And it must be remembered that in 1819, whatever might be the case with Coleridge, Wordsworth and Lamb were by no means taken to the hearts of Tories on their merits, and that in this very passage Blackwood is condemned not less severely than the Edinburgh. Another point in which Lockhart made a great advance was that he was one of the first (Lamb himself is, in England, his only important forerunner) to unite and combine criticism of different branches of art. He never has the disgusting technical jargon, or the undisciplined fluency, of the mere art critic, any more than he has the gabble of the mere connoisseur. But it is constantly evident that he has a knowledge of and a

feeling for the art of line and colour as well as of words. Nothing can be better than the fragments of criticism which are interspersed in the Scott book; and if his estimate of Hook as a novelist seems exaggerated, it must be remembered, as he has himself noted, that Thackeray was, at the time he spoke, nothing more than an amusing contributor of remarkably promising trifles to magazines, and that, from the appearance of *Waverley* to that of *Pickwick*, no novelist of the first class had made an appearance. It is, moreover, characteristic of Lockhart as a critic that he is, as has been noted, always manly and robust. He was never false to his own early protest against "the banishing from the mind of a reverence for feeling, as abstracted from mere questions of immediate and obvious utility." But he never allowed that reverence to get the better of him and drag him into the deplorable excesses of gush into which, from his day to ours, criticism has more and more had a tendency to fall. If he makes no parade of definite æsthetic principles, it is clear that throughout he had such principles, and that they were principles of a very good kind. He had a wide knowledge of foreign literature without any taint of "Xenomania," sufficient scholarship (despite the unlucky false quantity of *Janua*, which he overlooked) in the older languages, and a thorough knowledge and love of English literature. His style is, to me at any rate, peculiarly attractive. Contrasted with the more brightly coloured and fantastically-shaped styles, of which, in his own day, De Quincey, Wilson, Macaulay, and Carlyle set the fashion, it may possibly seem tame to those who are not satisfied with proportion in form and harmony in tint; it will certainly not seem so to those who are more fortunately gifted. Indeed, compared either with Wilson's welter of words, now bombastic, now gushing, now horse-playful, or with the endless and heartbreaking antitheses of what Brougham ill-naturedly but truly called "Tom's snip-snap," it is infinitely preferable. The conclusion of the essay on Theodore Hook is not easily surpassable as an example of solid polished prose, which is prose, and does not attempt to be a hybrid between prose and poetry. The last page of the Tennyson review is perfect for quiet humour.

But there is no doubt that though Lockhart was an admirable critic merely as such, a poet, or at least a song-writer, of singular ability and charm within certain limits, and a master of sharp light raillery that never missed its mark and never lumbered on the way, his most unique and highest merit is that of biographer. Carlyle, though treating Lockhart himself with great politeness, does not allow this, and complains that Lockhart's conception of his task was "not very elevated." That is what a great many people said of Boswell, whom Carlyle thought an almost perfect biographer. But, as it happens, the critic here has fallen into the dangerous temptation of giving his reasons. Lockhart's plan was not, it seems, in the case of his Scott, very elevated, because it was not "to show Scott as he was by nature, as the world acted on him, as he acted on the world," and so forth. Now, unfortunately, this is exactly what it seems to me that Lockhart, whether he meant to do it or not, has done in the very book which Carlyle was criticising. And it seems to me, further, that he always does this in all his biographical efforts. Sometimes he appears (for here another criticism of Carlyle's on the Burns, not the Scott, is more to the point) to quote and extract from other and much inferior writers to an extent rather surprising in so excellent a penman, especially when it is remembered that, except to a dunce, the extraction and stringing together of quotations is far more troublesome than original writing. But even then the extracts are always luminous. With ninety-nine out of a hundred biographies the total impression which Carlyle demands, and very properly demands, is, in fact, a total absence of impression. The reader's mind is as dark, though it may be as full, as a cellar when the coals have been shot into it. Now this is never the case with Lockhart's biographies, whether they are books in half a dozen volumes, or essays in half a hundred pages. He subordinates what even Carlyle allowed to be his "clear nervous forcible style" so entirely to the task of representing his subject, he has such a perfect general conception of that subject, that only a very dense reader can fail to perceive the presentment. Whether it is the right or whether it is the wrong presentment may, of course, be a matter of opinion, but, such as it is, it is always there.

One other point of interest about Lockhart has to be mentioned. He was an eminent example, perhaps one of the most eminent, of a "gentleman of the press." He did a great many kinds of literary work, and he did all of them well; novel-writing, perhaps (which, as has been said, he gave up almost immediately), least well. But he does not seem to have felt any very strong or peculiar call to any particular class of original literary work, and his one great and substantive book may be fairly taken to have been much more decided by accident and his relationship to Scott than by deliberate choice. He was, in fact, eminently a journalist, and it is very much to be wished that there were more journalists like him. For from the two great reproaches of the craft to which so many of us belong, and which seems to be gradually swallowing up all other varieties of literary occupation, he was conspicuously free. He never did work slovenly in form, and

he never did work that was not in one way or other consistent with a decided set of literary and political principles. There is a great deal of nonsense talked about the unprincipled character of journalism, no doubt; and nobody knows better than those who have some experience of it, that if, as George Warrington says, "too many of us write against our own party," it is the fault simply of those who do so. If a man has a faculty of saying anything, he can generally get an opportunity of saying what he likes, and avoid occasions of saying what he does not like. But the mere journalist Swiss of heaven (or the other place), is certainly not unknown, and by all accounts he was in Lockhart's time rather common. No one ever accused Lockhart himself of being one of the class. A still more important fault, undoubtedly, of journalism is its tendency to slovenly work, and here again Lockhart was conspicuously guiltless. His actual production must have been very considerable, though in the absence of any collection, or even any index, of his contributions to periodicals, it is impossible to say exactly to how much it would extend. But, at a rough guess, the Scott, the Burns, and the Napoleon, the Ballads, the novels, and Peter, a hundred Quarterly articles, and an unknown number in Blackwood and Fraser, would make at least twenty or five-and-twenty volumes of a pretty closely printed library edition. Yet all this, as far as it can be identified, has the same careful though unostentatious distinction of style, the same admirable faculty of sarcasm, wherever sarcasm is required, the same depth of feeling, wherever feeling is called for, the same refusal to make a parade of feeling even where it is shown. Never trivial, never vulgar, never feeble, never stilted, never diffuse, Lockhart is one of the very best recent specimens of that class of writers of all work, which since Dryden's time has continually increased, is increasing, and does not seem likely to diminish. The growth may or may not be matter for regret; probably none of the more capable members of the class itself feels any particular desire to magnify his office. But if the office is to exist, let it at least be the object of those who hold it to perform its duties with that hatred of commonplace and cant and the popularis aura, with, as nearly as may be in each case, that conscience and thoroughness of workmanship, which Lockhart's writings uniformly display.

## XII

### PRAED

It was not till half a century after his death that Praed, who is loved by those who love him perhaps as sincerely as most greater writers, had his works presented to the public in a form which may be called complete.[19] This is of itself rather a cautious statement in appearance, but I am not sure that it ought not to be made more cautious still. The completeness is not complete, though it is in one respect rather more than complete; and the form is exceedingly informal. Neither in size, nor in print, nor in character of editing and arrangement do the two little fat volumes which were ushered into the world by Derwent Coleridge in 1864, and the one little thin volume which appeared in 1887 under Sir George Young's name with no notes and not much introduction, and the very creditable edition of the political poems which appeared a year later under the same care but better cared for, agree together. But this, though a nuisance to those who love not a set of odd volumes, would matter comparatively little if the discrepancies were not equally great in a much more important matter than that of mere externals. Only the last of the four volumes and three books just enumerated can be said to have been really edited, and though that is edited very well, it is the least important. Sir George Young, who has thus done a pious work to his uncle's memory, was concerned not merely in the previous cheap issue of the prose, but in the more elaborate issue of the poems in 1864. But either his green unknowing youth did not at that time know what editing meant, or he was under the restraint of some higher powers. Except that the issue of 1864 has that well-known page-look of "Moxon's," which is identified to all lovers of poetry with associations of Shelley, of Lord Tennyson, and of other masters, and that the pieces are duly dated, it is difficult to say any good thing of the book. There are no notes; and Praed is an author who is much in need of annotation. With singular injudiciousness, a great deal of album and other verse is included which was evidently not intended for publication, which does not display the writer at his best, or even in his characteristic vein at all, while the memoir is meagre in fact and decidedly feeble in criticism. As for the prose, though Sir George Young has prefixed an introduction good as far as it goes, there is no index, no table even of contents, and the separate papers are not dated, nor is any indication given of their origin—a defect which, for reasons to be indicated shortly, is especially troublesome in Praed's case. Accordingly anything like a critical study of the poet is beset with very unusual difficulties, and the mere reading of him, if it were less agreeable in itself, could not be said to be exactly easy. Luckily Praed is a writer so eminently engaging to the mere reader, as well as so



interesting in divers ways to the personage whom some one has politely called "the gelid critic," that no sins or shortcomings of his editors can do him much harm, so long as they let him be read at all.

Winthrop Mackworth was the third son of Serjeant Praed, Chairman of the Board of Audit, and, though his family was both by extraction and by actual seat Devonian, he was born in John Street, Bedford Row, on 26th June 1802, the year of the birth of Victor Hugo, who was perhaps about as unlike Praed in every conceivable point, except metrical mastery, as two men possessing poetic faculty can be unlike one another. John Street may not appear as meet a nurse for a poetic child as Besançon, especially now when it has settled down into the usual office-and-chambers state of Bloomsbury. But it is unusually wide for a London street; it has trees—those of the Foundling Hospital and those of Gray's Inn—at either end, and all about it cluster memories of the Bedford Row conspiracy, and of that immortal dinner which was given by the Briefless One and his timid partner to Mr. Goldmore, and of Sydney Smith's sojourn in Doughty Street, and of divers other pleasant things. In connection, however, with Praed himself, we do not hear much more of John Street. It was soon exchanged for the more cheerful locality of Teignmouth, where his father (who was a member of the old western family of Mackworth, Praed being an added surname) had a country house. Serjeant Praed encouraged, if he did not positively teach, the boy to write English verse at a very early age: a practice which I should be rather slow to approve, but which has been credited, perhaps justly, with the very remarkable formal accuracy and metrical ease of Praed's after-work. Winthrop lost his mother early, was sent to a private school at eight years old, and to Eton in the year 1814. Public schools in their effect of allegiance on public schoolboys have counted for much in English history, literary and other, and Eton has counted for more than any of them. But hardly in any case has it counted for so much with the general reader as in Praed's. A friend of mine, who, while entertaining high and lofty views on principle, takes low ones by a kind of natural attraction, says that the straightforward title of *The Etonian* and Praed's connection with it are enough to account for this. There you have a cardinal fact easy to seize and easy to remember. "Praed? Oh! yes, the man who wrote *The Etonian*; he must have been an Eton man," says the general reader. This is cynicism, and cannot be too strongly reprehended. But unluckily, as in other cases, a kind of critical deduction or reaction from this view has also taken place, and there are persons who maintain that Praed's merit is a kind of coterie-merit, a thing which Eton men are bound, and others are not bound but the reverse, to uphold. This is an old, but apparently still effective trick. I read not long ago a somewhat elaborate attempt to make out that the people who admire Mr. Matthew Arnold's poems admire them because they, the people, are Oxford men. Now this form of "ruling out" is undoubtedly ingenious. "You admire Mr. Arnold's poems?"—"Yes, I do."—"You are an Oxford man?"—"Yes, I am."—"Ah! I see." And it is perfectly useless for the victim to argue that his admiration of the poet and his allegiance to the University have nothing to do with each other. In the present case I, at least, am free from this illogical but damaging disqualification. I do not think that any one living admires Praed more than I do;{379} and neither Eton nor Cambridge, which may be said to have divided influence on him, claims any allegiance from me. On Praed himself, however, the influence of Eton was certainly great, if not of the greatest. Here he began in school periodicals ("*Apis Matina*" a bee buzzing in manuscript only, preceded *The Etonian*) his prose and, to some though a less extent, his verse-exercises in finished literature. Here he made the beginnings of that circle of friends (afterwards slightly enlarged at Cambridge by the addition of non-Etonians and including one or two Oxford men who had been at Eton) which practically formed the staff of *The Etonian* itself and of the subsequent *Knight's Quarterly* and *Brazen Head*. The greatest of them all, Macaulay, belonged to the later Trinity set; but the Etonians proper included divers men of mark. There has been, I believe, a frequent idea that boys who contribute to school-magazines never do anything else. Praed certainly could not be produced as an instance. He was not a great athlete, partly because his health was always weak, partly because athletics were then in their infancy. But he is said to have been a good player at fives and tennis, an amateur actor of merit, expert at chess and whist, and latterly a debater of promise, while, in the well-known way of his own school and University, he was more than a sufficient scholar. He went to Trinity in October 1821, and in the three following years won the Browne Medals for Greek verse four times and the Chancellor's Medal for English verse twice. He was third in the Classical Tripos, was elected to a Fellowship at his college in 1827, and in 1830 obtained the Seatonian Prize with a piece, "*The Ascent of Elijah*," which is remarkable for the extraordinary facility with which it catches the notes of the just published *Christian Year*. He was a great speaker at the Union, and, as has been hinted, he made a fresh circle of literary friends for himself, the chief ornaments whereof were Macaulay and Charles Austin. It was also during his sojourn at Cambridge that the short-lived but brilliant venture of *Knight's Quarterly* was launched. He was about four years resident at Trinity in the first instance; after which, according to a practice then common enough but now, I believe, obsolete, he returned to Eton as private and particular

tutor to Lord Ernest Bruce. This employment kept him for two years. He then read law, was called to the Bar in 1829, and in 1830 was elected to Parliament for the moribund borough of St. Germans. He was re-elected next year, contested St. Ives, when St. Germans lost its members, but was beaten, was elected in 1834 for Great Yarmouth, and in 1837 for Aylesbury, which last seat he held to his death. During the whole of this time he sat as a Conservative, becoming a more thorough one as time went on; and as he had been at Cambridge a very decided Whig, and had before his actual entrance on public life written many pointed and some bitter lampoons against the Tories, the change, in the language of his amiable and partial friend and biographer, "occasioned considerable surprise." Of this also more presently: for it is well to get merely biographical details over with as little digression as possible. Surprise or no surprise, he won good opinions from both sides, acquired considerable reputation as a debater and a man of business, was in the confidence both of the Duke of Wellington and of Sir Robert Peel, was made Secretary of the Board of Control in 1834, married in 1835, was appointed Deputy-High Steward of his University (a mysterious appointment, of the duties of which I have no notion), and died of disease of the lungs on 15th July 1839. Not very much has been published about Praed personally; but in what has been published, and in what I have heard, I cannot remember a single unfriendly sentence.

Notwithstanding his reputation as an "inspired schoolboy," I do not know that sober criticism would call him a really precocious writer, especially in verse. The pieces by which he is best known and which have most individuality, date in no case very early, and in almost all cases after his five-and-twentieth year. What does date very early (and unluckily it has been printed with a copiousness betokening more affection than judgment, considering that the author had more sense than to print it at all) is scarcely distinguishable from any other verses of any other clever boy. It is impossible to augur any future excellence from such stuff as Emilia often sheds the tear  
But affectation bids it flow,

or as

From breasts which feel compassion's glow  
Solicit mild the kind relief;

and, for one's own part, one is inclined to solicit mild the kind relief of not having to read it. Even when Praed had become, at least technically, a man, there is no very great improvement as a whole, though here and there one may see, looking backwards from the finished examples, faint beginnings of his peculiar touches, especially of that pleasant trick of repeating the same word or phrase with a different and slightly altered sense which, as Mr. Austin Dobson has suggested, may have been taken from Burns. The Cambridge prize poems are quite authentic and respectable examples of that style which has received its final criticism in

Ply battleaxe and hurtling catapult:  
Jerusalem is ours! Id Deus vult,—

though they do not contain anything so nice as that, or as its great author's more famous couplet respecting Africa and the men thereof. The longer romances of the same date, "Gog," "Lilian," "The Troubadour," are little more than clever reminiscences sometimes of Scott, Byron, Moore, and other contemporaries, sometimes of Prior and the *vers de société* of the eighteenth century. The best passage by far of all this is the close of "How to Rhyme with Love," and this, as it seems to me, is the only passage of even moderate length which, in the poems dating before Praed took his degree, in the least foretells the poet of "The Red Fisherman," "The Vicar," the "Letters from Teignmouth," the "Fourteenth of February" (earliest in date and not least charming fruit of the true vein), "Good-night to the Season," and best and most delightful of all, the peerless "Letter of Advice," which is as much the very best thing of its own kind as the "Divine Comedy."

In prose Praed was a little earlier, but not very much. The Etonian itself was, even in its earliest numbers, written at an age when many, perhaps most, men have already left school; and the earlier numbers are as imitative, of the Spectator and its late and now little read followers of the eighteenth century, as is the verse above quoted. The youthful boisterousness of Blackwood gave Praed a more congenial because a fresher cue; and in the style of which Maginn, as Adjutant O'Doherty, had set the example in his Latinisings of popular verse, and which was to be worked to death by Father Prout, there are few things better than the "Musæ O'Connorianæ" which celebrates the great fight of Mac Nevis and Mac Twolter. But there is here still the distinct following of a model the taint of the school-exercise. Very much more original is "The Knight and the Knave:" indeed I should call this the first original thing, though it be a parody, that Praed did. To say that it reminds one in more than subject of Rebecca and Rowena, and that it was written some twenty years earlier, is to say a very great deal. Even here, however, the writer's ground is rented, not freehold. It is very different in such papers as "Old Boots" and "The Country Curate," while in the later prose contributed to Knight's Quarterly the improvement in originality is marked. "The Union Club" is

amusing enough all through: but considering that it was written in 1823, two years before Jeffrey asked the author of a certain essay on Milton "where he got that style," one passage of the speech put in the mouth of Macaulay is positively startling. "The Best Bat in the School" is quite delightful, and "My First Folly," though very unequal, contains in the introduction scene, between Vyvian Joyeuse and Margaret Orleans, a specimen of a kind of dialogue nowhere to be found before, so far as I know, and giving proof that, if Praed had set himself to it, he might have started a new kind of novel.

It does not appear, however, that his fancy led him with any decided bent to prose composition, and he very early deserted it for verse; though he is said to have, at a comparatively late period of his short life, worked in harness as a regular leader-writer for the Morning Post during more than a year. No examples of this work of his have been reprinted, nor, so far as I know, does any means of identifying them exist, though I personally should like to examine them. He was still at Cambridge when he drifted into another channel, which was still not his own channel, but in which he feathered his oars under two different flags with no small skill and dexterity. Sir George Young has a very high idea of his uncle's political verse, and places him "first among English writers, before Prior, before Canning, before the authors of the 'Rolliad,' and far before Moore or any of the still anonymous contributors to the later London press." I cannot subscribe to this. Neither as Whig nor as Tory, neither as satirist of George the Fourth nor as satirist of the Reform Bill, does Praed seem to me to have been within a hundred miles of that elder schoolfellow of his who wrote All creeping creatures, venomous and low, Still blasphemous or blackguard, praise Lepaux. He has nothing for sustained wit and ease equal to the best pieces of the "Fudge Family" and the "Two-penny Postbag"; and (for I do not know why one should not praise a man because he happens to be alive and one's friend) I do not think he has the touch of the true political satirist as Mr. Traill has it in "Professor Baloonatics Craniocracs," or in that admirable satire on democracy which is addressed to the "Philosopher Crazy, from the Island of Crazes."

Indeed, by mentioning Prior, Sir George seems to put himself rather out of court. Praed is very nearly if not quite Prior's equal, but the sphere of neither was politics. Prior's political pieces are thin and poor beside his social verse, and with rare exceptions I could not put anything political of Praed's higher than the shoe-string of "Araminta." Neither of these two charming poets seems to have felt seriously enough for political satire. Matthew, we know, played the traitor; and though Mackworth ratted to my own side, I fear it must be confessed that he did rat. I can only discover in his political verse two fixed principles, both of which no doubt did him credit, but which hardly, even when taken together, amount to a sufficient political creed. The one was fidelity to Canning and his memory: the other was impatience of the cant of the reformers. He could make admirable fun of Joseph Hume, and of still smaller fry like Waithman; he could attack Lord Grey's nepotism and doctrinairism fiercely enough. Once or twice, or, to be fair, more than once or twice, he struck out a happy, indeed a brilliant flash. He was admirable at what Sir George Young calls, justly enough, "political patter songs" such as,

Young widowhood shall lose its weeds, Old kings shall loathe the Tories, And monks be tired of telling beads, And Blues of telling stories; And titled suitors shall be crossed, And famished poets married, And Canning's motion shall be lost, And Hume's amendment carried; And Chancery shall cease to doubt, And Algebra to prove, And hoops come in, and gas go out Before I cease to love.

He hit off an exceedingly savage and certainly not wholly just "Epitaph on the King of the Sandwich Islands" which puts the conception of George the Fourth that Thackeray afterwards made popular, and contains these felicitous lines:

The people in his happy reign, Were blessed beyond all other nations: Unharm'd by foreign axe and chain, Unhealed by civic innovations; They served the usual logs and stones, With all the usual rites and terrors, And swallowed all their fathers' bones, And swallowed all their fathers' errors.

When the fierce mob, with clubs and knives, All swore that nothing should prevent them, But that their representatives Should actually represent them, He interposed the proper checks, By sending troops, with drums and banners, To cut their speeches short, and necks, And break their heads, to mend their manners.

Occasionally in a sort of middle vein between politics and society he wrote in the "patter" style just noticed quite admirable things like "Twenty-eight and Twenty-nine." Throughout the great debates on Reform he rallied the reformers with the same complete and apparently useless superiority of wit and sense which has often, if not invariably, been shown at similar crises on the losing side. And once, on an ever-memorable occasion, he broke into those famous and most touching "Stanzas on seeing the Speaker Asleep" which

affect one almost to tears by their grace of form and by the perennial and indeed ever-increasing applicability of their matter.

Sleep, Mr. Speaker: it's surely fair,  
If you don't in your bed, that you should in your chair:  
Longer and longer still they grow,  
Tory and Radical, Aye and No;  
Talking by night and talking by day;  
Sleep, Mr. Speaker; sleep, sleep while you may.

Sleep, Mr. Speaker: slumber lies  
Light and brief on a Speaker's eyes—  
Fielden or Finn, in a minute or two,  
Some disorderly thing will do;  
Riot will chase repose away;  
Sleep, Mr. Speaker; sleep, sleep while you may.

Sleep, Mr. Speaker; Cobbett will soon  
Move to abolish the sun and moon;  
Hume, no doubt, will be taking  
the sense  
Of the House on a saving of thirteen-pence;  
Grattan will growl or Baldwin bray;  
Sleep, Mr. Speaker; sleep, sleep while you may.

Sleep, Mr. Speaker: dream of the time  
When loyalty was not quite a crime,  
When Grant was a pupil in  
Canning's school,  
And Palmerston fancied Wood a fool.  
Lord, how principles pass away!  
Sleep, Mr. Speaker; sleep, sleep while you may.

Sleep, Mr. Speaker; sweet to men  
Is the sleep that comes but now and then;  
Sweet to the sorrowful, sweet to the ill,  
Sweet to the children who work in a mill.  
You have more need of sleep than they,  
Sleep, Mr. Speaker; sleep, sleep while you may.

But the chief merit of Praed's political verse as a whole seems to me to be that it kept his hand in, and enabled him to develop and refine the trick, above referred to, of playing on words so as to give a graceful turn to verse composed in his true vocation.

Of the verse so composed there are more kinds than one; though perhaps only in two kinds is the author absolutely at his best. There is first a certain class of pieces which strongly recall Macaulay's "Lays" and may have had some connexion of origin with them. Of course those who are foolish enough to affect to see nothing good in "The Battle of the Lake Regillus," or "Ivry," or "The Armada," will not like "Cassandra," or "Sir Nicholas at Marston Moor," or the "Covenanter's Lament for Bothwell Brigg," or "Arminius." Nevertheless they are fine in their way. "Arminius" is too long, and it suffers from the obvious comparison with Cowper's far finer "Boadicea." But its best lines, such as the well-known

I curse him by our country's gods,  
The terrible, the dark,  
The scatterers of the Roman rods,  
The quellers of the bark,

are excellent in the style, and "Sir Nicholas" is charming. But not here either did Apollo seriously wait for Praed. The later romances or tales are far better than the earlier. "The Legend of the Haunted Tree" shows in full swing that happy compound and contrast of sentiment and humour in which the writer excelled. And "The Teufelhaus" is, except "The Red Fisherman" perhaps, the best thing of its kind in English. These lines are good enough for anything:

But little he cared, that stripling pale,  
For the sinking sun or the rising gale;  
For he, as he rode, was dreaming  
now,  
Poor youth, of a woman's broken vow,  
Of the cup dashed down, ere the wine was tasted,  
Of eloquent speeches sadly wasted,  
Of a gallant heart all burnt to ashes,  
And the Baron of Katzberg's long moustaches.

And these:

Swift as the rush of an eagle's wing,  
Or the flight of a shaft from Tartar string,  
Into the wood Sir Rudolph went:  
Not with more joy the schoolboys run  
To the gay green fields when their task is done;  
Not with more haste the members fly,  
When Hume has caught the Speaker's eye. {391 }

But in "The Red Fisherman" itself there is nothing that is not good. It is very short, ten small pages only of some five-and-twenty lines each. But there is not a weak place in it from the moment when "the Abbot arose and closed his book" to the account of his lamentable and yet lucky fate and punishment whereof "none but he and the fisherman could tell the reason why." Neither of the two other practitioners who may be called the masters of this style, Hood and Barham, nor Praed himself elsewhere, nor any of his and their imitators has trodden the breadthless line between real terror and mere burlesque with so steady a foot.

Still not here was his "farthest," as the geographers say, nor in the considerable mass of smaller poems which practically defy classification. In them, as so often elsewhere in Praed, one comes across odd notes, stray flashes of genius which he never seems to have cared to combine or follow out, such as the unwontedly solemn "Time's Song," the best wholly serious thing that he has done, and the charming "L'Inconnue." But we find the perfect Praed, and we find him only, in the verses of society proper, the second part of the "Poems of Life and Manners" as they are headed, which began, as far as one can make out, to be written about 1826, and the gift of which Praed never lost, though he practised it little in the very last years of his life. Here, in a hundred pages, with a few to be added from elsewhere, are to be found some of the best-bred and best-natured verse within the English language, some of the most original and

remarkable metrical experiments, a profusion of the liveliest fancy, a rush of the gayest rhyme. They begin with "The Vicar," *vir nullâ non donandus lauru*.

[Whose] talk was like a stream, which runs  
With rapid change from rocks to roses:  
It slipped from politics to puns,  
It passed from Mahomet to Moses;  
Beginning with the laws which keep  
The planets in their radiant courses,  
And ending with some precept deep  
For dressing eels, or shoeing horses.

Three of the Vicar's companion "Everyday Characters" are good, but I think not so good as he; the fifth piece, however, "The Portrait of a Lady," is quite his equal.

You'll be forgotten—as old debts  
By persons who are used to borrow;  
Forgotten—as the sun that sets,  
When shines a new one on the morrow;  
Forgotten—like the luscious peach  
That blessed the schoolboy last September;  
Forgotten—like a maiden speech,  
Which all men praise, but none remember.

Yet ere you sink into the stream  
That whelms alike sage, saint, and martyr,  
And soldier's sword, and minstrel's theme,  
And Canning's wit, and Gattin's charter,  
Here, of the fortunes of your youth,  
My fancy weaves her dim conjectures,  
Which have, perhaps, as much of truth  
As passion's vows, or Cobbett's lectures.

Here, and perhaps here first, at least in the order of the published poems, appears that curious mixture of pathos and quizzing, sentiment and satire, which has never been mastered more fully or communicated more happily than by Praed. But not even yet do we meet with it in its happiest form: nor is that form to be found in "Josephine" which is much better in substance than in manner, or in the half-social, half-political patter of "The Brazen Head," or in "Twenty-eight and Twenty-nine." It sounds first in the "Song for the Fourteenth of February." No one, so far as I know, has traced any exact original<sup>[20]</sup> for the altogether admirable metre which, improved and glorified later in "The Letter of Advice," appears first in lighter matter still like this:

Shall I kneel to a Sylvia or Celia,  
Whom no one e'er saw, or may see,  
A fancy-drawn Laura Amelia,  
An ad libit Anna Marie?  
Shall I court an initial with stars to it,  
Go mad for a G. or a J.,  
Get Bishop to put a few bars to it,  
And print it on Valentine's Day?

But every competent critic has seen in it the origin of the more gorgeous and full-mouthed, if not more accomplished and dexterous, rhythm in which Mr. Swinburne has written "Dolores," and the even more masterly dedication of the first "Poems and Ballads." The shortening of the last line which the later poet has introduced is a touch of genius, but not perhaps greater than Praed's own recognition of the extraordinarily vivid and ringing qualities of the stanza. I profoundly believe that metrical quality is, other things being tolerably equal, the great secret of the enduring attraction of verse: and nowhere, not in the greatest lyrics, is that quality more unmistakable than in the "Letter of Advice." I really do not know how many times I have read it; but I never can read it to this day without being forced to read it out loud like a schoolboy and mark with accompaniment of hand-beat such lines as

Remember the thrilling romances  
We read on the bank in the glen:  
Remember the suitors our fancies  
Would picture for both of us then.  
They wore the red cross on their shoulder,  
They had vanquished and pardoned  
their foe—Sweet friend, are you wiser or colder?  
My own Araminta, say "No!"     •     •     •     •     •  
He must walk—like a god of old story  
Come down from the home of his rest;  
He must smile—like the sun in his glory,  
On the buds he loves ever the best;  
And oh! from its ivory portal  
Like music his soft speech must flow!  
If he speak, smile, or walk like a mortal,  
My own Araminta, say "No!"

There are, metrically speaking, few finer couplets in English than the first of that second stanza. Looked at from another point of view, the mixture of the comic and the serious in the piece is remarkable enough; but not so remarkable, I think, as its extraordinary metrical accomplishment. There is not a note or a syllable wrong in the whole thing, but every sound and every cadence comes exactly where it ought to come, so as to be, in a delightful phrase of Southey's, "necessary and voluptuous and right."

It is no wonder that when Praed had discovered such a medium he should have worked it freely. But he never impressed on it such a combination of majesty and grace as in this letter of Medora Trevilian. As far as the metre goes I think the eight-lined stanzas of this piece better suited to it than the twelve-lined ones of "Good Night to the Season" and the first "Letter from Teignmouth," but both are very delightful. Perhaps the first is the best known of all Praed's poems, and certainly some things in it, such as

The ice of her ladyship's manners,  
The ice of his lordship's champagne,  
are among the most quoted. But this antithetical trick, of which Praed was so fond, is repeated a little often in it; and it seems to me to lack the freshness as well as the fire of the "Advice." On<sup>{396}</sup> the other hand, the "Letter from Teignmouth" is the best thing that even Praed has ever done for combined grace and tenderness.

You once could be pleased with our ballads—To-day you have critical ears;You once could be charmed with our salads—Alas! you've been dining with Peers;You trifled and flirted with many—You've forgotten the when and the how;There was one you liked better than any—Perhaps you've forgotten her now.But of those you remember most newly,Of those who delight or enthrall, None love you a quarter so trulyAs some you will find at our Ball.

They tell me you've many who flatter,Because of your wit and your song:They tell me—and what does it matter?—You like to be praised by the throng:They tell me you're shadowed with laurel:They tell me you're loved by a Blue:They tell me you're sadly immoral—Dear Clarence, that cannot be true!But to me, you are still what I found you,Before you grew clever and tall;And you'll think of the spell that once bound you;And you'll come—won't you come?—to our Ball!

Is not that perfectly charming?

It is perhaps a matter of mere taste whether it is or is not more charming than pieces like "School and Schoolfellows" (the best of Praed's purely Eton poems) and "Marriage Chimes," in which, if not Eton, the Etonian set also comes in. If I like these latter pieces less, it is not so much because of their more personal and less universal subjects as because their style is much less individual. The resemblance to Hood cannot be missed, and though I believe there is some dispute as to which of the two poets actually hit upon the particular style first, there can be little doubt that Hood attained to the greater excellence in it. The real sense and savingness of that doctrine of the "principal and most excellent things," which has sometimes been preached rather corruptly and narrowly, is that the best things that a man does are those that he does best. Now though

I wondered what they meant by stock,I wrote delightful Sapphics,  
and

With no hard work but Bovney stream,No chill except Long Morning,  
are very nice things, I do not think they are so good in their kind as the other things that I have quoted; and this, though the poem contains the following wholly delightful stanza in the style of the "Ode on a Distant Prospect of Clapham Academy":

Tom Mill was used to blacken eyesWithout the fear of sessions;Charles Medlar loathed false quantitiesAs much as false professions;Now Mill keeps order in the land,A magistrate pedantic;{398}And Medlar's feet repose unscannedBeneath the wide Atlantic.

The same may even be said of "Utopia," a much-praised, often-quoted, and certainly very amusing poem, of "I'm not a Lover now," and of others, which are also, though less exactly, in Hood's manner. To attempt to distinguish between that manner and the manner which is Praed's own is a rather perilous attempt; and the people who hate all attempts at reducing criticism to principle, and who think that a critic should only say clever things about his subject, will of course dislike me for it. But that I cannot help. I should say then that Hood had the advantage of Praed in purely serious poetry; for Araminta's bard never did anything at all approaching "The Plea of the Midsummer Fairies," "The Haunted House," or a score of other things. He had also the advantage in pure broad humour. But where Praed excelled was in the mixed style, not of sharp contrast as in Hood's "Lay of the Desert Born" and "Demon Ship," where from real pity and real terror the reader suddenly stumbles into pure burlesque, but of wholly blended and tempered humour and pathos. It is this mixed style in which I think his note is to be found as it is to be found in no other poet, and as it could hardly be found in any but one with Praed's peculiar talent and temper combined with his peculiar advantages of education, fortune, and social atmosphere. He never had to "pump out sheets of fun" on a sick-bed for the printer's devil, like his less well-fated but assuredly not less well-gifted rival; and as his scholarship was exactly of the kind to refine, temper, and adjust his literary manner, so his society and circumstances were exactly of the kind to repress, or at least not to encourage, exuberance or boisterousness in his literary matter. There are I believe who call him trivial, even frivolous; and if this be done sincerely by any careful readers of "The Red Fisherman" and the "Letter of Advice" I fear I must peremptorily disable their judgment. But this appearance of levity is in great part due exactly to the perfect modulation and adjustment of his various notes. He never shrieks or guffaws: there is no horse-play in him, just as there is no tearing a passion to tatters. His slight mannerisms, more than once referred to, rarely exceed what is justified by good literary manners. His points are very often so delicate, so little insisted on or underlined, that a careless reader may miss them altogether; his "questionings" are so little "obstinate" that a careless reader may think them empty.

Will it come with a rose or a brier?Will it come with a blessing or curse?Will its bonnets be lower or higher?Will its morals be better or worse?

The author of this perhaps seems to some a mere jesting Pilate, and if he does, they are quite right not to even try to like him.

I have seen disdainful remarks on those critics who, however warily, admire a considerable number of authors, as though they were coarse and omnivorous persons, unfit to rank with the delicates who can only relish one or two things in literature. But this is a foolish mistake. "One to one" is not "cursedly confined" in the relation of book and reader; and a man need not be a Don Juan of letters to have a list of almost mille e tre loves in that department. He must indeed love the best or those among the best only, in the almost innumerable kinds, which is not a very severe restriction. And Praed is of this so fortunately numerous company. I do not agree with those who lament his early death on the ground of its depriving literature or politics of his future greatness. In politics he would most probably not have become anything greater than an industrious and respectable official; and in letters his best work was pretty certainly done. For it was a work that could only be done in youth. In his scholarly but not frigidly correct form, in his irregular sallies and flashes of a genius really individual as far as it went but never perhaps likely to go much farther, in the freshness of his imitations, in the imperfection of his originalities, Praed was the most perfect representative we have had or ever are likely to have of what has been called, with a perhaps reprehensible parody on great words, "the eternal undergraduate within us, who rejoices before life." He is thus at the very antipodes of Wertherism and Byronism, a light but gallant champion of cheerfulness and the joy of living. Although there is about him absolutely nothing artificial—the curse of the lighter poetry as a rule—and though he attains to deep pathos now and then, and once or twice (notably in "The Red Fisherman") to a kind of grim earnestness, neither of these things is his real forte. Playing with literature and with life, not frivolously or without heart, but with no very deep cares and no very passionate feeling, is Praed's attitude whenever he is at his best. And he does not play at playing as many writers do: it is all perfectly genuine. Even Prior has not excelled such lines as these in one of his early and by no means his best poems (an adaptation too), for mingled jest and earnest—

But Isabel, by accident, Was wandering by that minute; She opened that dark monument And found her slave within it; The clergy said the Mass in vain, The College could not save me: But life, she swears, returned again With the first kiss she gave me.

Hardly, if at all, could he have kept up this attitude towards life after he had come to forty year; and he might have become either a merely intelligent and respectable person, which is most probable, or an elderly youth, which is of all things most detestable, or a caterwauler, or a cynic, or a preacher. From all these fates the gods mercifully saved him, and he abides with us (the presentation being but slightly marred by the injudicious prodigality of his editors) only as the poet of Medora's musical despair lest Araminta should derogate, of the Abbot's nightmare sufferings at the hands of the Red Fisherman, of the plaintive appeal after much lively gossip—

And you'll come—won't you come?—to our Ball,

of all the pleasures, and the jests, and the tastes, and the studies, and the woes, provided only they are healthy and manly, of Twenty-five. Unhappy is the person of whom it can be said that he neither has been, is, nor ever will be in the temper and circumstances of which Praed's verse is the exact and consummate expression; not much less unhappy he for whom that verse does not perform the best perhaps of all the offices of literature, and call up, it may be in happier guise than that in which they once really existed, the many beloved shadows of the past.

### **XIII**

#### **GEORGE BORROW**

In this paper I do not undertake to throw any new light on the little-known life of the author of *Lavengro*. Among the few people who knew Borrow intimately, surely some one will soon be found who will give to the world an account of his curious life, and perhaps some specimens of those "mountains of manuscript" which, as he regretfully declares, never could find a publisher—an impossibility which, if I may be permitted to offer an opinion, does not reflect any great credit on publishers. For the present purpose it is sufficient to sum up the generally-known facts that Borrow was born in 1803 at East Dereham in Norfolk, his father being a captain in the army, who came of Cornish blood, his mother a lady of Norfolk birth and Huguenot extraction. His youth he has himself described in a fashion which nobody is likely to care to paraphrase. After the years of travel chronicled in *Lavengro*, he seems to have found scope for his

philological and adventurous tendencies in the rather unlikely service of the Bible Society; and he sojourned in Russia and Spain to the great advantage of English literature. This occupied him during the greater part of the years from 1830 to 1840. Then he came back to his native country—or, at any rate, his native district—married a widow of some property at Lowestoft, and spent the last forty years of his life at Oulton Hall, near the piece of water which is thronged in summer by all manner of sportsmen and others. He died but a few years ago; and even since his death he seems to have lacked the due meed of praise which the Lord Chief Justice of the equal foot usually brings, even to persons far less deserving than Borrow.

There is this difficulty in writing about him, that the audience must necessarily consist of fervent devotees on the one hand, and of complete infidels, or at least complete know-nothings, on the other. To any one who, having the faculty to understand either, has read *Lavengro* or *The Bible in Spain*, or even *Wild Wales*, praise bestowed on Borrow is apt to seem impertinence. To anybody else (and unfortunately the anybody else is in a large majority) praise bestowed on Borrow is apt to look like that very dubious kind of praise which is bestowed on somebody of whom no one but the praiser has ever heard. I cannot think of any single writer (Peacock himself is not an exception) who is in quite parallel case. And, as usual, there is a certain excuse for the general public. Borrow kept himself, during not the least exciting period of English history, quite aloof from English politics, and from the life of great English cities. But he did more than this. He is the only really considerable writer of his time in any modern European nation who seems to have taken absolutely no interest in current events, literary and other. Putting a very few allusions aside, he might have belonged to almost any period. His political idiosyncrasy will be noticed presently; but he, who lived through the whole period from Waterloo to Maiwand, has not, as far as I remember, mentioned a single English writer later than Scott and Byron. He saw the rise, and, in some instances, the death, of Tennyson, Thackeray, Macaulay, Carlyle, Dickens. There is not a reference to any one of them in his works. He saw political changes such as no man for two centuries had seen, and (except the Corn Laws, to which he has some half-ironical allusions, and the Ecclesiastical Titles Bill, which stirred his one active sentiment) he has referred to never a one. He seems in some singular fashion to have stood outside of all these things. His Spanish travels are dated for us by references to Doña Isabel and Don Carlos, to Mr. Villiers and Lord Palmerston. But cut these dates out, and they might be travels of the last century. His Welsh book proclaims<sup>{406}</sup> itself as written in the full course of the Crimean War; but excise a few passages which bear directly on that event, and the most ingenious critic would be puzzled to "place" the composition. Shakespeare, we know, was for all time, not of one age only; but I think we may say of Borrow, without too severely or conceitedly marking the difference, that he was not of or for any particular age or time at all. If the celebrated query in Longfellow's *Hyperion*, "What is time?" had been addressed to him, his most appropriate answer, and one which he was quite capable of giving, would have been, "I really don't know."

To this singular historical vagueness has to be added a critical vagueness even greater. I am sorry that I am unable to confirm or to gainsay at first hand Borrow's wonderfully high estimate of certain Welsh poets. But if the originals are anything like his translations of them, I do not think that Ab Gwilym and Lewis Glyn Cothi, Gronwy Owen and Huw Morris can have been quite such mighty bards as he makes out. Fortunately, however, a better test presents itself. In one book of his, *Wild Wales*, there are two estimates of Scott's works. Borrow finds in an inn a copy of *Woodstock* (which he calls by its less known title of *The Cavalier*), and decides that it is "trashy": chiefly, it would appear, because the portrait therein contained of Harrison, for whom Borrow seems, on one of his inscrutable principles of prejudice, to have had a liking, is not wholly favourable. He afterwards informs us that Scott's "Norman Horseshoe" (no very exquisite song at the best, and among Scott's somewhat less than exquisite) is "one of the most stirring lyrics of modern times," and that he sang it for a whole evening; evidently because it recounts a defeat of the Normans, whom Borrow, as he elsewhere tells us in sundry places, disliked for reasons more or less similar to those which made him like Harrison, the butcher. In other words, he could not judge a work of literature as literature at all. If it expressed sentiments with which he agreed, or called up associations which were pleasant to him, good luck to it; if it expressed sentiments with which he did not agree, and called up no pleasant associations, bad luck.

In politics and religion this curious and very John Bullish unreason is still more apparent. I suppose Borrow may be called, though he does not call himself, a Tory. He certainly was an unfriend to Whiggery, and a hater of Radicalism. He seems to have given up even the Corn Laws with a certain amount of regret, and his general attitude is quite Eldonian. But he combined with his general Toryism very curious Radicalisms of detail, such as are to be found in Cobbett (who, as appeared at last, and as all reasonable men should



have always known, was really a Tory of a peculiar type), and in several other English persons. The Church, the Monarchy, and the Constitution generally were dear to Borrow, but he hated all the aristocracy (except those whom he knew personally) and most of the gentry. Also, he had the odd Radical sympathy for anybody who, as the vernacular has it, was "kept out of his rights." I do not know, but I should think, that Borrow was a strong Tichbornite. In that curious book *Wild Wales*, where almost more of his real character appears than in any other, he has to do with the Crimean War. It was going on during the whole time of his tour, and he once or twice reports conversations in which, from his knowledge of Russia, he demonstrated beforehand to Welsh inquirers how improbable, not to say impossible, it was that the Russian should be beaten. But the thing that seems really to have interested him most was the case of Lieutenant P—— or Lieutenant Parry, whom he sometimes refers to in the fuller and sometimes in the less explicit manner. My own memories of 1854 are rather indistinct, and I confess that I have not taken the trouble to look up this celebrated case. As far as I can remember, and as far as Borrow's references here and elsewhere go, it was the doubtless lamentable but not uncommon case of a man who is difficult to live with, and who has to live with others. Such cases occur at intervals in every mess, college, and other similar aggregation of humanity. The person difficult to live with gets, to use an Oxford phrase, "drawn." If he is reformable he takes the lesson, and very likely becomes excellent friends with those who "drew" him. If he is not, he loses his temper, and evil results of one kind or another follow. Borrow's Lieutenant P—— seems unluckily to have been of the latter kind, and was, if I mistake not, recommended by the authorities to withdraw from a situation which, to him, was evidently a false and unsuitable one. With this Borrow could not away. He gravely chronicles the fact of his reading an "excellent article in a local paper on the case of Lieutenant P——"; and with no less gravity (though he was, in a certain way, one of the first humorists of our day) he suggests that the complaints of the martyred P—— to the Almighty were probably not unconnected with our Crimean disasters. This curious parochialism pursues him into more purely religious matters. I do not know any other really great man of letters of the last three-quarters of a century of whose attitude Carlyle's famous words, "regarding God's universe as a larger patrimony of Saint Peter, from which it were well and pleasant to hunt the Pope," are so literally true. It was not in Borrow's case a case of *sancta simplicitas*. He has at times flashes of by no means orthodox sentiment, and seems to have fought, and perhaps hardly won, many a battle against the army of the doubters. But when it comes to the Pope, he is as single-minded an enthusiast as John Bunyan himself, whom, by the way, he resembles in more than one point. The attitude was, of course, common enough among his contemporaries; indeed any man who has reached middle life must remember numerous examples among his own friends and kindred. But in literature, and such literature as Borrow's, it is rare.

Yet again, the curiously piecemeal, and the curiously arbitrary character of Borrow's literary studies in languages other than his own, is noteworthy in so great a linguist. The entire range of French literature, old as well as new, he seems to have ignored altogether—I should imagine out of pure John Bullishness. He has very few references to German, though he was a good German scholar—a fact which I account for by the other fact, that in his earlier literary period German was fashionable, and that he never would have anything to do with anything that fashion favoured. Italian, though he certainly knew it well, is equally slighted. His education, if not his taste for languages, must have made him a tolerable (he never could have been an exact) classical scholar. But it is clear that insolent Greece and haughty Rome possessed no attraction for him. I question whether even Spanish would not have been too common a toy to attract him much, if it had not been for the accidental circumstances which connected him with Spain.

Lastly (for I love to get my devil's advocate work over), in Borrow's varied and strangely attractive gallery of portraits and characters, most observers must perceive the absence of the note of passion. I have sometimes tried to think that miraculous episode of Isopel Berners and the Armenian verbs, with the whole sojourn of Lavengro in the dingle, a mere wayward piece of irony—a kind of conscious ascetic myth. But I am afraid the interpretation will not do. The subsequent conversation with Ursula Petulengro under the hedge might be only a companion piece; even the more wonderful, though much less interesting, dialogue with the Irish girl in the last chapters of *Wild Wales* might be so rendered by a hardy exegete. But the negative evidence in all the books is too strong. It may be taken as positively certain that Borrow never was "in love," as the phrase is, and that he had hardly the remotest conception of what being in love means. It is possible that he was a most cleanly liver—it is possible that he was quite the reverse: I have not the slightest information either way. But that he never in all his life heard with understanding the refrain of the "Pervigilium,"

*Cras amet qui nunquam amavit, quique amavit eras amet,*

I take as certain.

The foregoing remarks have, I think, summed up all Borrow's defects, and it will be observed that even these defects have for the most part the attraction of a certain strangeness and oddity. If they had not been accompanied by great and peculiar merits, he would not have emerged from the category of the merely bizarre, where he might have been left without further attention. But, as a matter of fact, all, or almost all, of his defects are not only counterbalanced by merits, but are themselves, in a great degree, exaggerations or perversions of what is intrinsically meritorious. With less wilfulness, with more attention to the literature, the events, the personages of his own time, with a more critical and common-sense attitude towards his own crotchets, Borrow could hardly have wrought out for himself (as he has to an extent hardly paralleled by any other prose writer who has not deliberately chosen supernatural or fantastic themes) the region of fantasy, neither too real nor too historical, which Joubert thought proper to the poet. Strong and vivid as Borrow's drawing of places and persons is, he always contrives to throw in touches which somehow give the whole the air of being rather a vision than a fact. Never was such a John-a-Dreams as this solid, pugilistic John Bull. Part of this literary effect of his is due to his quaint habit of avoiding, where he can, the mention of proper names. The description, for instance, of Old Sarum and Salisbury itself in *Lavengro* is sufficient to identify them to the most careless reader, even if the name of Stonehenge had not occurred on the page before; but they are not named. The description of Bettws-y-Coed in *Wild Wales*, though less poetical, is equally vivid. Yet here it would be quite possible for a reader, who did not know the place and its relation to other named places, to pass without any idea of the actual spot. It is the same with his frequent references to his beloved city of Norwich, and his less frequent references to his later home at Oulton. A paraphrase, an innuendo, a word to the wise he delights in, but anything perfectly clear and precise he abhors. And by this means and others, which it might be tedious to trace out too closely, he succeeds in throwing the same cloudy vagueness over times as well as places and persons. A famous passage—perhaps the best known, and not far from the best he ever wrote—about Byron's funeral, fixes, of course, the date of the wondrous facts or fictions recorded in *Lavengro* to a nicety. Yet who, as he reads it and its sequel (for the separation of *Lavengro* and *The Romany Rye* is merely arbitrary, though the second book is, as a whole, less interesting than the former), ever thinks of what was actually going on in the very positive and prosaic England of 1824-25? The later chapters of *Lavengro* are the only modern Roman d'Aventures that I know. The hero goes "overthwart and endlong," just like the figures whom all readers know in Malory, and some in his originals. I do not know that it would be more surprising if Borrow had found Sir Ozana dying at the chapel in Lyonesse, or had seen the full function of the Grail, though I fear he would have protested against that as popish. Without any apparent art, certainly without the elaborate apparatus which most prose tellers of fantastic tales use, and generally fail in using, Borrow spirits his readers at once away from mere reality. If his events are frequently as odd as a dream, they are always as perfectly commonplace and real for the moment as the events of a dream are—a little fact which the above-mentioned tellers of the above-mentioned fantastic stories are too apt to forget. It is in this natural romantic gift that Borrow's greatest charm lies. But it is accompanied and nearly equalled, both in quality and in degree, by a faculty for dialogue. Except Defoe and Dumas, I cannot think of any novelists who contrive to tell a story in dialogue and to keep up the ball of conversation so well as Borrow; while he is considerably the superior of both in pure style and in the literary quality of his talk. Borrow's humour, though it is of the general class of the older English—that is to say, the pre-Addisonian—humorists, is a species quite by itself. It is rather narrow in range, a little garrulous, busied very often about curiously small matters, but wonderfully observant and true, and possessing a quaint dry savour as individual as that of some wines. A characteristic of this kind probably accompanies the romantic ethos more commonly than superficial judges both of life and literature are apt to suppose; but the conjunction is nowhere seen better than in Borrow. Whether humour can or cannot exist without a disposition to satire co-existing, is one of those abstract points of criticism for which the public of the present day has little appetite. It is certain (and that is what chiefly concerns us for the present) that the two were not dissociated in Borrow. His purely satirical faculty was very strong indeed, and probably if he had lived a less retired life it would have found fuller exercise. At present the most remarkable instance of it which exists is the inimitable portrait-caricature of the learned Unitarian, generally known as "Taylor of Norwich." I have somewhere (I think it was in Miss Martineau's *Autobiography*) seen this reflected on as a flagrant instance of ingratitude and ill-nature. The good Harriet, among whose numerous gifts nature had not included any great sense of humour, naturally did not perceive the artistic justification of the sketch, which I do not hesitate to call one of the most masterly things of the kind in literature.

Another Taylor, the well-known French baron of that name, is much more mildly treated, though with little less skill of portraiture. As for "the publisher" of Lavengro, the portrait there, though very clever, is spoilt by rather too much evidence of personal animus, and by the absence of redeeming strokes; but it shows the same satiric power as the sketch of the worthy student of German who has had the singular ill-fortune to have his books quizzed by Carlyle, and himself quizzed by Borrow. It is a strong evidence of Borrow's abstraction from general society that with this satiric gift, and evidently with a total freedom from scruple as to its application, he should have left hardly anything else of the kind. It is indeed impossible to ascertain how much of the abundant character-drawing in his four chief books (all of which, be it remembered, are autobiographic and professedly historical) is fact and how much fancy. It is almost impossible to open them anywhere without coming upon personal sketches, more or less elaborate, in which the satiric touch is rarely wanting. The official admirer of "the grand Baintham" at remote Corcubion, the end of all the European world; the treasure-seeker, Benedict Mol; the priest at Cordova, with his revelations about the Holy Office; the Gibraltar Jew; are only a few figures out of the abundant gallery of *The Bible in Spain*. Lavengro, besides the capital and full-length portraits above referred to, is crowded with others hardly inferior, among which only one failure, the disguised priest with the mysterious name, is to be found. Not that even he has not good strokes and plenty of them, but that Borrow's prejudices prevented his hand from being free. But Jasper Petulengro, and Mrs. Hearne, and the girl Leonora, and Isopel, that vigorous and slighted maid, and dozens of minor figures, of whom more presently, atone for him. The *Romany Rye* adds only minor figures to the gallery, because the major figures have appeared before; while the plan and subject of *Wild Wales* also exclude anything more than vignettes. But what admirable vignettes they are, and how constantly bitten in with satiric spirit, all lovers of Borrow know.

It is, however, perhaps time to give some more exact account of the books thus familiarly and curiously referred to; for Borrow most assuredly is not a popular writer. Not long before his death Lavengro, *The Romany Rye*, and *Wild Wales* were only in their third edition, though the first was nearly thirty, and the last nearly twenty, years old. *The Bible in Spain* had, at any rate in its earlier days, a wider sale, but I do not think that even that is very generally known. I should doubt whether the total number sold, during some fifty years, of volumes surpassed in interest of incident, style, character and description by few books of the century, has equalled the sale, within any one of the last few years, of a fairly popular book by any fairly popular novelist of to-day. And there is not the obstacle to Borrow's popularity that there is to that of some other writers, notably the already-mentioned author of *Crotchet Castle*. No extensive literary cultivation is necessary to read him. A good deal even of his peculiar charm may be missed by a prosaic or inattentive reader, and yet enough will remain. But he has probably paid the penalty of originality, which allows itself to be mastered by quaintness, and which refuses to meet public taste at least half-way. It is certainly difficult at times to know what to make of Borrow. And the general public, perhaps excusably, is apt not to like things or persons when it does not know what to make of them.

Borrow's literary work, even putting aside the "mountains of manuscript" which he speaks of as unpublished, was not inconsiderable. There were, in the first place, his translations, which, though no doubt not without value, do not much concern us here. There is, secondly, his early hackwork, his *Chaines de l'Esclavage*, which also may be neglected. Thirdly, there are his philological speculations or compilations, the chief of which is, I believe, his *Romano-Lavo-Lil*, the latest published of his works. But Borrow, though an extraordinary linguist, was a somewhat unchastened philologist, and the results of his life-long philological studies appear to much better advantage from the literary than from the scientific point of view. Then there is *The Gypsies in Spain*, a very interesting book of its kind, marked throughout with Borrow's characteristics, but for literary purposes merged to a great extent in *The Bible in Spain*. And, lastly, there are the four original books, as they may be called, which, at great leisure, and writing simply because he chose to write, Borrow produced during the twenty years of his middle age. He was in his fortieth year when, in 1842, he published *The Bible in Spain*. Lavengro came nearly ten years later, and coincided with (no doubt it was partially stimulated by) the ferment over the Ecclesiastical Titles Bill. Its second part, *The Romany Rye*, did not appear till six afterwards, that is to say, in 1857, and its resuscitation of quarrels, which the country had quite forgotten (and when it remembered them was rather ashamed of), must be pronounced unfortunate. Last, in 1862, came *Wild Wales*, the characteristically belated record of a tour in the principality during the year of the Crimean War. On these four books Borrow's literary fame rests. His other works are interesting because they were written by the author of these, or because of their

subjects, or because of the effect they had on other men of letters, notably Longfellow and Mérimée, on the latter of whom Borrow had an especially remarkable influence. These four are interesting of themselves. The earliest has been, I believe, and for reasons quite apart from its biblical subject perhaps deserves to be, the greatest general favourite, though its literary value is a good deal below that of Lavengro. The Bible in Spain records the journeys, which, as an agent of the Bible Society, Borrow took through the Peninsula at a singularly interesting time, the disturbed years of the early reign of Isabel Segunda. Navarre and Aragon, with Catalonia, Valencia, and Murcia, he seems to have left entirely unvisited; I suppose because of the Carlists. Nor did he attempt the southern part of Portugal; but Castile and Leon, with the north of Portugal and the south of Spain, he quartered in the most interesting manner, riding everywhere with his servant and his saddle-bag of Testaments at, I should suppose, a considerable cost to the subscribers of the Society and at, it may be hoped, some gain to the propagation of evangelical principles in the Peninsula, but certainly with the results of extreme satisfaction to himself and of a very delightful addition to English literature. He was actually imprisoned at Madrid, and was frequently in danger from Carlists, and brigands, and severely orthodox ecclesiastics. It is possible to imagine a more ideally perfect missionary; but it is hardly possible to imagine a more ideally perfect traveller. His early habits of roughing it, his gipsy initiation, his faculties as a linguist, and his other faculties as a born vagrant, certain to fall on his feet anywhere, were all called into operation. But he might have had all these advantages and yet lacked the extraordinary literary talent which the book reveals. In the first chapter there is a certain stiffness; but the passage of the Tagus in the second must have told every competent reader in 1842 that he had to deal with somebody quite different from the run of common writers, and thenceforward the book never flags till the end. How far the story is rigidly historical I should be very sorry to have to decide. The author makes a kind of apology in his preface for the amount of fact which has been supplied from memory. I daresay the memory was quite trustworthy, and certainly adventures are to the adventurous. We have had daring travellers enough during the last half-century, but I do not know that any one has ever had quite such a romantic experience as Borrow's ride across the Hispano-Portuguese frontier with a gipsy contrabandista, who was at the time a very particular object of police inquiry. I daresay the interests of the Bible Society required the adventurous journey to the wilds of Finisterra. But I feel that if that association had been a mere mundane company and Borrow its agent, troublesome shareholders might have asked awkward questions at the annual meeting. Still, this sceptical attitude is only part of the official duty of the critic, just as, of course, Borrow's adventurous journeys into the most remote and interesting parts of Spain were part of the duty of the colporteur. The book is so delightful that, except when duty calls, no one would willingly take any exception to any part or feature of it. The constant change of scene, the romantic episodes of adventure, the kaleidoscope of characters, the crisp dialogue, the quaint reflection and comment relieve each other without a break. I do not know whether it is really true to Spain and Spanish life, and, to tell the exact truth, I do not in the least care. If it is not Spanish it is remarkably human and remarkably literary, and those are the chief and principal things.

Lavengro, which followed, has all the merits of its predecessor and more. It is a little spoilt in its later chapters by the purpose, the antipapal purpose, which appears still more fully in *The Romany Rye*. But the strong and singular individuality of its flavour as a whole would have been more than sufficient to carry off a greater fault. There are, I should suppose, few books the successive pictures of which leave such an impression on the reader who is prepared to receive that impression. The word picture is here rightly used, for in all Borrow's books more or less, and in this particularly, the narrative is anything but continuous. It is a succession of dissolving views which grow clear and distinct for a time and then fade off into vagueness before once more appearing distinctly; nor has this mode of dealing with a subject ever been more successfully applied than in Lavengro. At the same time the mode is one singularly difficult of treatment by any reviewer. To describe Lavengro with any chance of distinctness to those who have not read it, it would be necessary to give a series of sketches in words, like those famous ones of the pictures in *Jane Eyre*. East Dereham, the Viper Collector, the French Prisoners at Norman Cross, the Gipsy Encampment, the Sojourn in Edinburgh (with a passing view of Scotch schoolboys only inferior, as everything is, to Sir Walter's history of Green-breeks), the Irish Sojourn (with the horse whispering and the "dog of peace,") the settlement in Norwich (with Borrow's compulsory legal studies and his very un compulsory excursions into Italian, Hebrew, Welsh, Scandinavian, anything that obviously would not pay), the new meeting with the gipsies in the Castle Field, the fight—only the first of many excellent fights—these are but a few of the memories which rise to every reader of even the early chapters of this extraordinary book, and they do not cover its first hundred pages in the common edition. Then his father dies and the born vagrant is set loose

for vagrancy. He goes to London, with a stock of translations which is to make him famous, and a recommendation from Taylor of Norwich to "the publisher." The publisher exacted something more than his pound of flesh in the form of Newgate Lives and review articles, and paid, when he did pay, in bills of uncertain date which were very likely to be protested. But Borrow won through it all, making odd acquaintances with a young man of fashion (his least lifelike sketch); with an apple-seller on London Bridge, who was something of a "fence" and had erected Moll Flanders (surely the oddest patroness ever so selected) into a kind of patron saint; with a mysterious Armenian merchant of vast wealth, whom the young man, according to his own account, finally put on a kind of filibustering expedition against both the Sublime Porte and the White Czar, for the restoration of Armenian independence. At last, out of health with perpetual work and low living, out of employ, his friends beyond call, he sees destruction before him, writes *The Life and Adventures of Joseph Sell* (name of fortunate omen!) almost at a heat and on a capital, fixed and floating, of eighteen-pence, and disposes of it for twenty pounds by the special providence of the Muses. With this twenty pounds his journey into the blue distance begins. He travels, partly by coach, to somewhere near Salisbury, and gives the first of the curiously unfavourable portraits of stage coachmen, which remain to check Dickens's rose-coloured representations of Mr. Weller and his brethren. I incline to think that Borrow's was likely to be the truer picture. According to him, the average stage coachman was anything but an amiable character, greedy, insolent to all but persons of wealth and rank, a hanger-on of those who might claim either; bruiser enough to be a bully but not enough to be anything more; in short, one of the worst products of civilisation. From civilisation itself, however, Borrow soon disappears, as far as any traceable signs go. He journeys, not farther west but northwards, into the West Midlands and the marches of Wales. He buys a tinker's beat and fit-out from a feeble vessel of the craft, who has been expelled by "the Flaming Tinman," a half-gipsy of robustious behaviour. He is met by old Mrs. Hearne, the mother-in-law of his gipsy friend Jasper Petulengro, who resents a Gorgio's initiation in gipsy ways, and very nearly poisons him by the wily aid of her grand-daughter Leonora. He recovers, thanks to a Welsh travelling preacher and to castor oil. And then, when the Welshman has left him, comes the climax and turning-point of the whole story, the great fight with Jem Bosvile, "the Flaming Tinman." The much-abused adjective Homeric belongs in sober strictness to this immortal battle, which has the additional interest not thought of by Homer (for goddesses do not count) that Borrow's second and guardian angel is a young woman of great attractions and severe morality, Miss Isopel (or Belle) Berners, whose extraction, allowing for the bar sinister, is honourable, and who, her hands being fully able to keep her head, has sojourned without ill fortune in the Flaming Tinman's very disreputable company. Bosvile, vanquished by pluck and good fortune rather than strength, flees the place with his wife. Isopel remains behind and the couple take up their joint residence, a residence of perfect propriety, in this dingle, the exact locality of which I{426} have always longed to know, that I might make an autumnal pilgrimage to it. Isopel, Brynhild as she is, would apparently have had no objection to be honourably wooed. But her eccentric companion confines himself to teaching her "I love" in Armenian, which she finds unsatisfactory; and she at last departs, leaving a letter which tells Mr. Borrow some home truths. And, even before this catastrophe has been reached, Lavengro itself ends with a more startling abruptness than perhaps any nominally complete book before or since.

It would be a little interesting to know whether the continuation, *The Romany Rye*, which opens as if there had been no break whatever, was written continuously or with a break. At any rate its opening chapters contain the finish of the lamentable history of Belle Berners, which must induce every reader of sensibility to trust that Borrow, in writing it, was only indulging in his very considerable faculty of perverse romancing. The chief argument to the contrary is, that surely no man, however imbued with romantic perversity, would have made himself cut so poor a figure as Borrow here does without cause. The gipsies reappear to save the situation, and a kind of minor Belle Berners drama is played out with Ursula, Jasper's sister. Then the story takes another of its abrupt turns. Jasper, half in generosity it would appear, half in waywardness, insists on Borrow purchasing a thorough-bred horse which is for sale, advances{427} the money, and despatches him across England to Horncastle Fair to sell it. The usual Le Sagelike adventures occur, the oddest of them being the hero's residence for some considerable time as clerk and storekeeper at a great roadside inn. At last he reaches Horncastle, and sells the horse to advantage. Then the story closes as abruptly and mysteriously almost as that of Lavengro, with a long and in parts, it must be confessed, rather dull conversation between the hero, the Hungarian who has bought the horse, and the dealer who has acted as go-between. This dealer, in honour of Borrow, of whom he has heard through the gipsies, executes the wasteful and very meaningless ceremony of throwing two bottles of old rose champagne, at a guinea

apiece, through the window. Even this is too dramatic a finale for Borrow's unconquerable singularity, and he adds a short dialogue between himself and a recruiting sergeant. And after this again there comes an appendix containing an apologia for Lavengro, a great deal more polemic against Romanism, some historical views of more originality than exactness, and a diatribe against gentility, Scotchmen, Scott, and other black beasts of Borrow's. This appendix has received from some professed admirers of the author a great deal more attention than it deserves. In the first place, it was evidently written in a fit of personal pique; in the second, it is chiefly argumentative, and Borrow had absolutely no argumentative faculty. To say that it contains a great deal of quaint and piquant writing is only to say that its writer wrote it, and though the description of "Charlie-over-the-waterism" probably does not apply to any being who ever lived, except to a few school-girls of both sexes, it has a strong infusion of Borrow's satiric gift. As for the diatribes against gentility, Borrow has only done very clumsily what Thackeray had done long before without clumsiness. It can escape nobody who has read his books with a seeing eye that he was himself exceedingly proud, not merely of being a gentleman in the ethical sense, but of being one in the sense of station and extraction—as, by the way, the decriers of British snobbishness usually are, so that no special blame attaches to Borrow for the inconsistency. Only let it be understood, once for all, that to describe him as "the apostle of the ungenteel" is either to speak in riddles or quite to misunderstand his real merits and abilities.

I believe that some of the small but fierce tribe of Borrovians are inclined to resent the putting of the last of this remarkable series, *Wild Wales*, on a level with the other three. With such I can by no means agree. *Wild Wales* has not, of course, the charm of unfamiliar scenery and the freshness of youthful impression which distinguish *The Bible in Spain*; it does not attempt anything like the novel-interest of *Lavengro* and *The Romany Rye*; and though, as has been pointed out above, something of Borrow's secret and mysterious way of indicating places survives, it is a pretty distinct itinerary over great part of the actual principality. I have followed most of its tracks on foot myself, and nobody who wants a Welsh guide-book can take a pleasanter one, though he might easily find one much less erratic. It may thus have, to superficial observers, a positive and prosaic flavour as compared with the romantic character of the other three. But this distinction is not real. The tones are a little subdued, as was likely to be the case with an elderly gentleman of fifty, travelling with his wife and stepdaughter, and not publishing the record of his travels till he was nearly ten years older. The localities are traceable on the map and in Murray, instead of being the enchanted dingles and the half-mythical woods of *Lavengro*. The personages of the former books return no more, though, with one of his most excellent touches of art, the author has suggested the contrast of youth and age by a single gipsy interview in one of the later chapters. Borrow, like all sensible men, was at no time indifferent to good food and drink, especially good ale; but the trencher plays in *Wild Wales* a part, the importance of which may perhaps have shocked some of our latter-day delicates, to whom strong beer is a word of loathing, and who wonder how on earth our grandfathers and fathers used to dispose of "black strap." A very different set of readers may be repelled by the strong literary colour of the book, which is almost a Welsh anthology in parts. But those few who can boast themselves to find the whole of a book, not merely its parts, and to judge that whole when found, will be not least fond of *Wild Wales*. If they have, as every reader of Borrow should have, the spirit of the roads upon them, and are never more happy than when journeying on "Shanks his mare," they will, of course, have in addition a peculiar and personal love for it. It is, despite the interludes of literary history, as full of Borrow's peculiar conversational gift as any of its predecessors. Its thumbnail sketches, if somewhat more subdued and less elaborate, are not less full of character. John Jones, the Dissenting weaver, who served Borrow at once as a guide and a whetstone of Welsh in the neighbourhood of Llangollen; the "kenfigenous" Welshwoman who first, but by no means last, exhibited the curious local jealousy of a Welsh-speaking Englishman; the doctor and the Italian barometer-seller at Cerrig-y-Druidion; the "best Pridydd of the world" in Anglesey, with his unlucky addiction to beer and flattery; the waiter at Bala; the "ecclesiastical cat" (a cat worthy to rank with those of Southey and Gautier); the characters of the walk across the hills from Machynlleth to the Devil's Bridge; the scene at the public-house on the Glamorgan Border, where the above-mentioned jealousy comes out so strongly; the mad Irishwoman, Johanna Colgan (a masterpiece by herself); and the Irish girl, with her hardly inferior history of the faction-fights of Scotland Road (which Borrow, by a mistake, has put in Manchester instead of in Liverpool); these make a list which I have written down merely as they occurred to me, without opening the book, and without prejudice to another list, nearly as long, which might be added. *Wild Wales*, too, because of its easy and direct opportunity of comparing its description with the originals, is particularly valuable as showing how sober, and yet how forcible, Borrow's descriptions are.

As to incident, one often, as before, suspects him of romancing, and it stands to reason that his dialogue, written long after the event, must be full of the "cocked-hat-and-cane" style of narrative. But his description, while it has all the vividness, has also all the faithfulness and sobriety of the best landscape-painting. See a place which Kingsley or Mr. Ruskin, or some other master of our decorative school, has described—much more one which has fallen into the hands of the small fry of their imitators—and you are almost sure to find that it has been overdone. This is never, or hardly ever, the case with Borrow, and it is so rare a merit, when it is found in a man who does not shirk description where necessary, that it deserves to be counted to him at no grudging rate.

But there is no doubt that the distinguishing feature of the book is its survey of Welsh poetical literature. I have already confessed that I am not qualified to judge the accuracy of Borrow's translations, and by no means disposed to over-value them. But any one who takes an interest in literature at all, must, I think, feel that interest not a little excited by the curious Old-Mortality-like peregrinations which the author of *Wild Wales* made to the birth-place, or the burial-place as it might be, of bard after bard, and by the short but masterly accounts which he gives of the objects of his search. Of none of the numerous subjects of his linguistic roivings does Borrow seem to have been fonder, putting Romany aside, than of Welsh. He learnt it in a peculiarly contraband manner originally, which, no doubt, endeared it to him; it was little known to and often ridiculed by most Englishmen, which was another attraction; and it was extremely unlikely to "pay" in any way, which was a third. Perhaps he was not such an adept in it as he would have us believe—the respected Cymmrodorion Society or Professor Rhys must settle that. But it needs no knowledge of Welsh whatever to perceive the genuine enthusiasm, and the genuine range of his acquaintance with the language from the purely literary side. When he tells us that Ab Gwilym was a greater poet than Ovid or Chaucer I feel considerable doubts whether he was quite competent to understand Ovid and little or no doubt that he has done wrong to Chaucer. But when, leaving these idle comparisons, he luxuriates in details about Ab Gwilym himself, and his poems, and his lady loves, and so forth, I have no doubt about Borrow's appreciation (casual prejudices always excepted) of literature. Nor is it easy to exaggerate the charm which he has added to Welsh scenery by this constant identification of it with the men, and the deeds, and the words of the past.

Little has been said hitherto of Borrow's more purely literary characteristics from the point of view of formal criticism. They are sufficiently interesting. He unites with a general plainness of speech and writing, not unworthy of Defoe or Cobbett, a very odd and complicated mannerism, which, as he had the wisdom to make it the seasoning and not the main substance of his literary fare, is never disgusting. The secret of this may be, no doubt, in part sought in his early familiarity with a great many foreign languages, some of whose idioms he transplanted into English: but this is by no means the whole of the receipt. Perhaps it is useless to examine analytically that receipt's details, or rather (for the analysis may be said to be compulsory on any one who calls himself a critic), useless to offer its results to the reader. One point which can escape no one who reads with his eyes open is the frequent, yet not too abundant, repetition of the same or very similar{434} words—a point wherein much of the secret of persons so dissimilar as Carlyle, Borrow, and Thackeray consists. This is a well-known fact—so well known indeed that when a person who desires to acquire style hears of it, he often goes and does likewise, with what result all reviewers know. The peculiarity of Borrow, as far as I can mark it, is that, despite his strong mannerism, he never relies on it as too many others, great and small, are wont to do. The character sketches, of which, as I have said, he is so abundant a master, are always put in the plainest and simplest English. So are his flashes of ethical reflection, which, though like all ethical reflections often one-sided, are of the first order of insight. I really do not know that, in the mint-and-anise-and-cummin order of criticism, I have more than one charge to make against Borrow. That is that he, like other persons of his own and the immediately preceding time, is wont to make a most absurd misuse of the word individual. With Borrow "individual" means simply "person": a piece of literary gentility of which he, of all others, ought to have been ashamed.

But such criticism has but very little propriety in the case of a writer, whose attraction is neither mainly nor in any very great degree one of pure form. His early critics compared him to Le Sage, and the comparison is natural. But if it is natural, it is not extraordinarily critical. Both men wrote of vagabonds, and to some extent of picaroons; both neglected the conventionalities of their own language and literature; both had a singular knowledge of human nature. But Le Sage is one of the most impersonal of all great writers, and Borrow is one of the most personal. And it is undoubtedly in the revelation of his personality that great part

of his charm lies. It is, as has been fully acknowledged, a one-sided, wrong-headed, not always quite right-hearted personality. But it is intensely English, possessing at the same time a certain strain of romance which the other John Bulls of literature mostly lack, and which John Bunyan, the king of them all, only reached within the limits, still more limited than Borrow's, of purely religious, if not purely ecclesiastical, interests. A born grumbler; a person with an intense appetite for the good things of this life; profoundly impressed with, and at the same time sceptically critical of, the bad or good things of another life; apt, as he somewhere says himself, "to hit people when he is not pleased"; illogical; constantly right in general, despite his extremely roundabout ways of reaching his conclusion; sometimes absurd, and yet full of humour; alternately prosaic and capable of the highest poetry; George Borrow, Cornishman on the father's side and Huguenot on the mother's, managed to display in perfection most of the characteristics of what once was, and let us hope has not quite ceased to be, the English type. If he had a slight overdose of Celtic blood and Celtic peculiarity, it was more than made up by the readiness of literary expression which it gave him. He, if any one, bore an English heart, though, as there often has been in Englishmen, there was something perhaps more as well as something less than English in his fashion of expression.

To conclude, Borrow has—what after all is the chief mark of a great writer—distinction. "Try to be like somebody," said the unlucky critic-bookseller to Lamartine; and he has been gibbeted for it, very justly, for the best part of a century. It must be admitted that "try not to be like other people," though a much more fashionable, is likely to be quite as disastrous a recommendation. But the great writers, whether they try to be like other people or try not to be like them (and sometimes in the first case most of all), succeed only in being themselves, and that is what Borrow does. His attraction is rather complex, and different parts of it may, and no doubt do, apply with differing force to this and that reader. One may be fascinated by his pictures of an unconventional and open-air life, the very possibilities of which are to a great extent lost in our days, though patches of ground here and there in England (notably the tracts of open ground between Cromer and Wells in Borrow's own county) still recall them. To others he may be attractive for his sturdy patriotism, or his adventurous and wayward spirit, or his glimpses of superstition and romance. The racy downrightness of his talk; the axioms, such as that to the Welsh alewife, "The goodness of ale depends less upon who brews it than upon what it is brewed of"; or the sarcastic touches as that of the dapper shopkeeper, who, regarding the funeral of Byron, observed, "I, too, am frequently unhappy," may each and all have their votaries. His literary devotion to literature would, perhaps, of itself attract few; for, as has been hinted, it partook very much of the character of will-worship, and there are few people who like any will-worship in letters except their own; but it adds to his general attraction, no doubt, in the case of many. That neither it, nor any other of his claims, has yet forced itself as it should on the general public is an undoubted fact; a fact not difficult to understand, though rather difficult fully to explain, at least without some air of superior knowingness and taste. Yet he has, as has been said, his devotees, and I think they are likely rather to increase than to decrease. He wants editing, for his allusive fashion of writing probably makes a great part of him nearly unintelligible to those who have not from their youth up devoted themselves to the acquisition of useless knowledge. There ought to be a good life of him. The great mass of his translations, published and unpublished, and the smaller mass of his early hackwork, no doubt deserve judicious excerpition. If professed philologists were not even more ready than most other specialists each to excommunicate all the others except himself and his own particular Johnny Dods of Farthing's Acre, it would be rather interesting to hear what some modern men of many languages have to say to Borrow's linguistic achievements. But all these things are only desirable embellishments and assistances. His real claims and his real attractions are comprised in four small volumes, the purchase of which, under modern arrangements of booksellers, leaves some change out of a sovereign, and which will about half fill the ordinary bag used for briefs and dynamite. It is not a large literary baggage, and it does not attempt any very varied literary kinds. If not exactly a novelist in any one of his books, Borrow is a romancer, in the true and not the ironic sense of the word, in all of them. He has not been approached in merit by any romancer who has published books in our days, except Charles Kingsley; and his work, if less varied in range and charm than Kingsley's, has a much stronger and more concentrated flavour. Moreover, he is the one English writer of our time, and perhaps of times still farther back, who seems never to have tried to be anything but himself; who went his own way all his life long with complete indifference to what the public or the publishers liked, as well as to what canons of literary form and standards of literary perfection seemed to indicate as best worth aiming at. A most self-sufficient person was Borrow, in the good and ancient sense, as well as, to some extent, in the sense which is bad and modern. And what is more, he was



not only a self-sufficient person, but is very sufficient also to the tastes of all those who love good English and good literature.

## APPENDIX A

### DE QUINCEY

A short time after the publication of my essay on De Quincey I learnt, to my great concern, that it had given offence to his daughter Florence, the widow of one of the heroes of the Indian Mutiny, Colonel Baird Smith. Mrs. Baird Smith complained, in a letter to the newspapers, that I had accused her father of untruthfulness, and requested the public to suspend their judgment until the publication of certain new documents, in the form of letters, which had been discovered. I might have replied, if my intent had been hostile, that little fault could be justly found with a critic of the existing evidence if new evidence were required to confute him. But as the very last intention that I had in writing the paper was to impute anything that can be properly called untruthfulness to De Quincey, I thought it better to say so and to wait for the further documents. In a subsequent private correspondence with Mrs. Baird Smith, I found that what had offended her (her complaints being at first quite general) was certain remarks on De Quincey's aristocratic acquaintances as appearing in the Autobiography and "not heard of afterwards," certain comments on the Malay incident and others like it, some on the mystery of her father's money affairs, and the passage on his general "impenetrability." The matter is an instance of the difficulty of dealing with recent reputations, when the commentator gives his name. Some really unkind things have been said of De Quincey; my intention was not to say anything unkind at all, but simply to give an account of the thing "as it strikes" if not "a contemporary" yet a well-willing junior. Take for instance the Malay incident. We know from De Quincey himself that, within a few years, the truth of this famous story was questioned, and that he was accused of having borrowed it from something of Hogg's. He disclaimed this, no doubt truly. He protested that it was a faithfully recorded incident: but though the events were then fresh, he did not produce a single witness to prove that any Malay had been near Grasmere at the time. And so elsewhere. As I have remarked about Borrow, there are some people who have a knack of recounting truth so that it looks as if it never had been true. I have been informed by Mr. James Runciman that he himself once made considerable inquiries on the track of Lavengro, and found that that remarkable book is, to some extent at any rate, apparently historic. On the other hand I have been told by another Borrowian who knew Borrow (which I never did) that the Life of Joseph Sell never existed. In such cases a critic can only go on internal evidence, and I am sure that the vast majority of critics would decide against most of De Quincey's stories on that. I do not suppose that he ever, like Lamb, deliberately begat "lie-children": but opium-eating is not absolutely repugnant to delusion, and literary mystification was not so much the exception as the rule in his earlier time. As to his "impenetrability," I can only throw myself on the readers of such memoirs and reminiscences as have been published respecting him. The almost unanimous verdict of his acquaintances and critics has been that he was in a way mysterious, and though no doubt this mystery did not extend to his children, it seems to have extended to almost every one else. I gather from Mrs. Baird Smith's own remarks that from first to last all who were concerned with him treated him as a person unfit to be trusted with money, and while his habit of solitary lodging is doubtless capable of a certain amount of explanation, it cannot be described as other than curious. I had never intended to throw doubt on his actual acquaintance with Lord Westport or Lady Carbery. These persons or their representatives were alive when the Autobiography was published, and would no doubt have protested if De Quincey had not spoken truly. But I must still hold that their total disappearance from his subsequent life is peculiar. Some other points, such as his mentioning Wilson as his "only intimate male friend" are textually cited from himself, and if I seem to have spoken harshly of his early treatment by his family I may surely shelter myself behind the touching incident, recorded in the biographies, of his crying on his deathbed, "My dear mother! then I was greatly mistaken." If this does not prove that he himself had entertained on the subject ideas which, whether false or true, were unfavourable, then it is purely meaningless.

In conclusion, I have only to repeat my regret that I should, by a perhaps thoughtless forgetfulness of the feelings of survivors, have hurt those feelings. But I think I am entitled to say that the view of De Quincey's character and cast of thought given in the text, while imputing nothing discreditable in intention, is founded on the whole published work and all the biographical evidence then accessible to me, and will not be

materially altered by anything since published or likely to be so in future. The world, though often not quite right, is never quite wrong about a man, and it would be almost impossible that it should be wrong in face of such autobiographic details as are furnished, not merely by the Autobiography itself, but by a mass of notes spread over seven years in composition and full of personal idiosyncrasy. I not only acquit De Quincey of all serious moral delinquency,—I declare distinctly that no imputation of it was ever intended. It is quite possible that some of his biographers and of those who knew him may have exaggerated his peculiarities, less possible I think that those peculiarities should not have existed. But the matter, except for my own regret at having offended De Quincey's daughter, will have been a happy one if it results in a systematic publication of his letters, which, from the specimens already printed, must be very characteristic and very interesting. In almost all cases a considerable collection of letters is the most effective, and especially the most truth-telling, of all possible "lives." No letters indeed are likely to increase the literary repute of the author of the Confessions and of the Cæsars; but they may very well clear up and fill in the hitherto rather fragmentary and conjectural notion of his character, and they may, on the other hand, confirm that idea of both which, however false it may seem to his children, and others who were united to him by ties of affection, has commended itself to careful students of his published works.

## APPENDIX B

### LOCKHART

The most singular instance of the floating dislike to Lockhart's memory, to which I have more than once referred in the text, occurred subsequently to the original publication of my essay, and not very long ago, when my friend Mr. Louis Stevenson thought proper to call Lockhart a "cad." This extraordinary obiter dictum provoked, as might have been expected, not a few protests, but I do not remember that Mr. Stevenson rejoined, and I have not myself had any opportunity of learning from him what he meant. I can only suppose that the ebullition must have been prompted by one of two things, the old scandal about the duel in which John Scott the editor of the London was shot, and a newer one, which was first bruited abroad, I think, in Mr. Sidney Colvin's book on Keats. Both of these, and especially the first, may be worth a little discussion. I do not think that any one who examines Mr. Colvin's allegation, will think it very damaging. It comes to this, that Keats's friend Bailey met Lockhart in the house of Bishop Greig at Stirling, told him some particulars about Keats, extracted from him a promise that he would not use them against the poet, and afterwards thought he recognised some of the details in the Blackwood attack which ranks next to the famous Quarterly article. Here it is to be observed, first, that there is no sufficient evidence that Lockhart wrote this Blackwood article; secondly, that it is by no means certain that if he did, he was making, or considered himself to be making, any improper use of what he had heard; thirdly, that for the actual interview and its tenor we have only a vague *ex parte* statement made long after date. The other matter is much more important, and as the duel itself has been mentioned more than once or twice in the foregoing pages, and as it is to this day being frequently referred to in what seems to me an entirely erroneous manner, with occasional implications that Lockhart showed the white feather, it may be well to give a sketch of what actually happened, as far as can be made out from the most trustworthy accounts, published and unpublished.

One of Lockhart's signatures in Blackwood—a signature which, however, like others, was not, I believe, peculiar to him—was "Zeta," and this Zeta assailed the Cockney school in a sufficiently scorpion-like manner. Thereupon Scott's magazine, the London, retorted, attacking Lockhart by name. On this Lockhart set out for London and, with a certain young Scotch barrister named Christie as his second, challenged Scott. But Scott refused to fight, unless Lockhart would deny that he was editor of Blackwood. Lockhart declared that Scott had no right to ask this, and stigmatised him as a coward. He then published a statement, sending at the same time a copy to Scott. In the published form the denial of editorship was made, in the one sent to Scott it was omitted. Thereupon Scott called Lockhart a liar. Of this Lockhart took no notice, but Christie his second did, and, an altercation taking place between them, Scott challenged Christie and they went out, Scott's second being Mr. P. G. Patmore, Christie's Mr. Traill, afterwards well known as a London police magistrate. Christie fired in the air, Scott fired at Christie and missed. Thereupon Mr. Patmore demanded a second shot, which, I am informed, could and should, by all laws of the duello, have been refused. Both principal and second on the other side were, however, inexperienced and probably

unwilling to baulk their adversaries. Shots were again exchanged, Christie this time (as he can hardly be blamed for doing) taking aim at his adversary and wounding him mortally. Patmore fled the country, Christie and Traill took their trial and were acquitted.

I have elsewhere remarked that this deplorable result is said to have been brought on by errors of judgment on the part of more than one person. Hazlitt, himself no duellist and even accused of personal timidity, is said to have egged on Scott, and to have stung him by some remark of his bitter tongue into challenging Christie, and there is no doubt that Patmore's conduct was most reprehensible. But we are here concerned with Lockhart, not with them. As far as I understand the imputations made on him, he is charged either with want of straightforwardness in omitting part of his explanation in the copy sent to Scott, or with cowardice in taking no notice of Scott's subsequent lie direct, or with both. Let us examine this. At first sight the incident of what, from the most notorious action of Lord Clive, we may call the "red and white treaties" seems odd. But it is to be observed, first, that Lockhart could not be said to conceal from Scott what he published to all the world; secondly, that his conduct was perfectly consistent throughout. He had challenged Scott, who had declined to go out. Having offered his adversary satisfaction, he was not bound to let him take it with a proviso, or to satisfy his private inquisitiveness. But if not under menace, but considering Scott after his refusal as unworthy the notice of a gentleman, and not further to be taken into account, he chose to inform the public of the truth, he had a perfect right to do so. And it is hardly necessary to say that it was the truth that he was not editor of Blackwood.

This consideration will also account for his conduct in not renewing his challenge after Scott's offensive words. He had offered the man satisfaction and had been refused. No one is bound to go on challenging a reluctant adversary. At all times Lockhart seems to have been perfectly ready to back his opinion, as may be seen from a long affair which had happened earlier, in connection with the "Baron Lauerwinkel" matter. There he had promptly come forward and in his own name challenged the anonymous author of a pamphlet bearing the title of "Hypocrisy Unveiled." The anonym had, like Scott, shirked, and had maintained his anonymity. (Lord Cockburn says it was an open secret, but I do not know who he was.) Thereupon Lockhart took no further notice, just as he did in the later matter, and I do not believe that a court of honour in any country would find fault with him. At any rate, I think that we are entitled to know, much more definitely than I have ever seen it stated, what the charge against him is. We may indeed blame him in both these matters, and perhaps in others, for neglecting the sound rule that anonymous writing should never be personal. If he did this, however, he is in the same box with almost every writer for the press in his own generation, and with too many in this. I maintain that in each case he promptly gave the guarantee which the honour of his time required, and which is perhaps the only possible guarantee, that of being ready to answer in person for what he had written impersonally. This was all he could do, and he did it. {449}

Jacob Zeitlin

*Hazlitt on English Literature*  
*An Introduction to the Appreciation of Literature*

**PREFACE**

The present selection of Hazlitt's critical essays has been planned to serve two important purposes. In the first place it provides the materials for an estimate of the character and scope of Hazlitt's contributions to criticism and so acquaints students with one of the greatest of English critics. And in the second place, what is perhaps more important, such a selection, embodying a series of appreciations of the great English writers, should prove helpful in the college teaching of literature. There is no great critic who by his readableness and comprehensiveness is as well qualified as Hazlitt to aid in bringing home to students the power and the beauty of the essential things in literature. There is, in him a splendid stimulating energy which has not yet been sufficiently utilized. The contents have been selected and arranged to present a chronological and almost continuous account of English literature from its beginning in the age of Elizabeth down to Hazlitt's own day, the period of the romantic revival. To the more strictly critical essays there have been added a few which reveal Hazlitt's intimate intercourse with books and also with their writers, whether he knew them in the flesh or only through the printed page. Such vivid revelations of personal contact contribute much to further the chief aim of this volume, which is to introduce the reader to a direct and spontaneous view of literature. The editor's introduction, in trying to fix formally Hazlitt's position as a critic, of necessity takes account of his personality, which cannot be dissociated from his critical practice. The notes, in addition to identifying quotations and explaining allusions, indicate the nature of Hazlitt's obligations to earlier and contemporary critics. They contain a body of detailed information, which may be used, if so desired, for disciplinary purposes. The text here employed is that of the last form published in Hazlitt's own lifetime, namely, that of the second edition in the case of the Characters of Shakespeare's Plays, the lectures on the poets and on the age of Elizabeth, and the Spirit of the Age, and the first edition of the Comic Writers, the Plain Speaker, and the Political Essays. A slight departure from this procedure in the case of the essay on "Elia" is explained in the notes. "My First Acquaintance with Poets," and "Of Persons One Would Wish to Have Seen" are taken from the periodicals in which they first appeared, as they were not republished in book-form till after Hazlitt's death. Hazlitt's own spellings and punctuation are retained. To all who have contributed to the study and appreciation of Hazlitt, the present editor desires to make general acknowledgement—to Alexander Ireland, Mr. W. C. Hazlitt, Mr. Birrell, and Mr. Saintsbury. Mention should also be made of Mr. Nichol Smith's little volume of Hazlitt's Essays on Poetry (Blackwood's), and of the excellent treatment of Hazlitt in Professor Oliver Elton's Survey of English Literature from 1780 to 1830, which came to hand after this edition had been completed. A debt of special gratitude is owing to Mr. Glover and Mr. Waller for their splendid edition of Hazlitt's Collected Works (in twelve volumes with an index, Dent 1902-1906). All of Hazlitt's quotations have been identified with the help of this edition. References to Hazlitt's own writings, when cited by volume and page, apply to the edition of Glover and Waller. Finally I wish to express my sincere thanks to Professor G. P. Krapp for his friendly cooperation in the planning and carrying out of this volume, and to him and to my colleague, Professor S. P. Sherman, for helpful criticism of the introduction.

JACOB ZEITLIN.

February 20, 1913.

**INTRODUCTION**

**WILLIAM HAZLITT**

I

Hazlitt characterized the age he lived in as "critical, didactic, paradoxical, romantic." It was the age of the Edinburgh Review, of the Utilitarians, of Godwin and Shelley, of Wordsworth and Byron—in a word of the French Revolution and all that it brought in its train. Poetry in this age was impregnated with politics; ideas for social reform sprang from the ground of personal sentiment. Hazlitt was born early enough to partake of

the ardent hopes which the last decade of the eighteenth century held out, but his spirit came to ripeness in years of reaction in which the battle for reform seemed a lost hope. While the changing events were bringing about corresponding changes in the ideals of such early votaries to liberty as Coleridge and Wordsworth, Hazlitt continued to cling to his enthusiastic faith, but at the same time the spectacle of a world which turned away from its brightest dreams made of him a sharp critic of human nature, and his sense of personal disappointment turned into a bitterness hardly to be distinguished from cynicism. In a passionate longing for a better order of things, in the merciless denunciation of the cant and bigotry which was enlisted in the cause of the existing order, he resembled Byron. The rare union in his nature of the analytic and the emotional gave to his writings the very qualities which he enumerated as characteristic of the age, and his consistent sincerity made his voice distinct above many others of his generation.

Hazlitt's earlier years reveal a restless conflict of the sensitive and the intellectual. His father, a friend of Priestley's, was a Unitarian preacher, who, in his vain search for liberty of conscience, had spent three years in America with his family. Under him the boy was accustomed to the reading of sermons and political tracts, and on this dry nourishment he seemed to thrive till he was sent to the Hackney Theological College to begin his preparation for the ministry. His dissatisfaction there was not such as could be put into words—perhaps a hunger for keener sensations and an appetite for freer inquiry than was open to a theological student even of a dissenting church. After a year at Hackney he withdrew to his father's home, where he found nothing more definite to do than to “solve some knotty point, or dip in some abstruse author, or look at the sky, or wander by the pebbled sea-side.” This was probably the period of his most extensive reading. He absorbed the English novelists and essayists; he saturated himself with the sentiment of Rousseau; he studied Bacon and Hobbes and Berkeley and Hume; he became fascinated, in Burke, by the union of a wide intellect with a brilliant fancy and consummate rhetorical skill. Though he called himself at this time dumb and inarticulate, and the idea of ever making literature his profession had not suggested itself to him, he was eager to talk about the things he read, and in Joseph Fawcett, a retired minister, he found an agreeable companion. “A heartier friend or honester critic I never coped[*Pg xiii*] withal.” “The writings of Sterne, Fielding, Cervantes, Richardson, Rousseau, Godwin, Goethe, etc. were the usual subjects of our discourse, and the pleasure I had had, in reading these authors, was more than doubled.” How acutely sensitive he was to all impressions at this time is indicated by the effect upon him of the meeting with Coleridge and Wordsworth of which he has left a record in one of his most eloquent essays, “My First Acquaintance with Poets.” But his active energies were concentrated on the solution of a metaphysical problem which was destined to possess his brain for many years: in his youthful enthusiasm he was grappling with a theory concerning the natural disinterestedness of the human mind, apparently adhering to the bias which he had received from his early training.

But being come of age and finding it necessary to turn his mind to something more marketable than abstract speculation, he determined, though apparently without any natural inclination toward the art, to become a painter. He apprenticed himself to his brother John Hazlitt, who had gained some reputation in London for his miniatures. During the peace of Amiens in 1802, he travelled to the Louvre to study and copy the masterpieces which Napoleon had brought over from Italy as trophies of war. Here, as he “marched delighted through a quarter of a mile of the proudest efforts of the mind of man, a whole creation of genius, a universe of art,” he imbibed a love of perfection which may have been fatal to his hopes of a career. At any rate it was soon after, while he was following the profession of itinerant painter through England, that he wrote to his father of “much dissatisfaction and much sorrow,” of “that repeated disappointment and that long dejection which have served to overcast and to throw into deep obscurity some of the best years of my life.” When Hazlitt abandoned painting, he fell back upon his analytic gift as a means of earning a living. Not counting his first published work, the *Essay on the Principles of Human Action*, which was purely a labor of love and fell still-born from the press, the tasks to which he now devoted his time were chiefly of the kind ordinarily rated as job work. He prepared an abridgement of Abraham Tucker's *Light of Nature*, compiled the *Eloquence of the British Senate*, wrote a reply to Malthus's *Essay on Population*, and even composed an elementary English Grammar. It would be a mistake to suppose that these labors were performed according to a system of mechanical routine. Hazlitt impressed something of his personality on whatever he touched. His violent attack on the inhuman tendencies of Malthus's doctrines is pervaded by a glow of humanitarian indignation. For the *Eloquence of the British Senate* he wrote a sketch of Burke, which for fervor of appreciation and judicious analysis ranks with his best things of this class. Even the Grammar bears evidence of his enthusiasm for an idea. Whenever he has

occasion to express his feelings on a subject of popular interest, his manner begins to grow animated and his language to gain in force and suppleness.

But Hazlitt continued firmly in the faith that it was his destiny to be a metaphysician. In 1812 he undertook to deliver a course of lectures on philosophy at the Russell Institution with the ambitious purpose of founding a system of philosophy "more conformable to reason and experience" than that of the modern material school which resolved "all thought into sensation, all morality into the love of pleasure, and all action into mechanical impulse." Though he did not succeed in founding a system, he probably interested his audience by a stimulating review of the main tendencies of English thought from Bacon and Hobbes to Priestley and Godwin. At the conclusion of his last lecture, Hazlitt told the story of a Brahmin who, on being transformed into a monkey, "had no other delight than that of eating cocoanuts and studying metaphysics." "I too," he added, "should be very well contented to pass my life like this monkey, did I but know how to provide myself with a substitute for cocoanuts." But it must have become apparent to Hazlitt and his friends that he possessed a talent more profitable than that of abstract speculation. The vigor and vitality of the prose in these lectures, compared with the heavy, inert style of his first metaphysical writing, the freedom of illustration and poetic allusion, suggested the possibility of success in more popular forms of literature. He tried to work for the newspapers as theatrical and parliamentary reporter, but his temper and his habits were not adaptable to the requirements of daily journalism, and editors did not long remain complacent toward him. He did however, in the course of a few years, succeed in gaining admission to the pages of the *Edinburgh Review* and in establishing an enviable reputation as a writer, of critical and miscellaneous essays. Even in that anonymous generation he could not long contribute to any periodical without attracting attention. Readers were aroused by his bold paradox and by the tonic quality of his style. Editors appealed to him for "dashing articles," for something "brilliant or striking" on any subject. Authors looked forward to a favorable notice from Hazlitt, and Keats even declared that it would be a compensation for being damned if Hazlitt were to do the damning.

In his essays the features of Hazlitt's personality may be plainly recognized, and these reveal a triple ancestry. He claims descent from Montaigne by virtue of his original observation of humanity with its entire accumulation of custom and prejudice; he is akin to Rousseau in a high-strung susceptibility to emotions, sentiments, and ideas; and he is tinged with a cynicism to which there is no closer parallel than in the maxims of La Rochefoucauld. The union of the philosopher, the enthusiast, and the man of the world is fairly unusual in literature, but in Hazlitt's case the union was not productive of any sharp contradictions. His common sense served as a ballast to his buoyant emotions; the natural strength of his feelings loosened the bonds which attached him to his favorite theories; his cynicism, by sharpening his perception of the frailty of human nature, prevented his philanthropic dreams from imposing themselves on him for reality. The analytical gift manifested itself in Hazlitt precociously in the study of human nature. He characterized some of his schoolmates disdainfully as "fit only for fighting like stupid dogs and cats," and at the age of twelve, while on a visit, he communicated to his father a caustic sketch of some English ladies who "require an Horace or a Shakespeare to describe them," and whose "ceremonial unsociality" made him wish he were back in America. His metaphysical studies determined the direction which his observation of life should take. He became a remarkable anatomist of the constitution of human nature in the abstract, viewing the motives of men's actions from a speculative plane. He excels in sharp etchings which bring the outline of a character into bold prominence. He is happy in defining isolated traits and in throwing a new light on much used words. "Cleverness," he writes, "is a certain knack or aptitude at doing certain things, which depend more on a particular adroitness and off-hand readiness than on force or perseverance, such as making puns, making epigrams, making extempore verses, mimicking the company, mimicking a style, etc.... Accomplishments are certain external graces, which are to be learnt from others, and which are easily displayed to the admiration of the beholder, viz. dancing, riding, fencing, music, and so on.... Talent is the capacity of doing anything that depends on application and industry, such as writing a criticism, making a speech, studying the law." These innocent looking definitions are probably not without an ironic sting. It requires no great stretch of the imagination, for example, to catch in Hazlitt's eye a sly wink at Lamb or a disdainful glance toward Leigh Hunt as he gives the reader his idea of cleverness or accomplishment. Hazlitt's definitions often startle and give a vigorous buffet to our preconceptions. He is likely to open an essay on "Good-Nature" by declaring that a good-natured man is "one who does not like to be put out of his way.... Good-nature is humanity that costs nothing;" and he may describe a respectable man as "a person whom there is no reason for respecting, or none that we choose to name." Against the imputation of

paradox, which such expressions expose him to, he has written his own defence, applying his usual analytical acuteness to distinguish between originality and singularity. The contradiction of [Pg xviii]a common prejudice, which always passes for paradox, is often such only in appearance. It is true that an ingenious person may take advantage of the elusive nature of language to play tricks with the ordinary understanding, but it is equally true that words of themselves have a way of imposing on the uninquiring mind and passing themselves off at an inflated value. No process is more familiar than that by which words in the course of a long life lose all their original power, and yet they will sometimes continue to exercise a disproportionate authority. Then comes the original mind, which, looking straight at the thing instead of accepting the specious title, discovers the incongruity between the pretence and the reality, and in the first shock of the disclosure annoyingly overturns our settled ideas. This is the spirit in which Carlyle seeks to strip off the clothes in which humanity has irrecognizably disguised itself, and it is the spirit in which Robert Louis Stevenson tries to free his old-world conscience from the old-world forms. To take a more recent parallel, it is the manner, somewhat exaggerated, in which Mr. G. K. Chesterton examines the upstart heresies of our own agitated day. There would be nothing fanciful in suggesting that all these men owed a direct debt to Hazlitt—Stevenson on many occasions acknowledged it. Hazlitt was as honest and [Pg xix]sincere as any of them. Though the opening of an essay may appear perverse, he is sure to enforce his point before proceeding very far. He accumulates familiar instances in such abundance as to render obvious what at first seemed paradoxical. He writes “On the Ignorance of the Learned” and makes it perfectly clear that no person knows less of the actual life of the world than he whose experience is confined to books. On the other hand he has a whole-hearted appreciation of pedantry: “The power of attaching an interest to the most trifling or painful pursuits, in which our whole attention and faculties are engaged, is one of the greatest happinesses of our nature.... He who is not in some measure a pedant, though he may be a wise, cannot be a very happy man.” These two examples illustrate Hazlitt’s manner of presenting both views of a subject by concentrating his attention on each separately and examining it without regard to the other. On one occasion he anatomizes the faults of the dissenters, and on another he extols their virtues, “I have inveighed all my life against the insolence of the Tories, and for this I have the authority both of Whigs and Reformers; but then I have occasionally spoken against the imbecility of the Whigs, and the extravagance of the Reformers, and thus have brought all three on my back, though two out of the three regularly agree with all I say of the third party.” The strange thing is not that he should have incurred the wrath of all parties, but that he should show surprise at the result. Very often Hazlitt’s reflections are the generalization of his personal experience. The essay “On the Disadvantages of Intellectual Superiority” is but a record of the trials to which he was exposed by his morbid sensitiveness and want of social tact, and amid much excellent advice “On the Conduct of Life,” there are passages which merely reflect his own marital misfortunes. It is not so much that he is a dupe of his emotions, but in his view of life he attaches a higher importance to feeling than to reason, and so provides a philosophic basis for his strongest prejudices. “Custom, passion, imagination,” he declares, “insinuate themselves into and influence almost every judgment we pass or sentiment we indulge, and are a necessary help (as well as hindrance) to the human understanding; to attempt to refer every question to abstract truth and precise definition, without allowing for the frailty of prejudice, which is the unavoidable consequence of the frailty and imperfection of reason, would be to unravel the whole web and texture of human understanding and society.”

It is this infusion of passion and sentiment, the addition of the warm breath of his personal experience, that gives the motion of life to his analytic essays, and a deep and solemn humanity to his abstract speculations. Hazlitt felt life with an intensity which reminds us of a more spacious age. “What a huge heap, a ‘huge, dumb heap,’ of wishes, thoughts, feelings, anxious cares, soothing hopes, loves, joys, friendships, it is composed of! How many ideas and trains of sentiment, long and deep and intense, often pass through the mind in only one day’s thinking or reading, for instance! How many such days are there in a year, how many years in a long life, still occupied with something interesting, still recalling some old impression, still recurring to some difficult question and making progress in it, every step accompanied with a sense of power, and every moment conscious of the ‘high endeavour and the glad success!’” What an exultant sense of power over the resources of life! What an earnest delight in the tasting of every pleasure which the senses and the intelligence afford! His enjoyments comprehended the widest range of sensations and activities. He loved nature, he loved books, he loved pictures, he loved the theatre, he loved music and dancing. He loved good talk and good fellowship; he loved an idea and anyone who was susceptible to an idea. He also loved a spirited game of rackets, and though he hated brutality, he has left us a very vivid and

sympathetic account of a prize-fight. Above all he loved the words truth and justice and humanity. With such sensibilities, it is no wonder that his last words should have been "I have had a happy life." As the phrase is ordinarily understood, Hazlitt's dying expression might seem unaccountable. Outwardly few authors have been more miserable. Like the great French sentimentalist with whom we have compared him, a suspicious distrust of all who came near him converted his social existence into a restless fever. He had the gift of interpreting every contradiction to one of his favorite [Pg xxii] principles as a personal injury to himself, and in the tense state of party feeling then prevailing, the opportunities for taking offence were not limited. Hazlitt was one of the chief marks singled out for abuse by the critics of Government. To constant self-tormentings from within and persecution from without, there was added the misfortune of an unhappy marriage and of a still more unhappy love affair which lowered him in his own eyes as well as in the eyes of the world. From the point of view of the practical man, Hazlitt's life would be declared a failure.

The result of Hazlitt's hard experiences with the realities of life was to confirm him in a devoted attachment to the past. All his high enthusiasms, his sanguine dreams, his purest feelings continued to live for him in the past, and it was only by recurring to their memory in the dim distance that he could find assurance to sustain his faith. In the past all his experiences were refined, subtilized, transfigured. A sunny afternoon on Salisbury Plain, a walk with Charles and Mary Lamb under a Claude Lorraine sky, a visit to the Montpellier Gardens where in his childhood he drank tea with his father—occurrences as common as these were enveloped in a haze of glory. And rarer events, such as a visit to the pictures at Burleigh House, or to the galleries in the Louvre, tender visions of feminine grace and sweetness, were touched in the recollection with a depth and pathos which subdued even the most joyous impressions to a refined melancholy. In no other English writer is this rich sentiment of the past so eloquent, and no one was better qualified to describe its sources. "Time takes out the sting of pain; our sorrows after a certain period have been so often steeped in a medium of thought and passion, that they 'unmould their essence'; and all that remains of our original impressions is what we would wish them to have been.... Seen in the distance, in the long [Pg xxiii] perspective of waning years, the meanest incidents, enlarged and enriched by countless recollections, become interesting; the most painful, broken and softened by time, soothe." The "Farewell to Essay Writing" is perfumed with the odor of grateful memories from which the writer draws his "best consolation for the future." He almost erects his feeling for the past into a religion. "Happy are they," he exclaims, "who live in the dream of their own existence, and see all things in the light of their own minds; who walk by faith and hope; to whom the guiding star of their youth still shines from afar, and into whom the spirit of the world has not entered!... The world has no hold on them. They are in it, not of it; and a dream and a glory is ever around them!"

But this impassioned sentiment for the past was only a refuge such as Byron might seek among the glories of by-gone ages or amid the solitary Alpine peaks, where it was possible to regain the strength spent in grappling with the forces of the actual world and return newly nerved to the battle. For fighting was Hazlitt's more proper element. He could hate with the same intensity that he loved, and his hatred was aroused most by those whom he regarded as responsible for the overturning of his political hopes. Politics had played the most important part in his early education. In his father's house he had absorbed the spirit of protest, accustomed himself to arguing for the repeal of the Test Act, and to declaiming against religious and political persecution. At the age of twelve he had written an indignant letter to the *Shrewsbury Chronicle* against the mob of incendiaries which had destroyed the house of Priestley, and as a student at Hackney he showed sufficient self-reliance to develop an original "Essay on Laws." The defence of the popular cause was with him not an academic exercise, but a religious principle. "Since a little child, I knelt and lifted up my hands in prayer for it." The emotional warmth of his creed was heightened by the reading of Rousseau, and in Napoleon it found a living hero on whom it could expend itself. An uncompromising attachment to certain fundamental principles of democracy and an unceasing devotion to Napoleon constitute the chief elements of Hazlitt's political character. He sets forth his idea of representative government exactly in the manner of Rousseau when he proclaims that "in matters of feeling and common sense, of which each individual is the best judge, the majority are in the right.... It is an absurdity to suppose that there can be any better criterion of national grievances, or the proper remedies for them, than the aggregate amount of the actual, dear-bought experience, the honest feelings, and heart-felt wishes of a whole people, informed and directed by the greatest power of understanding in the community, unbiassed by any sinister motive." Hazlitt was not a republican, and he disapproved of the Utopian rhapsodies of Shelley, woven as they seemed of mere moonshine, without applicability to the evils that demanded



immediate reform. But he did insist that there was a power in the people to change its government and its governors, and hence grew his idolatry of Napoleon, who, through all vicissitudes, remained the “Child and Champion of the Revolution,” the hero who had shown Europe how its established despots could be overthrown.

The news of Waterloo plunged Hazlitt into deep distress, as if it had been the shock of a personal calamity. According to Haydon, “he walked about unwashed, unshaven, [Pg xxv]hardly sober by day, always intoxicated by night, literally for weeks.” But his disappointment only strengthened his attachment to his principles. These remained enshrined with the brightest dreams of his youth, and in proportion as the vision faded and men were beginning to scoff at it as a shadow, Hazlitt bent his energies to fix its outline and prove its reality. “I am attached to my conclusions,” he says, “in consequence of the pain, the anxiety, and the waste of time they have cost me.” His doctrines contained nothing that was subversive of social order, and their ultimate triumph lends the color of heroism to a consistency which people have often interpreted as proof of a limited horizon. It is at least certain that he did not put his conscience out to market, and that his reward came in the form of the vilest calumny ever visited upon a man of letters. These were the most infamous years of the Quarterly Review and Blackwood’s Magazine, both of which had been founded as avowed champions of reaction. Their purpose was to discredit all writers whose politics or the politics of whose friends differed from the Government. Everybody knows of the fate which Keats and Shelley suffered at their hands, chiefly because they were friends of Leigh Hunt, who was the editor of a Liberal newspaper which had displeased George IV. Even the unoffending Lamb did not escape their brutality, perhaps because he was guilty of admitting Hazlitt to his house. The weapons were misrepresentation and unconfined abuse, wielded with an utter disregard of where the blows might fall, in the spirit of a gang of young ruffians who knew that they were protected in their wantonness by a higher authority. In the chastened sadness of his later years Lockhart, who was one of the offenders, confessed that he had no personal grudge against any of Blackwood’s victims, in fact that he knew nothing about any of them, but that at the request of John Wilson, his fellow-editor, he had composed “some squibberies ... with as little malice as if the assigned subject had been the court of Peking.” The sincere regret he expressed for the pain which his “jokes” had inflicted ought perhaps to be counted in extenuation of his errors. It may be true, as his generous biographer suggests, that “his politics and his feud with many of these men was an affair of ignorance and accidental associations in Edinburgh,” that under different circumstances “he might have been found inditing sonnets to Leigh Hunt, and supping with Lamb, Haydon, and Hazlitt.”[23] But meanwhile irreparable mischief had been done to many reputations, and the life of one man had been sacrificed to his sportiveness.

The signal for the attack on Hazlitt was given by the Quarterly in connection with a review of *The Round Table*, Hazlitt’s first book. The contents of this volume were characterized as “vulgar descriptions, silly paradox, flat truisms, misty sophistry, broken English, ill humour and rancorous abuse.” A little later, when the *Characters of Shakespeare’s Plays* seemed to be finding such favor with the public that one edition was quickly exhausted, the Quarterly extinguished its sale by “proving that Mr. Hazlitt’s knowledge of Shakespeare and the English language is on a par with the purity of his morals and the depth of his understanding.” The cry was soon taken up by the Blackwood’s people in a series on the Cockney School of Prose. Lockhart invented the expression “pimpled Hazlitt.” It so happened that Hazlitt’s complexion was unusually clear, but the epithet clung to him with a cruel tenacity. When an ill-natured reviewer could find nothing else to say, he had recourse to “pimpled essays” or “pimpled criticism.” The climax of abuse was reached in an article entitled “Hazlitt Cross-Questioned,” which a sense of decency makes it impossible to reproduce, and which resulted in the payment of damages to the victim. Even the publisher Blackwood speaks of it, with what sincerity it is not safe to say, as disgusting in tone, and Murray, who was the London agent for the Magazine, refused to have any further dealings with it. But the harm was done. Hazlitt could not walk out without feeling that every passer-by had read the atrocious article and saw the brand of the social outcast on his features.

In an atmosphere like this, it is scarcely to be wondered at if Hazlitt’s temper, never of the amiable sort, should have become embittered, nor is it strange that he should sometimes, through ignorance, have committed the fault of which his enemies had been guilty in wantonness. Not content with retaliating the full measure of malice upon the heads of his immediate assailants, he turned the stream of his abuse upon Sir Walter Scott, whom he singled out deliberately as the towering head of a supposed literary conspiracy. He is credited with remarking; “To pay these fellows in their own coin, the way would be to begin with

Walter Scott, and have at his clump foot.” Very mean-spirited this sounds to us, who are acquainted with the nobility of Scott’s character and who know with what magnanimous wisdom he kept himself above the petty altercations of the day. But for Hazlitt, Sir Walter was the father-in-law and friendly patron of John Lockhart, he was the person who had thrown the weight of his powerful influence to make John Wilson Professor of Moral Philosophy at the University of Edinburgh! He did not carry his prejudice against the Author of Waverley.

In some instances Hazlitt was consciously the aggressor, but his attacks were never wanton. He denounced Wordsworth and Coleridge and Southey because they were renegades from the cause which lay nearest to his heart. Their apostasy was an unforgivable offence in his eyes, and his wrath was proportioned to the admiration which he otherwise entertained for them. It is true that he treated their motives hastily and unjustly, but none of his opponents set him the example of charity. In the earlier years of their acquaintance Coleridge had spoken of Hazlitt as a “thinking, observant, original man.” one who “says things that are his own in a way of his own,” whereas after their [Pg xxix]estrangement he discovered that Hazlitt was completely lacking in originality. Wordsworth, being offended at Hazlitt’s review of the “Excursion,” peevishly raked up an old scandal and wrote to Haydon that he was “not a proper person to be admitted into respectable society.” Perhaps Hazlitt was not as “respectable” as his poet-friends, but he had a better sense of fair play. At any rate, in a complete balancing of the accounts, Hazlitt’s frequent displays of ill-temper are offset by the insidious, often unscrupulous baitings which he suffered from his opponents.

Naturally his bitterness was extended to his reflections on mankind in general. He felt as if the human race had wilfully deceived his sanguine expectations, and he poured out his grievances against its refractoriness, taking revenge for his public and his private wrongs, in a passage in which high idealism is joined with personal spite, in which he has revealed himself in all his strength and weakness, and involved his enemies in a common ruin with himself. It concludes the essay “On the Pleasure of Hating”: “Instead of patriots and friends of freedom, I see nothing but the tyrant and the slave, the people linked with kings to rivet on the chains of despotism and superstition. I see folly join with knavery, and together make up public spirit and public opinions. I see the insolent Tory, the blind Reformer, the coward Whig! If mankind had wished for what is right, they might have had it long ago. The theory is plain enough; but they are prone to mischief, ‘to every good work reprobate.’ I have seen all that had been done by the mighty yearnings of the spirit and intellect of men, ‘of whom the world was not worthy,’ and that promised a proud opening to truth and good through the vista of future years, undone by one man, with just glimmering of understanding enough to feel that he was a king, but not to comprehend how he could be king of a free people! I have seen this triumph celebrated by poets, the friends of my youth and the friends of man, but who were carried away by the infuriate tide that, setting in from a throne, bore down every distinction of right reason before it; and I have seen all those who did not join in applauding this insult and outrage on humanity proscribed, hunted down (they and their friends made a bye-word of), so that it has become an understood thing that no one can live by his talents or knowledge who is not ready to prostitute those talents and that knowledge to betray his species, and prey upon his fellow-man.... In private life do we not see hypocrisy, servility, selfishness, folly, and impudence succeed, while modesty shrinks from the encounter, and merit is trodden under foot? How often is ‘the rose plucked from the forehead of a virtuous love to plant a blister there!’ What chance is there of the success of real passion? What certainty of its continuance? Seeing all this as I do, and unravelling the web of human life into its various threads of meanness, spite, cowardice, want of feeling, and want of understanding, of indifference towards others and ignorance of ourselves—seeing custom prevail over all excellence, itself giving way to infamy—mistaken as I have been in my public and private hopes, calculating others from myself, and calculating wrong; always disappointed where I placed most reliance; the dupe of friendship, and the fool of love; have I not reason to hate and to despise myself? Indeed I do; and chiefly for not having hated and despised the world enough.”—This is not exactly downright cynicism; it is more like disappointment, beating its head frantically against the wall of circumstance. Yet through his bitterest utterances there is felt the warm sentiment that, “let people rail at virtue, at genius and friendship as long as they will—the very names of these disputed qualities are better than anything else that could be substituted for them, and embalm even the most angry abuse of them.” It is no wonder that Hazlitt has never been a popular favorite. With a stronger attachment to principles than to persons, lavishing upon ideas or the fanciful creations of art a passionate affection which he grudgingly withheld from human beings, stubbornly tenacious of a set of political dogmas to which he was ready to sacrifice his dearest friends, morbidly sensitive to the faintest suggestion of a personal slight, and prompter

than the serpent to vent against the aggressor the bitterness of his poison, he plays the role of Ishmael among the men of letters in his day. The violence of his retorts when he felt himself injured and his capacity for giving offence even when he was not directly provoked, begot a resentment in his adversaries which blinded them to an appreciation of his genuine worth. At best they might have assented, after his death, to the sublime pity with which Carlyle, from his spiritual altitudes, moralized upon his struggles. "How many a poor Hazlitt must wander on God's verdant earth, like the Unblest on burning deserts; passionately dig wells, and draw up only the dry quicksand; believe that he is seeking Truth, yet only wrestle among endless Sophisms, doing desperate battle as with spectre-hosts; and die and make no sign!" We must appeal to the issue to determine whether Hazlitt's battle was altogether against spectre-hosts, and whether in his quest for truth and beauty he has drawn up nothing but quicksand. But at least Carlyle's expression recognizes [Pg xxxii]the earnestness of his purpose and the bravery with which he maintained the conflict.

Hazlitt gave himself freely and without reserve to his reader. By his side Leigh Hunt appears affected, De Quincey theatrical, Lamb—let us say discreet. Affectation and discretion were equally alien to Hazlitt's nature, as they concerned either his personal conduct or his literary exercises. In regard to every impression, every prejudice, every stray thought that struggled into consciousness, his practice was, to use his own favorite quotation,

"To pour out all as plain

As downright Shippen or as old Montaigne."

He has drifted far from the tradition of Addison and Steele with which his contemporaries sought to associate him. There was nothing in him of the courtier-like grace employed in the good-humored reproof of unimportant vices, of the indulgent, condescending admonition to the "gentle reader," particularly of the fair sex. In Hazlitt's hands the essay was an instrument for the expression of serious thought and virile passion. He lacked indeed the temperamental balance of Lamb. His insight into human nature was intellectual rather than sympathetic. Though as a philosopher he understood that the web of life is of a mingled yarn, he has given us none of those rare glimpses of laughter ending in tears or of tears subsiding in a tender smile which are the sources of Lamb's depth and his charm. The same thing is true of his humor. He relished heartily its appearance in others and had a most wholesome laugh; but in himself there is no real merriment, only an ironic realization of the contrasts of life. When he writes, the smile which sometimes seeks to overpower the grim fixity of his features, is frozen before it can emerge to the surface. He lacks all the ingratiating arts which make a [Pg xxxiii] writer beloved. But if one enjoys a keen student of the intricacies of character, a bold and candid critic of human imperfections, a stimulating companion full of original ideas and deep feelings, he will find in Hazlitt an inexhaustible source of instruction and delight. Hazlitt has long appealed to men of vigorous character and acute intellect, men like Landor, Froude, Walter Bagehot, Robert Louis Stevenson, and Ernest Henley, who have either proclaimed his praise or flattered him with imitation. By the friend who knew him longest and was better qualified than any other to speak of him, he has been pronounced as "in his natural and healthy state, one of the wisest and finest spirits breathing."

## II

The discovery in the seventeenth century of the Greek treatise "On the Sublime," attributed to Longinus, with its inspired appreciation of the great passages in Greek literature so different from the analytic manner of Aristotle, gave a decided impulse to English criticism. It was at the same time that English prose, under the influence of French models, was developing a more familiar tone than it had hitherto been acquainted with. The union of the enthusiasm of Longinus with this moderated French prose resulted in the graceful prefaces of Dryden, which remained unmatched for more than a century. The Longinian fire, breathed upon too by the genius of Shakespeare, preserved the eighteenth century from congealing into the utter formalism of pseudo-Aristotelian authority. Though they did not produce an even warmth over the whole surface, the flames are observed darting through the crust even where the crust seems thickest. It is significant that Dr. [Pg xxxiv]Johnson should exclaim with admiration at the criticism of Dryden, not because Dryden judged according to rules but because his was the criticism of a poet. And he singles out as the best example of such criticism the well-known appreciation of Shakespeare, the very passage which Hazlitt later quoted as "the best character of Shakespeare that has ever been written." [35] The high-priest of classicism wavered frequently in his allegiance to some of the sacred fetishes of his cult, and had enough

grace, once at least, to speak with scorn of the “cant of those who judged by principles rather than by perception.”

But to judge by perception is a comparatively rare accomplishment, and so most critics continued to employ the foot-rule as if they were measuring flat surfaces, while occasionally going so far as to recognize the existence of certain mountain-peaks as “irregular beauties.” In a more or less conscious distinction from the criticism of external rules there developed also during the eighteenth century what its representatives were pleased to call metaphysical criticism, to which we should now probably apply the term psychological. This consisted in explaining poetic effects by reference to strictly mental processes in a tone of calm analysis eminently suited to the rationalistic temper of the age. It methodically traced the sources of grandeur or of pathos or of humor, and then illustrated its generalization by the practice of the poets. It could thereby pride itself on going back of the rules to the fundamental laws of human nature. Kames’s *Elements of Criticism*, written in 1761, became a work of standard reference, though it did not impose on the great critics. In commending it Dr. Johnson was careful to remark, “I do not mean that he has taught us anything; but he has told us old things in a new way.” But in general Kames was considered a safer guide than the enthusiastic Longinus, who throughout the century was looked upon with distrust. “Instead of shewing for what reason a sentiment or image is sublime, and discovering the secret power by which they affect a reader with pleasure, he is ever intent on producing something sublime himself, and strokes of his own eloquence.” So runs the complaint of Joseph Warton. The distrust was not without ground. The danger that the method of Longinus in the hands of ungifted writers would become a cloak for critical ignorance and degenerate into empty bluster was already apparent. Only rarely was there a reader who could distinguish between the false and the true application of the method. Gibbon did it in a passage which impressed itself upon the younger critics of Hazlitt’s generation. “I was acquainted only with two ways of criticising a beautiful passage: the one, to shew, by an exact anatomy of it, the distinct beauties of it, and whence they sprung; the other, an idle exclamation, or a general encomium, which leaves nothing behind it. Longinus has shewn me that there is a third. He tells me his own feelings upon reading it; and tells them with such energy, that he communicates them.” That vital element, the commentator’s power of communicating his own feelings, constituting as it does the difference between phrase-making and valuable criticism, did not become prominent in English literature before the nineteenth century.

The official criticism of the early nineteenth century as represented by the *Edinburgh and Quarterly Reviews*, derives its descent directly from the eighteenth. Whatever the Government might have thought of the politics of the *Edinburgh*, its literary outlook remained unexceptionably orthodox. Jeffrey’s “*Essay on Beauty*” is a direct copy of Alison’s “*Essay on Taste*.” Much as Dr. Johnson in the preceding age, Jeffrey prided himself on the moral tendency of his criticism—a morality which consisted in censuring the life of Burns and in exalting the virtuous insipidities of Maria Edgeworth’s tales as it might have been done by any faithful minister of the gospel. To be sure he cannot be said to have held tenaciously to the old set of canons. Though he stanchly withstood the new-fangled poetic practices of Wordsworth and of Southey, he bowed before the great popularity of Scott and Byron, even at the cost of some of his favorite maxims. In his writings the solvents of the older criticism are best seen at work. Jeffrey both by instinct and training was a lawyer, and his position at the head of the most respected periodical formed a natural temptation to a dictatorial manner. He was a judge who tried to uphold the literary constitution but wavered in the face of a strong popular opposition. When the support of precedent failed him, he remained without any firm conviction of his own. While his poetic taste was quite adequate to the appreciation of a Samuel Rogers or a Barry Cornwall, it was incomparably futile in the perception of a Wordsworth or a Shelley. In a passage composed at the end of his long editorial career in 1829, he unconsciously announced his own extinction as a critic:

“Since the beginning of our critical career, we have seen a vast deal of beautiful poetry pass into oblivion, in spite of our feeble efforts to recall or retain it in remembrance. The tuneful quartos of Southey are already little better than lumber:—and the rich melodies of Keats and [Pg xxxvii] Shelley,—and the fantastical emphasis of Wordsworth,—and the plebeian pathos of Crabbe, are melting fast from the field of our vision. The novels of Scott have put out his poetry. Even the splendid strains of Moore are fading into distance and dimness, except where they have been married to immortal music; and the blazing star of Byron himself is receding from its place of pride. We need say nothing of Milman, and Croly, and Atherstone, and Hood, and a legion of others, who, with no ordinary gifts of taste and fancy, have not so properly survived their fame, as been excluded by some hard fatality, from what seemed their just

inheritance. The two who have the longest withstood this rapid withering of the laurel, and with the least marks of decay on their branches, are Rogers and Campbell; neither of them, it may be remarked, voluminous writers, and both distinguished rather for the fine taste and consummate elegance of their writings, than for that fiery passion, and disdainful vehemence, which seemed for a time to be so much more in favour with the public." But the authority of Jeffrey did not long remain unchallenged. His unfortunate "This will never do" became a by-word among the younger writers who were gradually awaking to the realization of a new spirit in criticism. The protest against the methods of the dictatorial quarterlies found expression in the two brilliant monthly periodicals, Blackwood's and the London Magazine, founded respectively in 1817 and 1820. In these no opportunity was neglected to thrust at the inflated pretensions of the established reviews, and, though the animus of rivalry might be suspected of playing its part, the blows usually struck home. There is an air of absolute finality about Lockhart's "Remarks on the Periodical Criticism of England," and his characterization of Jeffrey in this article is a bold anticipation of the judgment of posterity. The editor of the London Magazine writes with equal assurance, "We must protest against considering the present taste as the standard of excellence, or the criticisms on poetry in the Edinburgh Review as the voice even of the present taste." The test of critical eligibility in this age is an appreciation of Wordsworth and a proper understanding of Coleridge his prophet, and it is by virtue of what inspiration they drew from these oracles that John Lockhart and John Scott became better qualified than Jeffrey or Gifford to form the literary opinions of the public.

Coleridge more than any other person was responsible for bringing about a change in the attitude of literature toward criticism. As Hazlitt puts it with his inimitable vividness, he "threw a great stone into the standing pool of criticism, which splashed some persons with the mud, but which gave a motion to the surface and a reverberation to the neighbouring echoes, which has not since subsided." Whether his ideas were borrowed from the Germans or evolved in his own brain, their importance for English literature remains the same. Coleridge's service lay in asserting and reasserting such fundamental principles as that a critical standard is something quite distinct from a set of external rules; that the traditional opposition between genius and laws was based on a misconception as to the function of the critic; that all great genius necessarily worked in accordance with certain laws which it was the function of the critic to determine by a study of each particular work of art; that art, being vital and organic, assumed different shapes at different epochs of human culture; that only the spirit of poetry remained constant, while its form was molded anew by each age in accordance with the demands of its own life; that it was no more reasonable to judge Shakespeare's plays by the practice of Sophocles than to judge sculpture by the rules of painting. "O! few have there been among critics, who have followed with the eye of their imagination the imperishable yet ever wandering spirit of poetry through its various metempsychoses; or who have rejoiced with the light of clear perception at beholding with each new birth, with each rare avatar, the human race frame to itself a new body, by assimilating materials of nourishment out of its new circumstances, and work for itself new organs of power appropriate to the new sphere of its motion and activity." This rare grasp of general principles was combined in Coleridge with poetic vision and a declamatory eloquence which enabled him to seize on the more ardent and open-minded men of letters and to determine their critical viewpoint.

William Hazlitt was among the earliest to fall under Coleridge's spell. Just how much he owed to Coleridge beyond the initial impulse it is impossible to prove, because so much of the latter's criticism was expressed during improvised monologues at the informal meetings of friends, or in lectures of which only fragmentary notes remain. At any rate, while Coleridge's chief distinction lay in the enunciation of general principles, Hazlitt's practice, in so far as it took account of these general principles at all, assumed their existence, and displayed its strength in concrete judgments of individual literary works. His criticism may be said to imply at every step the existence of Coleridge's, or to rise like an elegant superstructure on the solid foundation which the other had laid. Hazlitt communicated to the general public that love and appreciation of great literature which Coleridge inspired only in the few elect. The latter, even more distinctly than a poet for poets, was a critic for critics, and three generations have not succeeded in absorbing all his doctrines. But Hazlitt, with a delicate sensitiveness to the impressions of genius, with a boundless zest of poetic enjoyment, with a firm common sense to control his taste, and with a gift of original expression unequalled in his day, arrested the attention of the ordinary reader and made effective the principles which Coleridge with some vagueness had projected. To analyze in cold blood such living criticism as Hazlitt's may expose one to unflattering imputations, but the attempt may serve to bring to

light what is so often overlooked, that Hazlitt's criticism is no random, irresponsible discharge of his sensibilities, but has an implicit basis of sound theory.

In his *History of Criticism*, Mr. Saintsbury takes as his motto for the section on the early nineteenth century a sentence from Sainte-Beuve to the effect that nearly the whole art of the critic consists in knowing how to read a book with judgment and without ceasing to relish it. We are almost ready to believe that the French critic, in the significant choice of the words judgment and relish, is consciously summarizing the method of Hazlitt, the more so as he elsewhere explicitly confesses a sympathy with the English critic.[48] Hazlitt has indeed himself characterized his art in some such terms. In one of his lectures he modestly describes his undertaking "merely to read over a set of authors with the audience, as I would do with [Pg xli]a friend, to point out a favorite passage, to explain an objection; or if a remark or a theory occurs, to state it in illustration of the subject, but neither to tire him nor puzzle myself with pedantical rules and pragmatistical formulas of criticism that can do no good to anybody." This sounds dangerously like dilettantism. It suggests the method of what in our day is called impressionism, one of the most delightful forms of literary entertainment when practiced by a master of literature. The impressionist's aim is to record whatever impinges on his brain, and though with a writer of fine discernment it is sure to be productive of exquisite results, as criticism it is undermined by the impressionist's assumption that every appreciation is made valid by the very fact of its existence. But this was scarcely Hazlitt's idea of criticism. Against universal suffrage in matters literary he would have been among the first to protest. We might almost imagine we were listening to some orthodox theorist of the eighteenth century when we hear him declaring that the object of taste "must be that, not which does, but which would please universally, supposing all men to have paid an equal attention to any subject and to have an equal relish for it, which can only be guessed at by the imperfect and yet more than casual agreement among those who have done so from choice and feeling." Though not the surest kind of clue, this indicates at least that Hazlitt's rejection of "pedantical rules and pragmatistical formulas" was not equivalent to a declaration of anarchy.

For Hazlitt the assertion of individual taste meant emancipation from arbitrary codes and an opportunity to embrace a compass as wide as the range of literary excellence. Realizing that every reader, even the professed critic, is hemmed in by certain prejudices arising from his temperament, his education, his environment, he was unwilling to pledge his trust to any school or fashion of criticism. The favorite oppositions of his generation—Shakespeare and Pope, Fielding and Richardson, English poetry and French—had no meaning for him. He was glad to enjoy each in its kind. "The language of taste and moderation is, I prefer this, because it is best to me; the language of dogmatism and intolerance is, Because I prefer it, it is best in itself, and I will allow no one else to be of a different opinion." This passage, in connection with the one last quoted, may be considered as fixing the limits within which Hazlitt gave scope to personal preference. The sum of his literary judgments reveals a taste for a greater variety of the works of genius than is displayed by any contemporary, and the absence of "a catholic and many-sided sympathy" is one of the last imputations that should have been brought against him. His criticism has limitations, but not such as are due to a narrowness of literary perception.

Even Hazlitt's shortcomings may frequently be turned to his glory as a critic. The most remarkable thing about his violent political prejudices is the success with which he dissociated his literary estimates from them. Such a serious limitation in a critic as deficiency of reading in his case only raises our astonishment at the sureness of instinct which enabled him to pronounce unerringly on the scantest information. Never was there a critic of nearly equal pretensions who had as little of the scholar's equipment. If, as he tells us, he applied himself too closely to his studies at a certain period in his youth, he atoned for it by his neglect of books in later life. A desultory education had left him without that intimacy with the classics which belonged of right to every cultivated Englishman. His allusions to the Greek and Latin writers are in the most general terms, but with a note of reverence which did not enter into his speech concerning even Shakespeare. "I would have you learn Latin (he is writing to his son) because there is an atmosphere round this sort of classical ground, to which that of actual life is gross and vulgar." His knowledge of Italian was no more thorough, though here he was more nearly on a level with his contemporaries. For Boccaccio indeed he showed an intense affection, and he could write intelligently, if not deeply, concerning Dante and Ariosto and Tasso. With French he naturally had a wider acquaintance, but still nothing beyond the reach of the very general reader. The notable point is that he refrains from passing judgment on the entire body of French poetry because it is unlike English poetry. He is not infected with the wilful provincialism of Lamb

nor with the spirit of John Bullishness which seriously proclaims in its rivals "equally a want of books and men." "We may be sure of this," says Hazlitt, "that when we see nothing but grossness and barbarism, or insipidity and verbiage in a writer that is the God of a nation's idolatry, it is we and not they who want true taste and feeling." Having this wholesome counsel ever before him, he can be more generously appreciative of the genius of Molière, more justly discerning in his analysis of the spirit of Rousseau, and more free of the puritanical clatter against Voltaire than any of his fellow-critics. With German literature his familiarity was bounded on the one hand by Schiller's "Robbers," on the other by the first part of "Faust," the entire gap between these being filled by the popular versions of Kotzebue's plays and Mme. de Staël's book on Germany. Yet he dared to write a character of the German people which is almost worth quoting.

In English his range of reading was correspondingly narrow. Such a piece of waywardness as his enthusiasm for John Bunce, derived no doubt from Lamb, is unique. Broadly speaking, he prefers to accept the established canon and approaches new discoveries with a deep distrust. He is very little concerned with writers of the second order, and in his Lecture on the Living Poets he shocked his audience unspeakably, when he came to the name of Hannah More, by merely remarking, "She has written a great deal which I have never read." He looked upon most living writers through the eyes of the somewhat jaded reviewer, who, though susceptible to a romantic thrill from one or the other, is usually on his guard against spurious blandishments and reluctant to admit the claims of new pretenders. Even in poets of the first rank he slurred over a great deal; but what he loved he dwelt on with a kind of rapt inspiration until it became his second nature, its spirit and its language fused intimately with his own. This revolutionist in politics was a jealous aristocrat in the domains of art, and this admission does not impair our earlier assertion of his openness to a greater variety of impressions than any of his contemporaries in criticism.

Hazlitt's professed indifference to system is probably due as much to lack of deep reading as to romantic impatience of restraint. When he declared that it was beyond his powers "to condense and combine all the facts relating to a subject" or that "he had no head for arrangement," it was only because he did not happen to be a master of the facts which required combination or arrangement. For he did have an unusual gift for penetrating to the core of a subject and tearing out the heart of its mystery; in fact, his power of concrete literary generalization was in his age unmatched. To reveal the distinctive virtue of a literary form, to characterize the sources of weakness or of strength in a new or a by-gone fashion of poetry, to analyze accurately the forces impelling a whole mighty age—these things, requiring a deep and steady concentration of mind, are among his most solid achievements. In a paragraph he distils for us the essence of what is picturesque and worth dwelling on in the comedy of the Restoration. In a page he triumphantly establishes the boundary-line between the poetry of art and nature—Pope and Shakespeare—which to the present day remains as a clear guide, while at the same time Campbell and Byron and Bowles are filling the periodicals with protracted and often irrelevant arguments on one side or the other which only the critically curious now venture to look into. In the space of a single lecture he takes a sweeping view of all the great movements which gave vitality and grandeur to the Elizabethan spirit and found a voice in its literature, so that in spite of his little learning he seems to have left nothing for his followers but to fill in his outline. The same keenness of discernment he applied casually in dissecting the genius of his own time. He associated the absence of drama with the French Revolution, its tendency to deal in abstractions and to regard everything in relation to man and not men—a tendency irreconcilable with dramatic literature, which is essentially individual and concrete. To be sure the eighteenth century before the Revolution was as void of drama as Hazlitt's generation, but what is true of the period which produced *Political Justice* and the *Edinburgh Review* would hold equally of the time which produced the "Essay on Man" and the deistic controversy. He sometimes harshly exposes the weaker side of contemporary lyricism as a "mere effusion of natural sensibility," and he regrets the absence of "imaginary splendor and human passion" as of a glory departed. But with all this he had the true historical sense. It breaks out most unmistakably when he says, "If literature in our day has taken this decided turn into a critical channel, is it not a presumptive proof that it ought to do so?" Of the actual application of historical principles, which were just beginning to be realized in the study of literature, we find only a few faint traces in Hazlitt. Some remarks on the influence of climate and of religious and political institutions occur in his contributions to the *Edinburgh*, but occasionally their perfunctory manner suggests the editorial pen of Jeffrey. Doubtless Hazlitt's discriminating judgment would have enabled him to excel in this field, had he been equipped with the necessary learning.

It may also be a serious limitation of Hazlitt's that he [Pg xlvi] neglects questions of structure and design. Doubtless he was reacting against the jargon of the older criticism with its lifeless and monotonous repetitions about invention and fable and unity, giving nothing but the "superficial plan and elevation, as if a poem were a piece of formal architecture." In avoiding the study of the design of "Paradise Lost" or of the "Faerie Queene" he may have brought his criticism nearer to the popular taste; but he deliberately shut himself off from a vision of some of the higher reaches of poetic art, perhaps betraying thereby that lack of "imagination" with which he has sometimes been charged. His interpretation of an author is therefore occasionally in danger of becoming an appreciation of isolated characters, or scenes, or passages, as if he were actually reading him over with his audience. But this is a limitation which Hazlitt shares with all the finer critics of his day. After all these shortcomings have been acknowledged, the permanence of Hazlitt's achievement appears only the more remarkable. It is clear that the gods made him critical. The two essential qualities of judgment and taste he seems to have possessed from the very beginning. It is impossible to trace in him any development of taste; his growth is but the succession of his literary experiences. One looks in vain for any of those errors of youth such as are met even in a Coleridge enamored of Bowles. What extravagance of tone Hazlitt displayed in his early criticism he carried with him to his last day. If any change is to be noted, it is in the growing keenness of his appreciation. The early maturity of his judicial powers is attested by the political and metaphysical tendency of his youthful studies. His birth as a full-fledged critic awaited only the stirring of the springs of his eloquence, as is evident from the excellence of what is practically his first literary essay, the "Character of Burke."

No critic has approached books with so intense a passion as Hazlitt. That sentimental fondness for the volumes themselves, especially when enriched by the fragrance of antiquity, which gives so delicious a savor to the bookishness of Lamb, was in him conspicuously absent. For him books were only a more vivid aspect of life itself. "Tom Jones," he tells us, was the novel that first broke the spell of his daily tasks and made of the world "a dance through life, a perpetual gala-day." Keats could not have romped through the "Faerie Queene" with more spirit than did Hazlitt through the length and breadth of eighteenth century romance, and the young poet's awe before the majesty of Homer was hardly greater than that of the future critic when a Milton or a Wordsworth swam into his ken. This hot and eager interest, deprived of its outlet in the form of direct emulation, sought a vent in communicating itself to others and in making converts to its faith. So intimately did Hazlitt feel the spell of a work of genius, that its life-blood was transfused into his own almost against his will. "I wish," he exclaims, "I had never read the Emilius ... I had better have formed myself on the model of Sir Fopling Flutter." He entered into the poet's creation with a sympathy amounting almost to poetic vision, and the ever-present sense of the reality of the artist's world led him to interpret literature primarily in relation to life. The poetry of character and passion is what he regards of most essential interest. This point of view unintentionally converts his familiar essays on life into a literary discourse, and gives to his formal criticism the tone of a study of life at its sources, raising it at once to the same level with creative literature. Though he nowhere employs the now familiar formula of "literature and life," the lecture "On Poetry in General" is largely an exposition of this outlook.

Life in its entire compass is regarded as the rough material of literature, but it does not become literature until the artist's imagination, as with a divine ray, has penetrated the mass and inspired it with an ideal existence. Among the numerous attempts of his contemporaries to define the creative faculty of the poet, this comparatively simple one of Hazlitt's is worth noting. "This intuitive perception of the hidden analogies of things, or, as it may be called, this instinct of imagination, is perhaps what stamps the character of genius on the productions of art more than any other circumstance: for it works unconsciously, like nature, and receives its impressions from a kind of inspiration." It is this power that he has in mind when he says "Poetry is infusing the same spirit in a number of things, or bathing them all as it were, in the same overflowing sense of delight." It shows Hazlitt to have fully apprehended the guiding principle of the new ideal of criticism which, looking upon the work of art as an act of original creation and not of mechanical composition, based its judgment on a direct sympathy with the artist's mind instead of resorting to a general rule. In the light of this principle he is enabled to avoid the pitfalls of a moralistic interpretation of literature and to decide the question as to the relative importance of substance and treatment with a certainty which seems to preclude the possibility of any other answer.

It is not the dignity of the theme which constitutes the great work of art, for in that case a prose summary of the "Divine Comedy" would be as exalted as the original, and it would be necessary merely to know the



subject of a poem in order to pass judgment upon it. A low or a trivial subject may be raised by the imagination of the artist who recognizes in it the elements of beauty or power. No definition of poetry can be worth anything which would exclude “The Rape of the Lock”; and Murillo’s painting of “The Two Beggar Boys” is as much worth having “as almost any picture in the world.” “Yet it is not true that execution is everything, and the class or subject nothing. The highest subjects, equally well-executed (which, however, rarely happens), are the best.” Though each is perfect in its kind, there can be no difficulty in deciding the question of greatness between “King Lear” and “The Comedy of Errors.” “The greatest strength of genius is shewn in describing the strongest passions: for the power of imagination, in works of invention, must be in proportion to the force of the natural impressions, which are the subject of them.”[76] One also finds a test of relative values in the measure of fulness with which the work of art reflects the complex elements of life. If we estimate a tragedy of Shakespeare above one of Lillo or Moore, it is because “impassioned poetry is an emanation of the moral and intellectual part of our nature, as well as of the sensitive—of the desire to know, the will to act, and the power to feel; and ought to appeal to these different parts of the constitution, in order to be perfect.”

In treating of the specific distinction of poetry Hazlitt does not escape the usual difficulties. Taking his point of departure from Milton’s “thoughts that voluntary move harmonious numbers,” he defines poetry in a passage that satisfactorily anticipates the familiar one of Carlyle, as “the music of language answering to the music of the mind.... Wherever any object takes such a hold of the mind as to make us dwell upon it, and brood over it, melting the heart in tenderness, or kindling it to a sentiment of enthusiasm;—wherever a movement of imagination or passion is impressed on the mind, by which it seeks to prolong or repeat the emotion, to bring all other objects into accord with it, and to give the same movement of harmony, sustained and continuous, or gradually varied according to the occasion, to the sounds that express it—this is poetry. The musical in sound is the sustained and continuous; the musical in thought is the sustained and continuous also. There is a near connection between music and deep-rooted passion.” In this mystical direction a definition could go no further, but like nearly all writers and speakers Hazlitt is inclined to use the word poetry in a variety of more or less connected meanings, ordinarily legitimate enough, but somewhat embarrassing when it is a question of definition. “That which lifts the spirit above the earth, which draws the soul out of itself with indescribable longings, is,” he says, “poetry in kind, and generally fit to become so in name, by ‘being married to immortal verse.’” If it is true that *Pilgrim’s Progress* and *Robinson Crusoe* possess the “essence and the power of poetry” and require only the addition of verse to become absolutely so, then the musical expression is only a factitious ornament, to be added or removed at the caprice of the writer. But Hazlitt is careful to declare that verse does not make the whole difference between poetry and prose, leaving the whole question as vaguely suspended as ever.

Bare theorizing, according to his own confession, was no favorite pursuit with Hazlitt. He enjoyed himself much more in the analysis of an individual author or his work. His aversion to literary cant, his love of “saying things that are his own in a way of his own,” were here most in evidence. What he says of Milton might appropriately be applied to himself, that he formed the most intense conception of things and then embodied them by a single stroke of his pen. In a phrase or in a sentence he stamped the character of an author indelibly, and, enemy to commonplace though he was, became a cause of commonplace in others. No matter how much might already have been written on a subject (and Hazlitt did not make a practice of celebrating neglected obscurity) his own view stood out fresh and clear, and yet his judgments were never eccentric. He wrestled with a writer’s thoughts, absorbed his most passionate feelings, and mirrored back his most exquisite perceptions with “all the color, the light and the shade.” His fertility is more amazing than his intensity, for no critic of nearly equal rank has enriched English literature with so many valuable and enduring judgments on so great a variety of subjects. Dr. Johnson is by common consent the spokesman of the eighteenth century, or of its dominant class; Coleridge and Lamb are entitled to the glory of revealing the literature between Spenser and Milton to English readers, and the former rendered the additional service of acting as the interpreter of Wordsworth. But to give an idea of Hazlitt’s scope would require a summary of opinions embracing poetry from Chaucer and Spenser to Wordsworth and Byron, prose sacred and profane from Bacon and Jeremy Taylor to Burke and Edward Irving, the drama in its two flourishing periods, the familiar essay from Steele and Addison to Lamb and Leigh Hunt, the novel from Defoe to Sir Walter Scott. This does not begin to suggest Hazlitt’s versatility. His own modest though somewhat over-alliterative words are that he has “at least glanced over a number of subjects—painting, poetry, prose, plays, politics, parliamentary speakers, metaphysical lore, books, men, and things.”

The importance of Hazlitt's Shakespearian criticism is no longer open to question. Though Coleridge alluded to them slightly as out-and-out imitations of Lamb, Hazlitt's dicta on the greatest English genius are equal in depth to Lamb's and far more numerous; and while in profoundness and subtlety they fall short of the remarks of Coleridge himself, they surpass them in intensity and carrying power. To both of these men Hazlitt owed a great deal in his appreciation of Shakespeare, and perhaps even more to August Wilhelm Schlegel, whose Lectures on Dramatic Literature he reviewed in 1815. His allusions to Schlegel border on enthusiasm and he makes it a proud claim that he has done "more than any one except Schlegel to vindicate the Characters of Shakespeare's Plays [Pg liv] from the stigma of French criticism." But however great his obligation, there was some point in the compliment of the German critic when he declared that Hazlitt had gone beyond him (l'avoit dépassé) in his Shakespearian opinions. A few years later Heine maintained that the only significant commentator of Shakespeare produced by England was William Hazlitt. Coleridge's notes, it is to be remembered, were not at that time generally accessible.

Hazlitt's attitude toward Shakespeare was wholesomely on this side of idolatry. He did not make it an article of faith to admire everything that Shakespeare had written, and refused his praise to the poems and most of the sonnets. Even Schlegel and Coleridge could not persuade him to see beauties in what appeared to be blemishes, but in a general estimate of Shakespeare's all-embracing genius he conceived his faults to be "of just as much consequence as his bad spelling." He saw in him a genius who comprehended all humanity, who represented it poetically in all its shades and varieties. He examined all the fine distinctions of character, he studied Shakespeare's manner of combining and contrasting them so as to produce a unity of tone above even the art of the classic unities. From the irresponsible comedy of Falstaff to the deepest tragic notes of Lear, the whole gamut of human emotions encounters responsive chords in the critic's mind—the young love of Romeo and Juliet or the voluptuous abandonment of Antony and Cleopatra, the intellect of Iago irresistibly impelled to malignant activity or Hamlet entangled in the coils of a fatal introspection. To the sheer poetry of Shakespeare he is also acutely sensitive, to the soft moonlit atmosphere of the "Midsummernight's Dream," to the tender gloom of "Cymbeline," to the "philosophic poetry" of "As You Like It." Some of his interpretations of isolated passages are hardly to be surpassed. He comments minutely and exquisitely on what he considers to be a touchstone of poetic feeling,

"Daffodils

That come before the swallow dares, and take  
The winds of March with beauty."

And with what complete insight he translates a speech of Antony's:

"This precarious state and the approaching dissolution of his greatness are strikingly displayed in the dialogue of Antony with Eros:

'Antony. Eros, thou yet behold'st me?

Eros. Ay, noble lord.

Antony. Sometime we see a cloud that's dragonish;  
A vapour sometime, like a bear or lion,  
A towered citadel, a pendant rock,  
A forked mountain, or blue promontory  
With trees upon't, that nod unto the world  
And mock our eyes with air. Thou hast seen these signs,  
They are black vespers' pageants.

Eros. Ay, my lord.

Antony. That which is now a horse, even with a thought  
The rack dislimns, and makes it indistinct  
As water is in water.

Eros. It does, my lord.

Antony. My good knave, Eros, now thy captain is

Even such a body,' etc.

"This is, without doubt, one of the finest pieces of poetry in Shakspeare. The splendour of the imagery, the semblance of reality, the lofty range of picturesque objects [Pg lvi]hanging over the world, their evanescent nature, the total uncertainty of what is left behind, are just like the mouldering schemes of human greatness. It is finer than Cleopatra's passionate lamentation over his fallen grandeur, because it is more dim, unstable, unsubstantial."

If an understanding of Shakespeare in Hazlitt's day may be taken as a measure of a critic's depth of insight, his attitude toward Shakespeare's fellow-dramatists will just as surely reveal his powers of discrimination. Lamb was often carried away by a pioneer's fervor and misled persons like Lowell, who, returning to Ford late in life, found "that the greater part of what [he] once took on trust as precious was really paste and pinchbeck," and that as far as the celebrated closing scene in "The Broken Heart" was concerned, Charles Lamb's comment on it was "worth more than all Ford ever wrote." Hazlitt's dispassionate sanity in this instance forms an instructive contrast: "Except the last scene of the Broken Heart (which I think extravagant—others may think it sublime, and be right) they [Ford's plays] are merely exercises of style and effusion of wire-drawn sentiment." The same strength of judgment rendered Hazlitt proof against the excessive sentimentality in Beaumont and Fletcher and gave a distinct value to his opinions even when they seemed to be wrong, which was not often. But in writing of Marlowe, of Dekker and of Webster, he spreads out all his sail to make a joyous run among the beauties in his course. And it is so with the rest of his criticism—throughout the same susceptibility to all that is true, or lofty, or refined, vigilantly controlled by a firm common sense, the same stamp of originality unmistakably impressed on all. "I like old opinions with new reasons," he once said to Northcote, "not new opinions without any." [94] But he did not hesitate to express a new opinion where the old one appeared to be unjust. His heretical preference of Steele over Addison has found more than one convert in later days. On Spenser or Pope, on Fielding or Richardson, he is equally happy and unimprovable. In the opinion of Mr. Saintsbury, Hazlitt's general lecture on Elizabethan literature, his treatment of the dramatists of the Restoration, of Pope, of the English Novelists, and of Cobbett have never been excelled; and who is better qualified than Mr. Saintsbury by width of reading to express such an opinion?

Of Hazlitt's treatment of his own contemporaries an additional word needs to be said. No charge has been repeated more often than that of the inconsistency, perversity, and utter unreliableness of his judgments on the writers of his day. To distinguish between the claims of living poets, particularly in an age of new ideas and changing forms, is a task which might test the powers of the most discerning critics, and in which perfection is hardly to be attained. Yet one may ask whether in the entire extent of Hazlitt's writing a great living genius has been turned into a mockery or a figurehead been set up for the admiration of posterity. Of his personal and political antipathies enough has been said, but against literary orthodoxy his only great sin is a harsh review of "Christabel." [96] If in general we look at the age through Hazlitt's eyes, we shall see its literature dominated by the figures [Pg lviii]of Wordsworth and Scott, the one regarded as the restorer of life to poetry, the other as the creator or transcriber of a whole world of romance and humanity. Coleridge stands out prominently as the widest intellect of his age. Byron's poetry bulks very large, though it is not estimated as superlatively as in the criticism of our own day. It is a pity that Hazlitt never wrote formally of Keats, for his casual allusions indicate a deep enjoyment of the "rich beauties and the dim obscurities" of the "Eve of St. Agnes" and an appreciation of the perfection of the great odes. If he failed to give Shelley his full dues, he did not overlook his exquisite lyrical inspiration. He spoke of Shelley as a man of genius, but "'all air,' disdaining the bars and ties of mortal mould;" he praised him for "single thoughts of great depth and force, single images of rare beauty, detached passages of extreme tenderness," and he rose to enthusiasm in commending his translations, especially the scenes from Faust. He has been accused of writing a Spirit of the Age which omitted to give an account of Shelley and Keats, but in the title of the book consists his excuse. As it was not his idea to anticipate the decision of posterity but only to sketch the personalities who were in control of the public attention, he passed over the finer poets who were still neglected, and wrote instead about Campbell and Moore and Crabbe. It is sufficient praise for the critic that those of whom he has undertaken to treat stand irreversibly judged in his pages. He is generous toward Campbell and Moore, who were both personally hostile to him; he is scrupulously honest toward Bentham, with whose system he had no sympathy. The concluding pages of his sketch of Southey, in view of that poet's rancor against him, are almost defiant in their magnanimity. His adverse judgments, moreover, are as

permanent as his favorable ones. He pronounced the verdict against the naked realism of Crabbe's poetry, which persons like Jeffrey thought superior to Wordsworth's, and he pricked the bubble of Edward Irving's popularity while it was at its pitch of highest glory. If he was often bitter toward men whom he at other times eulogized, it was in the heat and hurry of journalistic publication in a period when blows were freely dealt and freely taken. If he sometimes censured even Wordsworth and Scott and grew impatient with Byron and Coleridge, it must be remembered that these men of genius had imperfections, and that the imperfections of men of genius are of far greater concern to their contemporaries than to posterity. Time dispels the mists and allows the gross matter to settle to the bottom. We now have Wordsworth in the selections of Matthew Arnold, we read the *Waverley Novels* with Lockhart's *Life of Scott* before us, and we render praise to Coleridge for what he has accomplished since his death. With none of these advantages, Hazlitt's performance seems remarkable enough. No contemporary with the exception of Leigh Hunt displayed as wide a sympathy with the writers of that time, and Hazlitt so far surpasses Hunt in discrimination and strength, that he deserves to be called, strange as it may sound, the best contemporary judge of the literature of his age.

It has already been suggested that much of Hazlitt's appeal as a critic rests on the force of his popular eloquence, so that a brief consideration of his prose is not in this connection out of place. "We may all be fine fellows," said Stevenson, "but none of us can write like Hazlitt." To write a style that is easy yet incisive, lively and at the same time substantial, buoyant without being frothy, [Pg lx] glittering but with no tinsel frippery, a style combining the virtues of homeliness and picturesqueness, has been given to few mortals. Writing in a generation in which the standards of prose were conspicuously unsettled, when the most ambitious writers were seeking an escape from the frozen patterns of the eighteenth century in a restoration of the elaborate artifices of the seventeenth, when quaintness and ornateness were the evidence of a distinguished style, Hazlitt succeeded in preserving the note of familiarity without fading into colorlessness or in any degree effacing his individuality. He cannot be counted among the masters of finished prose, he is as a matter of fact often very negligent, but he developed the best model of an undiluted, sturdy, popular style that is to be found in the English language.

Perhaps an adherence to the eighteenth century tradition of plainness is the most prominent characteristic of Hazlitt's prose. But his plainness is not precisely of the blunt type associated with Swift and Arbuthnot. It is modified by the Gallic tone of easy familiarity, by the ideal deemed appropriate for dignified converse among educated people of the world. His periods are of the simplest construction and they are not methodically combined in the artificial patterns beloved of the eighteenth century followers of the plain style. Not that he altogether neglects the devices of parallelism and antithesis when he wishes to give epigrammatic point to his remarks, but he more generally develops his ideas in a series of easily flowing sentences which are as near as writing can be to "the tone of lively and sensible conversation." It is impossible to match in the English essay such talk as Hazlitt reproduces in his accounts of the evenings at Lamb's room or of his meeting with Coleridge, in which high themes and spirited eloquence find spontaneous and unaffected expression through the same medium as might be employed in a deliberate definition of the nature of poetry. The various sets of lectures are pitched in the same conversational key and are found adequate to conveying a notion of the grandeur of Milton as well as of the familiarity of Lamb.

Those who have praised Hazlitt's simplicity have often given the impression that his prose is a single-stringed instrument, and have failed to suggest the range comprised between the simple hammer-strokes of the essay on Cobbett and the magnificent diapason in which he unrolls the panorama of Coleridge's mind. In both passages there is the same sentence-norm. In the first, the periods, not bound by any connecting words, strike distinctly, sharply, with staccato abruptness. The movement is that of a clean-limbed wrestler struggling with confident energy to pin down a difficult opponent: "His principle is repulsion, his nature contradiction: he is made up of mere antipathies; an Ishmaelite indeed, without a fellow. He is always playing at hunt-the-slipper in politics. He turns round upon whoever is next to him. The way to wean him from any opinion, and make him conceive an intolerable hatred against it, would be to place somebody near him who was perpetually dinning it in his ears. When he is in England, he does nothing but abuse the Boroughmongers, and laugh at the whole system: when he is in America, he grows impatient of freedom and a republic. If he had staid there a little longer, he would have become a loyal and a loving subject of his Majesty King George IV. He lampooned the French Revolution when it was hailed as the dawn of liberty

by millions: by the time it was brought into almost universal ill-odour by some means or other (partly no doubt by himself) he had turned, with one or two or three others, staunch Bonapartist. He is always of the militant, not of the triumphant party: so far he bears a gallant show of magnanimity; but his gallantry is hardly of the right stamp: it wants principle. For though he is not servile or mercenary, he is the victim of self-will. He must pull down and pull in pieces: it is not in his disposition to do otherwise. It is a pity; for with his great talents he might do great things, if he would go right forward to any useful object, make thorough-stitch work of any question, or join hand and heart with any principle. He changes his opinions as he does his friends, and much on the same account. He has no comfort in fixed principles: as soon as anything is settled in his own mind, he quarrels with it. He has no satisfaction but in the chase after truth, runs a question down, worries and kills it, then quits it like vermin, and starts some new game, to lead him a new dance, and give him a fresh breathing through bog and brake, with the rabble yelping at his heels and the leaders perpetually at fault.”

In the other passage the clauses and phrases follow in their natural order, but they are united by the simplest kind of connective device in an undistinguishable stream over which the reader is driven with a steady swell and fall, sometimes made breathlessly rapid by the succession of its uniformly measured word-groups, but delicately modulated here and there to provide restful pauses in the long onward career:

“Next, he was engaged with Hartley’s tribes of mind, ‘etherial braid, thought-woven,’—and he busied himself for a year or two with vibrations and vibratiuncles and the great law of association that binds all things in its mystic chain, and the doctrine of Necessity (the mild teacher of Charity) and the Millennium, anticipative of a life to come—and he plunged deep into the controversy on Matter and Spirit, and, as an escape from Dr. Priestley’s Materialism, where he felt himself imprisoned by the logician’s spell, like Ariel in the cloven pine-tree, he became suddenly enamoured of Bishop Berkeley’s fairy-world, and used in all companies to build the universe, like a brave poetical fiction, of fine words—and he was deep-read in Malebranche, and in Cudworth’s Intellectual System (a huge pile of learning, unwieldy, enormous) and in Lord Brook’s hieroglyphic theories, and in Bishop Butler’s Sermons, and in the Duchess of Newcastle’s fantastic folios, and in Clarke and South and Tillotson, and all the fine thinkers and masculine reasoners of that age—and Leibnitz’s Pre-established Harmony reared its arch above his head, like the rainbow in the cloud, covenanting with the hopes of man—and then he fell plump, ten thousand fathoms down (but his wings saved him harmless) into the hortus siccus of Dissent” etc.

The same style which glistens and sparkles in describing the fancy of Pope rises to an inspired chant with a clearly defined cadence at the recollection of the past glory of Coleridge:

“He was the first poet I ever knew. His genius at that time had angelic wings, and fed on manna. He talked on for ever; and you wished him to talk on for ever. His thoughts did not seem to come with labour and effort; but as if borne on the gusts of genius, and as if the wings of his imagination lifted him from off his feet. His voice rolled on the ear like the pealing organ, and its sound alone was the music of thought. His mind was clothed with wings; and raised on them, he lifted philosophy to [Pg lxiv]heaven. In his descriptions, you then saw the progress of human happiness and liberty in bright and never-ending succession, like the steps of Jacob’s ladder, with airy shapes ascending and descending, and with the voice of God at the top of the ladder. And shall I, who heard him then, listen to him now? Not I! That spell is broke; that time is gone for ever; that voice is heard no more: but still the recollection comes rushing by with thoughts of long-past years, and rings in my ears with never-dying sound.”

It would take much space to illustrate all the notes to which Hazlitt’s voice responds—the pithy epigram of the Characteristics, the Chesterfieldian grace in his advice “On the Conduct of Life,” the palpitating movement with which he gives expression to his keen enjoyment of his sensual or intellectual existence, and the subdued solemnity of his reveries which sometimes remind us that he was writing in an age which had rediscovered Sir Thomas Browne. The following sentence proves how accurately he could catch the rhythm of the seventeenth century. “That we should wear out by slow stages, and dwindle at last into nothing, is not wonderful, when even in our prime our strongest impressions leave little trace but for the moment, and we are the creatures of petty circumstance.” Other passages in the same essay echo this manner only less strikingly: “Life is indeed a strange gift, and its privileges are most mysterious. No wonder when it is first granted to us, that our gratitude, our admiration, and our delight, should prevent us from reflecting on our own nothingness, or from thinking it will ever be recalled. Our first and strongest impressions are borrowed from the mighty scene that is opened to us, and we unconsciously transfer its

durability as well as its splendour to ourselves. So newly found we cannot think of parting with it yet, or at least put off that consideration sine die. Like a rustic at a fair, we are full of amazement and rapture, and have no thought of going home, or that it will soon be night. We know our existence only by ourselves, and confound our knowledge with the objects of it. We and nature are therefore one. Otherwise the illusion, the 'feast of reason and the flow of soul,' to which we are invited, is a mockery and a cruel insult. We do not go from a play till the last act is ended, and the lights are about to be extinguished. But the fairy face of nature still shines on: shall we be called away before the curtain falls, or ere we have scarce had a glimpse of what is going on? Like children, our step-mother nature holds us up to see the raree-show of the universe, and then, as if we were a burden to her to support, lets us fall down again. Yet what brave sublunary things does not this pageant present, like a ball or fête of the universe!"

In Hazlitt's vocabulary there is nothing striking unless it be the scrupulousness with which he avoids the danger of commonplaceness and of pedantry. It is easy to forget that the transparent obviousness of his style was attained only after many years of groping. We may well believe [Pg lxvi] that "there is a research in the choice of a plain, as well as of an ornamental or learned style; and, in fact, a great deal more." Though he did not go in pursuit of the word to the extent of some later refiners of style, he had a clear realization that the appropriate word was what chiefly gave vitality to writing. For this reason he constantly denounced Johnsonese with its polysyllabic Latin words which reduced language to abstract generalization. His own vocabulary is concrete and vivid, and of a purity which makes one wonder how even the Quarterly Review could have ventured to apply to him the epithet "slang-whanger."

In spite of all that may be said in honor of the unadorned style of composition, writers have ever found that even in prose ideas are most forcibly conveyed by means of imagery. Hazlitt, it should be remembered, was an ardent admirer of the picturesque qualities in the prose of Burke, the most brilliant of the eighteenth century. In recalling his first reading of Burke, he tells how he despaired of emulating his felicities. But whether by dint of meditating over Burke or by the native vigor of his fancy, Hazlitt learned to write as boldly and as brilliantly as the great orator. As a rule his rhetorical passages are not deliberately contrived, in the manner for example of his esteemed contemporary De Quincey. His tropes and images rise directly out of his subject or his feelings. Instead of dissecting the qualities of a character or a work of art, he translates its tone and its spirit as closely as language will permit. That is why his criticism, like Lamb's or that of the master of this form, Longinus, is itself first-rate literature, recreating the impression of a masterpiece and sometimes even going beyond it.

Of his picturesque quality examples enough may be found in the present volume, yet one cannot forbear to add a few illustrations at this point. There is his irresistible comparison of Cobbett in his political inconsistency to "a young and lusty bridegroom, that divorces a favorite speculation every morning, and marries a new one every night. He is not wedded to his notions, not he. He has not one Mrs. Cobbett among all his opinions." There is a good deal more than mere wit in the analogy between Godwin's mechanical laboriousness and "an eight-day clock that must be wound up long before it can strike." And there is real grandeur in his description of Fame: "Fame is the sound which the stream of high thoughts, carried down to future ages, makes as it flows—deep, distant, murmuring evermore like the waters of the mighty ocean. He who has ears truly touched to this music, is in a manner deaf to the voice of popularity." In representing the brilliant hues of Restoration comedy, he allows an even freer play to his fancy:

"In turning over the pages of the best comedies, we are almost transported to another world, and escape from this dull age to one that was all life, and whim, and mirth, and humour. The curtain rises, and a gayer scene presents itself, as on the canvas of Watteau. We are admitted behind the scenes like spectators at court, on a levee or birthday; but it is the court, the gala-day of wit and pleasure, of gallantry and Charles II.! What an air breathes from the name! what a rustling of silks and waving of plumes! what a sparkling of diamond ear-rings and shoe-buckles! What bright eyes, (Ah, those were Waller's Sacharissa's as she passed!) what killing looks and graceful motions! How the faces of the whole ring are dressed in smiles! how the repartee goes round! how wit and folly, elegance and awkward imitation of it, set one another off! Happy, thoughtless age, when kings and nobles led purely ornamental lives; when the utmost stretch of a morning's study went no farther than the choice of a sword-knot, or the adjustment of a side-curl; when the soul spoke out in all the pleasing eloquence of dress; and beaux and belles, enamoured of themselves in one another's follies, fluttered like gilded butterflies, in giddy mazes, through the walks of St. James's Park!"

Sometimes, it is true, he allows his spirits to run away with his judgment, although in such instances the manner is so obviously exaggerated as to suggest deliberate mimicry. His account of the tawdry sentimentality of Moore's poetry sounds like pure travesty: "His verse is like a shower of beauty; a dance of images; a stream of music; or like the spray of the water-fall, tinged by the morning-beam with rosy light. The characteristic distinction of our author's style is this continuous and incessant flow of voluptuous thoughts and shining allusions. He ought to write with a crystal pen on silver paper. His subject is set off by a dazzling veil of poetic diction, like a wreath of flowers gemmed with innumerable [Pg lxix]dew-drops, that weep, tremble, and glitter in liquid softness and pearly light, while the song of birds ravishes the ear, and languid odours breathe around, and Aurora opens Heaven's smiling portals, Peris and nymphs peep through the golden glades, and an Angel's wing glances over the glossy scene."

One feature of Hazlitt's style concerning which much has been said both in praise and in blame is his inveterate use of quotations. His pages, particularly when he is in a contemplative mood, are sown with snatches from the great poets, and the effect generally is of the happiest. A line of Shakespeare's or of Wordsworth's, blending with a vein of high feeling or deep reflection, transfigures the entire passage as if by magic. Sometimes the phrase is merely woven into the general texture of the prose without in any way raising its tone, and on occasion some fine poetic expression is vulgarized by being thrown into very common company. It is vandalism to muster a sonnet of Shakespeare's into such a service and it in no way enhances the expressiveness of the passage to say, "A flashy pamphlet has been run to a five-and-thirtieth edition, and thus ensured the writer a 'deathless date' among political charlatans." The fact is that quotations were a part of Hazlitt's vocabulary, which he used with the same freedom as common locutions and with less scrupulous regard for the associations which were gathered about them. He negligently misquoted or wantonly adapted to his purpose, but the reader is willing to pardon the moments of irritation for the numerous delightful thrills which he has provoked by some happy poetic memory "stealing and giving odor" to a sentiment in itself dignified or elevated.

Hazlitt's influence as a critic may be inferred from a summary of his opinions. It was not so much through the infusion of a new spirit in literature that he acted on other minds. Though his criticism owes much of its value to the freshness and boldness of his approach, this temperamental virtue was not something which could be imitated by a less gifted writer. Sainte-Beuve indeed seems to recognize Hazlitt as the exponent of the impetuous and inspired vein in criticism—"the kind of inspiration which accompanies and follows those frequent articles dashingly improvised and launched under full steam. One puts himself completely into it: its value is exaggerated for the time being, its importance is measured by its fury, and if this leads to better results, there is no great harm after all." But though he professed these to be his own feelings as a critic, they were in him so modified by the traditional French moderation and suavity of tone, as well as by a greater precision of method, as to make the resemblance to Hazlitt inconspicuous. It is hard to determine to what extent Hazlitt's individualism is responsible for the lawless impressionism of some later critics, but it is not to be imputed to him as a sin if, in the course of a century, one of his virtues has become exaggerated into a fault. He has but suffered human destiny.

Hazlitt's influence has been wide in guiding the taste of readers and in creating or giving currency to a body of opinions on literature which has found acceptance among critics. If the tributes of Schlegel and Heine to Hazlitt's Shakespearian criticism were insufficient, we have the word of his own countrymen for it that numberless readers were initiated into a proper understanding of Shakespeare by means of his writings. In our own days Mr. Howells has told us that Hazlitt "helped him to clarify and formulate his opinions of Shakespeare as no one else has yet done." Critics no less than readers owe him a large debt. Hazlitt had not been writing many years before his fellow-laborers in literature began to recognize and pay homage to his superior insight. His opinions were quoted as having the weight of authority by those who were friendly to him, the writers in the London Magazine or in the Edinburgh Review; they were appropriated without acknowledgement by the hostile contributors to Blackwood's. Many writers deferred to him as respectfully as he himself deferred to Coleridge and Lamb, even though Byron's respectable friends adjured the noble poet not to dignify Hazlitt in open controversy except by mentioning him as "a certain lecturer." Leigh Hunt was frequently indebted to him, but generally paid the tribute due. Macaulay sometimes assimilated a passage of Hazlitt's to the needs of his own earlier essays. In the essay on Milton his balancing of Charles's political vices against his domestic virtues is strikingly reminiscent of a similar treatment of Southey by the older critic. Personal dislike of Hazlitt, persisting after his death, for a long time prevented a proper respect

being paid to his memory without much diminishing the weight of his influence. The attitude [Pg lxxii] toward him is summed up by a writer whose treatment in general does not err on the side of enthusiasm. Hazlitt, he tells us, is “a writer with whose reputation fashion has hitherto had very little to do—who is even now more read than praised, more imitated than extolled, and whose various productions still interest many who care and know very little about the author.” But this very utterance was on the occasion of the turning of the tide. It was in a review of Hazlitt’s *Literary Remains* which had been introduced by appreciative essays from the pens of Bulwer-Lytton and Thomas Noon Talfourd, the former not a little patronizing, but Talfourd’s excellent in its discrimination of the strength and weakness of Hazlitt. A few years later came the implied compliment of Horne’s *New Spirit of the Age*, which would hardly be worth mentioning were it not that Thackeray in reviewing it took occasion to pay an exquisite tribute to Hazlitt. From this time forth he was not wanting in stout champions, though most people still maintained a cautious reserve in their judgments of him. So sound and penetrating a critic as Walter Bagehot became an earnest convert, and in Bagehot’s writings Mr. Birrell has pointed out more than one resemblance to Hazlitt. James Russell Lowell has not been profuse in his expressions of admiration, but he has probably followed Hazlitt’s track more closely than any other important critic. Many of his essays seem to have been composed with a volume of Hazlitt on the desk before him. There is the essay on Pope with its general correspondence of points and occasional startling parallel of phrase. Hazlitt at the end of his lecture on Pope and Dryden remarks that poetry had “declined by successive gradations from the poetry of imagination in the age of Elizabeth to the poetry of fancy in the time of Charles I,” and Lowell repeats this with some amplification. In the same connection he characterizes Shakespeare, Chaucer, Spenser, and Milton in the sharp epigrammatic manner reminding one of Hazlitt. In the concluding pages of the essay on Spenser we are also kept in a reminiscent mood, till Lowell tells us that “to read him is like dreaming awake,” and at once there flashes upon us Hazlitt’s expression that “Spenser is the poet of our waking dreams.” It is through missionary work like this, not altogether conscious and therefore all the more genuine, that his opinions have been diffused through the length and breadth of English and been incorporated into the common stock. “Gracious rills from the Hazlitt watershed have flowed in all directions, fertilizing a dry and thirsty land”—is the happily turned phrase of Mr. Birrell. If in our own day there are still persons who, looking upon criticism as a severe science, occasionally sneer at him as a “facile eulogist,” those who regard it rather as a gift have seen in him “the greatest critic that England has yet produced.” Wherever the golden mean between these two extremes of opinion may lie, there is no doubt that for introducing readers to an appreciation of the great things in English literature, Hazlitt still remains without an equal.



Sir Leslie Stephen

*English Literature and Society in the Eighteenth Century*

**TO HERBERT FISHER  
NEW COLLEGE, OXFORD**

MY DEAR HERBERT,—I had prepared these Lectures for delivery, when a serious breakdown of health made it utterly impossible for me to appear in person. The University was then good enough to allow me to employ a deputy; and you kindly undertook to read the Lectures for me. I have every reason to believe that they lost nothing by the change. I need only explain that, although they had to be read in six sections, and are here divided into five chapters, no other change worth noticing has been made. Other changes probably ought to have been made, but my health has been unequal to the task of serious correction. The publication has been delayed from the same cause. Meanwhile, I wish to express my gratitude for your services. I doubt, [Pg vi]too, whether I should have ventured to republish them, had it not been for your assertion that they have some interest. I would adopt the good old form of dedicating them to you, were it not that I can find no precedent for a dedication by an uncle to a nephew—uncles having, I fancy, certain opinions as to the light in which they are generally regarded by nephews. I will not say what that is, nor mention another reason which has its weight. I will only say that, though this is not a dedication, it is meant to express a very warm sense of gratitude due to you upon many grounds.

—Your affectionate

LESLIE STEPHEN.

November 1903.

**PUBLISHERS' NOTE**

Owing to the ill-health of Sir Leslie Stephen the proofs have been passed for press by Mr. H. Fisher, Fellow of New College, who read the Lectures at Oxford on behalf of the Author.

**ENGLISH LITERATURE AND SOCIETY IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY**

**I**

When I was honoured by the invitation to deliver this course of lectures, I did not accept without some hesitation. I am not qualified to speak with authority upon such subjects as have been treated by my predecessors—the course of political events or the growth of legal institutions. My attention has been chiefly paid to the history of literature, and it might be doubtful whether that study is properly included in the phrase 'historical.' Yet literature expresses men's thoughts and passions, which have, after all, a considerable influence upon their lives. The writer of a people's songs, as we are told, may even have a more powerful influence than the maker of their laws. He certainly reveals more directly the true springs of popular action. The truth has been admitted by many historians who are too much overwhelmed by state papers to find space for any extended application of the method. No one, I think, has shown more clearly how much light could be derived from this source than your Oxford historian J. R. Green, in some brilliant passages of his fascinating book. Moreover, if I may venture to speak of myself, my own interest in literature has always been closely connected with its philosophical and social significance. Literature may of course be studied simply for its own intrinsic merits. But it may also be regarded as one manifestation of what is called 'the spirit of the age.' I have, too, been much impressed by a further conclusion. No one doubts that the speculative movement affects the social and political—I think that less attention has been given to the reciprocal influence. The philosophy of a period is often treated as though it were the product of impartial and abstract investigation—something worked out by the great thinker in his study and developed by simple logical deductions from the positions established by his predecessors. To my mind, though I cannot now dwell upon the point, the [Pg 3] philosophy of an age is in itself determined to a very great extent by the social position. It gives the solutions of the problems forced upon the reasoner by the practical conditions of his time. To understand why certain ideas become current, we have to consider not

merely the ostensible logic but all the motives which led men to investigate the most pressing difficulties suggested by the social development. Obvious principles are always ready, like germs, to come to life when the congenial soil is provided. And what is true of the philosophy is equally, and perhaps more conspicuously, true of the artistic and literary embodiment of the dominant ideas which are correlated with the social movement. A recognition of the general principle is implied in the change which has come over the methods of criticism. It has more and more adopted the historical attitude. Critics in an earlier day conceived their function to be judicial. They were administering a fixed code of laws applicable in all times and places. The true canons for dramatic or epic poetry, they held, had been laid down once for all by Aristotle or his commentators; and the duty of the critic was to consider whether the author had infringed or conformed to the established rules, and to pass sentence accordingly. I will not say that the modern critic has abandoned altogether that conception of his duty. He seems to me not infrequently to place himself on the judgment-seat with a touch of his old confidence, and to sentence poor authors with sufficient airs of infallibility. Sometimes, indeed, the reflection that he is representing not an invariable tradition but the last new æsthetic doctrine, seems even to give additional keenness to his opinions and to suggest no doubts of his infallibility. And yet there is a change in his position. He admits, or at any rate is logically bound to admit, the code which he administers requires modification in different times and places. The old critic spoke like the organ of an infallible Church, regarding all forms of art except his own as simply heretical. The modern critic speaks like the liberal theologian, who sees in heretical and heathen creeds an approximation to the truth, and admits that they may have a relative value, and even be the best fitted for the existing conditions. There are, undoubtedly, some principles of universal application; and the old critics often expounded them with admirable common-sense and force. But like general tenets of morality, they are apt to be commonplaces, whose specific application requires knowledge of concrete facts. When the critics assumed that the forms familiar to themselves were the only possible embodiments of those principles, and condemned all others as barbarous, they were led to pass judgments, such, for example, as Voltaire's view of Dante and Shakespeare, which strike us as strangely crude and unappreciative. The change in this, as in other departments of thought, means again that criticism, as Professor Courthope has said, must become thoroughly inductive. We must start from experience. We must begin by asking impartially what pleased men, and then inquire why it pleased them. We must not decide dogmatically that it ought to have pleased or displeased on the simple ground that it is or is not congenial to ourselves. As historical methods extend, the same change takes place in regard to political or economical or religious, as well as in regard to literary investigations. We can then become catholic enough to appreciate varying forms; and recognise that each has its own rules, right under certain conditions and appropriate within the given sphere. The great empire of literature, we may say, has many provinces. There is a 'law of nature' deducible from universal principles of reason which is applicable throughout, and enforces what may be called the cardinal virtues common to all forms of human expression. But subordinate to this, there is also a municipal law, varying in every province and determining the particular systems which are applicable to the different state of things existing in each region.

This method, again, when carried out, implies the necessary connection between the social and literary departments of history. The adequate criticism must be rooted in history. In some sense I am ready to admit that all criticism is a nuisance and a parasitic growth upon literature. The most fruitful reading is that in which we are submitting to a teacher and asking no questions as to the secret of his influence. Bunyan had no knowledge of the 'higher criticism'; he read into the Bible a great many dogmas which were not there, and accepted rather questionable historical data. But perhaps he felt some essential characteristics of the book more thoroughly than far more cultivated people. No critic can instil into a reader that spontaneous sympathy with the thoughts and emotions incarnated in the great masterpieces without which all reading is cold and valueless. In spite of all differences of dialect and costume, the great men can place themselves in spiritual contact with men of most distant races and periods. Art, we are told, is immortal. In other words, is unprogressive. The great imaginative creations have not been superseded. We go to the last new authorities for our science and our history, but the essential thoughts and emotions of human beings were incarnated long ago with unsurpassable clearness. When FitzGerald published his *Omar Khayyâm*, readers were surprised to find that an ancient Persian had given utterance to thoughts which we considered to be characteristic of our own day. They had no call to be surprised. The writer of the *Book of Job* had long before given the most forcible expression to thought which still moves our deepest feelings; and Greek poets had created unsurpassable utterance for moods common to all men in all ages.

'Still green with bays each ancient altar stands

Above the reach of sacrilegious hands,'

as Pope puts it; and when one remembers how through all the centuries the masters of thought and expression have appealed to men who knew nothing of criticism, higher or lower, one is tempted to doubt whether the critic be not an altogether superfluous phenomenon.

The critic, however, has become a necessity; and has, I fancy, his justification in his own sphere. Every great writer may be regarded in various aspects. He is, of course, an individual, and the critic may endeavour to give a psychological analysis of him; and to describe his intellectual and moral constitution and detect the secrets of his permanent influence without reference to the particular time and place of his appearance. That is an interesting problem when the materials are accessible. But every man is also an organ of the society in which he has been brought up. The material upon which he works is the whole complex of conceptions, religious, imaginative and ethical, which forms his mental atmosphere. That suggests problems for the historian of philosophy. He is also dependent upon what in modern phrase we call his 'environment'—the social structure of which he forms a part, and which gives a special direction to his passions and aspirations. That suggests problems for the historian of political and social institutions. Fully to appreciate any great writer, therefore, it is necessary to distinguish between the characteristics due to the individual with certain idiosyncrasies and the characteristics due to his special modification by the existing stage of social and intellectual development. In the earliest period the discrimination is impossible. Nobody, I suppose, not even if he be Provost of Oriel, can tell us much of the personal characteristics of the author—if there was an author—of the Iliad. He must remain for us a typical Greek of the heroic age; though even so, the attempt to realise the corresponding state of society may be of high value to an appreciation of the poetry. In later times we suffer from the opposite difficulty. Our descendants will be able to see the general characteristics of the Victorian age better than we, who unconsciously accept our own peculiarities, like the air we breathe, as mere matters of course. Meanwhile a Tennyson and a Browning strike us less as the organs of a society than by the idiosyncrasies which belong to them as individuals. But in the normal case, the relation of the two studies is obvious. Dante, for example, is profoundly interesting to the psychologist, considered simply as a human being. We are then interested by the astonishing imaginative intensity and intellectual power and the vivid personality of the man who still lives for us as he lived in the Italy of six centuries ago. But as all competent critics tell us, the *Divina Commedia* also reveals in the completest way the essential spirit of the Middle Ages. The two studies reciprocally enlighten each other. We know Dante and understand his position the more thoroughly as we know better the history of the political and ecclesiastical struggles in which he took part, and the philosophical doctrines which he accepted and interpreted; and conversely, we understand the period the better when we see how its beliefs and passions affected a man of abnormal genius and marked idiosyncrasy of character. The historical revelation is the more complete, precisely because Dante was not a commonplace or average person but a man of unique force, mental and moral. The remark may suggest what is the special value of the literary criticism or its bearing upon history. We may learn from many sources what was the current mythology of the day; and how ordinary people believed in devils and in a material hell lying just beneath our feet. The vision probably strikes us as repulsive and simply preposterous. If we proceed to ask what it meant and why it had so powerful a hold upon the men of the day, we may perhaps be innocent enough to apply to the accepted philosophers, especially to Aquinas, whose thoughts had been so thoroughly assimilated by the poet. No doubt that may suggest very interesting inquiries for the metaphysician; but we should find not only that the philosophy is very tough and very obsolete, and therefore very wearisome for any but the strongest intellectual appetites, but also that it does not really answer our question. The philosopher does not give us the reasons which determine men to believe, but the official justification of their beliefs which has been elaborated by the most acute and laborious dialecticians. The inquiry shows how a philosophical system can be hooked on to an imaginative conception of the universe; but it does not give the cause of the belief, only the way in which it can be more or less favourably combined with abstract logical principles. The great poet unconsciously reveals something more than the metaphysician. His poetry does not decay with the philosophy which it took for granted. We do not ask whether his reasoning be sound or false, but whether the vision be sublime or repulsive. It may be a little of both; but at any rate it is undeniably fascinating. That, I take it, is because the imagery which he creates may still be a symbol of thoughts and emotions which are as interesting now as they were six hundred years ago. This man of first-rate power shows us, therefore, what was the real charm of the accepted beliefs for him, and less consciously for others. He had no doubt that their truth could be proved by syllogising; but they really laid so powerful a grasp upon him because they could be made to

express the hopes and fears, the loves and hatreds, the moral and political convictions which were dearest to him. When we see how the system could be turned to account by the most powerful imagination, we can understand better what it really meant for the commonplace and ignorant monks who accepted it as a mere matter of course. We begin to see what were the great forces really at work below the surface; and the issues which were being blindly worked out by the dumb agents who were quite unable to recognise their nature. If, in short, we wish to discover the secret of the great ecclesiastical and political struggles of the day, we should turn, not to the men in whose minds beliefs lie inert and instinctive, nor to the ostensible dialectics of the ostensible apologists and assailants, but to the great poet who shows how they were associated with the strongest passions and the most vehement convictions.

We may hold that the historian should confine himself to giving a record of the objective facts, which can be fully given in dates, statistics, and phenomena seen from outside. But if we allow ourselves to contemplate a philosophical history, which shall deal with the causes of events and aim at exhibiting the evolution of human society—and perhaps I ought to apologise for even suggesting that such an ideal could ever be realised—we should also see that the history of literature would be a subordinate element of the whole structure. The political, social, ecclesiastical, and economical factors, and their complex actions and reactions, would all have to be taken into account, the literary historian would be concerned with the ideas which find utterance through the poet and philosopher, and with the constitution of the class which at any time forms the literary organ of the society. The critic who deals with the individual work would find such knowledge necessary to a full appreciation of his subject; and, conversely, the appreciation would in some degree help the labourer in other departments of history to understand the nature of the forces which are governing the social development. However far we may be from such a consummation, and reluctant to indulge in the magniloquent language which it suggests, I imagine that a literary history is so far satisfactory as it takes the facts into consideration and regards literature, in the perhaps too pretentious phrase, as a particular function of the whole social organism. But I gladly descend from such lofty speculations to come to a few relevant details; and especially, to notice some of the obvious limitations which have in any case to be accepted.

And in the first place, when we try to be philosophical, we have a difficulty which besets us in political history. How much influence is to be attributed to the individual? Carlyle used to tell us in my youth that everything was due to the hero; that the whole course of human history depended upon your Cromwell or Frederick. Our scientific teachers are inclined to reply that no single person had much importance, and that an ideal history could omit all names of individuals. If, for example, Napoleon had been killed at the siege of Toulon, the only difference would have been that the dictator would have been called say Moreau. Possibly, but I cannot see that we can argue in the same way in literature. I see no reason to suppose that if Shakespeare had died prematurely, anybody else would have written Hamlet. There was, it is true, a butcher's boy at Stratford, who was thought by his townsmen to have been as clever a fellow as Shakespeare. We shall never know what we have lost by his premature death, and we certainly cannot argue that if Shakespeare had died, the butcher would have lived. It makes one tremble, says an ingenious critic, to reflect that Shakespeare and Cervantes were both liable to the measles at the same time. As we know they escaped, we need not make ourselves unhappy about the might-have-been; but the remark suggests how much the literary glory of any period depends upon one or two great names. Omit Cervantes and Shakespeare and Molière from Spanish, English, and French literature, and what a collapse of glory would follow! Had Shakespeare died, it is conceivable perhaps that some of the hyperboles which have been lavished upon him would have been bestowed on Marlowe and Ben Jonson. But, on the whole, I fancy that the minor lights of the Elizabethan drama have owed more to their contemporary than he owed to them; and that, if this central sun had been extinguished, the whole galaxy would have remained in comparative obscurity. Now, as we are utterly unable to say what are the conditions which produce a genius, or to point to any automatic machinery which could replace him in case of accident, we must agree that this is an element in the problem which is altogether beyond scientific investigation. The literary historian must be content with a humble position. Still, the Elizabethan stage would have existed had Shakespeare never written; and, moreover, its main outline would have been the same. If any man ever imitated and gave full utterance to the characteristic ideas of his contemporaries it was certainly Shakespeare; and nobody ever accepted more thoroughly the form of art which they worked out. So far, therefore, as the general conditions of the time led to the elaboration of this particular genus, we may study them independently and assign certain general causes. What Shakespeare did was to show more fully the

way in which that form could be turned to account; and, without him, it would have been a far less interesting phenomenon. Even the greatest man has to live in his own century. The deepest thinker is not really—though we often use the phrase—in advance of his day so much as in the line along which advance takes place. The greatest poet does not write for a future generation in the sense of not writing for his own; it is only that in giving the fullest utterance to its thoughts and showing the deepest insight into their significance, he is therefore the most perfect type of its general mental attitude, and his work is an embodiment of the thoughts which are common to men of all generations.

When the critic began to perceive that many forms of art might be equally legitimate under different conditions, his first proceeding was to classify them in different schools. English poets, for example, were arranged by Pope and Gray as followers of Chaucer, Spenser, Donne, Dryden, and so forth; and, in later days, we have such literary genera as are indicated by the names classic and romantic or realist and idealist, covering characteristic tendencies of the various historical groups. The fact that literary productions fall into schools is of course obvious, and suggests the problem as to the cause of their rise and decline. Bagehot treats the question in his *Physics and Politics*. Why, he asks, did there arise a special literary school in the reign of Queen Anne—a marked variety of human expression, producing what was then written and peculiar to it? Some eminent writer, he replies, gets a start by a style congenial to the minds around him. Steele, a rough, vigorous, forward man, struck out the periodical essay; Addison, a wise, meditative man, improved and carried it to perfection. An unconscious mimicry is always producing countless echoes of an original writer. That, I take it, is undeniably true. Nobody can doubt that all authors are in some degree echoes, and that a vast majority are never anything else. But it does not answer why a particular form should be fruitful of echoes or, in Bagehot's words, be 'more congenial to the minds around.' Why did the *Spectator* suit one generation and the *Rambler* its successors? Are we incapable of giving any answer? Are changes in literary fashions enveloped in the same inscrutable mystery as changes in ladies' dresses? It is, and no doubt always will be, impossible to say why at one period garments should spread over a hoop and at another cling to the limbs. Is it equally impossible to say why the fashion of Pope should have been succeeded by the fashion of Wordsworth and Coleridge? If we were prepared to admit the doctrine of which I have spoken—the supreme importance of the individual—that would of course be all that could be said. Shakespeare's successors are explained as imitators of Shakespeare, and Shakespeare is explained by his 'genius' or, in other words, is inexplicable. If, on the other hand, Shakespeare's originality, whatever it may have been, was shown by his power of interpreting the thoughts of his own age, then we can learn something from studying the social and intellectual position of his contemporaries. Though the individual remains inexplicable, the general characteristics of the school to which he belongs may be tolerably intelligible; and some explanation is in fact suggested by such epithets, for example, as romantic and classical. For, whatever precisely they mean,—and I confess to my mind the question of what they mean is often a very difficult one,—they imply some general tendency which cannot be attributed to individual influence. When we endeavour to approach this problem of the rise and fall of literary schools, we see that it is a case of a phenomenon which is very often noticed and which we are more ready to explain in proportion to the share of youthful audacity which we are fortunate enough to possess.

In every form of artistic production, in painting and architecture, for example, schools arise; each of which seems to embody some kind of principle, and develops and afterwards decays, according to some mysterious law. It may resemble the animal species which is, somehow or other, developed and then stamped out in the struggle of existence by the growth of a form more appropriate to the new order. The epic poem, shall we say? is like the 'monstrous efts,' as Tennyson unkindly calls them, which were no doubt very estimable creatures in their day, but have somehow been unable to adapt themselves to recent geological epochs. Why men could build cathedrals in the Middle Ages, and why their power was lost instead of steadily developing like the art of engineering, is a problem which has occupied many writers, and of which I shall not attempt to offer a solution. That is the difference between artistic and scientific progress. A truth once discovered remains true and may form the nucleus of an independently interesting body of truths. But a special form of art flourishes only during a limited period, and when it decays and is succeeded by others, we cannot say that there is necessarily progress, only that for some reason or other the environment has become uncongenial. It is, of course, tempting to infer from the decay of an art that there must be a corresponding decay in the vitality and morality of the race. Ruskin, for example, always assumed in his most brilliant and incisive, but not very conclusive, arguments that men ceased to paint good pictures simply because they ceased to be good men. He did not proceed to prove that the moral

decline really took place, and still less to show why it took place. But, without attacking these large problems, I shall be content to say that I do not see that any such sweeping conclusions can be made as to the kind of changes in literary forms with which we shall be concerned. That there is a close relation between the literature and the general social condition of a nation is my own contention. But the relation is hardly of this simple kind. Nations, it seems to me, have got on remarkably well, and made not only material but political and moral progress in the periods when they have written few books, and those bad ones; and, conversely, have produced some admirable literature while they were developing some very ugly tendencies. To say the truth, literature seems to me to be a kind of by-product. It occupies far too small a part in the whole activity of a nation, even of its intellectual activity, to serve as a complete indication of the many forces which are at work, or as an adequate moral barometer of the general moral state. The attempt to establish such a condition too closely, seems to me to lead to a good many very edifying but not the less fallacious conclusions.

The succession of literary species implies that some are always passing into the stage of 'survivals': and the most obvious course is to endeavour to associate them with the general philosophical movement. That suggests one obvious explanation of many literary developments. The great thriving times of literature have occurred when new intellectual horizons seemed to be suddenly opening upon the human intelligence; as when Bacon was taking his Pisgah sight of the promised land of science, and Shakespeare and Spenser were making new conquests in the world of the poetic imagination. A great intellectual shock was stimulating the parallel, though independent, outbursts of activity. The remark may suggest one reason for the decline as well as for the rise of the new genus. If, on the one hand, the man of genius is especially sensitive to the new ideas which are stirring the world, it is also necessary that he should be in sympathy with his hearers—that he should talk the language which they understand, and adopt the traditions, conventions, and symbols with which they are already more or less familiar. A generally accepted tradition is as essential as the impulse which comes from the influx of new ideas. But the happy balance which enables the new wine to be put into the old bottles is precarious and transitory. The new ideas as they develop may become paralysing to the imagery which they began by utilising. The legends of chivalry which Spenser turned to account became ridiculous in the next generation, and the mythology of Milton's great poem was incredible or revolting to his successors. The machinery, in the old phrase, of a poet becomes obsolete, though when he used it, it had vitality enough to be a vehicle for his ideas. The imitative tendency described by Bagehot clearly tends to preserve the old, as much as to facilitate the adoption of a new form. In fact, to create a really original and new form seems to exceed the power of any individual, and the greatest men must desire to speak to their own contemporaries. It is only by degrees that the inadequacy of the traditional form makes itself felt, and its successor has to be worked out by a series of tentative experiments. When a new style has established itself its representatives hold that the orthodoxy of the previous period was a gross superstition: and those who were condemned as heretics were really prophets of the true faith, not yet revealed. However that may be, I am content at present to say that in fact the development of new literary types is discontinuous, and implies a compromise between the two conditions which in literature correspond to conservatism and radicalism. The conservative work is apt to become a mere survival: while the radical may include much that has the crudity of an imperfect application of new principles. Another point may be briefly indicated. The growth of new forms is obviously connected not only with the intellectual development but with the social and political state of the nation, and there comes into close connection with other departments of history. Authors, so far as I have noticed, generally write with a view to being read. Moreover, the reading class is at most times a very small part of the population. A philosopher, I take it, might think himself unusually popular if his name were known to a hundredth part of the population. But even poets and novelists might sometimes be surprised if they could realise the small impression they make upon the mass of the population. There is, you know, a story of how Thackeray, when at the height of his reputation he stood for Oxford, found that his name was unknown even to highly respectable constituents. The author of *Vanity Fair* they observed, was named John Bunyan. At the present day the number of readers has, I presume, enormously increased; but authors who can reach the lower strata of the great lower pyramid, which widens so rapidly at its base, are few indeed. The characteristics of a literature correspond to the national characteristics, as embodied in the characteristics of a very small minority of the nation. Two centuries ago the reading part of the nation was mainly confined to London and to certain classes of society. The most important changes which have taken place have been closely connected with the social changes which have entirely altered the limits of the reading class; and with the changes of belief which have been cause and effect of the most conspicuous

political changes. That is too obvious to require any further exposition. Briefly, in talking of literary changes, considered as implied in the whole social development, I shall have, first, to take note of the main intellectual characteristics of the period; and secondly, what changes took place in the audience to which men of letters addressed themselves, and how the gradual extension of the reading class affected the development of the literature addressed to them.

I hope and believe that I have said nothing original. I have certainly only been attempting to express the views which are accepted, in their general outline at least, by historians, whether of the political or literary kind. They have often been applied very forcibly to the various literary developments, and, by way of preface to my own special topic, I will venture to recall one chapter of literary history which may serve to illustrate what I have already said, and which has a bearing upon what I shall have to say hereafter. One of the topics upon which the newer methods of criticism first displayed their power was the school of the Elizabethan dramatists. Many of the earlier critics wrote like lovers or enthusiasts who exalted the merits of some of the old playwrights beyond our sober judgments, and were inclined to ignore the merits of other forms of the art. But we have come to recognise that the Elizabethans had their faults, and that the best apology for their weaknesses as well as the best explanation of their merits was to be found in a clearer appreciation of the whole conditions. It is impossible of course to overlook the connection between that great outburst of literary activity and the general movement of the time; of the period when many impulses were breaking up the old intellectual stagnation, and when the national spirit which took the great Queen for its representative was finding leaders in the Burleighs and Raleighs and Drakes. The connection is emphasised by the singular brevity of the literary efflorescence. Marlowe's Tamburlaine heralded its approach on the eve of the Spanish Armada: Shakespeare, to whom the lead speedily fell, had shown his highest power in Henry IV. and Hamlet before the accession of James I.: his great tragedies Othello, Macbeth and Lear were produced in the next two or three years; and by that time, Ben Jonson had done his best work. When Shakespeare retired in 1611, Chapman and Webster, two of the most brilliant of his rivals, had also done their best; and Fletcher inherited the dramatic throne. On his death in 1625, Massinger and Ford and other minor luminaries were still at work; but the great period had passed. It had begun with the repulse of the Armada and culminated some fifteen years later. If in some minor respects there may afterwards have been an advance, the spontaneous vigour had declined and deliberate attempts to be striking had taken the place of the old audacity. There can be no more remarkable instance of a curious phenomenon, of a volcanic outburst of literary energy which begins and reaches its highest intensity while a man is passing from youth to middle age, and then begins to decay and exhaust itself within a generation. A popular view used to throw the responsibility upon the wicked Puritans who used their power to close the theatres. We entered the 'prison-house' of Puritanism says Matthew Arnold, I think, and stayed there for a couple of centuries. If so, the gaolers must have had some difficulty, for the Puritan (in the narrower sense, of course) has always been in a small and unpopular minority. But it is also plain that the decay had begun when the Puritan was the victim instead of the inflictor of persecution. When we note the synchronism between the political and the literary movement our conception of the true nature of the change has to be modified. The accession of James marks the time at which the struggle between the court and the popular party was beginning to develop itself: when the monarchy and its adherents cease to represent the strongest current of national feeling, and the bulk of the most vigorous and progressive classes have become alienated and are developing the conditions and passions which produced the civil war. The genuine Puritans are still an exception; they only form the left wing, the most thorough-going opponents of the court-policy; and their triumph afterwards is only due to the causes which in a revolution give the advantage to the uncompromising partisans, though their special creed is always regarded with aversion by a majority. But for the time, they are the van of the party which, for whatever reason, is gathering strength and embodying the main political and ecclesiastical impulses of the time. The stage, again, had been from the first essentially aristocratic: it depended upon the court and the nobility and their adherents, and was hostile both to the Puritans and to the whole class in which the Puritan found a congenial element. So long, as in Elizabeth's time, as the class which supported the stage also represented the strongest aspirations of the period, and a marked national sentiment, the drama could embody a marked national sentiment. When the unity was broken up and the court is opposed to the strongest current of political sentiment, the players still adhere to their patron. The drama comes to represent a tone of thought, a social stratum, which, instead of leading, is getting more and more opposed to the great bulk of the most vigorous elements of the society. The stage is ceasing to be a truly national organ, and begins to suit itself to the tastes of the unprincipled and servile courtiers, who, if they are not more immoral than their predecessors, are without the old heroic

touch which ennobled even the audacious and unscrupulous adventurers of the Armada period. That is to say, the change is beginning which became palpable in the Restoration time, when the stage became simply the melancholy dependent upon the court of Charles II., and faithfully reflected the peculiar morality of the small circle over which it presided. Without taking into account this process by which the organ of the nation gradually became transformed into the organ of the class which was entirely alienated from the general body of the nation, it is, I think, impossible to understand clearly the transformation of the drama. It illustrates the necessity of accounting for the literary movement, not only by intellectual and general causes, but by noting how special social developments radically alter the relation of any particular literary genus to the general national movement. I shall soon have to refer to the case again. I have now only to say briefly what I propose to attempt in these lectures. The literary history, as I conceive it, is an account of one strand, so to speak, in a very complex tissue: it is connected with the intellectual and social development; it represents movements of thought which may sometimes check and be sometimes propitious to the existing forms of art; it is the utterance of a class which may represent, or fail to represent, the main national movement; it is affected more or less directly by all manner of religious, political, social, and economical changes; and it is dependent upon the occurrence of individual genius for which we cannot even profess to account. I propose to take the history of English literature in the eighteenth century. I do not aim at originality: I take for granted the ordinary critical judgments upon the great writers of whom so much has been said by judges certainly more competent than myself, and shall recall the same facts both of ordinary history and of the history of thought. What I hope is, that by bringing familiar facts together I may be able to bring out the nature of the connection between them; and, little as I can say that will be at all new, to illustrate one point of view, which, as I believe, it is desirable that literary histories should take into account more distinctly than they have generally done.