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THE
AFTERNOON LECTURES ON
ENGLISH LITERATURE.

DELIVERED IN THE THEATRE OF THE MUSEUM OF
INDUSTRY, S. STEPHEN'S GREEN, DUBLIN,
IN MAY AND JUNE, 1863.



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AFTERNOON LECTURES ON LITERATURE.

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P R E F A C E.

THE special value of lectures has been well shown for some years past in the history and success of large associations in our cities and towns, consisting for the most part of young men whose daily pursuits shut them out from the ordinary means of mental improvement. Experience has shown that books are often laid aside by those to whom oral teaching is very acceptable ; and while the libraries of Mechanics' Institutions have been comparatively neglected, the evening lectures of " Young Men's Societies " have been thronged. No city has witnessed more happy results from these lectures than Dublin ; and they have been eagerly listened to by many for whom they were not exactly designed, while large numbers have had reason to regret that the hour and the place have been such as practically to exclude them.

In May 1863 it occurred to the minds of a few lovers of literature that a course of lec-

tures might advantageously be organized, which should be accessible to many who, for various reasons, are debarred from the meetings of the "Metropolitan Hall." Some of the conditions of the projected course of lectures were as follows:—They were to be given on important subjects connected with English Literature, and by the best lecturers whose aid could be secured. It was considered essential that the new lectures should be delivered in some suitable building of unsectarian or neutral character, on the south side of the city, and at an hour when ladies could conveniently attend, and when the daily occupations of persons engaged in the law courts and the public offices should have ceased. A Committee was formed for the purpose of carrying out these objects; and the Lord Chancellor of Ireland at once permitted his name to be prefixed as Chairman, and also signified his intention of presiding as frequently as possible at the lectures.

One of the main difficulties in the way was surmounted through the kind exertion of Sir Robert Kane, who forwarded, and cordially supported, an application to the central authorities for the use of the theatre of the Museum of Industry. A favourable reply at once placed at the disposal of the Committee the most suitable edifice in Dublin for their purpose—perhaps

the only one exactly fulfilling the conditions already referred to. The season was far advanced, but promises of assistance were so readily given, that the Committee felt justified in issuing a programme of a short course of lectures. The time did not admit of any long preparation, or of any arrangement as to the sequence of subjects ; but, notwithstanding these drawbacks, the Committee believe that the six lectures of the course are fully worthy of the reputation of the lecturers, and also believe that the publication of the lectures in a collected form will not only be gratifying as a memento to all who listened to them, but will be acceptable to the general public.

The present volume is therefore issued in the belief that it will not only be an addition of some value to the literary criticism of the year, but will also assist in gaining for the metropolis of Ireland a more distinct position in literature than she has hitherto attained. The publication will serve to show that the studies pursued in this portion of the Empire are likely to leave permanent results, and will afford an earnest of other, and yet riper, fruits to be gathered in time to come.

R. DENNY URLIN, }
R. H. MARTLEY, } *Hon. Secs.*





THE INFLUENCE OF NATIONAL
CHARACTER ON ENGLISH
LITERATURE.

BY THE

REV. JAMES BYRNE, M.A.,

FORMERLY FELLOW, AND DONNELLAN LECTURER,

TRINITY COLLEGE, DUBLIN.





THE
INFLUENCE OF NATIONAL CHARACTER
ON ENGLISH LITERATURE.

THE last and noblest of the sciences is the science of human society, which has for its object to investigate the causes of all that human society is and of all that it accomplishes. There are no inquiries which can rival these in dignity, for their subject is nothing less than the growth of the spirit of our species, and the progress of man's dominion over nature; none which can rival them in utility, for their established conclusions when translated into the language of practice would be rules for the advancement and amelioration of society in every direction. It is in the spirit of such a science that I would propose to make some general observations on the literature which has been given to the world in the English language. Not that I can hope within the limits of this lecture, even were it possible in the present state of our knowledge, to establish with regard to the causes of our literature anything which could deserve the name of science. But it may be within the

scope even of a single lecture to catch such a general view of the main features of our national character on the one hand, and of our literature on the other, as by their correspondence to each other will indicate a connection of cause and effect, although that connection may not be scientifically demonstrated or reduced to its simple laws.

The people of this United Kingdom have sprung from two sources distinct in race and in character. The great mass of the English and of the Lowland Scotch are of a Germanic origin; the majority of the Irish, Welsh, and Highland Scotch of a Celtic origin. It is necessary, therefore, in order to form a distinct idea of the character of the national mind, that we should notice the distinctive features of these two elements. We may, however, leave out of account the Welsh and the Highland Scotch, as these have never possessed such a distinct national existence, as is necessary to maintain a distinct national character strong enough to make itself felt in English literature.

In general, then, it may be stated that Germanic thought is slow, Celtic thought quick. Whence this difference has arisen it is not possible to say with any degree of assurance. All that can be said is that the southern or tropical races of men think quickly, the northern slowly, and that it is probable that the character of the Celt was formed and fixed under southern influences, that of the German in the north of Europe. For it would appear from the earliest accounts which we have of the Celts, that they had brought with them from their original Asiatic abodes a matured national

life, of which the German tribes, though sprung from the same original stock, were comparatively destitute. However this may be, the fact seems to be unquestionable that Germanic thought is slow, Celtic thought quick. I have said that the Irish people are principally Celts. The same may be said of the French. And whether we compare French or Irish thought with Germanic thought we shall find that this is the most obvious and fundamental distinction between them. I may mention one indication of this which will also illustrate it. The Germanic nations accentuate their words strongly, the French hardly at all. Now the accentuation of the words indicates the strength of each separate thought, and this is proportional to the attention which is devoted to it. The Germanic nations, therefore, dwell on the separate thoughts which the words express; the French pass lightly and quickly over them. It may be observed also that the French accentuate or at least dwell on the end of a sentence or clause. The true Irish also pass quickly over the parts of a sentence and dwell with an acuteness of voice on its conclusion, though with them this is obscured by the opposite principle of intonation, which is proper to the English language. This peculiarity arises from the quickness of the Celt. He thinks the elements of a fact with quickness and facility, so that the attention devoted to the fact is less engrossed by the parts, and is rather expended, after the parts have been thought, in contemplating the whole. Germanic thought is expended on the parts, by reason of its slowness in conceiving them, and it has less force left to contem-

plate the whole. We shall find that this exactly corresponds to one great characteristic difference between Germanic and Celtic literature, namely, that the former elaborates the parts more but has less sense of general effect than the latter. But I mention it here merely as an indication of the slowness of Germanic thought and the quickness of Celtic.

We must, however, take into account another quality of thought, before we can have a distinct idea of the character of mind from which our literature has sprung. Some minds prefer to occupy themselves with external things, the material objects of sense about them; others take pleasure in musing on their own ideas. I will call the former *outer* minds, the latter *inner*, and it will be found important to observe this distinction in forming an estimate of national character. Among the Germanic nations, the Anglo-Saxon had an outer mind, the German has an inner. Among the Celtic nations, the French have an outer mind, the Irish an inner. Perhaps, but it is only an hypothesis, these national differences arose from the different degrees in which the respective nations were occupied with industry or with adventure when their national character was forming. For there was nothing in primitive industry to furnish matter for musing thought; it fixed the mind on external things. It was adventure with all its stirring memories and unlimited hopes which turned thought inward, and made it luxury to muse. It would seem, I think, from the account which Tacitus gives of the German tribes, that those which occupied the lowlands of the north-west of Germany, and also

those in Sweden, were comparatively settled, peaceful, and, judging by their affluence, industrious. Those who occupied the higher lands of the South were more unsettled and adventurous; indeed, the vast forests must have made them hunters and kept up this unsettled character. The Anglo-Saxons came from the more settled Northern or low German stock, and as soon as they entered England their adventures ceased. They had indeed to fight their way continually with an ever-present enemy till they had effectually driven the Britons from England into Wales, but this was a practical necessity needing constant action, unlike the wild and occasional adventures in unknown regions, which furnished endless matter for romantic musings and romantic tales. When once the Britons were expelled, the Saxons had nothing to do but to repel the encroachments of strangers and of each other; and during their long settlement of about 500 years prior to the Norman invasion, they seem to have acquired a particularly outer and material character. Of this, two indications may be mentioned, their sensuality and their want of the sagas or tales which preserved the memory of heroic adventures. In this they differed from the Scandinavian, whose life of bold adventure wherever his ship would carry him maintained a spirit of adventure which was fed continually by musings on the glories of the past and the chances of the future. Now the Lowland Scotch have come principally from the Scandinavian stock, and they have a more inner mind than the Anglo-Saxon. From the same bold and hardy stock, the Scotch probably derived that rude boldness and inde-

pendent strength, which we hear so plainly in their national accent, and may trace so clearly in their literary productions. Still more inner is the modern German mind, which has come from the stock of the Southern or High German, who was always adventurous, and in whom this character was kept up by the boundless field for adventure opened to him in the rich provinces of the Roman Empire. Nothing can be more clearly marked than the inner character of the German mind compared with the outer character of the Anglo-Saxon. The former loves speculation, the latter practice; the former would evolve truth out of the depths of his own consciousness, the latter from external observation; the former is never content with facts till he can convert them into principles, nor the latter with principles till he can convert them into facts. The Scotchman is in these respects intermediate between the German and the Anglo-Saxon.

A similar distinction within the Celtic family separates the Irish from the French. The Irish are descended from the oldest off-shoot of the Indo-European stock, the first wave of emigration which passed over Europe from that centre. If, as I have conjectured, the Celtic character was formed in a Southern climate, it is vain to look for any trace of the causes, which may have given to the Irish mind an inner character, to the French an outer. Those causes had acted before the Gael first, and after him the Gaul had left their Asiatic abodes. But that this distinction between the Irish and French is real and fundamental will appear, I think, to any one who will analyse their respective characters.

The Frenchman, though quick, is most definite; his whole mind is concentrated in the glance which he directs to an object, and in which he takes in its external relations. Hence his clearness of thought, his quickness and precision of contrivance. No object, however, which does not admit of this definite conception, which requires that we should muse over it and ponder it that we may think of it at all, is suited to his genius. If we add to this that the Frenchman wants sensibility, and is deficient in strength and depth of principle, we shall have before us the image of a quick outer character of mind.

The Irishman on the other hand has somewhat of an inner musing nature. The outer object often fails to engage his full attention. Hence his ideas are apt to be indefinite, because liable to be mingled with another train of thought not directly connected with them. Hence his carelessness, his inattention to appearance, his disregard of consequence, all implying a want of concentrated attention to his actions. If, however, his mind be fully concentrated, he is capable of more depth of thought than the Frenchman. He loves the mystery on which he can muse; hence his fondness for religious thought. His sensibility is strong and impulsive. He is capable of principles which centuries of persecution cannot shake: witness his devotion to his religion and his country. It may be observed that the Irish, Scotch, and German, all have a national music, and that this is in accordance with their inner character. For music has less in it that is external to ourselves than any of the arts. Its productions have no existence but in our

sensations, and they cease with these. It is therefore of an inner nature, and is most congenial to this character of national mind.

Such, then, are the main features of the national character. The English indeed received from the Norman conquest an infusion of French character, which gave to the English mind a certain amount of French quickness and outerness, and made it more bright and objective than it was originally. Still, the Anglo-Saxon is the main element in it, and the English mind may still be described as slow and outer, the Scotch slow, more inner, and more forcible—the Irish quick and inner.

Let us turn now from the national mind to its literature. In doing so we turn from the ordinary many to the gifted few, from the multitude to its chiefs; for it is from genius that literature springs. But if so, how can we understand its origin or hope to discover the influences which affect it? Who can account for genius and explain its action? Who can enter that sanctuary and divulge its mysteries?—that sacred temple on whose altar the fires of invention, of sentiment, of passion are ever burning, within whose ample bounds the harmonies of nature are ever sounding, where the universe is mirrored, yea, created anew, where truth and beauty are ever honoured with rapturous worship. None can tell what passes there, but he in whose soul it has been erected by his God, and he can give but a poor and partial account of all he sees and all he feels. Yet while we acknowledge the peculiar and individual character of genius, and do homage to its exaltation

above all around it, we should greatly err if we supposed it to be so elevated, as to be unaffected by the multitude in the midst of whom it arises. On the contrary, genius is commonly most susceptible of social influences, enters with deepest sympathy into human fellowship, throws itself with least reserve into the human life that is busy around it; and, above all, is nurtured by the hopes of the applause of its fellows in whose hearts it aspires to be enthroned. No doubt there have been cases in which genius has by unfavourable circumstances been doomed to isolation, in which it has had to rely with faith on the consciousness of its own powers in the midst of depreciation and contempt, to look out into the past for fellowship with departed genius, and into the future for the glorious vision of universal fame. In such cases the marks of local and national character are in a corresponding degree absent from its works, and these sound as if they had issued from some central spirit of all humanity. But in general, genius will not thrive unless its own tendencies and impulses are in harmony with those of society around it. It is most mighty when seconded by them; or rather, I should say, when it adds its own impulse to theirs so as to shoot far beyond them, but still in the same direction. When it thinks and feels in unison with its fellows it is strengthened by their sympathy, and elevated by their applause; and we may expect to find that its greatest works reveal this unison, and are consequently marked with the features of the national mind. Let us see whether this is so in fact in the most conspicuous monuments of our own literature. In

making this comparative survey it will be necessary to consider separately the contributions which have been made to our literature by England, Scotland, and Ireland; and with regard to the first it may be convenient to state generally the characteristic excellences and defects of the literature, and then prove and illustrate these general statements by a more special appreciation of particular authors.

What then are the general features of English genius?

In the first place I would say, that English genius is characterised by strong and distinct conception of detail. There is no literature in the world which shows such a sense of character as that which has issued from the English mind, none in which all the minute traits and many sides of individual man are photographed with such life and truth. Nor is this distinctness of delineation confined to man. Nature too is pictured with similar accuracy and vividness. This distinct conception of detail reveals a slow and careful habit of mind. It corresponds to that distinct accentuation of each word which I have already noticed as distinguishing Germanic from Celtic speech. It corresponds also to the careful and truthful elaboration of details which distinguishes the early Germanic schools of painting. The mental character revealed in all these cases is the same, namely, that which does not readily pass from one object to another, but devotes more time to each, and accomplishes its processes slowly. Thought which thus dwells on its object goes beneath the surface, and hence arises much of that vividness with which English genius portrays man and nature. There is much

more in it than mere accuracy. In every trait there is character or sentiment or passion, and it is the force and truthfulness of these subjacent spiritual elements in which English excellence consists. In its strong and distinct conception of detail the English mind mingles feeling with the object on which it dwells in thought, but as it thus spiritualises nature, it still keeps close to nature. A slow and inner mind as it dwelt on the object would by the feelings which the object called forth be led away from it into musings of its own which would impair the distinctness of the impression, but the English mind is slow and outer. The object is paramount in its attention, the feeling is thus kept true and made definite, so as to animate the object with poetic life without either distorting its form or reducing its substantial reality to a mere abstraction.

Hence arise the peculiar force and richness of English imagination, for when the sentiment or passion associated with an object is strong because it has been dwelt on, and definitely appropriate because the object has been paramount in the combination, an image is furnished which can revive the feeling with almost all the brightness of its original colours.

Hence also arises another prominent feature of English genius, its humour. The incongruities which are ludicrous hardly exist at all outside human nature. Human character is the great field which produces them, and humour therefore naturally accompanies a strong and penetrating sense of character.

It is probable that these excellences of English genius derived some of their brightness and vividness from the

infusion of French influence at the Norman conquest. Yet it would appear that this influence was not very considerable. For still the characteristic excellences of English genius are quite different from those of Celtic genius, and the strong points of the Celt are the weak ones of the Englishman. I allude to fancy, wit, and sense of general effect. Fancy and wit connect thoughts with each other by superficial analogies, and they are therefore natural to the quick mind which passes lightly over objects, noticing principally their superficial and external qualities. Sense of general effect, too, needs, as I have already observed, that the parts shall be thought quickly and lightly in order that they may be comprehended in one connected whole. In these powers accordingly Celtic genius excels by reason of its quickness, English genius fails by reason of its slowness.

There was indeed a long period during which French genius dominated over English. When the Restoration brought with it a sceptical contempt for every form of deep thought and feeling, and the glory and splendour of Louis XIV. captivated the imagination of Europe, then it was inevitable that French taste should rule in England. But it seems strange that the influence should have lasted so long. In Johnson's time indeed French influence was very much on the wane, but still from Dryden to Cowper and Burns, taste was wonderfully uniform, and the character of English genius wonderfully different from what it had been before or has been since. It was due probably to the continuance of the reaction against the Commonwealth and the Puritans, which continued to involve as it did at the Restoration

a dislike for deep thought and earnest feeling of every kind. The Monarchy and the Church and the Universities were by reason of their position of direct antagonism, the strongholds of this sentiment, and the nation went with these leaders, for never was there a more exact adaptation than that which exists between the English mind and the English Church and Monarchy. During most of this period wit was the general name for genius, elegance was the quality most prized, and nothing was admired but what was light in thought and harmonious and correct in language. The characteristic qualities of English genius in its pure development are to be sought outside this period; and as my time is limited, I shall pass over it all, so far as England is concerned, confining my observations to authors who have flourished before or since; and amongst them noticing only the *poets* who have had the greatest influence in giving a character to English poetry.

Now in passing thus abruptly from the early to the late poets, we are conscious of a great change in the subjects of poetry, and in the mode of their treatment; and as this might suggest the idea, that the national genius had in the interval, in some degree, changed its character, it is necessary to make one or two observations on what seems to be a natural order of progressive change in the subjects of poetry.

Literary genius, on its first awaking into life, finds society so unsettled that every man has to hold himself ready to repel hostile violence by force, and to defend his rights with his life. At such a period, it is action which moves genius with the deepest interest.

Afterwards society becomes more settled. The civil power quells this internal war, but the spirit of man is not yet reclaimed. He still possesses all his native irregularity of disposition and passion, and is to be seen in all his natural variety of character. The principal interest which is fit to engage the energies of genius is then found, not in action, but in man, the actor.

At a subsequent period the spirit of man itself is reduced to comparative order, and as the turmoil of passion is quelled, and the need for violent exertion ceases, sentiment and feeling assume a finer character. Civil order gives personal security and enables man to expatiate over the face of nature with a mind free to admit all its gentle influences, and to mingle the varied feelings of his own chequered existence with its changing aspects. Then the mild reflection which it gives of his joys and sorrows has power to awaken the inspirations of genius, and nature, the scene of man's life, enters as a main element into his literary creations. The sense of human character and passion in this period becomes weaker, and these need the *account* of stirring incident to bring them out. Such incident of itself suggests the character to which it may be due, or the feelings which it must inspire, and thus helps the delineation of them. It is natural, then, that English literature should follow this order, and successively idealize action, man, and nature, without at all indicating therein any change in the character of the national genius. Whether that character has continued permanent may appear when we have endeavoured briefly to estimate the characteristic genius of some of the principal English poets of

the periods most pure from foreign influence. It is not to be expected that each one should possess every English excellence; for it is seldom granted to a single mind to hold dominion at once over all the faculties of the soul. The question to be asked is, whether the excellences and defects of each author, in his peculiar province, exhibit the features of the national mind.

This is most distinctly the case with Chaucer, the great father of English song. Character and humour are his perfections. I say perfections, for there is surely nothing in literature more absolutely free from defect than his sketches of the pilgrims to Canterbury, nothing which seems more incapable of increase than the humour of the characters, and of most of their tales. Indeed, the character and humour that is in Chaucer is of such a full and complete kind that you feel as if you could never take it all in, and appreciate all its excellence. This arises from the multitude of characteristic traits, each one of which is necessary to the complete idea of the character, and from the multitude of humorous incongruities which in the humorous characters are involved between each of these traits and the rest. The English particularity of thought and fidelity to nature appears strikingly in the idealization that there is in Chaucer's characters. Each one is the embodiment of an ideal, but of a very particular ideal. He does not draw the most perfect specimen of a soldier, but of a knight, a squire, and a yeoman; not of an ecclesiastic, but of a monk, a friar, and a parson; and in drawing these, though he imagines each as perfect, he never goes outside the special characteristics which

are peculiar to each in order to give them a perfection which might as well belong to another. There is here not only the slow mind which dwells with attention on its object so as to take a deep impression, but the outer mind which keeps true to the object, and whose thoughts are strictly controlled by it. Alas! many of Chaucer's tales are so immodest that they cannot be read for very shame. But they are not all so, and in some of them, as well as in others of his poems, there are excellences of a more poetical nature than character and humour. There is not, indeed, much strength of genuine passion. This was not Chaucer's province. His works are not of that kind that the absence of it is a defect. The passion of the "Knight's Tale" is, indeed, conventional, but it was quite appropriate, and no doubt intended, that the conventional sentiments of chivalry should be the governing element of the tale.

But, though there may not be much passion, there is true and touching tenderness, as in Griselde's parting with her children and her meeting with them again. There is fine imagination, too, as in the descriptions of the temples of Mars, Venus, and Diana, in the "Knight's Tale," and the sacred rites which are performed in them. And, though much is borrowed, yet the poet's own imagination is still seen active throughout.

Chaucer exhibits, in a remarkable degree, one power which peculiarly corresponds to the character of English genius, the power of allegory. At first sight this might seem to be identical with fancy, a faculty which I have ascribed rather to the Celtic mind than to the English. But fancy, at least in the sense in which I

use the term, consists in associating thoughts together through the medium of a superficial resemblance which does not enter deeply into the essential nature of either. Such is the fancy which sparkles throughout the poetry of Moore. Take, for example, the following, from his description of the early love of Zelica and Azim, in the "Veiled Prophet :"—

" There, on the banks of that bright river born,
The flowers that hung above the wave at morn,
Bless'd not the waters as they murmur'd by
With holier scent and lustre than the sigh
And virgin-glance of first affection cast
Upon their youth's smooth current as it pass'd."

The flowers looking into the stream in all their brightness, and exhaling over it their fresh morning fragrance, are a beautiful image of the virgin glance and sigh of first affection, over the smooth current of youth. But they do not represent youthful love itself, they do not picture to us what it is, the resemblance reaches not beyond the surface. Now this, which fancy does not, it is the very purpose of allegory to do. It takes a mental principle, or an ideal existence, and gives to it a bodily shape and substance, which shall represent its essential nature. For this it is necessary to dwell in thought on the ideal object in order to form a full and strong conception of it; and this needs a slow and careful habit of mind. And as ideal objects are apt to be shadowy and indistinct, there is further needed a mind which will be faithful to its object, and not mingle with it any musings or abstractions of its own, one which by its outer tendency can transport the

ideal into the material. Allegory, then, of this full and minute kind, belongs properly to the slow outer mind, and Chaucer's success in this province in his "Vision of the Temple of Fame" is in harmony with the character of English thought.

Indeed, the first conspicuous effort of English genius which preceded the works of Chaucer, the "Vision of Piers Ploughman," was an allegory too, characterized apparently by English humour and shrewdness of observation. And the great poet Spenser who succeeded him after a long interval has exhibited in the same form all the highest gifts of English genius.

How various and interesting the incidents, how picturesque and beautiful the forms in which Spenser, in his "Fairy Queen," embodies the various moral principles, and the vicissitudes of their history. What purity and elevation of moral feeling, what profound wisdom and deep view of human life is in the substance and meaning of his Allegory. That inner substance is the element in his immortal poem which is most peculiarly his own. The external form in which it is embodied is due in a considerable degree to that Romance literature, which, created by the Gallic genius of the Trouvères for the entertainment of their Germanic masters, gave a French brightness of objectivity to the deep motives and pleasures of Germanic adventure, and so was qualified to fire the southern genius of Tasso and Ariosto, as well as to strike deep into the English soul of Spenser. We are to look for the individual character of his genius, not so much to this romantic element which was the common property of Europe, as

to the peculiar treatment which it received in his hands, and to all that spiritual story which is entirely his own. Judging him in this way, we may observe that though Spenser is so admirably successful in the image or outer part of the allegory, yet his thoughts are more occupied throughout with the inner meaning. This indicates such a slowness of mind as gives depth, because it loves to dwell on an object till it takes it all in, with all its meaning. The quick mind keeps nearer to the surface; and, accordingly, if we compare the "*Fairy Queen*," or that other eminently English allegory, the "*Pilgrim's Progress*," with Swift's admirable allegory, the "*Tale of a Tub*," we shall find this characteristic difference illustrated. Swift was by birth and early education an Irishman, and he wrote during the period when French influence was predominant. We may expect in him the superficial characters of the quick mind, and accordingly it may, I think, be said with truth that Swift thinks rather more of the image than of the meaning; the humour lies rather in Peter, Martin, and John; Spenser and Bunyan fix their interest rather in Truth, Temperance, Faith, Hope.

This, indeed, is essentially connected with that which most strikes one in Spenser, his wonderful and admirable elaboration of details. Every feature in his characters, every movement in their adventures is full of deep spiritual meaning. Now this is not at all a necessary or universal quality in allegory. It is the treatment of allegory which we should expect from the slow and outer English mind, but we should not expect it nor do we find it in Swift's allegory. His

types are not of this minute kind. They are all principal incidents in his story, and it may be added that that story moves rapidly, and the characters are sketched with a free hand in a few touches. But in Spenser every detail is fully brought out. His is a Germanic picture, but how beautiful are the colours with which it glows! What richness of that poetic sentiment with which English genius by reason of its depth and truth can animate nature! What beauty of language, what admirable propriety of epithet, what harmony of verse! True, the very fulness of the spiritual meaning, and a certain deficiency of human interest arising from the predominance of the inner substance of the allegory over its outer form, makes it perhaps heavy to read through and regard as a whole. True it is also that as I have observed of English genius in general, there is perhaps in Spenser's genius a deficient sense of general effect. Indeed there is properly speaking no totality either in the "*Fairy Queen*," or in Chaucer's "*Canterbury Tales*," for the original plan of the whole was in both cases an unimportant element in the work and was never carried out. Yet with all this, Spenser is one of the brightest glories of modern literature; and England may well be proud of him, for his genius was emphatically English. And after that dark period which separated him from Chaucer, after all the desolation of the wars of the Roses, and all the deep trials of the Reformation, he rose on England, as if, to use an image of his own,

"At last, the golden orientall gate
Of greatest heaven gan to open fayre,

And Phæbus, fresh as brydegrome to his mate
Came duncing forth, shaking his deawie hayre,
And hurl'd his glistering beams through gloomy ayre."

That baptism of blood and fire through which England passed at the Reformation raised both Protestant and Catholic to a newness of life. That mighty working of heart and mind with which the nation then heaved throughout, went through every man and woman, and tried what manner of spirits they were of. What a preparation was this for that period of our literature in which man, the great actor of the drama of life, was about to appear on the stage. It was to be expected that the drama should then start into life, and that human character should speak from the stage with a depth and life never known before; but who could have imagined Shakespeare? It is needless for me to dwell on the characteristics of his genius, as they have been taken for the subject of one of these lectures by one much more competent to do them justice. I will content myself with observing, that if sense of character and richness of humour, if depth of feeling and fervour of imagination, if minuteness of detail and living fidelity to nature be English excellences, then the genius of Shakespeare was in strict conformity to English thought. If deficiency of true wit, and a certain inattention to that general effect which is produced by a regular and skilful composition of the whole, be English defects, then Shakespeare is the very type of English genius. Such a type, however, as those ideas which Plato imagined in the Divine mind to be the divine models of this lower world.

In Milton, on the contrary, there is a striking absence of English characteristics. There is no elaboration of details, no deficiency of general effect. His characters indeed are admirably drawn, and his descriptions shine with the light of genius, but we are struck rather with the poetry and truthfulness of the whole than with the life and fidelity of the particular touches. He had in common with all the born kings of human thought, the divine gifts by which they hold their universal and eternal dominion over the soul of man, but in him those gifts were specialized not as national but as individual. There was always something in Milton, or in his circumstances, which separated him from his fellows. Rusticated and flogged at college, in after years deserted by his wife, later still,

“ Fallen on evil days and evil tongues,
And with darkness and with danger compass'd round,”

his genius grew alone, and it was natural that, affected by present influences only of a hostile kind, it should assume that severe strength and awful sublimity which distinguished him, and should choose a subject which would lead his spirit forth in solitary grandeur to regions where human footsteps never trod, to see and tell

“ Of things invisible to mortal sight.”

And now passing, as I said I should do, over all the middle period of English literature, I must touch very briefly the character of English poetry of the present time, which may be said to owe its origin to Wordsworth's vehement protest against the conventionalities into which the poetry of the preceding period had sunk in its decay. The nature of that protest is revealed

in the very excesses to which it sometimes went. It was a recurrence from the customary generalities of literature, to the realities around us in their utmost particularity. It hardly contemplated an idealization of nature, but commanded us to listen to her very voice and we should hear sweetest music, to behold her very face and we should be blessed with most glorious visions. But for this it was necessary to give her more than a passing notice. Man cannot see the robe of grandeur and beauty with which he has himself invested nature, by the unconscious mingling of all past feeling with the scenes of his various life; he cannot hear the echo which she gives of the voices of forgotten years whispering to him all of best, and purest, and tenderest that has ever passed within him; unless he gives her a heedful attention, and, without abstracting or generalizing, receives faithfully the very impress of herself upon his soul. But this heedful faithful attention is but another expression for those characters of English thought which I have so often mentioned. Accordingly there is no nation which worships nature with such devotion as the English. What else brings them on their annual pilgrimages to Switzerland, as zealously performed as those of the Mahomedan to Mecca, but to pay their homage to Nature, where in Alpine valleys and snowy heights all the faithful recognize her shrine. But if this love of nature be a specially English sentiment then the poetry of nature must be acknowledged to be essentially English in its character. It was not confined to Wordsworth. Byron too went forth and pondered in this English fashion on whatever of grandest Europe had to show, and made it all sound with his own pas-

sion. But Wordsworth was the most faithful to nature. He was her very inspired prophet, and his inspiration was heightened by two causes. First, the time had long come in that order of poetic subjects which I have mentioned, for the poetry of nature, and the sentiment was moving in the heart of man, and was ready to burst into song, when Wordsworth first gave it distinct utterance. Secondly, the disappointment and scepticism into which he was thrown by the issue of the French revolution drove him to nature for the renewal of his faith and the revival of his hope. This entire devotion caused him to have little sense of human character, and indeed constituted so entirely the purpose of his poetry that there was not much room for any characteristic English excellence or defect beyond what it implied. But it gave his genius such power that we still feel the effect of its impulse.

Tennyson has the same earnest faithful devotion to nature. But this is not his only English characteristic. Indeed, I know not any more striking indication of the permanence of the national character of England than the similarity of Tennyson's genius to Spenser's. We can hardly venture to compare Tennyson with such a great master of song as Spenser. Perhaps, had he been born in a more poetical age, his genius might have assumed dimensions more comparable to Spenser's; but, as it is, we can see in Tennyson the same minute truthfulness of detail, and even love of allegory, similar beauty and sweetness of poetic sentiment breathing through his ideas a breath of life, similar beauty of language, and exquisite choice of words. All this bespeaks that English sensibility and elaboration of details

which we see under the same forms in Spenser. Indeed, with regard to language, it may be observed, that as there is a certain quaintness in Tennyson's style, so Spenser's language was rather antique even in his own time. Perhaps both were led to this by their delicate, fastidious taste in words. When language is a little antique, or a little unusual in its construction, it is less soiled by the associations of vulgar use, the ideas are conveyed, perhaps, with greater purity from the poet's mind, perhaps in a form more suited to their dignity, when that form is somewhat peculiar, or the language somewhat consecrated by age. Tennyson is not a poet of wit or fancy. So far from moving on the surface, his meaning sometimes goes so deep that it is impossible to discover it. It must be confessed also that the general effect of his poems is sometimes not good. What an odd story, for example, the story of "The Princess" is, notwithstanding the unrivalled beauty of many parts of the poem, than which there is nothing more exquisite in English poetry. But this only fixes more clearly on his genius the character of English thought.

Having thus traced that character down the main current of our literature which has come from England, let us consider, in the same point of view, the most prominent features of the contributions made to our literature by Scotland and Ireland.

Scotch thought is somewhat more forcible and more inner than English thought. The difference between them, however, is not so great but that Scotch thought might harmonize with, and nurture by its sympathy, a genius whose individual tendencies were strictly Eng-

lish in their nature. This, at least, was possible before Scotch genius had fully developed itself and established its own school of thought and feeling. At such a period, English genius, already fully developed in its characteristic form, would act powerfully on the literary taste and tendencies of Scotland, interfering with the free growth of whatever in these was peculiar to themselves; and it was therefore to have been expected that the first great Scotch contributor to English literature would display a genius not strongly marked with specially Scottish characteristics. This appears to me to be the case with Thomson, whose genius drew its inspiration from that faithful love of nature which I have described as harmonizing completely with English thought. What Thomson owed to his Scotch birth was his freedom from the repressing influence of that aversion to slow brooding thought which then prevailed in England, but from which Scotland was free by reason of her deep and spiritual religion. The prevalent French taste in England was due in a great degree to the reaction in England against that Puritanism to which English thought was unsuited; but there was no such reaction in Scotland. On the contrary, the Scotch nation had stamped the features of its strong and inner genius on its deep and spiritual religion, and in it had so fixed them that they could never be altogether lost. While, therefore, in London, wit and elegance were playing on the surface of things, most pleased with watching their own feats and listening to their own music, in Edinburgh a deeper and slower style of thought prevailed. There Thomson was drinking in Nature's beauty, and her own sweet voice was sounding

through his thoughtful soul, soon to break forth in that poetry of nature which, in love and fervour, was unequalled in England till near a century later.

Soon after Thomson's time, Scotch genius assumed more distinctly its own proper forms. A number of writers appeared who countenanced and encouraged each other's Scottish tendencies, and established an independent development of genius in harmony with the national character of thought. A band of philosophers arose who will ever be venerated amongst the profoundest teachers of mankind in mental and social science. The depth and strength of their thoughts and reasonings marked out Scotland as a land of thoughtful forcible minds, while the direction which their investigations took pointed to the inner world of mind and morals as their appropriate sphere. This same slowness of thought favoured research, and this innerness of thought gave strength to that tenacity of historic memories from which I have conjectured that it originally sprang. Thus history was congenial to Scottish genius; and it is characteristic of Scotch thought that history should have flourished along with philosophy in that constellation of genius in which Robertson, Hume, Smith, and Reid, shed on their country unfading glory.

This tenacity of historic memories may be observed in another form in Scott, whose genius was nurtured by them. Scott had no remarkable power of delineating character, though he could draw forcibly a single passion or peculiarity. His eye for nature was hardly such as to see her in the glory and beauty of poetic

vision, but all his faculties were quickened and rendered more poetical by that spirit of the past which of itself raised his thoughts from the actual to the ideal. That this power of reviving the spirit of the past was the predominant element of his genius may not only be seen in his works, but inferred by either tracing the growth of that genius in his own history, or observing the effects which it left behind it. From Scott's earliest years his genius fed on tales of the past and Scotch tradition, and grew into conformity with these; and the sum-total of the effects of his works was to generate a mediæval, high-church, monarchical spirit, and to surround Scotland with such a halo of romance that it became all classic ground. Thus, to appropriate and renew the spirit of the past belongs only to a genius which has the depth and thoroughness that slowness gives, and that power of seizing strongly a mental fact or habit which implies strength and innerness.

But of all Scotland's sons Burns was the most gifted with the sacred fire of poetry; and as in general the highest development of the spirit of man can be attained only when its native tendencies are in harmony with external influences, so was Burns the very impersonation of the mind of his countrymen, endowed, however, with a spirit whose vital action was poetic rapture, and which was tuned by the hand of Nature herself to join in symphony with all her voices. "I should have taken him," said Scott, "had I not known what he was, for a very sagacious country farmer of the old Scotch school. There was a strong expression of sense and shrewdness in all his lineaments. The eye alone,

I think, indicated the poetical character and temperament. It was large and of a dark cast, which glowed (I say literally *glowed*) when he spoke with feeling or interest. I never saw such another eye in a human head, though I have seen the most distinguished men of my time." That expression of sense and shrewdness reveals to us the same strong deliberate thought which gives to Scotchmen in general their characteristic soundness of judgment. It was this quality in Burns, refined and sublimed as in a superior nature, which enabled him to see and judge for himself the facts of man and nature, so that when he came from the plough into the society of some of the greatest and most cultivated men of his time, he exchanged his thoughts with theirs with a perfect freedom from embarrassment or affectation. It was this same quality which gave such truth to his ideas, bringing his spirit into actual contact with the reality of things instead of being satisfied with the reflections of them in the conventionalities and generalities of literature. To this same slow, strong quality of thought we may attribute that graphic force and racy life which animate the poetry of Burns and show the observant habit of his mind, and that rich humour which belongs to him who looks closely into things as they are, and sees their incongruities. This quality at least gave that particular form to his poetic genius; but how are we to understand that genius itself? That large, glowing, flashing eye, where has it fed its fire? It is the spirit within which lights it. But what kind of communion does that spirit hold with the spirit of the universe to exercise and maintain its far-darting

energies? Were I to be asked what was the leading element in the genius of Burns, what was the very centre of his strength, I should answer that it was his vivid sense of the various states of the spirit of man, a faculty similar in kind to that which I have already noted in Scott, but far greater in intensity. Scott could appropriate to himself and awaken in others the spirit of the past, but Burns dwelt as a mighty wizard with all the spirits which sway the human soul as his familiars. In this consists the excellence of "Scots wha hae wi' Wallace bled," that the very spirit of patriotic heroism is in the verse and in the words. Similar is the excellence of that most brilliant of all the emanations of his genius, "The Jolly Beggars." The very spirit of vagabond riot is in every line; an unclean spirit, indeed, but with a life and power which none but the very highest creative genius could impart, and possessing withal a courage and independence, and even a constancy of love, which mingle in such strange yet truthful union with beggary and drunkenness and lust. So it is with all his poetry. The very spirits of love, of lust, of friendship, of independence, of drunkenness, of religious adoration, of universal sympathy, are all evoked in turn by this mighty magician in all their life and power, bringing with them "airs from heaven or blasts from hell." This powerful sense of the various passions and sentiments of human nature expressed itself by its own sheer force in language which seems as if smitten by the strength of the thoughts to receive and return an exact impression of them. Such seems to me to be the essential nature of the genius of Burns. Slow, forcible, and

inner, his spirit thought deeply and observed closely, and, in the world of passion and sentiment, bore unlimited sway. The defects of Scotch genius are to a considerable degree similar to those of English genius, and I shall therefore not dwell on them.

Passing from Scotch to Irish genius we find ourselves in quite a different province of human thought. Yet the difference is not so great as that which exists between English and Irish thought. Irish genius is the exact opposite of English, the English mind being slow and outer, the Irish quick and inner. Hence the excellences and defects of each are to a great degree the opposites of those of the other. We shall, however, make a truer estimate if we lay aside this antithesis, and consider by themselves first the excellences and then the defects of Irish genius, illustrating each by an example. As the Irish mind is inner, it is fitted for speculation, and as it is quick and can consequently take a rapid view of a great number of particulars, it is fitted for comprehensive speculation. From these qualities also another characteristic power of the national genius arises. In consequence of his inner or musing tendency, the Irishman is ever ready when his interest or his feelings are aroused to start a train of thought which, by reason of its inner character, has close affinity for all the internal resources of his spirit, and draws them all forth to give it colour and warmth, while his quickness supplies him with ready utterance. Hence the Irish mind is fitted for eloquence; and if we combine these two powers of eloquence and comprehensive speculation, we have the character of the

genius of Edmund Burke, the wisest orator on the roll of fame, and whose genius Ireland may claim as all her own. Such comprehensive speculation is truest wisdom, for the very spirit of inductive philosophy is that instead of poring over particular facts, in order by force of study to divine their causes, we should make nature tell her own secrets, and so survey phenomena that their causes shall become apparent on the surface. But Burke combined with this another power, which by itself would have constituted greatness; that inner Irish eloquence which is most potent over the soul, for it comes saturated with feeling, glowing with passion, decked with the glorious colours of imagination, and every kindred sense in the spirits of men is awakened by its voice to enforce its dictates. Such has been the genius of the glorious company of Irish orators. I need not mention their names. We are Irishmen, and we know them all.

But in that province of speculation for which our national mind is fitted by its innerness, it possesses by reason of its quickness another aptitude besides comprehensiveness. The quick mind passes with facility from one idea to another, the slow mind cannot accomplish this transition so easily, and is therefore apt in some degree to mix the two ideas together. The quick mind therefore has the advantage in clearness; and when an inner tendency leads it to the mysteries of spirit and life, it excels in acuteness. Acute speculation then belongs to Ireland, and we may claim Berkeley as our own. True his blood was English, but his life and all the early influences which give to

genius its special character were Irish, and how diligently he surrendered himself to their education appears from his having been a fellow of Dublin College.

Leaving the field of speculation for that of lighter literature, we may observe that the Irish mind is fitted by that quickness which passes lightly over the surface of things and looks on them from the outside, to perceive those slight and superficial resemblances with which wit and fancy play. By far the grandest wit in the English language is Swift's, and he was an Irishman by birth, and early life, and education. I call it grand, for there is an excessive brightness and keenness in it which makes one wonder. His laugh sounds as if it came from a region about that of ordinary men. Nearer to our own times we have under a different form of genius an illustration of Irish wit and fancy in the poetry of Moore, which, above all else in the language, is their most charming inspiration.

Yet far more deeply, more touchingly beautiful, is the inspiration of the inner quality of our national thought in Goldsmith, who was an Irishman in every feature of its character. In Goldsmith the inner sentiment may almost be said to preponderate over the outer perception. No wonder then that, with this quality joined to rapidity of thought, he should be in society particularly liable to our national failing, blunder. But when his genius was concentrated on an object how it bathed it in pathos and humour. Indeed this union of apparently opposite sentiments is peculiarly Irish. It reminds one of the mingled gaiety and sadness of Irish music; and as we read the "Deserted Village," or the

"Vicar of Wakefield," the poet transforms us into the very image of "Erin," with "the tear and the smile in her eyes." Goldsmith had two excellences proper to the quick mind and akin to comprehensiveness. One of these was versatility. *Nilil tetigit quod non ornavit.* The poetry of simple life, comedy, the essay, the novel, prose composition adapted to every kind of subject, in all he was the greatest of his day. The other excellence was that sense of general effect which I have marked as defective in English genius. How fine, for example, is the general conception of the story in the "Vicar of Wakefield." Virtue involved in a continued succession of increasing calamities, but preserving throughout its purity and dignity and peace; thrown at length into the foulness of the prison, and reduced there to the very anguish of death, but even there purging the pollution by its angelic influence, and still triumphant over sorrow and sin. How well the whole story gradually rises to this grand climax. There is a completeness in it which may also be recognized in the parts. Each chapter has this finish as a whole, and often ends with a pointed sentence which reminds one of that final emphasis that is heard in Celtic intonation.

But we have been looking exclusively at the bright side of Irish genius, contemplating its excellences without noting its defects. These also correspond to the character of our national mind. Because Irish thought is quick, it is liable to be superficial. Because it is quick and inner, it is liable to be incorrect. From this cause, too, our oratory is liable to start aside from its proper purpose and to indulge in flights of its own in which

that purpose is forgotten, and its language and ideas cease to be exactly suited to the very subject which it is treating. Traces of these defects may be observed in most of our great authors; and as it is most salutary to study our own peculiar failings, I shall notice one or two examples of them in the order in which I have mentioned them. Nor need such a study wound our national pride. A fair estimate of the real merits of our great men can never take them down from that high pre-eminence which the unprejudiced judgment of mankind has assigned to them; and they will be doubly identified as Irish if their defects as well as their excellences are found to be those to which there is a natural tendency in Irish thought. I confess, however, the subject is a distasteful one, and therefore I shall be brief.

We must admit that there was a superficiality in Goldsmith's genius. The characters in the "*Vicar of Wakefield*," for instance, are superficial in a very strong sense of the word. There is a flatness in them. We are not enabled to go round them and see them under different aspects. They were not formed in the author's mind with that multiplicity of constituent principles which would show differently under different circumstances. Hence also the humour, though so genuine, partakes of the same character. We could tell why we laugh at Mrs. Primrose and the family riding to church, but we could not tell with the same precision why we laugh at the fancied grandeur of Shakespeare's Malvolio. In the former case the incongruity is between the act and the serious simplicity of the family, for the family are in truth little more than an embodi-

ment of simplicity. In the latter case the incongruity is between the imagined state, and all that Malvolio is ; but it would not be easy to tell all that Malvolio is. There is a similar want of the substance of reality in the description of the second family life after Dr. Primrose left the vicarage. This is too perfect a picture of pastoral beauty and happiness, and needs some other coexisting elements to give it truth and substance. But I need not multiply instances.

Moore's poetry has no doubt a superficial character. His delineations of strong and deep passion are not really strong and deep. We are shown the outside of it in the manifestations which conventionally belong to it, and it is lighted up with many a bright gleam of fancy ; but the depths are not disclosed ; we hear no voice which troubles the fountains of feeling within ourselves, because it is the sound of the deep tumult in another.

I know not that there is any incorrectness in Moore, but it surely may be seen in Goldsmith. We must be conscious of it in the style in which all the characters speak in the "*Vicar of Wakefield*." The author gives them all his own perfect pointed style. But this mistake is felt most strongly when Doctor Primrose narrates his own simplicity with Goldsmith's admirable humour, as if he were conscious of its ludicrousness. There are also improbabilities in the story which must strike every impartial reader ; but I have already said more than is agreeable to myself, or, I fear, to my audience.

The faults which I have mentioned as those to which Irish oratory is liable may be observed in most of our

orators. We know that Burke often spoke not so much for his audience as for himself; his spirit roaming over the subject in all its length and breadth, and taking in kindred subjects in his view for the sake of the lofty pleasure of such a comprehensive survey. All the treasures of his knowledge were opened, and the pictures of his imagination displayed, for the pure delight of thus soaring in spirit, while his audience was unmoved, listless, and weary.

Curran's glorious flights, too, were often private excursions of his own spirit, sometimes not very intimately connected with his subject, seldom very well fitted to persuade his hearers.

But, while we thus venture for our own instruction to observe the defects of Irish genius, we will not honour it the less. As Swift was the first, or equal to the first, genius of his day, so Goldsmith and Burke were incontestably the greatest of theirs, and though faults may be noted in Goldsmith's "*Vicar of Wakefield*," its beauties so predominate that there is scarcely a work in the language which has such charm for the heart. His comedies and his poems are scarcely open to adverse criticism.

If I have succeeded in showing a correspondence between the character of a nation's mind and the literature which it produces, perhaps I may be allowed to add two observations in conclusion.

I said in the commencement that the conclusions of science, when translated into the language of practice, become the rules of art; and so any glimpse which we may catch of the genesis of literature must furnish hints as to the way in which its development may be pro-

moted. Now, unless I am altogether mistaken, Irish literature must grow in conformity to the Irish mind. We must, therefore, freely and independently follow our own impulses, look at nature and man in our own way, and give to our thoughts an expression of our own. Never was there such need for originality as now. The predominant character of English literature is now essentially English, and English genius is the very opposite of Irish. If we slavishly follow English models, and try to adopt English modes of thought and feeling, we shall never attain to excellence.

But, secondly, every day brings us into more intimate union with the English nation, and subjects us more to English influence; and we need to have the independence of our thought maintained by a counter-vailing Irish influence. This can be obtained only by the spread of intellectual cultivation throughout the entire people, which shall qualify them to appreciate and honour Irish genius. In past time, alas! this cultivation was all but confined to the Protestant minority, and on it it was thrown to maintain the honour of Irish genius. But those days have passed away. So far as the civil Government is concerned, a blind zeal for religion no longer shuts out the light of knowledge from the people. Oh! that amongst ourselves that zeal were more enlightened, that it had more faith in truth, and beauty, and goodness, whatever may be their forms, and would welcome them as sisters, even though unattended by a particular religious guide. So might we hope, from the united mind of the nation, an impulse to its genius which should carry it again to that highest excellence which it has already repeatedly attained.



THE CLASSICAL AND ROMANTIC
SCHOOLS OF ENGLISH
LITERATURE.

AS REPRESENTED BY SPENSER, DRYDEN, POPE,
SCOTT, AND WORDSWORTH.

BY WILLIAM RUSHTON, M.A.

PROFESSOR OF HISTORY AND ENGLISH LITERATURE,
QUEEN'S COLLEGE, CORK.





THE
CLASSICAL AND ROMANTIC SCHOOLS OF
ENGLISH LITERATURE.

IT is easy to condemn desultory reading, and to urge the importance of system. Generalities of this kind are readily admitted, for we all know that we ought to be systematic. Practically, however, we find, if we wish to keep pace with the literature of the day, that there is a tendency in our reading to become desultory, and our best resolutions are often insufficient to make us read less and think more. Still, one thing is indispensable, namely, to acquire sound general principles of criticism; for, as in a judicious collection of paintings, where the works of the great masters are classified, those of the Italian school, for example, on the one side, those of the Flemish upon the other, and where the pictures are arranged progressively in order of time, it is possible, in a few weeks, to learn more about art, than by rambling for months among the galleries of the Continent; so, if we can arrange our authors in groups or classes, we shall study to much greater profit, even though we read less in quantity, because, by this

method, comparisons and contrasts will suggest themselves. I propose, on this occasion, to consider two of the great schools in English literature; but you will allow me to premise a brief observation upon the terms *classical* and *romantic*.

The term *classical*, which literally means belonging to a class, was restricted to the first class, and was originally applied to the best Greek and Latin authors, whence it was extended to the Greek and Latin writers generally. When we speak of the classical school in English literature, we refer to those writers who have formed their style upon the ancient models, and, for the sake of distinction, we might call it the Revived Classical, or the Neo-Classical school.

The word *romance* was first given to those languages which were derived from the *Lingua Romana*, a corrupt form of the Latin, from which we have the *French*, *Italian*, and *Spanish*. The term was then extended to the literature which appeared in those languages. We shall see that narrative heroic poems, arising in France, were called romances of chivalry, whence the term "romantic" was applied to similar literature in Italy, Spain, and other countries. I hold that what the epos or epic poem was in the heroic ages of Greece, the romance was in the heroic ages of Europe; for, though there are points of diversity between them, they have much in common: they are both narrative heroic poems. But as the romances were full of wonderful enterprises and marvellous adventures, the word "romantic" came to signify "extravagant," and, in a bad sense, "fantastic," or

“untrue.” One morning, a friend, calling upon M. Guizot, found him reading the “History of the Consulate and the Empire,” by M. Thiers. “You see, my friend,” said Guizot, “that I sometimes read romances;” so, too, in common conversation, we speak of romances in opposition to veritable history. Therefore, as the term “romantic” might cause ambiguity, and is often employed in an unfavourable sense, I was almost tempted to substitute the word “medieval,” or “European ;” but, on the other hand, as the term has been sanctioned by the critics, and as it is quite correct, when properly understood, it seemed better to make no change.

I shall first consider the origin and progress of romantic literature; then the revival of classical learning and its consequences; and then endeavour to trace the influence of the two schools on English literature.

First, I would call your attention to the fact, that there arose in Europe, during the middle ages, an epic and a dramatic poetry, quite independently of the classical epos and drama. It is to be observed that France preceded Italy in the development of literary activity; and that, while in the south of France the poetry of the troubadours partook of a lyric character, the poetry of northern France was decidedly epic, in the form of romances of chivalry. We may divide these chivalric romances into two classes:—

(1). Those which refer to the exploits of Arthur, son of Uther Pendragon, the British hero who defended Britain against the Saxon invaders.

(2). Those relating to Charlemagne and his Paladins.

The original source of the Arturian romances was the fanciful history of the Britons by Geoffrey of Monmouth, a Welshman who flourished in the reign of King Stephen. The excitement produced by his work was very great, and the subject was warmly taken up by the Norman and Anglo-Norman poets. Wace, in particular, who wrote in the reign of Henry II, added the legends of the "Round Table," with its feasts and games, of which Geoffrey makes no mention. The fashionable literary world at that time, as distinguished from professed scholars, was engaged in listening to stories concerning Arthur and his knights of the Round Table, who were extolled as models of valour, chivalry, and courtesy. Whilst Arthur and the magician Merlin claimed admiration as examples of courage or skill, the names of Sir Lancelot, Sir Gawain, and Sir Percival, were as familiar as Hamlet or Othello to ourselves.

Chivalry was the soul of this literature. "It represented," says Sismondi, "the ideal world such as it existed in the imaginations of the romance writers." Its essential character was devotion to women and to honour. Some have traced the origin of this chivalrous devotion to women in the manners of the Germanic races; others in the influence of Christianity, which, from the first, rendered peculiar honour to the female sex. But, be the cause what it may, we find in romantic literature a tone of higher love and deeper devotion than we can trace in the Greek and Latin writers. Some of the ancients, especially among the Romans, systematically speak of women as inferiors;

but, except in faires or comic stories, this was not the tone of romantic literature; for the high-flown sentiments of the poets gradually exerted a practical influence, and, by a just reward, the respect paid to women elevated and refined the men themselves. The same spirit has been inherited by modern Europe; we cannot conceive of a noble-minded man, who does not cherish a high admiration for the true woman.

! The feeling of personal honour was another characteristic. There is perhaps no passage in which this sentiment is more powerfully expressed than by Shakespeare, who lived near enough to the middle ages to be well acquainted with the spirit of the time. His "Harry Hotspur," the model of a gallant cavalier, exclaims—

"By heaven, methinks it were an easy leap
To pluck bright honour from the pale-faced moon,
Or dive into the bottom of the deep,
Where fathom-line could never touch the ground,
And pluck up drowned honour by the locks,
So he, that doth redeem her thence, might wear
Without ~~corival~~, all her dignities."

But Shakespeare, who is fond of looking at both sides of a question, makes Sir John Falstaff take a very different view. Falstaff is the exact opposite of a chivalrous character; he represents solid matter of fact as opposed to the ideal, and inquires,—

"Can honour set to a leg? No. Or an arm? No. Or take away the grief of a wound? No. Honour hath no skill in surgery then? No. What is honour? A word. What is in that word 'honour'? What is that honour? Air. A trim reckoning! Who hath it? He that died o' Wednesday. Doth he feel it? No. Doth he hear it? No. Is it insensible then? Yea,

to the dead. But will it not live with the living? No. Why? Detraction will not suffer it: therefore, I'll none of it. Honour is a mere scutcheon, and so ends my catechism."

We must beware of supposing, because in a given age exalted notions of honour were the fashionable theory, that there were not thousands of persons, probably a large majority, who despised the fashion, and took good care of their own interests. We know for a fact, that during the Crusades, when enthusiastic spirits were all on fire to join the Holy War, calculating men lent money at good interest upon the lands of those who wished to set out upon the expedition; and in many cases eventually obtained possession of those lands. The difference is, as we look back, that a gallant knight, armed at all points, ready for the crusade, may form the subject of a splendid picture, the hero of a romance; whereas the money-lender has nothing romantic about him, unless to serve as a foil to the picture.

The romances of Arthur, written in the French language, were great favourites with the Norman and Anglo-Norman poets; but those of the second class, the romances of Charlemagne and his Paladins, were entirely French. As the splendid victories of that monarch, his wars with the Pagan Saxons and the Saracens of Spain, excited popular admiration, he became a romantic hero, to whom a thousand fantastic adventures were attributed. The original source of these romances was the chronicle erroneously ascribed to Turpin, Archbishop of Rheims, which gave rise to a long series of poetical compositions. The exploits of Charlemagne against the Saracens of Spain lent a

crusading tone to romances of this class, and their most striking characteristic is enthusiasm for the holy wars, of which we observe no trace in the romances of the Round Table.

It is not my intention to say much about the dramatic literature of the middle ages: still it is necessary for my argument, that I should just touch upon that part of the subject. There are great differences of opinion respecting the origin of the romantic drama. Boileau ascribes it to the pilgrims who returned from the East at the end of the fourteenth century, and were, says he, the first to play mysteries. Fontenelle thinks that the clergy first introduced representations of religious subjects, and that the minstrels borrowed the idea from them; while Godwin, in his life of Chaucer, supposes that the idea originated with the minstrels, and that the clergy turned it to their own purposes.

But whichever theory we adopt, we may conclude that the origin was Christian as opposed to Pagan, and mediæval as opposed to antique. The earliest plays, called Miracles, were founded upon incidents in the lives of the saints; while the Mysteries were taken from narratives in the Old and New Testament. The Anglo-Normans were particularly attached to these representations, which were often performed in the cities of Chester and Coventry. The transition from this old religious spectacle to the modern drama was made by the moralities or moral plays, which represented virtues and vices personified. These allegorical plays were at their height in England during the reign of Henry VII.; but there must have been a rapid alteration in public

taste before the year 1520, when "a goodlie comedie of Plautus" was played in prefence of Henry VIII. at Greenwich. The study of the classics caused great changes in the drama; in fact, the theatre was, for years, the battle-ground of the two schools.

This may suffice to show, that epic and dramatic poetry arose in Europe during the middle ages; and there is no evidence that either one or other was indebted to classical traditions for its origin. We have now to observe the great change which took place.

It has been asserted by some writers that the revival of classical learning should rather be called the revival of Greek learning, because Latin had all along been cultivated as the language of the Church, and had never been banished from the schools. But we must distinguish between the language and the literature. At present, our very schoolboys are tolerably familiar with the manners and customs of the Romans: but if we examine the attempts made in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries to reproduce the ancient forms, we shall find a strange mixture of ideas. By the early German translators of the classics, the phrase "Cicero consul" was rendered "der Bürgermeister Cicero," that is, "Burgomaster Cicero," as though, comparing great things with small, a Roman consul corresponded to the burgomaster of a Dutch town. So in Chaucer's "Knight's Tale," the noble duke Theseus commands Palamon and Arcite each to bring a hundred knights armed for the lists; and Caxton, in his preface to "King Arthur," tells us of Duke Joshua who brought the children of Israel into the land of behest. The

same peculiarity is observable in the early specimens of Flemish art: Pilate is arrayed as a baron of the Empire, with a huge sword at his side; and Herod, if I mistake not, appears in a robe lined with fur, a dress well suited to our northern clime, but ill calculated for the latitude of Palestine. In theatrical representations similar discrepancies were allowed at a much later date: Catos and Cæsars appeared upon the stage in court dresses and tye-wigs. It is therefore not incorrect to speak of this change generally as the revival of learning, though we may admit that the influence of Greek literature was the more important of the two.

The credit of restoring polite letters is given to the poet Petrarch, who taught his countrymen to admire the beauties of Virgil and Cicero, and introduced that adoration of the ancient writers, which in the following ages was carried to an absurd extent. But Petrarch does not appear to have made much progress in Greek; and, practically, the revival of Greek literature cannot be dated before 1395, when Emanuel Chrysoloras was induced to settle in Italy as a teacher. Meanwhile, as the East was greatly disturbed, Greek refugees came over in large numbers; and when in 1453 Constantinople fell into the power of the Turks, the emigrants were still more numerous, bringing with them, in many instances, valuable manuscripts.

The enthusiasm evoked by Greek literature may be easily conceived: (1) it was new: for although during the middle ages some western scholars had attained a knowledge of Greek, yet in general the literature was unknown: (2) the stores of Greek learning were them-

selves sufficient to call forth the highest admiration. Let us reflect for a single moment upon the course of Greek literature: first we have epic poetry, then a transition to history, then the drama, oratory, and philosophy. Poetry arose in the youthful days of Greece, when the imaginative powers were strong; while philosophy was developed as the reflective faculties were more matured. Hence to those who are interested in the problems of higher education, it may be worth while to consider, whether the progressive development of the national Greek mind can furnish useful hints for the training of individual minds.

When, therefore, this encyclopædia of literature was unfolded to European scholars, the feeling of wonder was intense. It was like the discovery of a new world. We cannot be surprised at the admiration which was excited, or that the love of Greek and Latin absorbed the minds of scholars, causing them to neglect, if not to despise, other branches of learning. But with all the advantages gained, there were certain drawbacks.

(1.) A check was given to the national literature in various countries of Europe. The power of writing elegant Latin was deemed the highest of all accomplishments, and in proportion the vernacular dialects were undervalued. Besides, if a man wrote in Latin, all Europe could read and admire him: if he composed in his native tongue, his admirers were comparatively few and insignificant.

(2.) There was a blind admiration of classical antiquity. Some of the scholars were so far enamoured of Pagan mythology, that they almost forgot to be Christians: they worshipped the classics, and thus the study

of the ancients was fatally perverted. The learned, who alone had access to this knowledge, magnified their office, and claimed an unlimited authority for their favourite authors. Just as if nothing further could be expected from original efforts of the human mind, modern works were barely tolerated ; or if esteemed at all, were valued for any resemblance which they bore to classical models. Everything else was rejected as barbarous and unnatural.

(3.) As a consequence of this, hasty condemnation was passed upon the middle and early ages of Europe, which were characterized as the "dark ages." The Goths were by no means the most barbarous of the Germanic invaders who overturned the Roman empire ; but having ravaged Italy they acquired a bad name. Hence "Gothic" was used as a term of reproach for everything barbarous or ignorant ; and in this sense, all the mediæval institutions were summarily denounced as Gothic. The poetry, architecture, and fine arts of the middle ages were involved in one common censure, because they differed from the antique ; and this opinion prevailed until the middle of the last century. Addison says of fantastic poets, "I look upon these writers as Goths in poetry, who, like those in architecture, not being able to come up to the beautiful simplicity of the old Greeks and Romans, have endeavoured to supply its place with all the extravagances of an irregular fancy." And he adds, "Were I not supported by so great an authority as that of Mr. Dryden, I should not venture to observe, that the taste of most of our English poets, as well as readers, is extremely Gothic."

It is very difficult to assign dates for the duration of

any school in literature ; but if I may hazard an opinion, I would date the rise and progress of the classical school, from 1400 to 1550 ; the contest of the two schools from 1550 to 1650 ; the triumph of the neo-classical school from 1650 to 1750 ; and the reaction in favour of mediæval romance from 1750 to our own time. Of course I give the dates in round numbers.

Perhaps the most interesting period is that of contest ; and we shall find indications of the struggle in the "*Faerie Queene*" of Spenser.

The difficulties which the commentators have found in the "*Faerie Queene*" are partly to be explained as resulting from the contest of the two schools. The poets of that age experienced a curious struggle in their own minds : for when they leaned to the romantic school, they became the favourites of the public ; when they followed the classical school, they were praised by the learned. Thus while Ariosto, who is full of knights, giants, castles, and enchantments, indulged his taste for mediæval romance, Tasso, who wrote later, endeavoured in treating a romantic subject to emulate classical purity, and may be said to have trimmed between the two schools. Ariosto was preferred by the people of Italy, while the learned, and particularly the French critics, gave the preference to Tasso.

We shall see that Spenser wavered between the two schools ; but as if to complicate matters still further he introduces allegory. In his letter to Sir Walter Raleigh, expounding his whole intention, he says that the "*Faerie Queene*" is a continued allegory or dark conceit ; that the general end of the book is to fashion a

gentleman or noble person in virtuous discipline; and that to give a colouring of historic fiction he has chosen the "History of King Arthur." Not content with this moral allegory, he makes a secondary reference to Queen Elizabeth and the nobles of her court; so that between the allegorical references and the political allusions, his commentators find enough to do.

Some of the critics have regarded allegory as a distinct kind of poem, and have laid down rules applicable to it; others remark that as romantic stories were then going out of fashion, a moral tone was added to make them look respectable; others advise us to disregard the allegory altogether, and one of them observes, "if you leave it alone it won't bite you."

But let us examine further. Spenser took the romantic "History of Arthur," as the foundation of his work, and he translates freely from Geoffrey of Monmouth, the prime source of Arturian romance. As to the conduct of the poem, he says in the letter to Sir Walter Raleigh, "I have followed all the poets historical: first Homer, then Virgil; after him Ariosto and Tasso." By poets historical he must mean those who have treated heroic subjects: two are classical, Homer and Virgil; two are romantic, Ariosto and Tasso; and of the latter, Warton thinks that Ariosto was Spenser's favourite.

I regard the "Faerie Queene" as a narrative heroic poem, founded upon the romance of "King Arthur," borrowing freely from Ariosto and Tasso, but influenced and modified by the classical epic poets, Homer and Virgil. —

This poetical work is employed by Spenser allegorically to illustrate the course of education suitable for a gentleman, with a secondary reference to Queen Elizabeth and her nobles. But, as it seems to me, the allegorical view, whether in the first or second intention, is the least poetical part of the performance.

In estimating the poetry of Spenser, I shall perhaps express my meaning more clearly, if I first consider his chief merit, and then allude to the great defect with which the "*Faerie Queene*" is charged.

Poetry has been called a happy union of two of the fine arts: it has borrowed its harmonies from music, and its images from painting. But while its harmonies are addressed directly to the ear, its images are directed to the eye of the mind, still through the medium of the ear. Milton has well explained this, in speaking of the sister art, music:

"There let the pealing organ blow
To the full-voiced quire below,
In service high, and anthems clear,
As may with sweetness, through mine ear,
Dissolve me into ecstasies,
And bring all heaven before mine eyes."

Poetry, no more than music, makes a direct appeal to the eye: hence if the words alone reach the ear, charming it with melodious sounds, while no picture is presented to the mind, half the effect must be lost; especially in descriptive poetry, where it is not sufficient that our minds be in a passive state, ready to receive impressions: on the contrary, there must be great activity of mind to realise the descriptions of the poet.

Still, where difficulties arise, the fault is not always in the reader. The poet who excels in imagery, may sometimes fail in his versification: and another, however scrupulous in polishing his verses, may neglect the picturesque. Thus Pope has been accused, though in some cases unjustly, of spoiling Homer's pictures, in attempting to present them in an English form.

Now Spenser is remarkable for excellence in both respects. As Professor Craik has remarked, "his poetry is vision unrolled after vision, to the sound of endlessly varying music. No writer has evinced a deeper feeling for all forms of the beautiful, nor have words ever been made to embody thought with more wonderful art."

For proof of this I must refer you to the poem itself. Time will not allow me to make more than one or two remarks. When Una has been abandoned by the Red-crofs Knight, and, wearied with her wandering, reposes in the forest,—

"her angel's face
As the great eye of heaven shined bright,
And made a sunshine in the shady place:
Did never mortal eye behold such heavenly grace."

A lion rushing from the thicket is overawed by her presence, and attends upon her,—

"As he her wronged innocence did weet:
O how can beauty master the most strong,
And simple truth subdue avenging wrong.
* * * * *

"The lion, lord of every beast in field,"

Quoth she, "his princely puissance doth abate,
And mighty proud to humble weak does yield."

But he, my lion and my noble lord,
How does he find in cruel heart to hate

Her that him loved, and ever most adored
As the god of my life! why hath he me abhorred!"

This rapid change of movement, in the last line, to denote the paroxysm of her grief, is a master-piece of rhythm.

The bower of bliss, in the second book, is portrayed with wonderful skill, and illustrates the maxim, *Ars est celare artem*,—

"And that which all fair works doth most aggrace,
The art, which all that wrought, appeared in no place."

The musical harmony of the enchanted ground is equally remarkable:—

"Eftsoons they heard a most melodious sound
Of all that mote delight a dainty ear,
Such as at once might not on living ground,
Save in this paradise, be heard elsewhere:
Right hard it was for wight which did it hear
To read what manner music that mote be:
For all that pleasing is to living ear
Was there comforted in one harmony,
Birds, voices, instruments, winds, waters, all agree.

The joyous birds shrouded in cheerful shade
Their notes unto the voice attempted sweet,
The angelical soft trembling voices made
To the instruments divine response meet:
The silver-sounding instruments did meet
With the base murmur of the water's fall:
The water's fall with difference discreet,
Now soft, now loud, unto the wind did call:
The gentle warbling wind low answered to all."

Now the question arises, if the poetry of Spenser possesses these merits, as may abundantly be proved, and as all the critics admit, how is it that his greatest

work is seldom read, and still more rarely read through? Some reply that his language is obsolete, others that he is too allegorical, or too fantastic, or wanting in human interest. But the great charge is that the construction of the "*Faerie Queene*" is faulty, that the poem is deficient in unity. Dryden's opinion was that "the action of the poem is not one: there is no uniformity of design: the poet aims at the accomplishment of no action." Some of Spenser's editors seem to join in the same censure: one informs us that it is no great matter in what order we begin to read, whether we commence with the first book or the third: and another thinks it well for Spenser's reputation that he never completed the poem, that we have only six entire books of the twelve which he designed.

As this want of unity is alleged against Ariosto, and against Shakespeare in dramatic poetry, we may consider the question more generally. I think that Schlegel has hit the mark, when he says that the genius of classical art is plastic or statuesque, but that the genius of romantic art is picturesque. Let us see what is involved in this comparison.

In sculpture we have form, and particularly the forms of men and animals. Inanimate objects are rarely introduced, unless it be a fragment of rock, or the trunk of a tree: landscape is out of the question, except in reliefs or friezes. Thus sculpture deals with single figures, or groups limited in number and easily taken in at a glance. We lose in extent but we gain in concentration. Hence unity lies very near this kind of art; and as all art endeavours to give variety in unity, here

the chief difficulty is to produce variety, while the idea of unity readily suggests itself.

The statuesque character of Greek literature is particularly seen in tragedy, where never more than three, or in one play four, persons are brought upon the stage at the same time.

On the other hand, in painting, the forms are all reduced to a flat surface, but we gain in colour and in extent: we have landscape, and there may be great variety of figure. But while we gain in extent, we may lose in concentration; and painters are sometimes accused of this very fault, want of unity in action. Some critics (shallow ones, says Kugler) have brought this charge against Raphael's celebrated picture of the Transfiguration. The defence of the painters is that they are allowed to introduce several actions, provided that there be unity of design, and if all the actions serve to illustrate one idea.

The same argument is advanced by Bishop Hurd in defence of Spenser. He contends that "the unity of his poems consists in the relation of its several adventures to one common *original*—the appointment of the 'Faerie Queene,' and to one common *end*—the completion of her injunctions. This, it is true, is not classical unity, which consists in the representation of one entire action; but it is a unity of another sort, a unity resulting from the respect which a number of related actions have to one common purpose. In other words, it is a unity of design and not of action."

While admitting the general principle, I am not quite prepared to say, that it is fully applicable to

Spenser. I must candidly confess that, in the "Faerie Queene," the incidents are so varied, and the changes of action so sudden, as to make it doubtful whether the design is sufficiently obvious. But this I will say, that if the unity of the "Faerie Queene" can be defended at all, it must be upon the ground taken by Bishop Hurd, and on no other.

We may observe that Dr. Hurd has anticipated the reasoning so triumphantly employed by Schlegel and Coleridge in defence of Shakespeare and the romantic drama. For as Westminster Abbey is not to be deemed grotesque or barbarous because its architecture differs from that of the Parthenon at Athens, so Shakespeare is not to be censured merely because he differs from Sophocles. It has been shown that Shakespeare's dramas exhibit a unity of design, though not of action; hence, if we find the same law in the works of the romantic poets, both epic and dramatic, we are justified in assuming this as a characteristic of the school.

The great advocate of classical tastes at this period was Ben Jonson, who was educated at Westminster under the great scholar William Camden, and afterwards spent some time at St. John's, Cambridge. Endowed with a clear intellect, and proud of his classical attainments, he insisted upon strict adherence to rule. Some of his efforts display a charming fancy—for example, in "Cynthia's Revels," the song of Hesperus, "Queen and huntress, chaste and fair," is a perfect gem—but to the higher fields of imagination he seldom rises. When, however, he comes down to real life, and satirically lashes the vice of the day, he is great.

But with this he was not content; he tried to destroy the traditions of the middle ages, to substitute intellect for imagination as the chief power in poetry, and to bring poetry herself within the limits of dry regularity. His attempts were only part of the great movement which was then combating the romantic, and introducing the critical element.

Ben Jonson always assumed an air of patronising superiority over the untaught genius of Shakespeare, whom he describes as having "small Latin and less Greek:" but the fertility of Shakespeare contrasted with his own labour in composition was ever a sore point with Jonson. The players had said in praise of Shakespeare that he never blotted (*i.e.* corrected) a line; to which Jonson replied, "Would he had blotted out a thousand!" which they thought a malevolent speech. The neglect of careful correction, he maintained, was Shakespeare's great fault; for while he had "an excellent phantasy and gentle expressions, he flowed with that facility, that sometimes it was necessary he should be stopped. His wit was in his own power; would the rule of it had been so too."

It was owing, in a great measure, to the influence of Ben Jonson and his followers, that Shakespeare, though deemed a wonderful genius, was considered an incorrect poet for having violated rule, and not having sufficiently controlled his natural exuberance. This opinion was maintained until the beginning of the present century.

The period of the Civil Wars produced one great poet, Milton. Although he was a deep student of

classical antiquity, yet he was also a diligent reader of the old romances, as might be proved by many of his allusions ; but it is impossible, within the limits of this lecture, to discuss his influence :

“ His soul was like a star and dwelt apart.”

He amply deserves separate consideration, for nothing could be more unsatisfactory than an imperfect estimate of Milton. I therefore pass on to the development of the neo-classical school in the works of Dryden and Pope.

It has often been said that Dryden was an imitator of Boileau ; and French influence is explained by the fact that Charles II, who had spent much of his time upon the Continent, introduced foreign tastes at his return.

There is some truth in this ; but in cases where a resemblance appears between English and foreign literature, we must not hastily conclude that our countrymen are mere imitators of the foreigner. At the beginning of this century, it happened that Schlegel, at Vienna, and Coleridge, in London, took similar views about Shakespeare. Immediately there was an outcry that Coleridge had been borrowing from the German ; but he was able to prove that his opinions had been formed independently, a fact which gave them additional scientific value, and furnished another instance that original theories may suggest themselves at the same time to inquirers in different parts of Europe.

It is not as though Dryden's views had been entirely unknown in English literature. In admiration of

classical models, and the defence of regularity, we may regard Dryden as the successor of Ben Jonson. No doubt, when Dryden quotes Boileau with respect, as the "admirable Boileau," and calls him "a living Horace and a Juvenal," such expressions prove the high esteem in which the French critic was held. But the changes in literature, as in philosophy, are governed by general laws; and it is safer to say that similar influences produced similar results, at home and abroad—that what Boileau was doing in France, Dryden was doing in England.

They both combated the traditions of the romantic school, and endeavoured to establish the classical. Their spirit was critical; their principle was conformity to rule; their standard was classical antiquity. As the weakness of the romantic school was on the side of extravagance in imagination and in feeling, the new school attached great importance to correctness, by which they understood unity of construction, and scrupulous regard to form, especially in versification.

Before we mention the peculiarities of the new school, we may watch the transition by observing the criticisms passed by Dryden upon his predecessors; for no poet has written a greater number of prefaces and defences discussing the first principles of his art.

He does justice to Shakespeare, acknowledging that he was the man who, of all modern, and, perhaps, ancient poets, had the largest and most comprehensive soul; that those who accuse him to have wanted learning give him the greater commendation; he was naturally learned; he needed not the spectacles of

books to read nature ; he looked inwards, and found her there. But Ben Jonson was a most learned and judicious writer ; a most severe judge of himself and others. If, he adds, I would compare him with Shakespeare, I must acknowledge him the more correct poet, but Shakespeare the greater wit. Shakespeare was the Homer or father of our dramatic poets ; Jonson was the Virgil, the pattern of elaborate writing ; I admire him, but I love Shakespeare.

We have seen that he condemns Spenser for want of uniformity of design ; he further censures, as faults of second magnitude, his obsolete language, and the ill choice of his stanza ; but praises the harmony of his verses, as inferior only to Virgil among the Romans, and Waller among the English.

He is still harder upon Milton, urging that the subject of "Paradise Lost" is not that of a heroic poem properly so called, because "Milton's design is the losing of our happiness, whereas, in all other epic works, the event is prosperous ; his heavenly machines are many, and the human persons are but two." "No man," says he, "has more happily copied the manner of Homer, or so copiously translated his Grecisms, or the Latin elegancies of Virgil. It is true, he runs into a flat of thought, sometimes for a hundred lines together, but it is when he has got into a track of Scripture."

If we may believe the anecdotes of the time, Milton had said that Dryden was a rhymer and no poet. Dryden rejoins that "whatever causes Milton may allege for the abolishing of rhyme, his own particular

reason plainly was that rhyme was not his talent; he had neither the ease of doing it, nor the graces of it, as proved by his youthful verses, where his rhyme is always forced, and comes hardly from him, at an age when the soul is most pliant, and the passion of love makes almost every man a rhymers, though not a poet."

It is reported, however, that one day, at Will's coffee-house, Dryden was speaking in high terms about "Paradise Lost," when a young man in the company observed, "But, sir, it is not in rhyme." "No," said Dryden, "it is not in rhyme, but this man cuts us all out, and the ancients too." And yet Dryden conceived the singular idea, not merely of altering the versification, but actually of dramatizing the subject. Aubrey tells us that Dryden waited upon the blind old bard, asking permission to put his great poem into rhyme. "Aye," said Milton, "you may tag my verses if you will." At all events, in 1674, soon after Milton's death, Dryden published what he called an opera, entitled the "State of Innocence," founded upon "Paradise Lost." This opera, or rhymed tragedy, which was never acted, is altogether a very strange production; but these four lines are perhaps the most remarkable, nor were they spared by the critics:—

"Seraph and cherub careless of their charge
And wanton, in full ease now live at large:
Unguarded leave the passes of the sky,
And all dissolved in hallelujahs lie."

"I have heard," says one critic, "of anchovies dissolved in sauce; but never of an angel dissolved in hallelujahs."

Twenty years afterwards, Dryden confessed that when he wrote this opera "he knew not half the extent of Milton's excellence."

The progressive development of the correct school is marked by the names of Denham, Waller, Dryden, and Pope.

"Denham and Waller improved our versification." says Prior, "and Dryden perfected it." And so Pope tells us—

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

It does seem strange, after we have been reading Chaucer, Spenser, and Shakespeare, writers of no mean order, to find Dryden asserting, and Dr. Johnson repeating, that Sir John Denham and Mr. Waller were the *fathers* of English poetry. But our surprise may be modified by reflecting that, between the time of Spenser and Dryden, there had arisen a group of quaint and fantastic poets, beginning with Donne and ending with Cowley. To this Dr. Johnson refers, when he says, "After about half a century of forced thoughts and rugged metre, some advances towards nature and harmony had been already made by Waller and Denham. But the new versification, as it was called, may be considered as owing its establishment to Dryden, from whose time it is apparent that English poetry has had no tendency to relapse into its former savageness."

Without entering into detail, we may state the principles of this versification :—

- ✓ (1.) A power of expression, combined with harmony pleasing to the ear—

“And praise the easy vigour of a line,
Where Denham’s strength and Waller’s sweetness join.”

- (2.) A nice adaptation of the sound to the thing signified :—

“ ’Tis not enough no harshness gives offence,
The sound must seem an echo to the sense.”

These principles appear to contain the germ of much that was afterwards written on the subject.

Equal importance was attached to poetic diction, that is, the delicate selection of words, which were supposed to distinguish poetry from prose. “Before the time of Dryden,” says Dr. Johnson, “this delicacy of selection was little known to our authors; there was no poetical diction, no system of words at once refined from the grossness of domestic use, and free from the harshness of technicality.”

But these changes of versification and diction, however remarkable, are not sufficient to account for the great revolution in English literature. We must inquire further, and ask what was the prevailing mode of thought with regard to poetry and art. We shall probably find an answer in “Pope’s Essay on Criticism.”

Pope, who always acknowledged the benefit of Dryden’s example, was just old enough to remember the poet. When quite a youth he was taken to Will’s coffee-house, that he might see the great man: *Virgilium vidi tantum*—Virgil I saw and that was all—as he says, quoting the words of Ovid. At the early

age of twenty-one he wrote his "Essay on Criticism," a didactic poem, which exhibits great learning and wonderful discrimination for so young a man. Nor was he unconscious of his own merit: he declared that he did not expect the sale of his essay to be rapid, because not one gentleman in sixty, even of liberal education, could understand it.

1. He begins by exalting the critical spirit, that judgment, in the fine arts, then called "taste," which he places almost, if not altogether, on a level with poetic genius:—

" 'Tis with our judgments as our watches, none
Go just alike, yet each believes his own.
In poets, as true genius is but rare,
True taste, as seldom, is the critic's share:
Both must alike from heaven derive their light,
These born to judge, as well as those to write."

No doubt every good and perfect gift comes from God: but that is not the point here. It had been customary to think that the poetic faculty was a peculiar gift of God, a sort of inspiration or "enthusiasm," in the Greek sense of the word: and here Pope contends that the critical faculty is equally special and divine.

2. Secondly, he places the Greek and Latin classics on a level with nature. He admits, as a general principle, that we ought to follow nature, and to form our judgment by her standard: but then he says that the rules discovered by the ancients are nature still, though in another form:—

"Those rules of old discovered, not devised,
Are nature still, but nature methodised."

Hence it should be our care to study the Greek exemplars, and especially the poems of Homer. For Virgil, when designing his great work, seemed at first above the critic's rules, and disdained to draw from any other source than Nature herself:—

“ But when to examine every part he came,
Nature and Homer were, he found, the same :
Convinced, amazed, he checks the bold design,
And rules as strict his laboured work confine,
As if the Stagirite o'erlooked each line.
Learn hence for ancient rules a just esteem :
To copy Nature is to copy them.”

This opinion was quite in accordance with the theory of the new school, that while Homer was the greater genius, Virgil was the more correct writer, and more in keeping with the rules of Aristotle.

We find then that the adherents of the new school considered taste, i.e. correct judgment in the fine arts, as equal to poetic genius, and that they took the ancient classics as the exponents of Nature ; while they insisted strongly upon regular form in diction and versification.

The predominant spirit of the age was not enthusiasm or deep feeling, but intellectual criticism, with a tendency to satire : so much so, that the poets themselves assumed a corresponding tone. Sharp reflection, terseness, and epigrammatic turns were highly esteemed. Wit was proclaimed king in literature, and took the place of poetic enthusiasm. But we must not confound wit with mere jesting or joking : we are rather to understand the operations of a keen and refined intellect ; or, as Pope says,—

“True wit is Nature to advantage dressed,
What oft was thought but ne’er so well expressed.”

We may compare the wit of that day to the rapiers which they used. In the old-fashioned method of fighting, with large swords and shields, two men might batter away at one another for an hour, and no great harm done; but with the rapier all was quickness, dexterity, and point. Similarly in writing they aimed at a terse and epigrammatic style, with frequent use of antithesis. In this very “*Essay on Criticism*” there are several instances, which have passed into proverbs: as, “To err is human; to forgive, divine. Again, “For fools rush in where angels fear to tread;” and the much contested maxim, “A little learning is a dangerous thing,” often quoted, “A little knowledge is a dangerous thing,” to which Lord Brougham has sometimes replied, that “A little knowledge is better than great ignorance.”

Apart from dramatic works and translations, if we review the poems of Dryden and Pope, we shall find that the chief are satirical, including the mock-heroic; and didactic, including argumentative and controversial works. Of the former kind, we have “*Abraham and Achitophel*,” and “*M. Flecknoe*,” by Dryden; the “*Dunciad*,” and the “*Rape of the Lock*,” by Pope; of the latter description, Dryden has given us the “*Hind and Panther*,” and the “*Religio Laici*,” Pope, the “*Essay on Criticism*,” and the “*Essay on Man*.” In vigorous satire Dryden is unsurpassed; his power of reasoning in verse, and his rhetorical declamation, have been praised by all the critics; while the polished edge of Pope’s satire has been equally admired. In our time their

claim to the title of poets has been questioned, because they fail to display the lofty imagination of Shakespeare and Milton; but all admit that for mental vigour and intellectual power they rank with the highest names in our literature.

This period was certainly not distinguished for lyric poetry; but it would be unjust not to mention Dryden's "Ode for St. Cecilia's Day," commonly known as "Alexander's Feast." That composition is worthy of a diligent study: (1.) For its graphic or even dramatic power; and I would remark that the scene, which is laid at Persepolis, will bear rich illustration from the travels of Sir Robert Ker Porter, and the discoveries of more recent explorers: (2.) For its variety of rhythm and metre, upon which there are some valuable observations in Dr. Campbell's "Philosophy of Rhetoric," towards the close: (3.) And above all, we should not neglect the music which Handel afterwards adapted to the words; for the manner in which that great composer has phrased and accented the passages is admirable, and may be consulted with profit by the poet as well as by the musician. A careful examination of the ode, with the illustrations referred to, and the music, would afford gratification of a very high kind.

In considering Dryden and Pope as the leaders of the neo-classical school, we must not omit their poetical translations from the classics. Previous attempts had varied between servile copying and excessive latitude. Ben Jonson had rendered Horace almost word for word; and Cowley had spread his wings so boldly as almost to forsake his authors. Waller had attempted

paraphrase, keeping his author in view, but assuming a certain latitude; and Dryden, improving upon Waller, aimed at a style which was not so loose as paraphrase, yet not so close as a servile interpretation. His great work was the translation of Virgil, and he was followed by Pope in the famous translation of Homer.

Pope's version has been the object of extravagant praise and undeserved censure. His admirers said that future ages would inquire who first turned Homer into Greek: his opponents retort that the old bard appears, in Pope's translation, as an English gentleman dressed in the newest French fashion, with ruffles and periwig. Pope is reported to have said that Chapman's version was such as Homer might have written when a very young man; the rejoinder was, that Pope's version was such as Homer would never have written at any time.

No translation will satisfy the scholars; they will always say that it falls below the original; but then they are the very persons who do not need a translation. The object is not to satisfy the requirements of exacting scholars, but to produce a version sufficiently close for the public. But this is not all. A translation of Homer must be an agreeable poem, otherwise the public will not read it. In works of this kind nothing is more fatal than heaviness or tediousness, a power, says Dr. Johnson, which propagates itself; for he that is weary the first hour will be still more weary the second, and will soon close the book altogether. In every poem the reader expects to be pleased, and if he is disappointed in this expectation he is rarely tempted to go forward.

Now, it is allowed that Pope's version makes an agreeable poem, while the charms of other versions are very doubtful; practically it is found that his translation is popular, while the others are not. Great efforts have been made of late years to bring Chapman's version into notice, but success has not corresponded to the effort; and Cowper's translation, though preferred by some as very literal, is too heavy to suit the public taste. Therefore, even if Pope's version is not the best, it has the advantage over others which are hardly read at all. It is undeniable that Pope's "*Iliad*" has taken a distinguished place in English literature, and has done very much to diffuse a classical taste among the public. In this sense it is one of the most important productions of the neo-classical school.

The faulty side of the new school was neglect or confusion of imagery. These lines of Dryden were once greatly admired:—

"All things are hushed, as Nature's self lay dead;
The mountains seem to nod their drowsy head,
The little birds in dreams their songs repeat," &c.

On which Macaulay remarks, that the imitation is quite unlike the thing imitated. Addison has this unfortunate passage:—

"I bridle in my struggling muse with pain,
That longs to launch into a bolder strain."

As though the reining in of a horse could prevent the launch of a boat. Besides, the idea of correctness was misconceived; if it means conforming to sound principles, it may be only another name for excellence; but, if it means conformity to arbitrary rules, it may be

only another name for absurdity. The errors of the school are most easily seen, not in the leaders but in the imitators, who, forgetting the genius of Dryden and Pope, could only copy their manner, just as the admirers of Dr. Johnson could imitate the balance of his sentences, but took care not to follow him in vigour of thought or power of reasoning.

From the time of Pope the critics were busily occupied in drawing up arbitrary laws for poetical composition, many of which were utterly unreasonable, and would have been disregarded by Pope himself, who, indeed, often violates his own rules. Thus Rymer tells us that Shakespeare ought not to have made Othello black, for the hero of a tragedy ought always to be white. We found Dryden saying that Milton ought not to have taken Adam for his hero, because the hero of an epic poem ought always to be victorious; and another critic informs us that Milton should not have put so many similes into his first book, because there are no similes in the first book of the "Iliad." It would be endless to enumerate the minute laws established for heroic rhyme; that there must be a pause, a comma at least, at the end of every couplet, no full-stop except at the end of a line, with other regulations of a similar kind.

All the critics are now agreed that English poetry, during the middle of the 18th century—say from 1740 to 1760-80—is exceedingly wearisome, except what was written by Gray, Thomson, and Goldsmith; and that the first poet who did much to bring back genuine feeling and a natural style was William Cowper. Sick-

ness and disappointment have given a melancholy tone to much of his poetry ; but there was nothing of fervility in Cowper. We see a mind bowed down, nay, almost crushed, by severe affliction, yet rising again and speaking a free word in the cause of rational liberty.

With regard to versification, Cowper, distinctly complaining of the creamy smoothness so much admired in his day, and of the mere mechanism to which poetry had been reduced, ascribes it to an abuse of Pope's example :—

“ But he (his musical finessè was such,
So nice his ear, so delicate his touch),
Made poetry a mere mechanic art,
And every warbler had his tune by heart.”

But there were parts of the kingdom to which the laws of the correct school had never penetrated—the hills of Cumberland, the highlands of Scotland, the mountains and glens of Ireland. Romance was not utterly extinguished, but the first restoration of the romantic muse was under a mask ; in other words, a literary imposture of the most surprising kind called general attention to the treasures of the old national poetry. In 1760, James Macpherson published poetic fragments, which he gave out as translations from the Gaelic of the songs of Ossian, a Scottish bard of the fourth century. This publication excited the most lively interest, and gave rise to a learned controversy, in which numerous essays appeared for and against the authenticity of these poems. Macpherson's singular behaviour in refusing to produce his originals was alone

sufficient to excite suspicion ; and further inquiry proved that his poems were a patch-work, founded on tradition, but made up from various sources. When the illusion was dispelled, there was a speedy end to the extraordinary admiration which the poems of Ossian had awakened in England, Germany, and even in France and Italy. As long as the halo of antiquity surrounded them they were extravagantly worshipped ; but when it appeared that the composition was recent, no criticism was too severe. On the whole, however, Macpherson did good ; he gave prominence to the fact that Gaelic traditions were current in Scotland, and we have since learned that interesting poems, oral and manuscript, exist in Ireland. We have seen only the beginning of Celtic studies ; the Germans are now working indefatigably at both Gaelic and Cymric ; and there is every probability that European scholars will turn their energies in this direction. I sincerely trust that Ireland will take a foremost position in this inquiry, as upon such a subject she clearly ought to do.

Greater effect was produced by Bishop Percy's "Reliques of Ancient English Poetry," a work resulting from a careful investigation of the old ballads. This collection of the ancient minstrelsy tended to produce an impression that the essence of poetry did not consist in dry formality, but that much more was requisite.

The ballad poetry, still dear to the hearts of the people, and full of national traditions from heroic times, flourished between the fourteenth and sixteenth centu-

ries. The oldest ballads turn upon the contests be-
 1. tween the Saxons and the Danes, as “Havelock the
 Dane,” “King Horn,” and “Guy of Warwick;” then
 we have the songs of the Border Wars between Eng-
 2. land and Scotland, as “Chevy Chase” and the “Battle
 of Otterbourne;” and lastly, the most popular of all,
 3. the ballads of Robin Hood, the forester bold, who
 was cherished by the English people as a champion
 against the tyranny of Norman feudalism; even yet his
 name awakens a sympathy in the hearts of the com-
 mons. Altogether the poetic value of the minstrelsy is
 very great, and its influence upon English literature is
 undoubted.

But those who were accustomed to the elegance of
 the classical school, could not tolerate the harsh versifi-
 cation of the old ballads. One evening, at Mrs. Thrale’s,
 Dr. Johnson condemned them in severe terms: he
 maintained that such effusions were worthless, and to
 prove that such rhymes could be produced without
 any effort, he began:—

“I put my hat upon my head,
 And walk’d into the Strand,
 And there I met another man,
 Whose hat was in his hand.”

And so he went on extemporizing nonsense verses for
 several stanzas, to show how easy it was.

Of course the versification is rude. But the ballads
 were read in a different spirit by a boy in Scotland.
 At the age of thirteen, Walter Scott read “Percy’s Re-
 liques,” at Kelso on the Border, within sight of the
 Cheviots, near the river Tweed, nor far from Melrose.

At the age of thirty-one (in the year 1802) he published the "Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border," the result of his labours in that haunt of the national ballad-poetry. These songs, taken down from the lips of the people, and edited with valuable remarks, formed as it were a supplement to "Percy's Reliques;" but displaying wild energy, intense nationality, and that wonderful depth of passion, to which the Scot gives utterance, when he expresses his enthusiastic love of home.

From 1805 to 1814, Walter Scott wrote metrical romances, of an epic character, but with much of the ballad in them. In the "Lay of the Last Minstrel" he restored the legendary, in his "Marmion" the historical, romance. But the greatest triumph of the romantic epos was his "Lady of the Lake," where the harp of the North resounded amid the scenery of the Highlands, and attracted the civilised world to the mountains and heaths of Scotland.

Soon afterwards he began to write his romances in prose, and we may regard him as the founder of the modern historical romance. He was the first, among the moderns, who exhibited in its full power the picturesque side of historic narrative; and he has the merit of pointing out the distinction of races as an element in history. In his "Ivanhoe" he brings out the differences between Saxon and Norman, tracing the results of those differences, and leading to conclusions which many professed historians have entirely overlooked. Ample justice has been done to his historical merit by Augustin Thierry, the celebrated author of the "Conquest of England by the Normans;" and on the important uses

of the imagination in the study of history, I would refer you to Archbishop Whately's "Rhetoric," part ii. chap. 2.

Both in poetry and prose, Scott is remarkable for vivid description—for the power of "bringing before the eyes." To some minds, his figures and scenes are so palpable that they might almost be touched. For example, in the "Legend of Montrose," we have the chieftain's banquet, where a clansman stands behind each chair, holding in his right hand a drawn sword with the point turned downwards, and a blazing pine-torch in the left; so the interview between Louis XI. and Charles the Bold in "Quentin Durward;" the tournament in "Ivanhoe," or the scene where Rebecca describes to the wounded Ivanhoe the contest raging at the cattle gate. So, too, the battle-scene in "Marmion;" and as for the "Lady of the Lake," some of the annual visitors to Loch Katrine make the minutest inquiries about the island, and the residence of Ellen Douglas, in a manner which reflects the highest credit upon their imaginative powers, though not so much upon their judgment. He is equally successful in landscape, presenting to us not merely the outward scenery, but the air and spirit, the very genius of the place.

We cannot fail to remark his nationality and determined patriotism. It has sometimes been asserted that patriotism is the last refuge of a scoundrel; but this is, in reality, a tribute to its excellence. For a scoundrel, in assuming the cloak, fancies that patriotism, like charity, will cover a multitude of sins. The abuse is no argument against the thing itself. Sir Walter Scott

stigmatizes the man who is even cold or indifferent toward his native land: he says that such a man—

“Living, shall forfeit fair renown,
And, doubly dying, shall go down
To the vile dust from whence he sprung,
Unwept, unhonour'd, and unsung.”

On these principles, Sir Walter considered the minstrelsy and the old legends as a most valuable element in the mediæval history of the country, as reflecting the national spirit: and he always loved to dwell upon the heroic deeds of his fathers. He never wavered, never flinched in his patriotic devotion; he was a true son of Scotland, and there is no writer to whom she owes a greater debt of gratitude.

But though Scott laboured so effectually in restoring mediæval romance, he never placed himself in antagonism to the neo-classical school: nay, he edited, in a very genial spirit, the works of Dryden, whom he often calls “glorious old John.” Direct opposition to the “correct” school was instituted by William Wordsworth.

In 1798 he published the first, and in 1800 a second edition of “Lyrical Ballads,” with a preface condemning the poetic diction which had so long been admired, and recommending the language of actual life. The principal object in these poems was, to choose incidents and situations from common life, and to describe them in a selection of language really used by men: at the same time to throw over them a certain colouring of imagination, whereby ordinary things should be presented to the mind in an unusual aspect. He complains

of the ignorance displayed in treating of the most obvious natural appearances, as in Dryden's verses descriptive of night, where the "mountains nod their drowsy heads," and in Pope's moonlight scene in the eighth book of the *Iliad*. He considers Dryden's lines bombastic and senseless; Pope's false and contradictory. The verses of Dryden, he adds, once highly celebrated, are forgotten: those of Pope still retain their hold upon public estimation, and are often recited without a suspicion of their absurdity.

But Wordsworth was not content with attacking the conventionality of the past age: he seemed to go out of his way for the purpose of introducing mean or trivial language, and of showing that the phrases of common life, pure and simple, are suitable for poetry. Besides this, the dogmatic tone assumed in his preface, gave even greater offence than his verses.

The Edinburgh Reviewers were loud in their condemnation. "This will never do," said Jeffrey. Lord Byron, who was a devoted admirer of Pope, set no limits to his sarcasm; in his "English Bards and Scotch Reviewers," he calls Wordsworth a writer,

"Who, both by precept and example, shows
That prose is verse, and verse is merely prose."

Elsewhere, in allusion to the trivial subjects in which Wordsworth seemed to delight, he exclaims,

"'Pedlars,' and 'boats,' and 'waggons!' Oh, ye shades
Of Pope and Dryden! are we come to this?"

* * * * *

The 'little boatman,' and his 'Peter Bell,'
Can sneer at him who drew Achitophel."

If Wordsworth had confined his attack to the abuse of conventional language, he would have carried conviction much sooner. We have seen that Cowper complained of the mechanical versification which was in fashion; and it had been carried so far that natural objects were almost invariably mentioned either by a circumlocution, or by a mythological reference: the sun was "Phœbus," or "the orb of day;" the moon was "Cynthia," the "refulgent lamp of night." It was easy for a poetaster to sit in his chamber, stringing phrases and rhymes together, without giving any picture of the things described. Nay, Pope himself had already condemned writers of this class:—

"While they ring round the same unvaried chimes,
 With sure returns of still expected rhymes:
 Where'er you find 'the cooling western breeze,'
 In the next line 'it whispers through the trees:'
 If crystal streams 'with pleasing murmurs creep,'
 The reader's threatened, not in vain, with 'sleep.'
 Then at the last and only couplet fraught
 With some unmeaning thing they call a thought,
 A needless Alexandrine ends the song,
 That, like a wounded snake, drags its slow length along."

The cautions of Wordsworth were eminently needed at the time, but he carried his theory to an extreme. His own friend, Coleridge, objected to the insipidity and childishness into which he often fell; and, on the other hand, proved that some of his finest passages were in direct contradiction to his own theory, because not even the most violent construction could reconcile them with the language of common life. Similarly De Quincey has shown that much of Pope's poetry is in violation

of rules which he himself laid down ; and we may conclude that, in each case, the practice of the poet was better than his own dogmatic theory.

In another of his reforms, Wordsworth was more happy ; he possessed great love for external nature, and spent much of his time in the open air. To use a familiar illustration, he led poetry out of the drawing-room, and invited her to take an excursion among the hills of Cumberland. In directing the minds of men to study nature, he touched one of the great defects of our artificial life. We study astronomy from books, but we forget to regard the heavens ; we can tell the name of a beech-tree in several languages, and can quote pastoral poetry about it from Virgil downwards, without being able to point out the tree itself in its native forest. In these respects the botanists and other students of natural science possess a marked advantage, often exhibiting a healthy and enviable freshness of thought. Now, Wordsworth did great service in showing that poetical students may enjoy the same, or even higher privileges ; for while they find equal scope for their powers of observation, they may cultivate deeper sympathy with nature, and obtain a spiritual insight reaching below the surface of things. It does not fall within the design of this lecture to consider the philosophical aspect of Wordsworth's poetry ; that is a question better left to the metaphysicians ; it may suffice to say here that his example tended to found what we may call a "natural school" in poetry. But here, too, some of the imitators have gone to extremes by an excess of minute description, and by dwelling too exclu-

sively upon the vegetable creation; just as in some inferior pictures of the Pre-Raphaelite school, we observe great elaboration of unnecessary detail, and a remarkable absence of anything like human interest.

But we have to inquire how Wordsworth stands related to the romantic school of literature. He not only had a great kindness for that house, but in early life he coquetted with the romantic muse, as in the "Armenian Lady's Love," partly in imitation of the "Spanish Lady's Love," a ballad in Percy's "Reliques," and the "Prioress's Tale," after Chaucer. In later years he cultivated a more extensive acquaintance in the "White Doe of Rylstone."

But there is one department of poetry in which we may fairly claim him, that is, the sonnet. We must remember that the ode is classical, but the sonnet is mediæval, and was first introduced into Italian literature by Petrarch, who borrowed it from the Sicilians. "Scorn not the sonnet," (says Wordsworth,)—

" with this key
Shakespeare unlocked his heart :
 and when a damp
Fell round the path of Milton, in his hand
The Thing became a trumpet, whence he blew
Soul-animating strains—alas, too few ! "

It seems singular that Wordsworth, who began by making war upon form, should have chosen the sonnet, which is one of the strictest forms of metrical composition. This bed of Procrustes, as an Italian has termed it, confines the poet's thoughts within the stated space of fourteen verses; so that if the thought be too long,

it must be compressed within this space, or, if too short, it must be stretched out to fill the measure; while there are fixed rules for the alternation, or rather complication of the rhymes.

He wrote two series of miscellaneous sonnets, two series dedicated to Liberty, and Ecclesiastical sonnets on the Church History of Britain. In the miscellaneous collection are three remarkable sonnets translated from the Italian of Michael Angelo. The poet asserts that true love does not depend on outward forms, but is a deeper principle, which hallows and makes pure all gentle hearts:—

“ His hope is treacherous only whose love dies
With beauty, which is varying every hour ;
But in chaste hearts uninfluenced by the power
Of outward change, there blooms a deathless flower
That breathes on earth the air of paradise.”

And so in the second sonnet from the same original :

“ The wise man, I affirm, can find no rest
In that which perishes : nor will he lend
His heart to aught which doth on time depend :
’Tis sense, unbridled will, and not true love,
That kills the soul : love betters what is best
Even here below : but more in heaven above.”

The third sonnet, addressed to the Supreme Being, deserves careful study and reflection.

The sonnets to liberty, written during the struggles of the French War, breathe a patriotic spirit, and show the workings of a mind originally filled with admiration for the French Republic, then seeing the fairest hopes destroyed, but yet remaining true to the cause of

freedom. One of these, addressed to Milton, possesses a literary as well as a political interest; its date is London, 1802:—

“Milton! thou shouldst be living at this hour:
 England hath need of thee: . . .
 . . . We are selfish men;
 Oh! raise us up, return to us again,
 And give us manners, virtue, freedom, power.
Thy soul was like a star, and dwelt apart:
Thou hadst a voice whose sound was like the sea.
 Pure as the naked heavens, majestic, free,
 So didst thou travel on life's common way
 In cheerful goodliness: and yet thy heart
 The lowliest duties on herself did lay.”

Thus we have passed from the romantic school of the middle ages, through the revived classical, on to the new romantic. It would seem as though, during the last thirty or forty years, we have entered upon a phase of revived mediævalism. The period from 1760 to 1820 was a transition state, chequered by the events of the American War and the French Revolution; but, from 1820 to the present time, there has been a manifest tendency to dwell upon the history, literature, and art of the middle ages. The names of Hallam, Guizot, and Thierry in history; of Scott, Coleridge, Schiller, and Schlegel in literature, will justify the assertion that similar tendencies have prevailed at home and upon the Continent. The same influence may be seen in the arts: the churches and chapels erected from fifty to a hundred years ago made no great pretensions to ornament; but during the last thirty years numerous ecclesiastical structures have been erected in various

styles of Gothic architecture ; and we might venture to say that more Gothic churches have been built within our own memory than during the previous two hundred years.

In painting, if the term Pre-Raphaelite has any meaning, it signifies a recurrence to the principles of art observed in the schools before the time of Raphael, who lived 1483-1520. Now Raphael flourished during the period of the renaissance or revival in art, which corresponds to the revival of classical studies in literature ; and we may infer that the style of art, which preceded the renaissance, partook more or less of mediæval ideas. An examination of the early pictures will confirm this impression. That an acquaintance with mediæval art has become popular is clear from the fact that the names of Giotto, Fra Angelico, Van Eyck, and Quentin Matsys are much better known than formerly. In the Royal Institution at Liverpool there is a small, but very choice collection of early paintings ; and when they were first thrown open, people looked at them, wondering why any persons should take the trouble to bring together such very strange pictures. But now, the use of that collection, as illustrating the history of art, is better understood by the public.

We cannot go far wrong in saying that there is an analogy between the Pre-Raphaelite school of painting, and the romantic school of poetry ; but we can hardly assert that the painters, in their attempts at reform, have been equally successful with their brethren in literature. The poets have done more with the pen, than the painters have done with the pencil.

In other departments we may trace manifestations of the same tendency. Within our memory, ardent young men, very far gone in mediæval enthusiasm, wished to revive the mysteries and miracle plays of the middle ages. Imaginative minds, charmed with the picturesque, attempted to restore the forms of a past age, and were sometimes carried further than they originally intended to go. But quaint old Thomas Fuller shrewdly remarks of the true church antiquary, that "He baits at middle antiquity, but lodges not till he comes at that which is ancient indeed." There is always risk of error if we are satisfied with partial views, and stop half-way; for in dealing with any subject, we ought to obtain a view of the whole. So in literature, while we are grateful to Coleridge and others, who have taught us how to think, and what to think about old romance, we ought not to rest there; but we should compare mediæval literature and art with the classical and the antique, in order to determine the merits and defects of each.

On the present occasion, we have considered two of the great schools, but we ought, in like manner, to review the various departments of literature. It would be well, also, to compare the different schools of painters, architects, and musicians, with a view of discovering analogies, and contrasting one kind of art with another. Without an extended investigation of this kind, it is impossible to arrive at final conclusions; but, from what we have seen, we may draw one or two practical inferences.

First, we should beware of being carried away by

any one school. We are especially in danger of this if we live at a time when new doctrines are promulgated ; for when discoveries are made, and new lights are introduced, we are apt to be dazzled, and to imagine that what went before was all wrong or foolish. Thus, at the revival of learning, unmerited contempt was poured upon mediæval literature ; so, too, Addison was unjust in his censure of Gothic architecture. But, in turn, Dryden and Pope have been treated too severely by the followers of Wordsworth. About twenty years ago, by very young men, Pope and Addison were scouted as mere dilettanti ; it was supposed that they never looked below the surface, that they had no aspirations after the infinite, as the phrase was ; so that when the question was discussed " Whether Pope was a poet," it was generally carried in the negative by a large majority. Of late, this judgment has been considerably modified.

Secondly, we may say that every great school has some good in it. The romantic is characterized by enthusiasm and graphic power ; the classical by regularity and dignified repose. Charmed by the former, we were almost led to undervalue the classical element ; but here, too, there has been a reaction. Though verbal scholarship and critical accuracy are most important in their proper places, and form the groundwork of all true scholarship, yet we should go forward to take an æsthetic view of classical antiquity.

Hence, great service has been rendered by those who have illustrated the classics from the monuments of ancient art. Some years ago, Dr. Christopher Word-

worth published his valuable work upon Greece; and Dr. William Smith, in editing his classical dictionaries, has obtained copious illustrations from the sculptures, monuments, and coins. An excellent treatise on Greek art, by Mr. Scharf, is prefixed to a new edition of "Wordsworth's Greece;" and the designs for Dean Milman's *Horace*, by the same gentleman, deserve mention. Mr. Falkener, in his work entitled "*Dædalus*," has discussed the advantages which may be derived from a study of the antique. If these pursuits are continued, they may eventually act upon our popular literature, and not without good effect. For, in Greek art, as in the classical authors, there is a certain power of control. For example, in the *Laocoon*, we have a representation of intense agony, yet not carried to the point of abandonment: and so in every work of art there should be a due amount of reserve and dignity. Constant complaints are made that our modern literature is too spasmodic and sensational: perhaps classical training would administer the very sort of correction that is wanted.

Thirdly, we may certainly affirm, that each school has its weak side. As, in manners, the stately person is sometimes too formal, while the man of warm temper may be too familiar; so writers, who cultivate a classical taste, often fall into conventionality or stiffness; while those of the romantic group are sometimes chargeable with irregularity in thought or sentiment. Our judgment should seek the middle path, between wild extravagance of feeling upon the one hand, and cold formality upon the other; and if I may hazard a

conjecture about the future, I think that our literature, true to its national traditions, will remain essentially romantic; yet that the classical element will be duly cultivated, not as a substitute, but as a regulating and controlling power.





SHAKESPEARE,

BY JOHN K. INGRAM, LL.D.

FELLOW OF TRINITY COLLEGE, AND PROFESSOR OF ENGLISH

LITERATURE IN THE UNIVERSITY OF DUBLIN.





SHAKESPEARE.

THE author of the thoughtful discourse on the life and writings of John Foster begins by observing that some persons would probably consider him to have selected his subject injudiciously, because the name of John Foster was not one of general notoriety, nor his rank in English literature a very high one. I can well believe that my own choice may have been criticised for exactly the opposite reason. There are doubtless few, if any, in the audience I address, who are not well acquainted with the principal works of Shakespeare, who have not admired their poetic beauties, felt their power and pathos, and reflected on their moral significance. And so much has he been the theme of our whole critical literature—so many gifted writers have taken him for the text of their æsthetic disquisitions—that just systematic views of his genius and dramatic art have become more or less familiar to all educated minds. Is it likely that I shall be able to present in any new light the great subject I have selected? Is it still possible to offer any novel, or at least unhackneyed considerations,

which may interest even those who have been habitual readers of the great poet, and may send them back to the study of his works with fresh zest and with topics of inquiry worth their pains in prosecuting?

Let me answer this question in the words of Professor Craik, one of the most distinguished Shakespearean scholars of our time. "After all the commentatorship and criticism," he says, "of which the works of Shakespeare have been the subject, they still remain to be studied in their totality with a special reference to Shakespeare himself. The man Shakespeare as read in his works—Shakespeare as there revealed, not only in his genius and intellectual powers, but in his character, disposition, temper, opinions, tastes, prejudices, is a book yet to be written." The sentences I have just read I wish you to regard as furnishing the key-note of what I am now to say. I am far indeed from supposing myself competent to handle adequately the great subject thus sketched out. And to do so, as it would be beyond my ability, so also would require much more time than is now at my disposal. In the remarks I have to offer to you, I shall deal only with one or two aspects of the problem. Placing myself at the point of view indicated by Mr. Craik, I shall endeavour to throw some light, *first*, on the development of Shakespeare's genius in the progress of his poetic career; and, *secondly*, on a few of the leading features of his mental and moral nature, his turn of thought, and his general views of life, as they are, more or less distinctly, revealed to us in his works.

In undertaking this task, I am not thrown altogether

on my own resources ; the field is not perfectly new, though not yet systematically cultivated. From all the critics I shall freely borrow materials, and especially from Coleridge, whose observations, though unhappily scattered as the Sibyl's leaves, are full of the keenest insight and the finest feeling. My aim will be to give to facts and thoughts collected from every source one common bearing, to make them all converge towards the illustration of Shakespeare's personality.

He began writing for the stage most probably about 1591, and did not cease before 1612 or 1613. Now one of the most decisive evidences of vigorous vitality, is steady and healthy growth. In so opulent a nature as Shakespeare's, one would say beforehand, there must have been many capacities, comparatively latent at first, which only gradually exhibited their full energy, as they found their due nutriment in a larger experience, and a fitting sphere for their exercise in the demands of his art. His excellence, too, lies so much in the just delineation of the realities of human character and feeling, that without tolerably prolonged observation it could not attain its height. It should seem reasonable, therefore, to assume that his greatest works must have been the product of his mature age. But this conclusion, obvious as it appears, has not been received without question. Rowe, his first critical editor, propounded the notion that perhaps we are not to look for his beginnings, like those of other writers, in his least perfect works. "Art," he says, "had so little, and nature so large a share in what he did, that for aught I know, the performances of his youth, as they were the most

vigorous, were the best." This whimsical paradox is part of the general way of thinking which represents Shakespeare as a sort of *lufus naturæ*, exempt from the ordinary influences which mould and modify genius, and producing his effects by a kind of mysterious instinct, altogether apart from the general energies of a powerful and comprehensive intellect. Johnson, with his usual strong sense, saw and exposed the absurdity of Rowe's idea. "The power of nature," he says, "is only the power of using to any certain purpose the materials which diligence procures or opportunity supplies. Nature gives no man knowledge; and when images are collected by study and experience, can only assist in combining or applying them. Shakespeare, however favoured by nature, could apply only what he had learned; and, as he must increase his ideas, like other mortals, by gradual acquisition, he, like them, grew wiser as he grew older, could display life better as he knew it more, and instruct with more efficacy as he was himself more amply instructed." In this passage, Johnson, as it seems to me, attends too exclusively to the accumulation of materials, overlooking the spontaneous growth of the shaping and combining power. But, having regard to both considerations, we must expect to find the later works of the poet greatly superior, on the whole, to the earlier in strength and splendour of imagination, in truth and breadth of painting, and in solidity and depth of thought.

Now, in order to verify the fact which we are thus led to anticipate, it becomes necessary to solve a previous question, which, though neglected by most readers

of Shakespeare, is of the greatest importance for the right understanding and full appreciation of him, whether as poet or as man. We must ascertain, with at least approximate correctness, the chronological order of his works.

On this subject even the ablest of the early critics entertained the most erroneous and indeed irrational views. Dryden, for example, says, in a line which has often been quoted,

“Shakespeare’s own muse his *Pericles* first bore.”

But, with our present lights, we cannot hesitate to pronounce that whatever he had to do in the composition of that play (for the whole of it is not his) belongs to a late period of his career. The same Dryden, again, when he was assigning reasons for taking in hand what he called his “improvement” of the “*Troilus and Cressida*,” states his opinion that that work had been produced by the great dramatist “in the apprenticeship of his writing.” How any person of moderate discernment could suppose that play, so full of knowledge of the world and all the fruits of ripe reflection, to have been the work of a very young man, I confess, passes my comprehension. The truth is, that in order of time it comes after “*Othello*” and “*Macbeth*.”

The whole question of the chronology of the plays was first systematically handled by our countryman, Edmund Malone, in an essay published in the year 1778. The sort of evidence on which he mainly relied was that which could be derived from the following sources. First, the dates of the quarto editions of some of the

plays printed during the life of the poet; or entries in the register of the Stationers' Company of their intended publication. Secondly, statements about the plays in contemporary books or manuscripts. Thirdly, supposed allusions in the plays to contemporary circumstances or events. And fourthly, imitations of passages in Shakespeare by other authors, of the dates of whose writings we have independent knowledge.

Let me give you one or two examples of each of these classes of arguments; not confining myself, however, to those used by Malone, but mentioning some which have been brought to light since his time.

I. The first kind of evidence is available in the case of the "*Antony and Cleopatra*," which was entered on the Stationers' books in 1608, though not printed till long after. Again, the first edition of "*Much Ado about Nothing*" appeared in 1600; and joining this fact to the circumstance of its omission in a list of which I shall presently speak, we may safely infer that it had not been acted earlier than the preceding year.

II. Under the second kind of evidence comes a celebrated passage, in a treatise by one Francis Meres, entitled "*Palladis Tamia*," and published in September, 1598. This writer speaks of Shakespeare as foremost among the dramatists of the age. "As Plautus and Seneca," he says, "are accounted the best for comedy and tragedy among the Latins, so Shakespeare, among the English, is the most excellent in both kinds for the stage: for comedy, witness his '*Gentleman of Verona*,' his '*Errors*,' his '*Love's Labour's Lost*,' his '*Love's Labour's Won*,' his '*Midsummer Night's*

Dream,' and his 'Merchant of Venice;' for tragedy, his 'Richard II,' 'Richard III,' 'Henry IV,' 'King John,' 'Titus Andronicus,' and 'Romeo and Juliet.'" One of the plays here enumerated ("Love's Labour's Won"), we do not find in any edition of Shakespeare, at least under the same name; and "Titus Andronicus" is, by most of the eminent critics, believed not to have been his work. But the remaining plays, ten in number (for probably only the first part of "Henry IV." is intended to be named), are from this passage ascertained to have appeared on the stage before the latter part of the year 1598.

Again, there has been found in the British Museum a little MS. diary, kept by a student of the Middle Temple, named Manningham, in which he occasionally jotted down his experiences. In this document there is a record of the performance of Shakespeare's "Twelfth Night," in February, 1602. This was a discovery of some importance; for Malone had been at first led by considerations of little weight to fix on this play as the last which Shakespeare produced; and, though he had afterwards changed his opinion, had not assigned to it an earlier date than 1607.

III. Allusions to contemporary events (which supply the third kind of evidence) have often been imagined in Shakespeare, where they do not seem to have been intended. But there are a few which are quite undeniable. Thus, in the "Comedy of Errors," act III. sc. 2, there is a pun, the point of which depends on the circumstance that the *heir of France*, afterwards Henry IV, was engaged, when the play was acted,

in a struggle for his regal rights. The passage alluded to must, therefore, have been written between the August of 1589 and the July of 1593. Again, in the chorus prefixed to the last act of Henry V, the following words occur:—

“ Were now the general of our gracious emperors,
(As, in good time, he may) from Ireland coming,
Bringing rebellion broached on his sword.”

Here is a plain reference to the absence of Essex on his Irish mission. Unless, therefore, the verses which contain this reference were added after the play was finished, it follows that it must have been written between April and September, 1599. Finally, when Macbeth sees (act iv, sc. 1.) the vision of the long line of Scottish kings who were to descend from the loins of Banquo, some of the last rise before him

“ That twofold balls and treble sceptres carry;”

and thus we learn that the play was produced after the union of the three kingdoms of England, Scotland, and Ireland, under the sovereignty of James I.

IV. Of the fourth kind of evidence a single example must suffice. At the close of the “Julius Cæsar” there is a striking speech of Antony, in which he eulogises the character of Brutus. Now, a palpable imitation of this speech is found in a second edition of Drayton’s “Barons’ Wars,” published in 1603, which is wanting in the earlier form of that poem, as it was printed in 1598. It is, therefore, at least highly probable that the play had made its appearance on the stage in the interval between these two dates.

These specimens will enable you to understand the

nature of the arguments by which Malone arrived at his conclusions on the chronological question, and the means by which others, since his time, have succeeded in correcting certain errors in his scheme.

He, and his successors in the same path, have without doubt worked out correctly the main points of the problem. But from the fortuitous, dispersive, and, in some degree, precarious nature of the evidence employed, his conclusions cannot be said to have gained a firm hold on the public mind. With respect to some of the plays he had no arguments, or very unsatisfactory ones, to adduce; and there always remained the possibility that some of the passages relied on may have been added in a second or third redaction of the piece in which they occur, as we know some were added, for example, to the "*Merry Wives of Windsor*." Accordingly, no less competent a judge than Coleridge appears, from his "*Literary Remains*," to have fluctuated much in his opinions on the subject, and to have constructed, at different times, chronological arrangements of the plays, arbitrary in their character, and mutually discordant.

In such a question as this the most convincing sort of proof is furnished by the concurrence of two different sorts of evidence—the scattered incidental notes of time falling in with some principle or law of change in the structure of the works themselves. Happily, this complete confirmation has been supplied, with relation to the problem we have been considering, by some highly interesting recent researches. The order proposed by Malone being provisionally assumed as correct in its

essential features, the plays so arranged have been studied with respect to a single element—namely, the structure of the verse. It has thus become apparent that Shakespeare's versification altered, from the first to the last, regularly in one direction. When we have got hold of this fact, and thoroughly apprehended the nature of the change, we possess a key by which we can at once pronounce to what stage of Shakespeare's poetic life any play belongs. What *was* comparatively a chaos becomes a cosmos; and we learn to view the works of Shakespeare in their totality as an ordered series, where every element (or at least every little group of elements) has an ascertained place, and a determinate relation to those which precede and those which follow it.

It is only of late that this conception has emerged into full distinctness. It has been well explained by Mr. Craik, in the "Prolegomena" to his edition of the "Julius Cæsar," and has been wrought out in detail with much sagacity and justness of remark in a little work by Mr. Bathurst,* to which, on its appearance, some of the critical journals did not show the favour which, in my opinion, it deserved.

The essential nature of the change is, as Mr. Bathurst expresses it, from unbroken to interrupted verse. In "Gorboduc," and the other earliest English plays, the sense very often closes at the end of each line, the next taking up a new clause, and there are but few

* Remarks on the differences in Shakespeare's versification in different periods of his life. London: John W. Parker and Son, 1857.

breaks or pauses in the middle of the line. This structure of verse is still, though not in so great a degree, a marked feature of Shakespeare's early works, of the "Henry VI." for example, and the "Comedy of Errors;" and, along with this system of versification, we feel in those plays a certain stiffness and crampness of style which might seem to be its necessary accompaniment. But, at a more advanced stage, boldness and freedom of execution are reconciled in a remarkable degree with the system of unbroken verse, as in "King John" and "Romeo and Juliet." Later again, the broken structure shows itself, and grows more and more on the poet with manifest advantage to his spirit and variety; and what are called his *weak endings* begin to appear,—that is to say, his lines sometimes close in unemphatic and unaccented monosyllables, connected in sense not with what precedes, but with what follows. In the last years of his author-life the broken style of verse is at its height, and the weak endings are of very frequent occurrence. Indeed, in one of the latest plays, the "Winter's Tale," this manner may appear to be carried to excess; for, in passages where the matter is insignificant or diffuse, it is apt, if pushed far, to have a lax and slovenly effect. The perfection of the broken style is to be sought in the "Tempest," where there is all the lightness and vivacity it is fitted to produce, without any detriment to closeness and compactness of structure.

The general conclusion to which we are led, alike by the more broad and palpable proofs adduced by Malone, and the more subtle and indirect evidences which these

late researches have brought to light, may be stated in the following form. We can distinguish in the poetic life of Shakespeare three successive periods marked by peculiar features, and exhibiting his genius in the successive stages of its development. They may conveniently be designated as the youthful, the manly, and the mature periods.

The characteristic distinction of the first period is, that in the plays which belong to it the Poet still predominates over the Dramatist. This shows itself even in the form; rhyme abounds, for example, in "Love's Labour's Lost;" and in that play, and the "Comedy of Errors," there are whole passages in alternate rhymes, which in his later stages he altogether abandoned. But I allude to something deeper than mere form. What I mean is, that in these early plays we have liveliness of fancy, beauty of imagery, brilliancy of expression—all the qualities which in the "Venus and Adonis" gave promise of a great poet—but that in character and passion, the true home of the dramatist, they are comparatively weak. In the "Two Gentlemen of Verona," for example, the delineations of Proteus and Valentine, of Julia and Sylvia, are graceful indeed, but thin and faint—"outlines," as some one has said, "loosely sketched in." In "Love's Labour's Lost" (of which it may be remarked that it has a bookish air, and reads like the work of a student) there are some happy conceptions both of character and of situation, but they are imperfectly worked out; and Shakespeare was, apparently, quite conscious of this, for the Biron and Rosaline of this play he afterwards developed into the

Benedick and Beatrice of "Much Ado about Nothing." In the "Midsummer Night's Dream," which closes the youthful stage, the great artist decisively shows himself. A wonderful luxuriance of fancy and delicacy of poetic grace is admirably harmonised, not merely with whimsical merriment, but with the broadest extreme of farcical absurdity. In the contexture of the plot there is a marked advance, the threads of several distinct actions being successfully interwoven. But here also there is not much of character—unless the humours of Bottom and his associates be ranged under that head, and in the graver persons of the drama there is more of the emphatic profession of strong feeling than of its vivid exhibition.

The second, or manly period, is that of Shakespeare's best comedies, and of almost all his chronicle plays. He now draws his characters with deeper colours and with a firmer hand. I need not conduct you through the wonderful series of creations which belong to this stage—the Richards, the Shylocks, the Falstaffs—nor labour to prove that for the execution of these portraits a larger experience and a deeper insight into human nature were necessary than had manifested themselves in the works of the first period. Nor, be it observed, is it merely his principal personages—those who occupy prominent places on his canvases, that he has depicted with such truthfulness and consistency. In fact, now that his powers were ripe and his experience sufficiently enlarged, it would seem as if he *could not help* drawing character correctly. And, accordingly, even the subordinate persons, who have little

to do with the conduct of the plot, and are not meant to fix our attention strongly, have, for the most part, the same sort of reality as the main actors.

Let me say a few words in passing of Shakespeare's painting of character. His prime excellence in this respect is the perfect individuality he gives to the creations of his genius. Poets of inferior power are apt to distribute mankind into fixed classes, marked by one prevailing tendency or feature of disposition. Their men and women are like the personages of the old moral plays,—mere personifications of abstract qualities. But this is not the method of nature nor of Shakespeare. Just as the form and expression of the human face are determined by the combination of many different traits, so a human character is compounded of a great variety of powers and propensities, partly bestowed by nature, partly ingrafted by circumstance and habit. Every face may be placed in several different classes, according to the particular feature which we especially consider at the time; and so may every character. And as the boundaries of these classes cross each other in every possible way, an endless variety of countenances and characters is produced. As no two faces are altogether alike,—though some similar features may lead us to class them together, so every character has something that distinguishes it from every other. This is the fact in nature: and so it is also in the works of the great dramatist. Pope truly said of Shakespeare's characters, "It is impossible to find any two alike: and such as, from their affinity or relation in any respect, appear most to be twins will, upon comparison, be found re-

markably distinct." This last observation suggests to us a very interesting study; which, while it will bring out more clearly the conceptions of the poet, will give us more distinct views of our own nature. I mean the discrimination between the different species of the same quality, as it is manifested in different persons of his dramas. Thomas Whately, in a well-known little work,* has given an excellent specimen of this sort of inquiry, in contrasting the courage of Richard III, which is of the nature of constitutional intrepidity, with the courage of Macbeth, genuine indeed, and never deficient when called on, but requiring stimulus and effort to "screw it to the sticking-place." And to take an example from the opposite failing, the natural poltroonery of Parolles is altogether different from the calculated and systematic cowardice of Falstaff.

In the painting of female character Shakespeare is especially admirable. No one has more exquisitely delineated those qualities of the heart which may be called the essential and fundamental constituents of that character in its worthy types—modesty, purity, tenderness, self-forgetting devotion. Nor has any one done fuller justice to the true merits of the female intellect, its delicate grace, its fine sagacity, its quick-glancing intuition. And his female portraits are marked by the same nice discrimination as those of the other sex. The lines of character in women are, for the most part, not so deeply marked by nature as in men; and the uniformity of their domestic office prevents in general any strong

* Remarks on some of the Characters of Shakespeare. See Archbishop Whately's preface to his edition of this work.

development of individuality. But the distinctions are real, though requiring to be drawn with a delicate pencil. Mrs. Jameson, in her charming work on the women of Shakespeare, has divided them into three classes, according as intellect and wit predominate in them, or passion and fancy, or the moral sentiments and the affections. But within these classes there is a wonderful range of diversity. Portia and Beatrice in the first, Juliet and Miranda in the second, and Desdemona and Hermione in the third, are separated from each other by perfectly definite characteristics.

Let me also, while I am on this subject, call your attention to Shakespeare's mode of exhibiting character. He does not make the persons of his drama practise psychological analysis on themselves for our enlightenment, and take their hearts to pieces, that we may observe the hidden mechanism. In general, they say nothing, do nothing at all for the sake of the spectator. They are not thinking of the audience, they are wholly absorbed in the action of the play. But it is with them just as with vivid natures in real life,—while they act and speak, too much in earnest about the business of the moment to think of effect, their characters unconsciously come out and imprint themselves on the mind of the observer.

So much with respect to Shakespeare's second period. If we compare the third or mature period to its predecessor in relation to the depiction of character, it will be found that there is an increase in the complexity of the principles and motives by which the persons of the drama are supposed to be actuated. This may be ex-

emplified in the case of Macbeth, a type, as we have seen, so much akin to Richard III. as to admit of comparison with him by way of parallel. But the character of Macbeth is greatly more complicated than that of Richard. "To express and to blend with consistency all the several properties which are ascribed to the former, required," says Mr. Whately, "a greater variety and a greater delicacy of painting." It is, however, the exhibition of Passion by which this, essentially tragic, third stage is particularly characterised. And in this Shakespeare is no less eminent than in the delineation of our nature in its more quiescent forms. It is easy to represent one master impulse singly and uniformly dominating the soul, and to give it expression by a set of more or less conventional manifestations. The really difficult problem, which Shakespeare solves, is to exhibit passion, as in real life, varied in manifold ways by character and situation,—by the whole group of co-existing tendencies, and by every variety of surrounding circumstance. Jealousy, for example, awakened by the promptings of a fiend in a free and noble nature like that of Othello is very different from the same passion spontaneously engendered in the suspicious and prying soul of a Leontes. Nor does he show us passion only in its maturity, but in its incubation and development, from the first greeting of the Weird Sisters, or the first whisper of Iago, till it has fully wrought its awful work and left its victim's inner and outer world alike in ruins. He shows it, too, in its terrible fluctuations, of certainty and doubt, of hope and despair, of courage and irresolution, driving the soul hither and thither, like the sur-

face of an agitated sea. He sounds, in a word, all the depths, and exhibits all the workings of our nature.

But not only in his third period does he thus culminate as a dramatist, but he exhibits himself to us as a powerful thinker, struggling with the problems of existence. I believe that Shakespeare had force and depth of intellect, apart from what are commonly recognised as poetic gifts, sufficient to have furnished out a Plato or a Leibnitz. But in him the creative faculty and the speculative power interpenetrated and were fused together. And it results from this union of a grand imagination with profound thought, that in studying his greatest works we feel that we are not occupied only with the interests, however grave, and passions, however intense, of the narrow group of ideal beings who are the persons of the drama. These individual existences are mystically bound up with the whole of things. We feel that in them humanity is, as it were, condensed—that the interests at stake are wide as the world and deep as the roots of the universe. In “Macbeth” the unseen powers are busy in the action—responding to each other and working together with an awful mutual intelligence. In “Lear” all earth and heaven are coloured with the lurid glow of the wronged father’s stormy indignation—the same shock that wrenches his reason from its seat seems to shake the pillars of the world. By this combination of a lofty imagination with an all-comprehending grasp of thought, Shakespeare is related to Æschylus and Dante, as by his variety, lifelikeness, and genial humanity, he is akin to Homer.

Through some such ascending scale as I have described, the genius of Shakespear arose in his successive stages. What I have now to observe is, that, parallel with the development of his powers of conception and reflection, went on a progressive change in his style, or system of expression. We have seen enough to show us that a radical vice of ambiguity taints the observations usually made in books of criticism on the structure of Shakespeare's blank verse. So much did it alter from the beginning to the end of his author-life, that, unless we discriminate between his different periods, it will be impossible to escape vagueness in assigning its characteristic qualities. Now a strictly similar remark may be made with respect to Shakespeare's style. I do not mean to affirm that there are not certain deep-seated characters belonging alike to the style of his youth and to that of his mature manhood. But they are not the broad or obvious ones—in such features as lie on the surface there is, between the two, not merely a difference but a contrast. When his youthful manner is at the best, his expression has an easy flow, but shows some want of volume. There is almost constant grace and felicity of diction; but rarely the strong pregnant phrases which stamp themselves at once and for ever on the memory. He dwells on the images of his fancy, and develops them in detail. His reflective passages, too, he works out deliberately enough. A good example of the former is supplied by the beautiful description of the free and impeded stream spoken by Julia in the "Two Gentlemen of Verona" (Act II. sc. 7); and of the latter by the well known lines on the

hindrances to the course of true love in the "Midsummer Night's Dream (Act 1. sc. 1). In his latest stage, on the contrary, there is an eager rapidity in the movement of his mind; he seems impatient of fully exhibiting his images and reflections; he flashes each on us for a moment, and then takes up the next. What Charles Lamb said with too general an application, is perfectly true of this period:—"Shakespeare mingles everything, runs line into line, embarrasses sentences and metaphors; before one idea has burst its shell, another is broken and clamorous for disclosure." From the hurry of expression required to keep pace with his thronging thoughts arises a frequent obscurity; there is much to make us pause and weigh the words; much that must be analyzed, disentangled, and spelt out. Dryden was struck by this in the "Troilus and Cressida;" and, after censuring it with a good deal of petulance, he annexes the apologetic statement that Shakespeare "in his latter plays wore off somewhat of his rust." This, as we have seen, is precisely the reverse of the truth, and affords another example of the errors and confusions which are unavoidable, even by the ablest critics, when they are ignorant, or negligent, of the chronological order of the plays.

Mr. Bathurst wishes that an edition of Shakespeare should be published, in which they should be disposed in that order, now at length sufficiently ascertained. In this wish I heartily concur. In the folio of 1623, which has been followed by most of the critical editions, including that by Mr. Dyce, and the one which has just begun to appear at Cambridge—the "Tempest,"

one of the poet's very latest works, comes first; and next after it is the "Two Gentlemen of Verona," one of his very earliest. This arrangement keeps out of view all those evidences of progressive change, which would otherwise spontaneously present themselves to the thoughtful reader. And if the plays were habitually considered with reference to their succession in time, not only would those broader facts which I have endeavoured to present to you be more easily and more firmly grasped; but I am convinced that many minute, but noteworthy and characteristic particulars, illustrative, not merely of the ripening of Shakespeare's genius, but also of the history of his thoughts and his studies, would gradually be brought to light. The mere consideration of his gnomic sentences, not in the arbitrary order of Dodd and other collectors, but in that in which he produced them, would doubtless afford interesting results. And, upon the whole, the stimulation of freshness and of a novel point of view would encourage Shakespearian studies, and give them, at least for some mental constitutions, an additional and peculiar charm.

When we seek to read in the *plays* of Shakespeare some revelation of himself, his ways of thinking and his habitual feelings, we are met by a difficulty arising from the dramatic form. He does not mean to affirm all the propositions which he puts into the mouths of his personages, any more than the author of the Book of Job adopted all the utterances both of the patriarch and of his friends. But as in the latter case we are little perplexed in separating what is meant to be accepted as truth from what is introduced to exhibit the opposition

and conflict of thought, so in Shakespeare the difficulty is more hypothetic than real. We can easily discover into what line of thought he throws himself with peculiar spontaneity and heartiness; and we can see what are the types of character and the modes of feeling on which he lets the sunshine of his special favour fall. I wish, however, to call your attention now to some of his writings, highly interesting from our present point of view, and which are far from being studied as carefully as they deserve. I mean, as you will probably have anticipated, the Sonnets. I am not about to dwell on their poetical beauties, though I entirely concur in the judgment of Wordsworth, that there is no part of the writings of Shakespeare, where is to be found in an equal compass a greater number of exquisite feelings felicitously expressed. I refer to them now because we hear in them the voice of the poet uttering in his own person his thoughts and emotions. Written with a considerable degree of continuity, and submitted at first to one eye only besides his own, they form a sort of diary of Shakespeare's inner life, in which from time to time he recorded the most intimate feelings of his heart. Here, then, we have a guide to some of the secret depths of this great nature. Many difficulties indeed beset us in studying these poems, and in particular we have to beware of extending to Shakespeare's whole spiritual life some phases of sentiment here revealed, which were only occasional or transient. But as we gain more and more insight into their meaning, we are able to gather from them with increasing clearness a view of the soul of the poet in some of its most interesting aspects.

The epithet by which in his lifetime he seems to have been most commonly described was that of the gentle Shakespeare; and the whole of his works conveys to us the same impression of an easy, unexacting, generous nature—a mild, humane, and tolerant temper. These are the characteristics of the persons of his drama whom he especially commends to our sympathies, and surrounds with peculiar love and reverence. In the Sonnets he further appears as capable of the utmost fervour of personal affection. Most of those remarkable poems are addressed to a young man of high rank, endowed with every grace of person and every accomplishment of mind, though not exempt from the errors of youth; and they breathe throughout a spirit of nothing less than passionate friendship. It seems probable, indeed, that in the person of this “lord of his love,” whom in one place he calls “his better angel”—he, to some extent, idealizes all the nobler influences that acted on his own nature, averting him from evil and attracting him to good. But, after allowing for this, there remains enough to prove an intensity of personal devotion, which some have considered excessive even to weakness. This, at least, we may admit, that the Sonnets do not give us the idea of a robust self-sufficing nature, bestowing love from its own conscious affluence, but of one forced to go out of itself for solace and support, and prone to self-distrust and self-depreciation. In several respects, indeed, these poems tend to modify considerably the popular notions of Shakespeare’s character. He is commonly represented by his biographers as a practical man, who was quite at home in theatrical

life, and was well contented so long as his pieces succeeded and his theatre prospered. But in the Sonnets he shows himself ill at ease in the profession he followed, and bitterly deplores the injury done to his nature as well as his reputation by the influences of his calling :—

“O for my sake do you with Fortune chide,
The guilty goddess of my harmful deeds,
That did not better for my life provide
Than public means, which public manners breeds.
Thence comes it that my name receives a brand :
And almost thence my nature is subdued
To what it works in, like the dyer’s hand.”

Again, he is often spoken of as having been little aware of his own greatness, and having entertained little thought of posthumous renown. But in the Sonnets he often shows himself proudly conscious that he wrote not for an age, but for all time. Again and again he recurs with confident anticipation to the immortality which was secured to the object of his affection by the poems he had dedicated to his praise :—

“Not marble, not the gilded monuments
Of princes, shall outlive this powerful rhyme.”

“Your monument shall be my gentle verse
Which eyes not yet created shall o’er-read,
And tongues to-be your being shall rehearse,
When all the breathers of this world are dead ;
You still shall live (such virtue hath my pen)
Where breath most breathes, even in the mouths of men.”

In considering Shakespeare’s opinions and ways of thinking, as revealed in his writings, the first question we ask ourselves is apt to be, What was his religion ? I find no evidence in him of a scepticism rare in his

age, at least in England, and altogether foreign to his poetic mission. But while he did general homage to the creed of Christendom, he was probably little occupied with, or interested in, theological questions. The supernatural doctrines of religion he uses, as might be expected of a poet, principally for the enforcement of human obligations:—

“Why, all the souls that were, were forfeit once ;
And He, that might the vantage best have took,
Found out the remedy : How would you be,
If He, which is the top of judgment, should
But judge you as you are ? Oh think on that,
And mercy then will breathe within your lips,
Like man new-made.”

An aspect of things which seems most profoundly impressed upon him is the moral order of the world—a fact which has an intimate affinity with the constitution of great minds, and to which most of them, in their several dialects, bear reverent testimony.

“Bloody instructions, being taught, return
To plague th’ inventor :—even-handed justice
Commends the ingredients of our poison’d chalice
To our own lips.”

“The Powers, delaying, not forgetting.”

“The Gods are just, and of our pleasant vices
Make instruments to plague us.”

“ . . . When we in our viciousness grow hard,
 the wise gods seal our eyes,
 drop our clear judgments, make us
Adore our errors, laugh at us while we strut
To our confusion.”

A Protestant Shakespeare plainly appears to have been,

~~but without any tincture of anti-Catholic fanaticism.~~
He never treats the old Church with disrespect. When there is denunciation of the ecclesiastical power, as in well known passages of "King John," it is dictated, not by religious rancour, but by the spirit of patriotism. The Protestant Reformation in England cannot be adequately explained as a mere revolution in opinion; it was also, and still more, regarded by the people themselves as a vindication of their national independence: and it is this latter sentiment that supplies the key-note of that play. There is no worthy idealization of the Catholic priest in Shakespeare, such as Chaucer sketched in outline in the fourteenth century, or as, almost in our own times, Manzoni has nobly drawn in the Padre Cristoforo of the "Promessi Sposi." But neither is there any vulgar mockery of the sacerdotal character. That would have been inconsistent with his general principle of showing every profession and condition, not in its abuses or perversions, but in its normal state, and, in some sense, at its best. The monastic clergy, wherever he introduces them, he represents as virtuous and beneficent. The Friar Lawrence of "Romeo and Juliet" is a kind, well-intentioned, simple-hearted old man. The Friar in "Much Ado about Nothing," when Hero lies under the burden of a foul suspicion, reads her innocence in her face, and maintains her cause against the world. In "Measure for Measure," Friar Thomas and Friar Peter are the sagacious confidants and agents of the good and noble-minded Duke. Though Shakespeare in his "King John" follows pretty closely the old play of the "Trou-

blesome Reign," when he comes to a scene where there is some ribaldry about monastic institutions, he omits it altogether. All this proves pretty clearly that if the prejudices of the multitude were to be humoured by abuse and ridicule of the ancient faith, Shakespeare was not the man to do the unworthy office. Nay, here and there, I find in him traces of a positive sympathy with the religious spirit of the Middle Ages; as, for example, in the passage of "Macbeth," where Malcolm's parents are described:—

- "The king thy father
Was a most fainted king: the queen that bore thee,
• Oftener upon her knees than on her feet,
Died every day she lived:—"

which latter words are better adapted to a Saint Elizabeth of Hungary, than to the ordinary type of the virtuous royal matron.

On the other hand, it is to be observed that neither does he pander to low tastes by ridicule of the Puritans, who in his time were becoming the butt of dramatic raillery. Only three or four times does he allude to them, and then not offensively. He does not, like Ben Jonson, bring on the stage a Tribulation Wholesome or a Brother Ananias, to whine, and cant, and turn up his eyes for the amusement of the audience. And yet here there was some temptation; for the Puritans were no friends of the theatre, and Goffon and others of the party had lately carried on as fierce a warfare against it as was waged by Jeremy Collier in the days of Dryden and Congreve.

Whatever may have been the personal sins or weak-

nesses of Shakespeare, his moral convictions were never other than sound and healthy. On human duty he speaks with no uncertain accents. He draws the broad lines of law with inexorable firmness. He has none of the specious sophisms by which ingenious scepticism plays fast and loose with right and wrong. Such suggestions he brings to shame in the person of Angelo, and rebukes in the heart of Claudio by words of fire from the vestal lips of Isabella. When he would win our deepest sympathy for the youthful Malcolm, he represents him as pure as the Sir Galahad of old romance. He never builds the interest of his dramas on revolting perversions of natural feeling and the natural relations of life. He does not turn the "sacred Muse" into a "scandalous Bayadere," to taint the imagination or seduce the passions. He does, indeed, sometimes offend against modesty, but (as Dr. Newman has said) "he is clear of a worse charge—sensuality." It is only by studying the other popular writers of his age that we are enabled to estimate him aright in these respects. We ought to compare him with Beaumont and Fletcher, for the purpose, not of excusing his faults, but of measuring his elevation.

This, too, is worthy of remark, that he habitually contemplates human duty and the good human feelings as *sacred* things, and invests with sanctity the natural and instituted relations of life. The bridal kiss is the "holy close of lips;" a marriage not founded in affection is "an unholy match," and the evil of such forced unions lies in the "irreligious cursed hours" that follow them. Imogen's obedience to her father is

“her holy duty ;” the ties of kindred are “the holy cords which are too intrinse to unloose ;” tears of compassion he calls “drops that sacred pity has engendered,” and those of sorrow for the departed—

“The holy and obsequious tears
Which dear religious love steals from our eyes.”

In one noble passage he has admirably set forth the largest view of social obligation, as it may be compendiously embraced in the prescription “to live for others.” The place I allude to is in “Measure for Measure,” where the Duke is giving his commission to Angelo :—

“Thyself,” he says, “and thy belongings
Are not thine own so proper, as to waste
Thyself upon thy virtues, them on thee.
Heav’n doth with us, as we with torches do ;
Not light them for themselves : for if our virtues
Did not go forth of us, ’twere all alike
As if we had them not. Spirits are not finely touch’d,
But to fine issues : nor Nature never lends
The smallest scruple of her excellence,
But, like a thrifty goddess, she determines
Herself the glory of a creditor,
Both thanks and use.”

I have already incidentally spoken of Shakespeare’s patriotic sentiment. I think his feeling for England may be best gathered, not from particular passages, but from the whole tone and tenor of his historical plays. He never, so far as I remember, talks about love of country in the abstract ; that is one of the moral commonplaces, of which one would suppose—had he written only to draw houses, and please the pit—he

might have made theatrical capital to a greater extent. Nor are there many places where he sets himself to extol the character of his fellow-countrymen. He is fonder of a fly hit at their foibles, as when in "Othello" he glances at their "potency in potting," or, in the "Tempest," laughs at their weakness for running after strange sights; or, in "Hamlet," makes the gravedigger hint that madness among them was the rule and not the exception—the eccentric whims of Englishmen then, as now, probably making their Continental neighbours stare.

There is, however, one place where he has lavished on the glorification of his country all the resources of his eloquence, and decked her out with all the ornaments his lavish fancy could bestow. I allude to the magnificent death-bed speech of Gaunt in "Richard II."—

"This royal throne of kings—this scepter'd isle,
This earth of majesty—this seat of Mars—
This other Eden—demi-paradise;
This fortress built by nature for herself
Against infection and the hand of war;
This happy breed of men, this little world;
This precious stone set in the silver sea,
Which serves it in the office of a wall,
Or as a moat defensive to a home,
Against the envy of less happier lands,
This blessed plot, this earth, this realm, this England."

There is something, too, very grand and impressive in the closing speech of King John:—

"This England never did, nor never shall
Lie at the proud feet of a conqueror"—

and it must have deeply stirred the souls of those whose thoughts, while they heard it, reverted to the recent terrors and overthrow of the Armada.

As it regards politics,* we must not of course look in Shakespeare for any promulgation of party tenets—for Whiggism, as in Massinger, or high-flying Toryism, as in Beaumont and Fletcher, but only for the enunciation of what is universal and perennial. And it may be generally observed of him that he is heartily loyal to all the fundamental institutions of society. He is a friend to all that is stable, orderly, and well-organized: a foe to all that is nomadic or anarchical. The distinction of ranks he respects and values. He is full of fine high-toned speeches about "degree, priority, and place." He has the constitutional Conservatism of Englishmen. Feeling that his country is not a thing of yesterday,—that everything around him has its roots in the past, he prizes the hereditary forms which represent the principle of social continuity. He has a great idea of the regal office, and the "divinity that doth hedge a king;" and, let me add, also of the duties of the office; witness the noble catalogue in "Macbeth" of what he calls the "king-becoming graces":—

"As justice, verity, temperance, stableness,
Bounty, perseverance, mercy, lowliness,
Devotion, patience, courage, fortitude."

To a mob, as Coleridge remarks, he takes the tone of good-humoured banter, as to a huge irrational animal,

* Coleridge's *Literary Remains*, vol. i. p. 305.

and turns its follies and passions into sport, as we see in "Julius Cæsar" and "Coriolanus."

It would be interesting, if it were possible, to know what he thought of the government of England in his day, and of the public men who were then conspicuous. The commentators have noticed in several of his plays indignant satire directed against the arrogance of official persons, and the sham wisdom of politicians. But it is to be observed that all these passages are found in a group of plays, which were produced within a few years of each other after the beginning of the seventeenth century. The "insolence of office," and "the politician who would circumvent God," are in "Hamlet." "Man, proud man, Drest in a little brief authority—like an angry ape, Playing fantastic tricks before high heaven," is in "Measure for Measure." The "dog in office," and "the scurvy politician, seeming to see the thing he does not," are in "King Lear." And this leads me to remark that the general history of Shakespeare's views of life—of the lights and shadows under which human nature and society appeared to him at different times, may, not less than his intellectual development, be illustrated from the chronology of his writings.

Up to the middle of his poetic career we find every appearance of his having possessed a joyous, unembarrassed spirit. There is nothing harsh or jarring in his tone of feeling: what melancholy there is, is but the softly harmonious, poetic melancholy of "Romeo and Juliet." I often think that in a class of characters which abound in the plays of the first and part of the

second period, we may see some image of Shakespeare's own temper in the earlier years of his manhood. I mean the youths of birth and breeding whom he has introduced in such numbers into these plays, the Biron, the Mercutio, the Benedicks. They are marked, indeed, by different traits; but the varieties are wrought upon a common basis. They are all represented as combining with active intellect, lively fancy, and dexterous wit, an airy animation and elastic buoyancy of tone. I cannot doubt that Shakespeare, perhaps unconsciously, drew them from himself—that he had not here, as in other cases, to pass, by an effort of imagination, out of his personality—but had only to communicate freely to these creations the exuberance of his own youthful nature.

About the close of the sixteenth century, there is a marked alteration in his tone. I do not mean merely that there is more gravity of thought and seriousness of feeling; these would be the natural fruit of advancing years. "There seems," says Hallam, "to have been a period of Shakespeare's life when his heart was ill at ease, and ill content with the world or his own conscience: the memory of hours mis-spent, the pang of affection misplaced or unrequited, the experience of man's worse nature which intercourse with unworthy associates, by choice or circumstance, peculiarly teaches; these, as they sank down into the depths of his great mind, seem not only to have inspired into it the conception of Lear and Timon, but that of one primary character—the censurer of mankind." And the critic proceeds to show how this one character, changing its

form, but retaining its essence, appears in several of the plays—how the type is seen alike in the “philosophic melancholy” of Jacques—in the wayward gloom of Hamlet, broken by flashes of “feigned gaiety and extravagance”—in the stern, harsh justice of the Duke in “Measure for Measure”—in the inspirations which lend “an awful eloquence” to the frenzy of Lear—and in the fierce “Juvenalian satire” of the Athenian misanthrope.

Mr. Knight, who deserves acknowledgment as one of the most genial and reverential of Shakespeare’s commentators, rejects this theory of Hallam, and regards all these persons of the poet’s drama simply as creatures of his art, not in any degree as exponents of his self-consciousness. But, I think, in order to do so, it is necessary either to neglect the Sonnets, or to give them a non-natural interpretation. It is clear from those poems (which belong to the interval between 1599 and 1603) that about the middle of his author-life he passed through a prolonged moral crisis. They show that the hollowness and insincerity which experience of the world had made known to him, and the social wrongs and abuses he had witnessed, had powerfully affected his mind. He had also, too plainly, tasted of the Dead-Sea fruits of unlawful pleasure, which sooner or later turn to ashes on the lips. And it is intimated that in some way or other he had been exposed to public censure and shame. Under the pressure of gloomy thoughts he breaks out in the 66th Sonnet,

“Tired with all these, for restful death I cry.”

The tone of many of the Sonnets is what has been

well called a "Hamlet-like discontent" with others and with himself; and, in particular, the one which opens with the line I have quoted has much in common with the celebrated soliloquy "To be or not to be." The state of feeling to which the "censurer of mankind" gives utterance was therefore undoubtedly a phase through which Shakespeare's own mind was passing about the time when he wrote the plays in which that character appears.

But Shakespeare was not to sink into such morbid misanthropy as corroded the soul of Swift. The sins and wrongs he saw around him, the bitterness of spirit he felt within, did not rob him of his faith in Humanity. That he all along believed intensely in human love, and friendship, and fidelity, is sufficiently proved by the creation of Kent and Cordelia. In his later works, "Macbeth" and the rest, the character described by Hallam, and the tone of sentiment which it embodies, never again present themselves. Nay, we are able to follow the poet into a serene and peaceful region, in which the old sweetness and cheerfulness are restored, joined with all the breadth and elevation of his maturity. Three of the works of the last period, which must be referred to its closing years, stand in some degree apart from the other members of the group. I mean "Cymbeline," the "Winter's Tale," and the "Tempest." It is a notion of Mr. Spalding's, and one to which we would gladly assent, that these works were the productions of the quiet evening of Shakespeare's life, after he had returned to Stratford, when in tranquil meditation he wandered through his

native fields or along the banks of Avon. Willingly, too, would we accept the idea of Campbell, worthy of a poet, and which neither external nor internal evidence contradicts, that the "Tempest" was the last of all his plays, that in it he was inspired to represent himself under the image of the potent and beneficent enchanter, and that our Prospero, when the dainty Ariel of his imagination had completed this last task, forswore his magic, and buried the implements of his art deeper than ever plummet founded. However this may be, it is with lively satisfaction that we see imaged in these latest writings, and particularly in the "Tempest," the final calmness and harmony of the poet's soul. Over the discords, contradictions, and perplexities of life, he here serenely triumphs; and, with mind disengaged, and temper in which the sportive and the serious are exquisitely blended, throws into the air that wonderful cloud-picture of the Enchanted Isle. How noble the figure of Prospero! how pure and tender the character of Miranda—his most exquisite ideal of the maiden, as Imogen of the wife! What delicacy, yet distinctness in the painting! What lofty wisdom in the thought! What all-embracing humanity in the sentiment!

Here it is fitting that I should close. But I cannot do so without saying a few words of the obligations we owe to the poets, and pre-eminently to Shakespeare. It is a very false notion of the uses of poetry which regards it merely as an amusement—a graceful and refined occupation for idle hours. Remembering how much it has to do with the formation of character, we

ought to regard it in a far more serious light. Poets are, in truth, the most effective educators of the human race. It is mainly from them, as the interpreters of experience, that the mass of mankind imbibe whatever they attain of the most valuable of all knowledge—that, namely, of the laws of their own nature. They present to us each of the relations of life in its true essence, and make us feel and value our citizenship in the great commonwealth of Humanity. By keeping before us high ideals, they lead us up to purity and nobleness; by painting the weaknesses and errors of our fellow-men, they teach us humility and compassion. Transporting us beyond the narrow sphere of daily circumstance, they wean us from selfish and mercenary thoughts—they train us to all gentleness and courtesy—and show us the beauty of generosity, fidelity, and devotion. They nourish and foster all those delicate sentiments of the heart which may be called the affluents or feeding-streams of religion.

And to which of all the laurelled band ought we to feel most grateful for these benefits? Is it not to Shakespeare, who, in our mother-tongue, has taught us best of all these sweet and ennobling lessons?

“ Blessings be with him and eternal praise—
Our sacred poet, who has made us heirs
Of truth and pure delight by heav’nly lays.”





THE ENGLISH DRAMA;
ITS PAST HISTORY AND PROBABLE FUTURE.

BY ARTHUR HOUSTON, M.A.

PROFESSOR OF POLITICAL ECONOMY, TRINITY
COLLEGE, DUBLIN.





THE ENGLISH DRAMA.

WHAT I purpose to attempt in the course of this Lecture, is to sketch rapidly the rise and progress of the English drama from the earliest period to the present time, noting the successive changes through which it passed, with the causes which gave birth to them, selecting as specimens the works of such authors as seem best to represent the spirit of each successive age, and illustrating their style by an occasional brief quotation. I shall also venture to intersperse a few critical remarks, and, if time permit, make some observations on the probable future of the drama.

Without further prologue, therefore, let the curtain rise on the first act of the English drama; and a very curious scene it presents. Try to imagine, if you can, for a few moments, that we are living somewhere about four or five hundred years ago, in the middle of the fourteenth or fifteenth century, and fancy that we are a crowd of rustics, clad in all sorts of quaint picturesque costumes, and collected on a fair-day or a feast-day to witness a play of the period. If you will assist me in doing this, I shall try to point out what we should have seen under the circumstances.

Rather a lofty platform, technically termed a "scaffold," is before us; behind and about it are some rude attempts at scenery. On it we shall, on attentive observation, perceive a very odd collection of characters. Your glance will probably be first attracted by a gentleman of distinguished, though rather unprepossessing appearance. On closer inspection, you will probably observe that he sports rather a dubious foot, and carries a long tail thrown over his arm. By these marks and tokens, even if he be not also furnished with a smart pair of horns, you may recognize the most favourite character in the early British drama—to wit, no less a personage than his Satanic majesty himself.

I almost shrink from telling you what other beings of a higher and holier order were presented in the likeness of men; but our ancestors were by no means so squeamish, and not unfrequently more than one person of the Trinity figured in these strange spectacles.

That meek-looking female, with downcast eyes and voice subdued, is probably meant for Mary the Virgin, and her companion, beautiful even in her coarse garb of penitence, is the Magdalen.

Among these august personages, however, are mingled others of a less awful presence. Probably some youth is represented as forming the subject of an animated contest between the powers of good and evil, who each claim him for their own. Or it may be that some hoary-headed sinner who has been dabbling in alchemy, or some precocious young damsel that has been practising witchcraft, is about to be handed over

to the tender mercies of the afore-mentioned gentleman of finifter aspect.

To those accustomed to the modern drama, with its completely worldly character, such a picture of the only kind of play known in the middle ages cannot but appear strange. Nevertheless such exhibitions were then exceedingly common. They were chiefly provided by the clergy for the purpose of conveying religious or moral instruction to the people in an entertaining manner, and the performance was not unfrequently given in a place of worship after divine service.

Perhaps it was not strictly correct to speak of that precise type of dramatic spectacle of which I have endeavoured to give you some notion, as the *earliest* form of play acted in England. The fact is, these religious dramas were of two classes. The earlier consisted merely of some Scripture story or some faintly legend thrown into a dramatic shape. In it all the characters were real, though some were supernatural. Such a drama was called a "Miracle Play." But, for some reason, probably on account of the manifest impropriety of introducing the Deity on the stage, and in company with the devil moreover, this species of play was afterwards in a great measure superseded by another called the "Morality." In the "Morality" the virtues and vices supplied the places of the powers of good and evil, and, in general, feelings, passions, and principles, were represented in the abstract. Thus Justice and Patriotism, as well as Falsehood, Vice, or Ingratitude, were made to take part in the action.

Finally came a third species of religious play, in which both these species of characters were intermingled. This "Mixed" play, as it is sometimes called, was that half-miracle, half-morality, which my description referred to.

Although the plots of the miracle plays were drawn from Scripture narratives and faintly legends, they did not strictly follow the original. In order to render them palatable to a popular audience, it was necessary to enliven them by the introduction of scenes and episodes of a more worldly character; and here, indeed, we can occasionally perceive not a little dramatic power, though displayed on so singular a stage.

In order to enable you to form some idea of a miracle-play, I shall take as an example one of that famous collection known as the "Townley Mysteries." The "Townley Mysteries" consist of a series of these sacred dramas founded on Scriptural subjects, commencing with the Creation, and embracing most of the leading incidents narrated in the Old and New Testaments. The one I have chosen for an example is the "Proceſſus Noe," or "Career of Noah." It opens with a description of the interview between the Deity and the Patriarch, in which the coming of the flood is foretold, and directions are given for the construction of the ark. In this portion of the work the Mosaic account is followed pretty closely; but the writer has enlivened the play with an episode which strangely contrasts with this solemn opening.

Noah, it seems, according to this veracious record, was somewhat unfortunate in his domestic relations.

His wife was a fhrew ; and the home of the patriarch was much disturbed by family jars. When disinissed, therefore, from the Divine presence, his thoughts immediately recur to the reception his intelligence will receive from his helpmate. It is thus he foliloquises :—

“My wife, I will see what she will say ;
And I am aghast lest we have a fray
Betwixt us both ;
For she is ill-tempered,
For little oft angry.
If anything wrong be,
Soon is she wroth.”

Here it may be well to observe that in this and any other extracts I had occasion to make, I found it necessary to modernise the language a good deal, as otherwise it would not have been very intelligible without the aid of an Anglo-Saxon glossary. I have, however, endeavoured to preserve the spirit and metre of the original as far as possible.

Notwithstanding Noah's dread of the coming domestic storm, he addresses his wife with assumed cheerfulness and composure :—

“God speed, dear wife : how fare ye ?”

She replies to his affectionate inquiries after her state :—

“Now, as I hope to thrive, the worse that thee I see.
Come, tell me, by your leave, where has thou so long be.
We may be driven to death, for thee,
By want of victual.
While *we* toil and swink,
Thou dost what thou think,
Yet of meat and of drink
Have we but little.”

Passing over these complaints in silence, Noah replies gravely :—

“ Wife, we are fore distrefs’d by tidings new.”

But she laughs at his fears, and taunts him with habitual gloom. This rouses his ire ; he bids her have done, or he will *compel* her to hold her tongue, even if he have recourse to violent measures. She defies him, and threatens to retaliate ; on which provocation he exclaims :—

“ We shall try it at once ; have at thee—Gill,”

and aims a blow at her, which she returns with spirit and effect. But though vanquished, she is not subdued ; though he accuses her of “ shrieking ” and “ whining ” by turns, it appears that she “ bites ” with not less pertinacity.

The patriarch becoming at length somewhat exhausted with his exertions, and the lady somewhat cooled down, she goes to her spinning, and he begins to think of the light and agreeable task he had before him, namely, the construction of the ark :—

“ I tarry full long from my work I trow,

Now my gear will I take and thitherward go.

* * * * *

Now assay will I

What I ken of carpentry.

* * * * *

To begin on this tree my bones will I bend,

I trow from the Trinity will succour be send.

* * * * *

Now my gown will I cast, and work in my coat,

Make will I the mast, ere I stir one foot.

Ah ! my back it will break ! ‘ This is a sorry note,

’Tis a wonder I last, I am such an old dote.”

Despite of much more repining to the same effect the work progresses, and, to his great astonishment, is at length quite finished, even to the coat of pitch and tar that was to make the vessel water-tight. Meanwhile his wife has been engaged in her favourite occupation, spinning. At this stage of the proceedings it becomes necessary to inform her and his family of the state of affairs, for as yet they are unaware of the approaching cataclysm:—

Noah. “Come hither, wife, quickly, and consider;
Hence must we fly all at once together
In haste.

Wife. Why, sirs, what ails ye?
Who is it affails ye?
To flee it avails ye,
And ye be aghast.

Noah. There are wigs on the green else, my dame.*

Wife. Come tell me all about it, else ye get blame.”

He does so and her consternation is great. Noah says—

“Be not afraid: have done: pack up our traps: †
That we be i’ th’ ark ere noon, without more mishaps.”

The sons then enter and begin to put the household gods on board the ark with alacrity; their mother lends a hand too; but lest it should be thought that she was a willing agent, takes care to let it be known that she only does so “for fear of a skelp.” Everything being now ready, it only remains to get snugly into the ark, shut the door, and quietly watch the rest of the world

* The original is, “There is yarn on the reel else, my dame.”

† “Gear,” in the original.

in process of submerſion. An unforeſeen difficulty, however, now preſents itſelf. The effects of her morning's caſtigation having apparently paſſed off, the wife is once more, like Pip's ſiſter, "on the rampage." She gives vent to her ill-temper accordingly after the following faſhion :—

Wife. "I never was mew'd up before, as ever I might thee,
In ſuch a cuib as this ;
In faith I cannot find
Which is before and which behind.

But ſhall we here be penn'd,
Noah, as you hope for bliſs ?

Noah. Dame, as it is reaſon, here muſt we abide, grace ;
Therefore, wife, with good-will come into this place

Wife. For Jack nor for Gill will I turn my face
Till I have on this bill ſpun a ſpace
On my rock."

At this unexpected announcement, accompanied by a threat that ſhe will "*knock*" any one that "*lets*" her, blank aſtoniſhment lights on her whole family. The reſt of the ſcene, if I had time to read it to you, is exquiſitely ludicrous. The water falls in "*cataraſts*" from the ſky, and guſhes in floods from the earth. The ark is ready to receive the favoured family, and ſave them from the deſtruction which is now overtaking the reſt of the world. But there ſits this obſtinate woman, plying her diſtaff with provoking energy and aggravating perſeverance, enjoying the conſternation of the little group that are preſſing round her, imploring her frantically to take refuge while there is ſtill time. Noah points to the gaping windows of heaven, and conjures her by his affection for her to come in : "*ſhe doesn't care*

a pin," she says, "*for him or his affection.*" Her sons entreat her to listen *for once* to reason; their wives very judiciously urge that she can spin as much as she likes when she is in the ark. It is all to no purpose. "She will spin a space on her rock;" "this spindle" she "will slip upon this hill;" in a word, "she *will* be drowned, and nobody *shall* save her." At last, Noah, losing all patience, declares if she does not come they will leave her to her fate. Her situation is now becoming somewhat uncomfortable; the water is rising rapidly; the seat she sits on is submerged; she can keep up the farce no longer; she is forced to give way, and bundle into the ark, glad enough to escape, and rather ashamed of her waywardness, as it would appear.

This, it will be allowed, though a quaint, was a singularly lively and well-drawn picture.

Religious dramas began to be written about the beginning of the twelfth century, and ceased about the beginning of the seventeenth. Their purpose had been served. They had helped to console the people under oppression by representing the triumphs of virtue and the punishment of vice. They had served to keep up a belief in the existence and interposition of a beneficent Providence, at a time when the long reign of violence and injustice might lead men to doubt if the earth were not handed over to the rule of the spirit of this world. They had instructed them in the doctrines of religion and morality at a time when the masses could only be reached through the eye and ear, books being scarce, and the art of reading as rare as it is now happily common. But with the middle ages the want

of such a source of consolation, and such a means of instruction, and such an engine of morality, was no longer felt.

A few of these sacred dramas have, however, been composed in recent times. Milton originally cast his great work in this mould. It is a matter of sincere congratulation that he afterwards chose a form more suitable to the dignity of the subject. Byron, we are all aware, wrote a mystery called "*Cain*," which abounds with fine poetry and bold speculation. It is in all respects a very different class of production from the old mystery. In it the devil gets at least his due, if not something more. The last miracle-play written in English is Longfellow's paraphrase of the "*Golden Legend*." Though the poetry in many passages is exquisite, the mind is rather shocked at the familiarity with which sacred subjects are treated. There is nothing edifying, for instance, in the scene which represents the second person of the Trinity in his childhood playing with Judas on the shores of the Sea of Galilee, and making sparrows out of mud.

Long after they had disappeared from our stage, religious plays survived on the Continent, especially in the Roman Catholic states. Even in these, however, they were prohibited from time to time. But, strange to say, one has still kept its ground. Once every ten years the "*Passion of Christ*" is represented in Ammergau, a village in Bavaria. About 1663 a pestilence visited the vale in which Ammergau lies; and on that occasion the inhabitants made a vow, in fulfilment of which this decennial representation takes place, this

drama being exempted from the general prohibition by a special privilege accorded by the King of Bavaria in 1810.*

From the existence of such attempts at dramatic composition as the Miracle-plays, of which we have had a specimen, no one could have anticipated the splendid future that was in store for the English drama. Nevertheless, early in the sixteenth century it began to give signs of clearing itself from those incumbrances which retarded its development. Thus a sort of play in one act had been invented to fill up the time between the courses of the banquets given by princes and nobles. They were on that account called "Interludes." As anything partaking of a sacred character would have been out of place amid the rude junketings of still but half-civilized aristocracy, these interludes were mostly founded on incidents drawn from common life, and of a more or less humorous character. John Heywood seems to have dealt largely in this species of composition, if, indeed, he was not the inventor of it. A very good specimen of the interlude is furnished by a piece of his called the "Four P's," so styled from the initial letter of each of the four *dramatis personæ*, namely, a Palmer, a Pardoner, a Pedlar, and a Poticary (or, apothecary). These four worthies engage in a spirited contest as to which can tell the greatest lie. In the course of the piece the

* Those who take an interest in the subject will find a full account of the pageant in the second volume of *Macmillan's Magazine*, p. 463. Since writing this passage I have ascertained that these spectacles are still represented in America.

Palmer happens to observe that he never saw a woman out of temper. His rivals, upon his making this casual remark, unguardedly declare that it was the greatest falsehood they ever heard. The Palmer, taking advantage of this involuntary admission, claims the prize, and most undeservedly, in my humble judgment, bears away the palm for mendacity.

A piece like the "Four P's" can scarcely lay more claim to the title of a drama than an acting charade. But some time previous to 1551, a play had been produced possessing in point of plot, characters, and form, all the features belonging to a drama proper. This was the comedy of "Ralph Roister Doister." Before the discovery of this work, another, called "Gammer Gurton's Needle," enjoyed the credit of being the proto-comedy in the English language. This latter is founded on a domestic bereavement; to wit, the loss of Dame Gurton's favourite, if not her only, needle. In that age, before the furniture of a lady's work-box was turned out by steam-power, such a loss was a real calamity. I am happy, therefore, to inform you that the good lady, in the end, found her needle; but the how and the where I decline to say. The curious must consult the original.

I cannot say that "Gammer Gurton's Needle" possesses much point; nor do I admire the rollicking mirth of "Ralph Roister Doister." These pieces have very little value in a literary point of view, whatever they may possess as matters of antiquarian curiosity.

"Ralph Roister Doister" and "Gammer Gurton's

Needle" were both comedies. But we are told that, in 1562, Queen Elizabeth witnessed, at her palace of Whitehall, a play called "Gorboduc," performed by the gentlemen of the Inner Temple. "Gorboduc" is remarkable as being, so far as we know, the earliest tragedy proper in the language. But it is perhaps still more remarkable as being the earliest experiment in the employment in dramatic productions of that species of versification which experience has fully shown to be best adapted to them, namely, blank verse.

The tragic drama of "Gorboduc" is the joint production of Thomas Sackville, Lord Buckhurst, and of Thomas Norton. The latter was a mere rhymester, as may be gathered from the fact that he had a hand in the travesty of the sublime sacred songs of the Jews, known to fame as "Sternhold and Hopkins's Version of the Psalms of David." Thomas Sackville was a man of different stamp. He was at least a poet, if he was not a dramatist. His style possesses all the gloomy grandeur of Spenser in his sombre mood; it is funereal indeed, but it represents the majesty of woe. This tragedy was not the only work in which Sackville had been concerned, he had also planned and assisted in carrying out a literary project called "The Mirrour for Magistrates," which was a collection of versified biographies of the principal characters in English history, and enjoyed a lengthened popularity. However, with all his deep pathos, and all his sublimity of imagination, Sackville wanted that animation which is essential to a dramatist. He excelled in narrative, but in dialogue he failed. Hence "Gorboduc" is more like an epic broken up into acts

and scenes, than a work originally cast in a dramatic mould.

The Rubicon once passed, the progress of dramatic composition in England was rapid. The names of the authors and their works are almost legion. The reader of the productions of the last half of the sixteenth century feels himself as it were suddenly thrown among the crowd in a busy and populous city; or perhaps a better illustration would be the sensation of a stranger who for the first time mingles in the carnival at Rome. It teems with life, with life in every variety, with character in every phase. There is no rank, no calling, no idiosyncrasy without its representative. Emperors, politicians, priests, Frenchmen, Spaniards, Germans, Turks; the swarthy inhabitants of Indostan, and the fierce warriors of Tartary; the miser and the spendthrift; the ruined aristocrat, and the purse-proud upstart; gentle and affectionate wives, and cruel traitors to the marriage-vow, all throng the stage, and move about in scenes which, if sometimes tinged with exaggeration and improbability, are seldom deficient in power and interest.

Amid such a profusion the task of selecting is difficult. It seems slighting the mighty dead to pass over any of their names in silence. But I cannot pause to speak of Beaumont and Fletcher, the Damon and Pythias of literature, nor of Lyly the euphuist, and his imitators, Peele and Greene, and Kyd and Lodge, who did so much to refine, and not a little to weaken the pronunciation of our language by their courtly utterance. Passing over the works of these and many others, I have

made choice of two pieces, a tragedy and a comedy, as illustrating this epoch. The tragedy is that of "Faustus," by Christopher Marlowe; the comedy, Ben Jonson's "Every Man out of his Humour."

By a consent almost unanimous, the palm of dramatic excellence among the predecessors of Shakespeare is given to Marlowe, and in this posterity has only endorsed the verdict on his merits which his contemporaries returned. Thus in the affectionate tribute to Shakespeare's genius penned by Ben Jonson, his name is thus introduced:—

"And tell how far thou didst our Lyly outshine,
Or sporting Kyd, or Marlowe's *mighty line*."

Shakespeare himself, in the following couplet, quotes an expression of Marlowe's with approbation:—

"Dead shepherd! now I know thy saw of might:
Who ever loved, that loved not at first sight?"

Schlegel's judgment on Marlowe is not very favourable; but coming as it does from so discriminating a critic, it cannot be considered as altogether uncomplimentary. "He has," he remarks, "handled the history of Edward II. in a very artless way it is true, but with a certain truth and effect, so that many scenes do not fail to produce a pathetic effect. His verses are flowing, but without energy; how Ben Jonson came to use the expression 'Marlowe's mighty line,' is more than I can conceive. Shakespeare could neither learn nor derive much from the luscious manner of Lyly. But in Marlowe's 'Edward II.' I certainly imagine I can discover

the feebler model of the earlier historical pieces of Shakespeare.”*


The play here alluded to certainly does present, in many of its scenes, a marked resemblance to Shakespeare’s “Richard II,” the subject of which was, in his foolish life and melancholy end, almost the counterpart of his unfortunate ancestor. There is a play of Marlowe’s between which and Shakespeare’s “Merchant of Venice” some little parallel exists, namely, “Barabas the Jew of Malta.” But nothing can set the superiority of Shakespeare in a clearer light than a comparison of the character of Barabas with that of Shylock. In the latter, the avaricious money-lender is merged in the Jew; in the former, the Jew is swallowed up in the unscrupulous usurer. If time allowed, I might trace the social causes which have stamped on the Jews the characteristics they display, and show that while Shakespeare has accurately reproduced the type in a naturally sensitive mind, it has been misrepresented by Marlowe. But the play of Marlowe’s to which I wish to draw your attention particularly, is that of “Dr. Faustus.” The story on which it is founded, is the same as that which supplied Goethe with materials for his immortal work. Faust, or Faustus, was one of the first to practise the art of printing while the process was yet kept a profound secret; and such was the rapidity with which facsimiles were turned out, that his ignorant and superstitious countrymen attributed to the agency of the Evil One, what was in reality

* Schlegel’s *Dramatic Literature*, translated by Black, vol. i. pp. 287-8.

but the work of human ingenuity. Faust, like most of the early typographers, was a person of considerable attainments; and the German mind, which unites in the highest degree the analytic power of the intellect with the synthetic power of the imagination, framed from these facts one of the most sublime of German legends. Goethe added the finishing touch when he introduced the beautiful being whose name is always associated with that of the noble-minded but misguided Faust. Marguerite, by the strong contrast between her character and that of her lover, brings out the latter in bolder prominence, and by the charm of her feminine trustfulness, relieves the deep gloom which the hopeless scepticism of Faust sheds over the story. Any one accustomed to the plot as constructed by Goethe, will sadly miss the sweet face of Marguerite from the group drawn by Marlowe in his "Faustus." Her place is but ill-supplied by the unsubstantial forms of the bloodthirsty courtesan who instigated Alexander to the destruction of Babylon, and of the faithless wife who occasioned the fall of Troy. The play, I think, grows weaker as it proceeds. The opening passages are marked by a vigour of expression, and a loftiness of thought, not to be found in those that occur farther on. The terrible end of the doctor of course is of itself sufficient to impart a tragic interest to the closing scenes; but there is not much dramatic skill exerted in the handling of this dreadful episode.

Before dismissing Marlowe, I may just mention another of his plays which is of interest, as affording the earliest example of the use of blank verse in dramas

intended for a popular audience; those previously written in that measure being in general acted before the Court. This play is the tragedy of "Tambour-lane." Its language is pompous in the extreme, the delineation of character is coarse, and the description of passion violent. But great allowance must be made for these apparent defects, when we take the subject of the play into account. The principal characters are Eastern barbarians, proverbially prone to the extremes of passion, and addicted to the use of hyperbolic expressions. Marlowe in my opinion has been rather under-rated. Gifford thinks he bestows sufficient commendation when he says that Marlowe does not deserve ridicule. Schlegel cannot conceive how Ben Jonson could have employed the expression, "Marlowe's mighty line." The fact is, that the splendour of Shakespeare's genius so completely eclipses that of the lesser lights by which he was surrounded, that critics have forgotten their stellar beauty and brightness amid the blaze of his noontide refulgence. The more Marlowe's plays are read, the more the vigour of his best passages will become apparent: they are, however, unfortunately often found side by side with others weak in the extreme.

 We have now traced the drama from its cradle to its manhood. We have watched its rise as a dry miracle-play, which, careless of pointing a moral, was satisfied to adorn a tale by clothing it in a dramatic dress. We have seen how from this was developed a form of play, grotesque in many of its features, but still superior in this, that it attempted to convey some useful lesson.

Next, we have observed how, shaking itself free from the supernatural appendages that impeded its action and marred its effect, it assumed a more natural dress, and appeared as a drama properly so-called, imperfect, indeed, in many of its parts, but still possessing the germs of a better state of existence. Lastly, we have seen how, in the hands of the Sackvilles and Marlowes of the time, it arrived at such a state, that in form it may be described as perfect, though in the style of its versification, and in the treatment of character, much improvement yet remained to be made. The statue had now been roughly chiselled from the block: its outlines, full of strength and beauty, could be plainly discerned; it wanted but the finishing touches from the hand of a master to render it the very counterpart of life. Had that master's hand been wanting, or had the hand which was to add these last touches been deficient in delicacy, the figure might have lain for ever in its uncouth, irregular beauty, or been marred by the awkward strokes of some unskilful chisel. But happily the work fell to the lot of an artist of the most exquisite taste, the most consummate skill, and the most transcendent power. Under his hand all the latent vigour and all the veiled beauties of the unfinished statue awoke to life. Need I say that artist was Shakespeare? His works will be revered by future generations as the Grecian statues and temples are by us, as models to be studied and imitated by all who would aspire to excel in the arts which they illustrate.

I do not intend to pause and contemplate the writings of Shakespeare, for the recollection of the

splendid essay on this subject, to which we very lately listened, is still so fresh, that to do so would be presumption on my part. And indeed, it is fortunate that I am relieved from a task from which I should have shrunk in despair. I should have approached the works of Shakespeare with an awe that would have prevented me venturing to hint at the existence of a single fault, and with an admiration that would, I fear, have betrayed me into eulogies that might have appeared excessive.

Therefore I have selected the works of a second-rate dramatist—second-rate only by comparison with the genius of Shakespeare—to illustrate this period in the history of our dramatic literature.

The comedy I have chosen from the dramas of this period is that of “Every Man out of his Humour.” It is from the pen of Ben Jonson, “Rare Ben Jonson,” as the simple inscription on the slab that covers his narrow grave in our national mausoleum touchingly styles him. Jonson began to write for the stage about 1593, the year of Marlowe’s death, but did not bring out his first successful drama, “Every Man *in* his Humour,” till about three years later. I have chosen “Every Man *out of* his Humour,” written some time afterwards, not because I think it his best play, but because it is, on the whole, that which is most characteristic, that in which his peculiar vein of thought is most strikingly displayed.

Jonson was a dramatic Dickens. He delighted in the portrayal of characters original and eccentric to a degree that makes them little short of caricatures in every case, and in many cases extremely repulsive. He is nervously anxious, too, that we should understand

the idiosyncrasy of the several *dramatis personæ*, and hence he is careful to prefix to each of his plays an outline sketch of each. He is the very antithesis of Shakespeare in the delineation of character. As was admirably pointed out by Dr. Ingram in his lecture, Shakespeare did not commit himself to the theory of a master-passion, swallowing up all minor feelings, and leaving the individual a mere abstract representation of such and such a trait. And further, Shakespeare makes the character reveal itself as it does in real life, by actions, and not by a "self-dissection" performed in the hearing of the audience, and for their instruction. Jonson, on the other hand, not content even with this expedient, has recourse to that of forestalling the reader's or rather the actor's judgment, in the manner I have described. This not only deprives us of the pleasure derived from watching the gradual unfolding of character, and the satisfaction of seeing our anticipations realised, an exercise most gratifying to an observant mind, but renders much of the play positively superfluous, and the *dénouement* a foregone conclusion.

The scene I have chosen to exemplify Jonson's style is a dialogue between Sogliardo and Carlo Buffone. As already remarked, Jonson has prefixed to his plays a slight sketch of the character of each of the *dramatis personæ*, and as this will help you to understand the dialogue, I shall take the liberty of quoting his own description of these two personages.

Of Sogliardo he says: "An essential clown, yet so enamoured of the name of gentleman, that he will have it though he buys it. He comes up to town every term to learn to take tobacco, and see new motions

[*plays*]. He is in his kingdom when he can get himself into company where he may be well laughed at.”

I may observe, on the fact that one of the motives of Sogliardo's periodic visits to town was in order to “*learn to take tobacco*,” that at one time this was reckoned a polite accomplishment, and studied as such under the tuition of duly qualified professors, who had devoted to its cultivation the time and attention a subject of so much importance deserved. The present generation, if inferior to their ancestors in other respects, certainly excel them in this, that they manage to arrive at very considerable proficiency in the art without any adventitious assistance.

Of the second speaker, *Carlo Buffone*, he says:—
 “A public, scurrilous, and profane jester, that, more swift than Circe, with absurd similes will transform any person into deformity. A good feast-hound, or banquet-beagle, that will scent you out a supper some three miles off, and swear to his patrons A slave that hath an extraordinary gift in pleasing his palate, and will swill up more sack at a sitting than would make all the guard a posset. His religion is railing, and his discourse ribaldry. They stand highest in his respect whom he studies most to reproach.”

“*Sogl.* Nay, look you, Carlo, this is my humour now! I have land and money; my friends left me well, and I will be a gentleman, whatsoever it costs me.

Car. A most gentlemanlike resolution.

Sogl. Tut! An I take an humour of a thing once, I am like a tailor's needle, I go through.—But for my name, signor, what think ye? Will it not serve for a gentleman's name when the Signor is put to it? eh?

Car. Let me hear, how is it?

Sogl. Signor Infulso Sogliardo : methinks it sounds well.

Car. Oh ! excellent ! tut ! an all fitted to your name, you might stand well for a gentleman. I know many Sogliardos gentlemen.

Sogl. Why, and for my wealth I might be a justice of the peace.

Car. Ay, and a constable for your wit.

Sogl. All this is my lordship you see here ; and these farms you came by.

Car. Good steps to gentility too, marry ; but Sogliardo, if you affect to be a gentleman indeed, you must observe all the rare humours and qualities of a gentleman.

Sogl. I know it, signor, and if you please to instruct, I am not too good to learn.

* * * * *

Car. First, to be an accomplished gentleman, that is, a gentleman of the time, you must give up housekeeping in the country, and live altogether in the city among gallants, where at your first appearance it were well you turned four or five hundred acres of your best land into two or three trunks of apparel,—you may do it without going to a conjuror ; and be sure you mix yourself with such as flourish in the spring of the fashion and are least popular :—study their carriage and behaviour in all ; learn to play at primers and passage ; and ever when you lose, have two or three peculiar oaths to swear by that no man else swears : but above all, protest in your play, and affirm, upon your credit as you are a true gentleman, at every cast ;—and you may do it with a safe conscience, I warrant you !

Sogl. O admirable ! rare ! he cannot choose but be a gentleman that has these excellent gifts : more, more ! I beseech you.

Car. When you come to plays, be humorous ; * look with a good starched face ; ruffle your face like a new boot : laugh at nothing but your own jests, or else as the noblemen laugh. That's a special grace you must observe.

Sogl. I warrant you, sir.

Car. Ay, and sit on the stage and flout :—provided you have a good suit.

Sogl. Oh ! I'll have a suit only for that, sir.

* This means "moody."

Car. You must talk much of your kindred and allies.

Sogl. Lies! No, signor: I shall not need to do so. I have kindred in the city to talk of: I have a niece is a merchant's wife; and a nephew of the Inns of Court.

Car. Oh, but you must pretend alliance with courtiers and great persons. . . . You must keep your men gallant at the post: fine pied liveries laid with good gold lace; there's no loss in it; they may rip it off and pawn it when they lack victuals.

Sogl. By'r lady, that's chargeable, signor; 'twill bring a man in debt.

Car. Debt! why that's the more for your credit: it's excellent policy to owe much these days, if you note it.

Sogl. As how? good signor. I would fain be a politician.

Car. Oh, look: where you are indebted any great sum, your creditor observes you with no less regard than if he were bound to you for some huge benefit, and will quake to give you the least cause of offence, lest he lose his money. I assure you in these times no man has his servant more obsequious and pliant than gentlemen their creditors, to whom if at any time you pay but a moiety or a fourth part, it comes more acceptably than if you gave them a new year's gift.

Sogl. I perceive you, sir; I will take up and bring myself in credit, sure . . . But I lack a cullisen.*

Car. Why now you ride to the city, you may buy one: I'll bring you where you shall have your choice for money.

Sogl. Can you, sir?

Car. Oh ay; you shall have one take measure of you and make you a coat of arms to fit you of whatever fashion you will.

Sogl. By word of mouth I thank you, signor: I'll be once a little prodigal, i' faith, and have a most prodigious coat."

The dawn of our dramatic history had been bright and hopeful; its noontide had been glorious beyond all example. But its night was soon to come, and to come with clouds and darkness thick and suffocating in pro-

* From the context it would seem that a cullisen was a coat of arms.

portion as its day had been clear and brilliant. This bright interval in our dramatic history was now to be brought to a close for a time by the Puritan ascendancy. Henceforward all that was amusing was to be proscribed as sinful. Music and poetry were laid under an interdiction. The drama shared a like fate. The same hands that showed their zeal in defacing the paintings and mutilating the statues, in destroying the windows of stained glass, in whitewashing the columns of porphyry, and crushing the pavements of mosaic, with which the piety of former ages had sought to give outward expression to its feelings—the hands that had emulated and surpassed in the seventeenth century the Vandalism of the fifth, could not refrain from laying their grasp on the drama, and all that belonged to it. Accordingly that assembly known to fame as the “Long Parliament” passed a statute suppressing stage-plays among other recreations. For the next twenty years Marlow, and Jonson, and Shakespeare, were banished. The curtain fell, the lights were put out, and the play-house was closed, not to be reopened until the Restoration of the Monarchy.

It is curious to notice the quarter from which came the earliest English drama of any real merit produced after this temporary suspension of dramatic animation. It was not from the gay *dilettanti* that surrounded the Merry Monarch, but from the very camp of the enemy of the drama. 'Tis true the play I am about to speak of was never acted, or intended to be acted, nor, indeed, would it be adapted for representation on our stage. Nevertheless, the appearance of a piece under such

auspices is a striking proof how natural and powerful a vehicle is the drama for the expression of strong emotion. I refer to the magnificent tragedy of "Sampson Agonistes," the work of Milton—a very Saul among the prophets on this occasion. It was composed in the interval between the production of the "Paradise Lost" and the "Paradise Regained," probably about the year 1662.

"Sampson Agonistes," I have observed, affords a striking proof of the capability of the drama to express the deepest passions of human nature, because in this piece I think we have a faithful picture of the workings of that mighty mind, when, in the decline of years, he saw all he had done battle for overthrown, and all he had fought against triumphant. Milton was emphatically one of those writers whose works reflect their thoughts. As one of the lecturers of this course has said of John Foster, he was no book-maker, but wrote what he thought; and because he thought it and felt it. He was essentially a subjective writer, and his subjectivity sometimes degenerated into egotism. In his palmy days, when the cause for which he struggled was hopeful or triumphant, he gave utterance to his hopes and his exultation in such magnificent poems as "Lycidas," in which he not obscurely threatens his enemy Laud with a scaffold. But when the day of disaster came he seemed to feel as if the reverses of his party were concentrated in himself. The lofty nature of his theme prevented this breaking out conspicuously in the "Paradise Lost," but in the "Sampson Agonistes" he found an appropriate vent for his feelings. The whole

piece abounds with expressions which show that, consciously or unconsciously, he was painting his hero from himself. One of the characteristics of Milton's mind was a power of tracing analogies. He could have written an allegory as poetical as the "Fairy Queen," and as obvious in its application as the "Pilgrim's Progress." His sacred poetry is full of adaptations of Pagan legends to Christian subjects. But he also had a faculty, characteristic of his age, and common to all minds strongly tinged with religion, namely, the power of applying the Scripture narrative to his own case, and extracting comfort from the adaptation. This is clearly the spirit in which the "Sampson Agonistes" was written. Sampson had done battle against the enemies of his country and his God: Milton had devoted his life to combating the foes of his party and his creed. Sampson had been betrayed by his wife: Milton had been deserted by his. Sampson had been deprived of sight by the Philistines: Milton had lost his vision in his controversy with Samarius. Finally, at the close of his life, Sampson found himself at the mercy of his enemies, who kept him in prison, and made him do the work of a slave: Milton, in the evening of his, lived in obscurity, poverty, and dread, by sufferance of the son of the hated Charles Stuart. The analogy was wonderfully complete; and in the drama its application is unmistakeable.

Though the "Sampson Agonistes" belongs chronologically to the Restoration period, in spirit it is far removed from it. On the 29th of May, 1660, the reign of Puritanism came to a close. The nation, like a young

heir come suddenly into the possession of unbounded wealth, gave loose rein to all the pent-up feelings that had been accumulating in the course of twenty years of restraint. It was to be expected that excesses would be committed. England presented a melancholy picture during the next quarter of a century ; and the Court, by its profligacy, taught a lesson of immorality to a nation only too ready to better the instruction. Every phase of society, and every department of human nature, suffered from this taint. The stage, which seldom fails to reflect the manners of the age, early showed how deeply it was dyed with the fashionable licentiousness. How twenty years could have wrought so great a change in popular taste seems incomprehensible. Two companies of players were formed immediately after the Restoration, one under the patronage of the king, the other under that of the Duke of York. An account of the pieces acted by these companies shows that of the dramas revived by them but a very few were Shakespeare's, a somewhat larger number were from the pen of Beaumont and Fletcher, and a still greater proportion from that of Ben Jonson. This alone indicates a marked deterioration in the public taste. But these revivals do not seem to have been very popular. The public taste had retrograded, not only with respect to the matter and style, but with regard to the verification of the drama. Thomas Davies, in his "Dramatic Miscellany," an interesting collection of criticisms and anecdotes published in the end of the last century, thus describes the falling-off in public taste : " Heroic tragedies in rhyme, bombastic in diction, and

extravagant in sentiment, and witty comedies, abounding with smart repartee and loose action, were the immediate successors of the old drama, which was founded on nature, where the dialogue was formed from general manners, the passions arose from character and incident, and the catastrophe was closed with an instructive moral."

'Of all the authors of these bombastic tragedies in rhyme, and these witty comedies, Dryden deserves the earliest mention. It will help us to judge how deeply the popular taste had sunk, when we reflect that a genius so great as Dryden did not escape the general taint. Not content with writing in rhyme, he defended the practice vigorously, and even angrily attacked all who ventured to impugn his judgment. In time, however, after he had produced several works in rhyme, such as the "*Indian Queen*" and the "*Indian Emperor*," he grew tired of the jingling of like endings, and in the prologue to his last and best rhyming tragedy, "*Aurungzebe*," thus announces his conversion :—

" But he has now another taste of wit,
And to confess the truth, though out of time,
Grows weary of his long-loved mistress, Rhyme."

In the "*Aurungzebe*" Dryden had brought the rhyming tragedy to the highest degree of perfection that such a style of composition was susceptible of. The most admired passage in the whole play paints in forcible terms the unsatisfying character of life, and reminds one of the lines in *Macbeth* where a similar conviction steals over the mind of the usurper, when just at the moment that he seemed secure in the

possession of all he had been struggling for, he felt it melting away in his grasp. It is thus that the Eastern conqueror moralizes :—

“ When I consider life, 'tis all a cheat ;
 Yet, fool'd with hope, men favour the deceit ;
 Trust on, in hopes to-morrow will repay ;
 To-morrow's falser than the former day,
 Lies more, and when it says we shall be blest'd
 With some new joys, cuts off what we possess'd.
 Strange cozenage ! None would live past years again,
 Yet all hope pleasure from what still remain ;
 And from the dregs of life hope to receive
 What the first sprightly runnings cannot give.
 I'm tired of waiting for this chemic gold,
 Which fools us young, and beggars us when old.”

So enamoured, however, had Dryden once been of his “ long-loved mistress, Rhyme,” that he actually converted the “ *Paradise Lost* ” into a rhymed opera, styled “ *The State of Innocence and the Fall of Man.* ” It appears he had the grace to apply to Milton for permission to make the improvement, and Milton is said to have answered contemptuously, “ Ay, you may tag my lines if you will.” What the result of this tagging process would be he perfectly foresaw. We are all familiar with the powerful description in the first book of the original where the rebel angels first begin to revive after their protracted descent, and find themselves wallowing in a sea of liquid fire. Those who read the rhymed paraphrase of this splendid passage, will probably close the book without proceeding further.

It may be doubted whether Dryden's conversion from rhyme to blank verse was a greater calamity to

our literature than his former devotion to "his long-loved mistress." The mode in which he made proof of sincerity in adopting his new creed was certainly curious, and had the merit of being convenient. This was nothing more or less than a condescending patronage of Shakespeare, whose works he undertook to "improve" sufficiently to render them presentable before the discriminating audiences that the Restoration period had disciplined in dramatic taste. The first upon which he tried his hand was one of the last and most finished of Shakespeare's productions, "The Tempest." Afterwards "Antony and Cleopatra" reappeared in a new dress, as "All for Love, or the World Well Lost." I may add, that while Dryden acknowledged the skill and power of the elder dramatists in their tragedies, for their comedies he entertained a profound contempt. They were sadly deficient in the intrigue and indelicacy that set off the chaste productions of Mr. Wycherley and his *collaborateurs* in that field.

"The Tempest," under the hands of Dryden and Davenant, who worked together at this congenial task, received considerable additions, and underwent many alterations. Thus, they amended the plot by the introduction of two or three new characters, in order that no one might be without an exact match with whom they might precisely correspond. Thus, in the original play we have Miranda, the daughter of Prospero, a girl who has never seen a man till the arrival of Ferdinand. They add, in the person of Hippolito, a man who had never seen a woman. This Hippolito, moreover, in another point of view, serves as a match for Pro-

spéro, namely, in being the rightful heir to the dukedom of Mantua, as Prospero was the rightful duke of Milan. Even Caliban is considerately provided with a counterpart in the person of Sycorax, his sister. By this addition, and that of Dorinda, a sister of Miranda, the effect of the picture which that lonely island with its three strange denizens presented, is studiously weakened.

The passages interpolated in the play tend to enfeeble it quite as much as the new characters. In the opening scene, for instance, the sailors carry on a long dialogue in nautical jargon, unintelligible to ordinary readers, and the object of which is, I suppose, to give it a characteristic colouring, and to impress the mind with a sense of the extreme peril which gives rise to such confusion and such a multiplicity of conflicting orders. In the original these ends are served by the judicious use of a few sea terms, which must have been familiar to most people at the time, and by the contemptuous indifference with which the skipper and his crew in that critical moment treat the illustrious landsmen who are on board. Instead of this simple and effective opening, we have in Dryden's edition a protracted scene, in which such directions as these fly about: "man the cap-storm," "cut down the hammocks," "overhaul the fore-bowling," and "brace the larboard." These, with such remarks as that the "anchor's apeak," and that it is blowing a "mackerel gale," could have had but little other effect than to perplex the audience.

I have given Dryden the first place in the list of dramatists of this epoch, less in compliment to his dramatic power than in deference to his acknowledged

superiority in other departments of literature. As a dramatist, at least one name must stand higher on the roll—that of Thomas Otway, the author of “The Orphan” and “Venice Preserved.” Like Dryden, he at first patronised rhyme, but afterwards changed it for blank verse, under the influence of a long course of Shakespearian study. Like Dryden, too, he first tried his hand at adaptations from his master. In “Caius Marius” he has interpolated whole scenes from “Romeo and Juliet.” It is characteristic of the taste of the times, that the success of the play of “Caius Marius” was secured, not by the sublimer passages extracted from the finished production of Shakspeare’s genius, including, for instance, the scene where Juliet passes through all the varying phases of horror before taking the potion and entering the tomb of her ancestors: it owed its success to the acting of one Mrs. Nokes, in the character of *the nurse*!

Otway caught a great deal of Shakspeare’s spirit from frequent communing with him. We can distinctly trace the influence of this intercourse in the play of “Venice Preserved,” which, being a conspiracy to overthrow the government by assassination, bears in many passages a striking resemblance to the tone and sentiment pervading “Julius Cæsar.” It would have been well if Otway had contented himself with having caught some of his master’s inspiration, and had refrained from repeating some of his utterances as though they were his own. Thus, in the play of “Venice Preserved,” he appropriates the beautiful sentiment of Brutus that among patriots oaths are not necessary.

When Pierre, previous to enrolling Jaffier among the conspirators, bids him swear not to reveal the plot, the latter replies, "When thou wouldst bind me is there need of oaths?" and then the passage runs on in feeble imitation of the magnificent apostrophe of Brutus:—

"No! Not an oath——

* * * *

Swear priests, and cowards, and men cautelous,
Old feeble carrions, and such suffering souls
That welcome wrongs; unto bad causes swear
Such creatures as men doubt: but do not stain
The even virtue of our enterprise,
Nor the unspotted metal of our spirits,
To think that or our cause or our performance
Did need an oath."

Deeply as tragedy and serious comedy had fallen from their former estate during the Restoration period, the comic drama had sounded still lower depths. The comic dramatists, headed by the profligate Wycherley, fought to reflect the manners of that degraded time. Such exhibitions of triumphant vice were shocking, as Macaulay remarks, not so much for their impurity as their inhuman spirit. That writer observes finely: "We find ourselves in a world in which the ladies are like very profligate, impudent, and unfeeling men, and in which the men are too bad for any place but Pandemonium or Norfolk Island. We are surrounded by foreheads of bronze, hearts like the nether millstone, and tongues set on fire of hell." How long this state of things would have lasted, if left to itself, it is hard to say; the evil might have been gradually corrected by the influence of advancing civilization. However, the reformation of the English stage was hastened, if not

brought about, by the appearance of the "Short View of the Profaneness and Immorality of the English Stage," from the pen of Jeremy Collier, an Anglican clergyman. Wycherley, Congreve, Farquhar and Dryden, were assailed by Collier with unsparing but well-merited severity. The people sided against the priests of Baal, and his worship was henceforward proscribed. Since that time the English stage has been remarkably free from the taint of impurity.

French tastes affected not only the moral tone, but the versification and the general plan of our drama; the one by substituting the trim, well-cut garb of rhyme for the flowing and majestic robe of blank verse; the other by introducing a code of pedantic rules, which every "correct" drama should obey. The chief of these was the observance of the "unities" of time, place, and action. The most perfect specimen of a play framed on this model is Addison's "Cato," hailed by cotemporary French critics as the *ne plus ultra* of dramatic excellence. It has, however, been long since condemned as frigid and artificial, and no more worthy of comparison with one of Shakespeare's Roman plays than a bronze statue with a living, moving, human form.

The heartlessness of the Restoration drama disappeared soon after the publication of Collier's "Short View;" a powerful reaction set in, and as usually happens, men rushed into the opposite extreme. From ridiculing the idea of the existence of natural feeling, they fell into the depths of an exaggerated sentimentalism. From relishing nothing but the coarsest buffoonery, they suddenly lost a taste for anything but the deepest melancholy. An invitation to the theatre was equiva-

lent to saying as Nero used to his friends, "Come let us be miserable together." "During some years," says Macaulay, "more tears were shed at comedies than at tragedies."

In this lachrymose state of the popular taste, when people were revelling in all the luxury of woe, a countryman of ours, one Oliver Goldsmith, ventured to write a comedy containing some scenes of irresistible drollery, and some inimitable strokes of humour. The play was called the "Good-natured Man." Garrick was then the lessee of Drury Lane Theatre; and well knowing the mournful cast of the public mind, discreetly declined a piece that admitted so unfashionable an element as wit or fun. It was, however, produced at a less aristocratic house, Colman's theatre, in Covent Garden, where it met with some little success with an audience not so deeply tinged with the fashionable melancholy as the patrons of Drury Lane. But the empire of sadness was, nevertheless, near its end. Five years after the production of the "Good-natured Man," public favour was fairly taken by storm by that "incomparable farce in five acts," as Macaulay styles the play of "She Stoops to Conquer." The genesis of the play is curious. It happened that Goldsmith was going on a visit to the house of an English country gentleman, and not having the organ of locality strongly developed, seems to have lost all consciousness of his whereabouts. Night coming on, he made for the nearest inn, and entered a comfortable and spacious edifice that seemed to answer that description. He ordered and partook of refreshments, but soon found to

his horror, that he had mistaken a hatchment for a sign, and a mansion for a common hostelry. This incident Goldsmith has worked up into a most amusing play, the hero of which makes the same blunder, and though very bashful in presence of women of birth and education, is gifted with a superabundance of flippancy, wit, and impudence, in his intercourse with those of a lower grade. Under these circumstances, he makes strong love to the daughter of his host, whom he mistakes for a waitress, and she being rather partial to him, takes care to let him remain under the delusion till he has gone too far to withdraw, and thus the marriage, which was her father's darling object, is brought about. As a specimen of the humour of the play, I may read a passage.

Mr. Hardcastle, the father of the heroine, being a plain country gentleman, and of a retiring disposition, is not in the habit of seeing much company. Being anxious, however, to receive the son of his old friend in becoming style, he drills his house and farm servants for some days before the arrival of his guests.

“Enter Hardcastle, followed by three or four awkward servants.

Hard. Well, I hope you're perfect in the table exercise I have been teaching you these three days. You all know your posts and places, and can shew you have been used to good company without stirring from home.

Omnes. Ay, ay.

Hard. When company comes, you are not to pop out and stare, and then run in, like rabbits in a warren.

Omnes. No, no.

Hard. You, Diggory, whom I have taken from the barn, are to make a show at the side table; and you, Roger, whom I have advanced from the plough, are to place yourself behind *my* chair. But you're not to stand so, with your hands in your pockets. Take

your hands from your pockets, Roger, and from your *head*, you block-head, you. See how Diggory carries his hands. They're a little too stiff indeed, but that's no great matter.

Digg. Ay, mind how *I* hold them. I learned to hold my hands this way when I was upon drill for the militia. And so, being upon drill—

Hard. You must not be so talkative, Diggory. You must be all attention to the guests. You must hear *us* talk, and not think of talking; you must see *us* drink, and not think of drinking; you must see *us* eat, and not think of eating.

Digg. By the laws, your worship, that perfectly *unpossible*; whenever Diggory sees yeating going forward, egad, he's always wishing for a mouthful himself."

In thus rescuing the drama from its state of hypochondria, and bringing it back to nature, Goldsmith was assisted by another countryman of ours. What "The Good-natured Man," and "She Stoops to Conquer," began, "The Rivals," and "The School for Scandal," completed. Richard Brinsley Sheridan was almost born a dramatist. His father had been an actor, his mother was an authoress, and his whole life was one long romance. It would have been strange, therefore, if he had not been led to throw some of his experiences into a dramatic shape. He did so in "The Rivals." It happened that when at Bath he was introduced to Miss Linley, the daughter of a celebrated composer. She was a woman of great beauty, possessed of a voice of rare quality, and had already won considerable reputation as a vocalist. She was accordingly the centre of a large circle of admirers, wealthy and high-born, many of them. But Sheridan's youth, and brilliant talents, and fascinating manner, soon distanced all his competitors, and Miss Linley became secretly

engaged to him. At this time a gentleman, named Matthews, addressed her in a manner calculated to arouse the indignation of a less ardent lover and a less quick-tempered man than Sheridan. He challenged Matthews; they fought with swords, Sheridan disarmed his antagonist and compelled him to beg his life, and publish an apology in the Bath papers. Matthews then retired into private life. But his friends so taunted him that he once more broke cover, and challenged Sheridan. For the second time they fought. Sheridan endeavouring to repeat a manœuvre that served him in the former encounter, unfortunately laid himself open to attack, and received a wound which would have been fatal but that his adversary's sword broke in the thrust. At the same time Sheridan's weapon met with a similar accident. The combatants then closed in a struggle, and fought desperately with the broken points. They fell together, Matthews being uppermost. Sheridan's life was now in turn at his adversary's mercy; but when called on to beg for it, he refused to do so in language more emphatic than reverential. The seconds interfered; and Matthews, who does not seem to have fought any more encounters with the pugnacious Irishman, left him and his young wife in peace.

It is upon this incident that Sheridan has founded "*The Rivals*;" the first, and, after "*The School for Scandal*," the most successful of his dramas. These two plays are the most popular of all dramatic works composed since Shakespeare's time. They are valuable in the highest degree as perpetuating the manners of the time. In this respect they may be compared with

Shakespeare's "Merry Wives of Windsor," and the comedies of Jonson and Wycherley generally. They have, however, the great fault of exaggeration. Such utter poltroonery as that of Bob Acres, and such elaborate blundering as that of Mrs. Malaprop were surely never seen.

We have now traced the drama down to the opening of the present century. On looking back over its history we shall see that in the main it followed the order of development which the eloquent and philosophic lecturer who lately addressed us pointed out as that which a national literature must follow. Passing by the sacred drama, the drama of religious narrative and moral allegory, we come first to the drama of heroic action, and well defined character, as typified by Shakespeare. Next comes the drama of violent passion and scandalous intrigue, borrowed from France, which is represented by Dryden and Wycherley. Next to that the drama of sentiment. After this came the revolt of Goldsmith and Sheridan against this unnatural manner: and they have been seconded by such writers as Sir E. B. Lytton in his plays of "Money" and of the "Lady of Lyons." But, according to the order laid down by Mr. Byrne, we should now be in that stage of the drama when external nature forms its main subject.

Has the order of development been preserved with respect to the drama, as well as with respect to every other branch of literature? At first sight nothing appears a less appropriate subject for dramatic treatment than the beauties of nature. The proper study of the dramatist is not things, but men, action and character:

these ought to be his theme. Hence the age of Shakespeare was the most favourable for the growth of the drama, because that was the time in which our literature was passing from the stage of action to the stage of character, and thus combined both.

Nevertheless, the drama has succumbed to the influence, though it has been longer in yielding to it. What is the great characteristic of dramatic representation now? Scenic effect. This is the meaning of the expression, "The Sensation Drama." A drama is successful now in proportion as it presents not so much an ingenious and interesting plot; not so much as it portrays or develops character; but as it furnishes some striking situations which can be represented to the eye of the spectator. The stage has become the home, not of the drama, but of the diorama. Fortunes are lavished on magnificent scenery, and years are spent on archaeological investigation respecting costume and furniture, as though one went to study transient manners and customs, and not the abiding facts of human nature. This seems to me to be a singular misapprehension respecting the effect produced by scenery, dresses, and decorations. What is their object? Merely to strengthen the illusion. How is this to be done? Is it by reproducing the scene in its minute accuracy? Not at all: but by removing everything that may tend to remind us of the unreal nature of the representation, and draw off our attention from the human element in the drama. Now the nature of the *mise en scène* depends altogether on the audience. If they are learned in ancient costumes, they will be shocked at any incongruity in this

respect. If not, all that needs be done is to provide that scenery and costume which best accord with *their* notion of the characters and period of the play. Thus, before a classical audience, it would be a mistake not to represent a Roman play with all the propriety of which it is capable of being put on the stage; but before an audience ignorant of the costume of a Roman senator, it would be as great a mistake to exhibit him in toga and sandals. In both cases the attention of the beholder would be distracted from the real object of the spectacle: and in both its effect would therefore be weakened.

The present age, then, is the age of dramatic spectacle. Never was the art of theatrical carpentry carried to such perfection. If the "Sampson Agonistes" were put upon the stage at the present day, instead of the magnificent *description* given of the destruction of the theatre and the death of Sampson, this would form the sensation scene. They have learned to represent everything to the life, even ghosts! These are no longer mere vulgar supernumeraries daubed with flour and red ochre. They are now unsubstantial, transparent as a cloud of vapour, only more fugacious, and less susceptible of derangement in their form. They not only appear unaccountably, and mysteriously vanish, but they walk, and even talk, to the great horror and satisfaction of the spectators.*

* These spectres as yet frequent the minor theatres only, and have not yet reached the fashionable haunts of Her Majesty's or Drury Lane. The *Times* has devoted an article to one of them, and the other papers have followed suit. A very good idea of the drama of "Faith, Hope, and Charity," in which this shadowy

It formed no part of my plan in this lecture to discuss the question of theatrical representations: the drama in its literary aspect alone coming properly within

appearance plays a prominent part, may be formed from the following description extracted from a London weekly paper:—

“On our front page we give an engraving of the Ghost Scene in the drama of ‘Faith, Hope, and Charity,’ which is nightly drawing a crowded audience to the Britannia. It is a domestic drama (says the *Spectator*), with three murders, one suicide, two conflagrations, four robberies, one virtuous lawyer, twenty-three angels, and a ghost. There are three heroines in the piece—Faith, Hope, and Charity—the first, an elderly lady, widow of a clergyman, and in straitened circumstances; and the other two, her daughters, pretty and poor, and of course models of perfection, as indicated by the label. The plot turns upon the possession of the lease of a house, which Sir Gilbert Northlaw, a proud and scheming baronet, class representative of the bloated aristocracy, has acquired by fraud from the clerical widow. Before the parchment is restored to the right owner a number of violent incidents take place, which, although in no perceptible connection with the story, yet seem to charm the audience to an immense degree, as evinced by frequent thundering applause. A burning house, in particular, gives rise to tremendous excitement in the gallery. The scene shows a woman getting out of the window and walking along the outer ledge to a tree, where a man takes her in his arms, after which, the tree, by some magic means, bows to the ground with its human burden. Various minor accidents, murders, and manslaughter follow, till at length the lease is stolen by an honest man from the pocket of the wicked baronet. With a fine feeling of virtue, the audience show their appreciation of this act of pickpocketing by three rounds of applause. But the aristocratic villain is not yet defeated; for it turns out that the lease which the honest man has stolen is but a duplicate after all, and that the fiendish nobleman remains in possession of the original. This discovery breaks the heart of Faith, and sets Hope and Charity a-crying so loud that all the bystanders get into convulsions. The question of the lease appears still as undecided as ever when the curtain falls over the terrestrial part of

the scope of a lecture delivered in this place. I have, therefore, introduced these remarks only for the purpose of enabling us to understand what future the

the drama, to open again, after a few minutes' interval, for the spiritual portion. All the souls of all the people murdered, slain, burned, and bruised in the new and original drama are now carried up to heaven by a regiment of little angels in flaxen hair and short petticoats. Midway between heaven and earth they make a halt, which allows time for the inspection of the tableau and the due seasoning of the mind in its contemplation. It is evident that the impression created upon the audience is of the deepest, preparing all eyes and ears for the still greater things to come. There are now no more discharges of ginger-beer artillery from above and behind, the sucking of oranges and cracking of nuts has entirely ceased, and even the numerous babies have left off crying. Presently, the vast house sinks into obscurity, only a few flickering gas jets being left here and there to create a faint twilight. Once again Sir Gilbert Northlaw steps upon the stage, closely followed by—a skeleton. The apparition is certainly striking. It gradually and almost imperceptibly evolves itself out of the air, and after various movements vanishes with the rapidity of a flash of lightning. A second time it comes and goes as before, and immediately after appears a female form, the exact counterpart of Faith, the widow. Closely as the eye may watch the operation of the whole proceeding, it is impossible to detect the source of the fine optical delusion. There the figure certainly stands, walks, and talks, but disappears as instantaneously as if fashioned out of the mere vapour of the air. On the second appearance of Widow Faith, or rather of Widow Faith's ghost, Sir Gilbert Northlaw takes courage, and, rising from his seat, attacks her with the sword. But the sharp steel, aimed at a walking and speaking human figure, meets no resistance but the empty air, as shown in our illustration, and the would-be murderer is mocked by a loud sardonic 'Ha, ha, ha!' This is the crisis of the spectacle. While the baronet is making desperate efforts to grasp the widow, the spectre vanishes in the twinkling of an eye, leaving the echo of a mocking voice resounding from afar."

drama has before it in a literary point of view. And this, I think, is not at all hopeful. The highest type of dramatic composition is that which supplies us with studies of character, skilfully worked out, in a plot not deficient in probability, and by means of incidents not wanting in interest. It is clear that so long as the public appetite for sensation episodes continues, and so long as these episodes are capable of being exhibited visibly, there is no necessity for any but the most superficial delineations of character, and no room left for any appeal to the imagination. From this it follows that while the prevalent taste lasts, the drama will languish as a literary production. Whatever power of depicting character and describing incident exists at the present day—and it exists in superabundance—will be diverted into the channel of novel-writing, and will not enter that of dramatic composition at all. However, as our literature is already so rich in this department, we need not lament the deficiency.

The task which I set before me is now accomplished so far as my feeble powers and limited time permitted. If I have succeeded in conveying to any one here an idea of the importance of the subject, and awakening an interest in it, the interval we have passed together in reviewing the history of the English drama, will not have been unprofitably spent.







LIFE AND WRITINGS OF THE
LATE JOHN FOSTER,
THE ESSAYIST.

BY THE REV. EDWARD WHATELY, M.A.





THE LIFE AND WRITINGS OF THE
LATE JOHN FOSTER.

IDARE say there are many here present who have never so much as heard of the name of John Foster; and I am aware that I might easily be represented as injudicious in selecting such an author, on the grounds that he is neither sufficiently well known, nor sufficiently pre-eminent in point of ability, to render him a worthy subject for a lecture, when there are so many who are more deserving of such a distinction. But it is sometimes useful to depart from the beaten track; and one of my objects on the present occasion will be to bring before your notice a writer who, though perhaps he may be inferior to many whom I might have chosen, was nevertheless a man of no mean powers, and whose works (at all events his *Essays*), if thoughtfully studied, could not fail to prove beneficial to many at the present age, and in some measure to furnish an antidote to that feverish excitement in which people now live, by leading them to sober reflection, self-examination, and introspection.

But it is not merely for his own sake that I have chosen John Foster for my subject. I have selected him in a great measure because I mean to make him a pin upon which to hang my own reflections. I must also forestall another objection to which I may lay myself open, by forewarning you that this lecture will be rather a desultory one; a fault however, which, in the eyes of some people, assumes the character of a virtue; and which, I believe, has at least this recommendation, that it is popular with ladies, if not with gentlemen. At all events, in the present case I cannot very well help myself. For the life of John Foster is too small a subject, and his *Essays* too large a one, (or rather comprises too many subjects,) to render it possible for me to give an air of anything like unity to this lecture. His life is indeed almost entirely devoid of any incident worthy of record; it is the life of a quiet secluded Dissenting minister, who shrunk from mixing in the busy world around him; and it is rendered still more meagre from the fact that his biographer appears to have wanted either the power, or the will, to give any accurate delineation of his character, so that we are compelled in a great measure to trace that character for ourselves out of his *Letters* and *Essays*, occasionally making use of such stray hints on the subject as we may receive from other sources. But this may be indeed no uninteresting or unprofitable occupation. It is interesting to endeavour to trace the man in his writings, to go back to his life, and to see what particular training, external and internal, and what peculiar cast of mind, tended to produce the work which has attracted our attention, and to stamp

that work with its attractive character. Where the writer is a mere book-maker, as is the case with too many writers of the present day, it is of course impossible to do this, because in that case the book does not really reflect the man. His own mind and life bear no testimony to the truths he inculcates, and consequently those truths fall lifeless upon the reader's ear, as being the mere cold calculations of reason, or as plants gleaned from the mind of another, which have died when transplanted into an uncongenial soil. Far otherwise was it with John Foster: in his *Essays* it appears as if the whole mind and heart and soul of the author had gone forth into his writings, and it is this feature which constitutes their peculiar charm, and which gives them that peculiar weight which each sentence seems to carry with it; and it is no common-place character which his works display. It is not indeed a character which has many sides to it, or which would furnish the materials for a long and interesting biography. No, it is made up of a few touches, bold, vigorous, and more strongly marked than the characteristic features of most other men's minds. The leading feature of his mind was earnestness and intensity, produced by a vivid, powerful, and sometimes morbid imagination, and by a remarkable tendency to concentrate the attention on certain objects of interest, which his imagination clothed with an awful grandeur and a stern solemnity. This disposition, combined with a habit of looking inwards rather than outwards, and fostered by his early education, tended to repress in him all outward expression of thought or feeling, and must have had the effect in a

degree of isolating him from his fellow-creatures. Some clergyman in speaking of him once described him as a man without a heart. There could not have been a more false assertion than this. His Letters (not to say his *Essays*) show a very large heart; but the mistake probably arose from the fact that his powers of sympathy were not great. He himself remarks of himself that when any important idea had taken hold on his mind he could not get rid of it, it still clung to him when others who for the time had been forcibly impressed by it, had forgotten it and had gone off to some other subject. This disposition of mind must in some measure have cut him off from that genial intercourse with his fellow-creatures, that interchange of mind with mind in small matters, which connects society together. From his thoughts being continually absorbed on the highest subjects he must have unduly depreciated trifles, as was evident from the fact of his preaching in a blue coat and top boots, and brass buttons. One of the most eloquent passages in his *Essays*, which I have not time to quote, but which I strongly recommend to your perusal, seems to show exactly what manner of spirit he was of with respect to those subjects which absorb the whole energy and rivet the whole attention of many of the triflers of this world.

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A most forcible and just appeal; but yet it may fairly be doubted whether the author (judging from the general cast of his mind, and from the scattered traits of character which we may gather from his life) was sufficiently alive to the fact that we must be children before

we can become men; indeed, it may be doubted whether the occasional power of trifling may not be necessary, in order to keep up the social amenities of life, and to act as a bridge from mind to mind, by which we may arrive at greater and deeper points of sympathy; besides which, the mind needs relaxation. Now mere intellectual relaxation does not give it sufficient rest, or, in other words, is not a full and entire relaxation. Certain periods of dullness and apathy will unbend some minds, but it is not all who are capable of this sort of relief. Others fly to sensual enjoyment as a pastime; but in this case the remedy is worse than the disease. Again, field sports are resorted to by some, but these are open only to one sex, and not to all even of them; consequently a certain amount of trifling may be absolutely necessary in some cases, to preserve the health of the mind, only we must take care that it is not foolish or hurtful trifling. We must bear in mind the Apostle's injunction, "Whatever we do to do all to the glory of God." If we bring this principle to bear on every part of our life, we shall find that those very things which formerly shut out the religious life from our view, now minister to its nourishment, for after all, that life being the life not only of a perfect man, but also of the only complete pattern of humanity (even Christ) must be coincident with every part of our natural life which does not partake of sin; it is, in fact, the substance, of which the other is only the shadow.

But to return to John Foster. His mind had apparently no power of relaxing itself; there was no counteracting influence—until his latter years, when he

became a husband and a father—which could soften down the stern edges of his character, or enable him to unbend himself. Though not devoid of the sense of the ludicrous, he did not possess enough of it to lighten the pressure which a strong feeling of the ills of life, both moral and social, continually imposed upon his spirit. This disposition is generally very strong in powerful and earnest minds, and was doubtless bestowed on them for wise purposes. And we believe indeed that it has tended very often to preserve their life and reason. It was not, however, vivid enough, in Foster's case, to balance his more serious impressions, and the glowing images which accompanied them. Consequently, at one period of his life, his reason (at least so I have been told) gave way.

But the number of those who require to be warned against the peculiar dangers which beset his mind, is not great. It is not against morbid *earnestness*, but against *indifference* to the highest subjects, that the greater portion of mankind require to be cautioned. And against this sort of indifference the character and writings of John Foster afford a perpetual protest. They are like the writing on the wall described by the prophet Daniel, though the interpretation is not exactly the same. They seem to say, "What shall it profit, though a man gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" Such a protest must have been needful in its generation, and may be made useful now, though the man is dead and his works comparatively forgotten. He reminds me of one of those rugged crags which look down on the fruitful plains beneath, in half contempt at the minute kind of life which is going on there, and seem to say, "You are

very busy and active, but you cannot see what I see; you cannot penetrate, as I do, through the mafs of clouds which obscures my summit."

"He who ascends to mountain tops shall find
The loftiest peaks most wrapt in cloud and snow;
He who surpasses or subdues mankind
Must look down on the hate of those below.
Though high above the sun of glory glow,
And far beneath the earth and ocean spread,
Round him are icy rocks, and loudly blow
Contending tempests on his naked head;
And thus reward the toils which to those summits lead."

There are some minds which seem so thoroughly to fit into this life, and to be so satisfied with it, and to have so few aspirations beyond it, that we almost are tempted to doubt whether they have any of the elements of a future existence within them. There are others again, though comparatively few in number, who make themselves so little at home in this world, that the wonder is how they came there; they seem to be the natural nurslings of immortality, and their soul continually flaps its wings against its earthly prison-house like a caged eagle. So it was with John Foster; and as in picturing to ourselves the state of any Christian when transplanted into a higher and happier life, we naturally fix upon some particular blessing which he most ardently desired, or was in an unusual degree deprived of, while on earth; so in thinking of him transplanted as he now is to a more congenial world, our first involuntary reflection is that he is free, that his spirit has put off its burden, and is escaped from what

to him was little better than a dungeon. You will perceive from what I have said, that his character was not one which we could altogether hold up as a perfect model; but what character can be thus held up without a great deal of qualification?—for almost every virtue in this world carries with it its attendant defect. Well for us if our defects, as in the case of Foster, arise not from any thing base or depraved, but only from excess of high and noble qualities. Indeed, most of his deficiencies may be rather called misfortunes than faults. At all events, it was to the peculiar type of character which I have described, with its beauties and its drawbacks, that his *Essays* owe their attractive qualities, and that peculiar weight which they must carry with every thoughtful person who will take the trouble carefully to read them. In fact, it is this which has enabled them to triumph over obstacles and to become comparatively popular, in spite of certain faults of style which are essentially prejudicial to popularity. Foster's style wants simplicity, it wants brevity, and it wants perspicuity; and yet he rivets our attention, and excites our curiosity. But it is remarkable also that though prolixity and pomposity, especially if accompanied, as they universally are, with an undue preponderance of Latin words, generally impart feebleness to the style; yet Foster, though he falls into both these faults, always writes with vigour. Now this discrepancy I attribute in some measure to the fact that his faults in style were not a part of himself, but were rather the results of accidental circumstances. For it is remarkable that most learned writers among the Dissenters fall into the same errors.

As one of the Edinburgh reviewers remarks, they adopt a studiously latinized style, as if they were anxious to show that they can write as classical English as those who wear silk gowns and have enjoyed the benefit of an University education. Thus the faults of Foster's style are more or less characteristic of the class to which he belonged, some of them arising from the above-mentioned causes, and some being attributable to the want of that regular systematic training which our Universities afford; but his merits are peculiar to himself. The earnestness and intensity of his nature communicates itself to his writings, and gives to the opinions which he expresses a weight which they would probably not carry with them if uttered by another. They are the result of deep convictions engraven in the heart at the expense of severe reflection and painful experience.

And now I find myself approaching the second part of my subject, namely, the writings of John Foster. His Essays are the only portion of those writings which I mean to touch on; but confining myself, as I do, to these, I find (as before remarked) the subject rather a large one to handle, especially as I do not devote to it the whole even of one single lecture. But the way I propose to deal with it will be this: I shall presuppose that you either have read, or mean to read, the book of which I am speaking, and shall not, therefore, give you an analysis of it, but shall say what I think the writer has omitted to say, rather than what he has said, on the various topics which he discusses.

The first Essay is on "A Man's writing Memoirs of himself;" a title which I think to some minds would

not convey a very distinct idea of the subject-matter. The writer's great object seems to be to impress upon men's minds the importance of introspection and self-examination, with a view to making an analysis of their lives, and in order to enable them to see what are the effects produced by the operation of a particular class of circumstances upon their minds—what, in short, are the causes, and what the influences, which contributed to form their present character. It seems certainly to me, as it does to him, most extraordinary that most men never take account of this. As Foster himself observes, men realize their existence in the surrounding objects that act upon them, and form the interests of self, rather than *in* self, that interior being which is thus acted upon. The fact is that many men have scarcely sufficient of the sense of individuality to care what eventually becomes of them; whether, in short, they are finally saved or lost. Looking at everything as they do, from the outside rather than from the inside, the work of self-examination appears quite foreign to their nature. Foster seems clearly to perceive, and deeply to deplore, the evils of such a disposition; but he seems to have failed in pointing out with equal clearness the evils which arise from the opposite disposition. The minds of men may be divided into two classes, objective and subjective, each of which class possesses its own peculiar excellencies, and its own peculiar deficiencies. The commonest type of mind is the objective; and the present age is particularly favourable to its development, owing to the rate of high pressure at which our life moves, which leaves us no time for

reflection, and for a careful examination either of our own minds and lives, or of the various objects and influences by which we are surrounded ; and this is a task to which, even under favourable circumstances, most men are averse. Their impressions come to them from without rather than from within ; and they estimate everything by its outward appearance, and by the form which it assumes ; and those who attempt to penetrate beneath the surface of things into their spirit they would in many instances deprecate, as impracticable and visionary. Spiritual they interpret to mean figurative ; and what are tangible and visible they consider to be the only realities, whereas, in point of fact, the reverse is the case. The true essence of a thing is its spirit ; the natural form with which it is clothed is only its type or shadow. Persons of the class I have been describing find it very difficult to understand what constitutes the essence of the Christian life ; they make it consist in a certain set of actions, perhaps accompanied by a certain state of mind, not perceiving that these are only the outward and visible signs of an inward and spiritual grace. The Christian's life is hidden with Christ in God ; and those manifestations which meet the eye of man are merely properties which are attached to its essence. True religion has, indeed, a tendency to counteract this defect of mind of which I have been speaking, because the life of Christ is one which comprises and reconciles together all, even the most apparently antagonistic, qualities in the human mind ; but still in each individual Christian the original type will always more or

less remain, and perhaps it is right that it should do so, for all members have not the same office. The other type of mind, the subjective, is not perhaps so common as the one we have first described, but we may find many experiences of it in the world if we look about us. Persons of this cast of mind are indeed well disposed to the work of self-examination, and will easily be led to speculate on the events which befall them, and the influence which those events exercise on their character. But with them the danger to be guarded against is lest their process of analysis should end as it began, in mere speculation. Being naturally averse to action, they spend their time in pondering and musing, while plain practical duties which ought to be performed, and the performance of which would exercise a beneficial effect on their inward man, press around them; and thus life, with all its golden opportunities, passes away, never to return, leaving them little to show at the great day of account. The tendency of this disposition of mind, when fully carried out and uncoun-teracted by higher influences, is gradually to reduce all virtuous principles to mere matters of theoretical speculation, and to reduce all religious truths into certain mental impressions. In the German nation this disposition is pushed to the greatest length; and many of their writings have infected our countrymen with the same disease. Viewing every principle and doctrine apart from the practical purposes which it was intended to serve, and regarding it only as an object of admiration or of a curious speculation and analysis, the German philosophers have many of them sunk by degrees into the lowest depths of

infidelity. The road by which they arrived at this goal was indeed very different from that of Hume, Bolingbroke, and Voltaire : they did not openly attack Christianity, but they refined it away until at last they reduced it to a mere myth—the shadow of a shade. This same disposition of mind has led some of our modern writers to undervalue external evidences, and to depend too much on what they call the verifying power of man's mind. That such a power does exist there is no doubt ; but it needs continually to be tested by a reference to external truths, which must be taken for granted because they are supported by external evidence. If not submitted to this process, the verifying will become a falsifying power. Thus you see we live between Scylla and Charybdis.

There are two opposite dangers to be guarded against in dealing with life ; the danger of throwing ourselves so entirely into the outer life as to forget the inner ; and the danger of passing our time in vain speculation, forgetting the words of Bacon, that “in this world God and the angels should be the only lookers-on.” For the rest I must refer you to Foster's own remarks, for I really have not space to give you both his reflections and my own ; and I will merely add one observation which bears upon the subject of his Essay, and which I think at least deserving of attention. It was made by one who was hovering between life and death, and who therefore saw, as persons in this condition often do (when disease does not cloud the mind), more of the hidden machinery by which life is moved, than those who are in the vigour of health. The

observation is this: that when we come suddenly in contact with persons and circumstances which seem to contradict the previous tenor of our lives, there is a presumption that God is working in us something which bears a special reference to eternity. Thus, in entertaining these strange visitants, we may be often entertaining angels unawares.

The second Essay is "On Decision of Character," a subject which the writer enters into *con amore*. He has evidently the highest admiration for this quality, and most forcibly does he set forth its inestimable advantages, and the evils of indecision; so much so that any one who reads the Essay ought to read to the end, where the author shows that firmness if wrongly directed is but weakness in the sight of God. I give this caution partly because I know that there was in the world, even if there is not now, a certain school called the spasmodic school, which differed from the Byronian in this respect, that its disciples did not, like those of Byron, make heroes of mere passionate weaklings, but selected for the object of their worship, one man remarkable for his strength and determination of character, if also remarkable for his badness, so much the better, because it seemed in their eyes to bring out his strength into fuller relief; and thus they would deify as a hero, a man of whom we should be tempted to say if we met him in real life, that hanging was almost too good for him. But certainly Foster, with all his admiration for decision of character, does not pander to this spirit. He has, however, made one omission; he has noticed only the peculiar evils of indecision of charac-

ter, and has failed to point out an opposite class of faults into which men of more resolute disposition are apt to fall. Great decision is generally accompanied with a certain amount of doggedness, which will not listen to reason, which often brings its owner into trouble, and which prevents him from learning the lessons which his misfortunes ought to teach him. The directions which Foster gives to the undecided, are wise and good : but there is one consideration which he has omitted to suggest, which I think is a useful one for those persons to bear in mind, whose indecision is connected, as it often is, with the fear of man. Probably one-half of those we meet with in this world are as great cowards as ourselves, and only require that we should make the first move (provided we do so with coolness and good temper), in order to induce them to give way. The very same persons whom it might be safe to oppose, are often dangerous to run away from. I will conclude this part of the subject by referring you to a passage which I will not read, but which I recommend you to read if you wish for a specimen of Foster's most eloquent effusions. I allude to his description of the character of Howard the philanthropist, a man who indeed exhibited an instance of decision of character directed to the highest and noblest objects.

Of the third Essay, "On the Epithet Romantic," I shall say but little, because I have myself treated of the same subject in a former lecture. He dwells chiefly on the evils resulting from the disposition to clothe real life with the gay plumage of romance ; but, as far as I recollect, he has not set forth with equal clearness the fact that

all these exalted conceptions of the good and beautiful which, when applied to this life, appear so ridiculously overstrained, have their counterpart and their true explanation in the life of a higher world, and are unconscious witnesses to its existence. But there is one observation of his which I shall mention, because I failed to notice it in my own lecture when speaking of the dangerous tendency of those novels which imbue the youthful mind with false views of life. There are some novelists of this class, he remarks, who bring their heroes to ultimate success in the world by a series of lucky and improbable accidents, independent of their own forethought or exertion. Now, the tendency of such narratives is to foster a gambling spirit in the minds of young persons, to lead them to live in the hope some wonderful piece of good-fortune will turn up without any trouble on their part; a disposition of mind which is a sort of gross caricature of that hopeful faith which, without neglecting means, believes that all things work together for good to those that love God.

The last Essay is "On the Aversion of Men of Taste to Evangelical Religion," and most important are the considerations which it suggests. It appears to be the production of a man who had himself some sympathy with that state of feeling, the existence of which in the literary world he deplores and deprecates. Foster does not impress us with the idea of one whose mind has naturally any predilection for Evangelical truths; he appears to have embraced those truths partly, perhaps, owing to early training, and partly from the operations of Divine influence on his heart; but they do not seem

to be naturally congenial to his mind. He is himself more or less a specimen of the class of which he is speaking, and is therefore the more capable of entering into their difficulties, and perceiving the stumbling-blocks which stand in the way of their reception of plain Gospel truths. Some of these stumbling-blocks he supposes (and rightly so) to arise from the manner in which those truths are often stated, and the weaknesses and follies of many who profess them; and folly, he thinks, is in most men's minds less easily separable from the essence of religion than sin. This last proposition, however, I should not be inclined to assent to as fully as he does. I think that the inconsistency of conduct which often accompanies not merely the weakness but a high Evangelical profession is sure to be laid to the door of Evangelical religion by those who, not having entered in at that door, look at the subject from the outside instead of from the inside; such persons are only too glad of a pretext for attributing an Antinomian tendency to that religion which rests everything on the vicarious work of Christ. But nevertheless I agree with Foster, that we can hardly under-estimate the evil which the follies and want of taste which often accompany the conduct and writings of sincere Christians produce upon a certain class of minds; the more so because these faults seem to be bound up and inseparably connected with their religion; and I verily believe that not all the works of Hume and Voltaire could produce such an injurious effect on some persons as the perusal of one weak and vulgar tract, written by a pious but foolish Christian. Truly we need to remember our Lord's

injunction to be not only harmless as doves, but also wise as serpents. It is frequently from the neglect of this injunction on the part of the Christian, that Satan succeeds in seducing into folly many whom he cannot seduce into flagrant sin; and his task is easier, because God, for His own wise reasons, has chosen the weak things of the world in preference to the wise. For though there are many exceptions to this rule, yet on the whole we should say that the great mass of learning and talent, and of those distinctions, either real or adventitious, which make the greatest show in the eyes of the world, are not enlisted on the side of true spiritual religion; and the treasure which we have, being in earthen vessels, will sometimes taste of those vessels.

But it is a question worth enquiring into, why Evangelical religion is easily liable to be vulgarised? There are many reasons for this; one is that Evangelical religion is of all systems the most humbling and levelling. It gives no advantage to natural acquirements, talents, or a fine constitution of mind; but declares that all men must become as little children, must be born again, before they can enter into the kingdom of God. Again, its tendency is to bring us into familiar communion with God, to cast out fear of Him; and in our corrupt nature, familiarity and the absence of fear are apt (unless we carefully watch against this danger) to produce if not contempt, at least want of reverence. You remember the fable of the fox who at first dared not approach the lion, but who at last when he found he had nothing to dread from him treated him with insolent familiarity. This is the way in which some persons

deal with the Almighty, after being at length convinced that their imperfectness is no barrier between them and their Maker if they come to Him by the merits of the Guiltless, they sometimes with their fear lay aside also their reverence, a most ungrateful return to Him who has freed them from bondage. Then again it is also to be observed that as there is but one step between the sublime and the ridiculous, so the higher and nobler any subject is, the more easily it may be caricatured, and the more revolting is the shape which the caricature assumes. Thus the caricature of spiritual religion is the most easily produced of any, and disgusts us the most when it is produced, just as a monkey disgusts us more than any other animal, from its resemblance to God's noblest earthly work. Besides which the mere use of conventional phrases, unless guided by caution, and good taste, and good feeling, is apt to degenerate into a sort of slang.

But though admitting this, I would not go as far as Foster does, when he asserts that another kind of phraseology might just as well be substituted. For it is a remarkable fact, and in some measure contradicts this assertion, that many who have at one time of their life shrunk from the use of Scriptural terms, have afterwards felt themselves obliged to resort to those terms as being the best adapted to express their meaning. At the same time I think we should be careful to avoid those terms (even at the risk of a circumlocution) when we are speaking to or writing for the benefit of those in whose minds they would excite a prejudice against the truths we are inculcating. There are many persons who re-

quire to be caught by guile; they are like timid birds who are liable to be frightened away by the slightest noise. And it is important that we should remove every cause of offence (however unreasonable) except the offence of the Cross, *that* we must *never* remove. And we shall find that this offence will remain even in the absence of all others. But does that offence exist only in refined and cultivated minds? No; but with persons of this description the offence takes a different form from what it does with others. They dislike the humbling, levelling nature of the doctrines of the Cross; they do not like to wash in the same pool with the maimed, &c., with men of lower habits and grosser minds; the dislike is less against the doctrines of the Cross than against the practice which it involves. There are diversities of operation but the same spirit. In all cases the stumblingblock lies in the principle of self, which is differently represented in different characters, but which all alike are by nature unwilling to crucify.

But without attempting to remove by our own effort an offence which can only be removed by the Spirit of God, I would say this, that we require a larger-minded and more cultivated set of Christians than we have formerly possessed, in order to meet the wants of the age and to combat its infidelity; we want Christians, not to be, as they too often are, merely men of one idea; they should be able to press every truth into the service of religion; for after all, every truth is only an emanation from Him who is the one great Truth; and truth if separated from Him loses its real life. And we shall see in proportion as we refer everything to

Him, that all those facts which we formerly thought had no connection with Him will gradually tend in the same direction by a common attraction, and will assemble round Him who is their true centre. Christianity is a wide as well as a deep stream, and it is the non-recognition of this fact which among the orthodox has caused an undue power to fall into the hands of those who are wrong in essentials but who recognize certain truths which were overlooked by many who ought to be the salt of the salt of the earth. And with this observation I will conclude, though I am aware that I have not said half that could have been said on the various subjects which I have touched on. I trust, however, that I have said enough to induce you to read the writings of John Foster, and also enough to suggest to you topics for reflection which may last you for some time to come.

NOTE.

SINCE delivering this Lecture I have been requested to append to it a short sketch of the life of John Foster. He was born Sept. 17, 1770, in the parish of Halifax, of humble but respectable parents. After the completion of his seventeenth year he became a member of the Baptist congregation at Hebden-bridge, and shortly after entered on a course of classical and general instruction. After spending three years in this way application was made for his admission into the Baptist College, Bristol. After leaving Bristol the first place where he was regularly engaged as a preacher was Newcastle-upon-

Tyne; here he remained little more than three months, and shortly afterwards removed to Ireland, where he was invited to preach to a Baptist society meeting in Swift's Alley, Dublin; he remained in Ireland for about a year or two. In 1797 he was invited to become the minister of a General Baptist Church at Chichester, here he remained two years and a half, after which time he removed to Battersea, near Bristol, where he first met with the lady whom he afterwards married. His marriage was celebrated in May, 1808. He seems to have lived long and happily with his wife. He did not survive her many years. His death took place somewhere about 1843, and he was interred in the burial-ground belonging to the chapel at Downe, where he formerly preached. His chief works (besides the volume of Essays which form the subject of this Lecture) are an Essay on Popular Ignorance, an Essay on the Preaching of Robert Hall, and several articles in the *Eclectic Review*.* These works are but little known; and perhaps, considering the peculiar faults of style which characterize his writings, and which I have already noticed, we cannot wonder at this. I think, however, that they will fully repay any one who is willing to take the trouble of giving them a careful perusal.

* The contributions to the *Eclectic*, sixty in number, have been republished in two volumes, under the title of "Foster's Critical Essays," in Bohn's Standard Library.

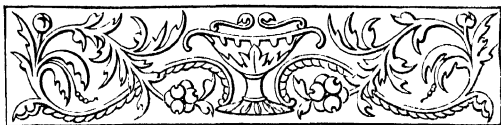


THE BALLAD AND LYRICAL
POETRY OF IRELAND.

BY RANDAL W. MAC DONNELL, ESQ.

EX-SCHOLAR, TRINITY COLLEGE, DUBLIN.





THE BALLAD AND LYRICAL POETRY OF IRELAND.

THE subject which I have chosen is one which, I think, demands no introduction, (to an Irish audience at least,) and certainly no apology. In the first place, whatever may be its actual value, it has been drawn from that mighty treasure of moral truth which lies deposited in poetry and fiction. It belongs, too, to that part of poetry which flows freshest and purest from the very heart of man. But in Ireland it should possess a tenfold interest: for all at least who care to look deep into the curious genius of our people; because in the Celtic intellect generally, and in the Irish intellect most particularly, the lyrical element possesses a peculiar predominance. So great indeed is that predominance that the very essential spirit of the ballad and the lyric does not pervade the imagination only, but extending its subtle influence beyond the domain of fancy tinctures the reason and impregnates the character of the nation. Thus while this order of poetry possesses many charms for all, it is fraught with deep significance and interest

for such as are concerned in ascertaining the true bent of the national character and the true capacity of the national understanding.

Whether the singular development of this lyrical power is cause or effect—whether it is due to the conspiring tendency of all the faculties as they are constituted in the Celtic mind, or on the contrary those faculties have all been enslaved by the fancy, is a metaphysical question which hardly admits of any certain solution. But this much is sure, that the quality of the imagination is discernible in every other region of the Celtic brain—"subtle, rapid, versatile, graceful," are words as exactly applicable to the reason as they are to the fancy of the Irish people; while in both there is frequently a want of strength, boldness, and comprehension. A tendency precisely analagous may be observed in the habits of the memory, which, while it shrinks from the irksome task of yielding to the mind in slow succession the materials for abstraction, or for that laborious discernment of differences which is the province of the judgment, delights in supplying with incredible quickness images linked by some resemblance of almost impalpable subtlety. The moral character also of the Celtic races is highly favourable to the development of the faculty which we are considering. Pensive, and yet sensuous—joyous and passionate—they find in their moments of meditation a hoard of vivid images gathered in their gayer hours but destined to serve as the material for strains of gloom and passion. Habitual impatience, sometimes violating the laws of perfect taste, but always ensuring a simple and natural

utterance of the most genuine feeling, increases still further the marvellous rapidity of the mind itself, and completes a condition the most favourable that can be imagined to the production of ballad and lyrical poetry.

It follows, as an almost necessary result from the possession of a mental constitution so propitious to the *conception* of this kind of poetry, that the language of a people so endowed should be equally favourable to its *expression*. Such is accordingly the case. The Irish tongue, scorned now that its glory has departed, was once, it must not be forgotten, the language of the most cultivated of European peoples. Its growth, too, was at a time when all knowledge was imparted in verse. It is, moreover, singularly musical. One of its most marked characteristics is a great predominance of vowel sounds over the less fluent consonant. So great was the number of its synonyms that they would have been useless in the hands of a people less gifted with the finest powers of discrimination. It is said that for the word "ship" there were in the Irish no less than fifty equivalents. In a word, the language used by the ancient Irish was one singularly adapted to the requirements of poetry—redundant in its modes of expression, subtle in its shades of meaning—liquid, various, flexible, harmonious.

With these qualifications, as well of language as of mind, it would have been strange if the ballad and lyrical poetry of Ireland had not attained to very great excellence. I propose, in the following Lecture, to touch very briefly (for the purpose of comparison) on the rise and eventual fate of this delightful and stirring

kind of verse in some of the other countries of Europe, to sketch its history in our own, and to call your attention to a few examples which (however inadequately) may illustrate the various periods to which I shall refer. While doing so I hope to point out the singular tenacity with which this kind of composition has retained its hold upon the Irish mind, while in other countries it has always passed, with the progress of the people, into some higher form of poetry; to show that the spirit which gave it birth is not confined to poetry, but is of the very essence of the Irish mind; and to suggest what appears to me to be a speculation of the highest importance touching the probable future of a national genius which has so long contented itself with efforts merely momentary. I shall be glad if, in doing this, I can besides awaken, in such a circle as I have the honour to address, a livelier interest in poets of whom some have been drawn into obscurity with the decline of an unfashionable tongue, and of whom most of the others have been eclipsed in the gloom of an unsuccessful political struggle.

While written records are still unused or rare among a people, memorable events (chiefly owing to the aid which memory receives from rhyme) are fixed in verse, and in that form handed from one generation to another. The poems in which the early history of nations is thus preserved (the rudest form of ballad poetry) are found, as might be anticipated, among all peoples in their infant state, and furnish the most certain indications of their intellectual vigour. The ballads which are now generally supposed to have been collected, after long preservation by oral tradition, into

the poem *called* Homer, were the first short flights of the transcendent genius of Greece. That Rome had a literature in which her early greatness was recorded is abundantly proved, though the poems themselves are lost. The conception of what they might have been is that which has found so brilliant a realization in Lord Macaulay's "Lays of Ancient Rome." In the north and west of Europe the gloomy imagination of the bards found vent in the "Sagas" in which they sung the praises of their heroes, and recorded the terrible superstition of which Tor and Wodin were the deities; while Spain employed all the powers of her sweet sonorous dialects in telling the glories of her struggle with the Saracen and the Goth. The lay of the Nibelungs bears testimony to the existence in Germany, ages since, of those poetic powers which have of recent years filled the ear of Europe. France had her troubadours. In Scotland the ballad flourished with great luxuriance. In Wales and England the earliest materials were supplied by the legends of King Arthur and his knights. Subsequently the gay outlaws of Sherwood and the endless feuds of the Border became the theme; and the success of these first efforts is attested in the sylvan freshness of "Robin Hood" and the nervous simplicity of "Chevy Chase."

In all these countries their ballad literature gave great poetic promise, and in nearly all that promise has been richly realised. Nor has the ballad been merely the forerunner of those mighty poems which each has produced, but its flavour is easily and sensibly discernible in each. In Spain the "Cid" is but a lay expanded to the proportions of an epic. The sublime severity of the

great English epic recalls the vigorous unembellished purity of the minstrelsy of the Border; and the rustic tranquillity of the more peaceful ballads seems like a foretaste of such sylvan scenes as the forest of Ardennes or the shades that envelope the orgies of "Comus." A still closer connection may be observed between the old poetry and the "Fairy Queen," in point of subject at least. Deeply as the "Æneid" is indebted to Grecian sources, it can hardly be doubted that in it are preserved, to some extent, the rude traditions of the early Latin songs. Homer is, as I have said, supposed to be but a lay, or a series of lays, of unparalleled beauty and grandeur, and even the dramas of Greece were spoken of by her sublimest dramatist as "morsels from the Homeric banquet."

These instances, however scanty, will suffice to show that there is a very perceptible relation between the early lays of peoples and their loftier and more sustained efforts—that as a general rule there is realised in the maturity of a people's fancy the promise implied in the sweet and genuine utterances of its childhood. Bearing in view this connexion as it appears in other countries, let me now ask your attention to the earlier history of this species of composition in our own.

It is well known that in those dark ages which followed the overthrow of the Roman Empire the light of learning, darkened or extinguished in the other countries of Europe, was in Ireland kept alive, and fed and tended here with pious care. In order the better to preserve her knowledge the Irish people and princes established numbers of colleges throughout the island,

and in them every branch of learning—law and religion, science and literature—was imparted through the agreeable medium of verse. Of those educated in these seats of learning, by far the most important portion were “the Bards.”

This *sacred* office—for such it was in times too simple or too wise to ignore the tie that links poetry to religion—was confined to a few of the most illustrious families, and from these were chosen the children of the most promising genius. In cloisters hidden deep in old oak forests, and never penetrated by the beams of the sun, they are said to have pursued their studies by the light of lamps and tapers, and for twelve long years to have been taught to “spurn delights and live laborious days.” This ordeal having been passed, a very different life awaited them. Going forth into the world they became personages of the highest importance in the families of the chieftains. Lands were allotted to them. Their persons were sacred. They were the constant companions of their chief. Their social position was so high that an ancient sumptuary law, which regulated the number of colours in which the various grades of the people might array themselves, allowed two to an ordinary gentleman; five to a nobleman; six to a bard; while the royal family itself was limited to seven.

The account given of the duties of these Irish bards immediately discloses their resemblance to those whom I have already mentioned as having existed elsewhere. They were expected to perpetuate in verse the memorable incidents of their own time, and to keep alive the tales already current of the mighty deeds of former

heroes. In this we recognise the ballad poem. Odes on joyful occurrences and dirges over the fallen also constituted a portion of their service, and here they approached most nearly the lyric form. Their principal office, however, was the former, and in its performance they were required even to attend their chieftain to the field, and Tyrtæus-like to animate his courage and that of his followers with such strains "as raised to height of noblest temper heroes old arming for battle."

The mode in which they were suffered to accomplish this presents a strange contrast to modern warfare. The bard, arrayed in a flowing robe of white, and carrying his harp (of which each of them was a perfect master) advanced into the very thickest of the fray, and sang and played unharmed among the contending warriors.

One instance only is handed down of an injury inflicted on one of these sacred personages. The anecdote deserves to be recorded as illustrating very strongly the sanctity attributed to the bards by the Irish of that era.

A war was raging between the monarch of Ireland and the king of Leinster, and they met in battle at Cruachan. In the course of the engagement the king of Leinster, stung by the sarcasms of his adversary's bard, assailed him. The poet fled for protection to the ranks of the king's own soldiers, but was pursued and slain by the infuriated warrior. The people in their abhorrence of his guilt gave him the name of Kinfala or "foul head," and this term of loathing was perpetuated to his posterity.

Very few fragments of the lays of the bards, produced

before the time of Ossian, are now in existence. Many Ossianic or rather post-Ossianic pieces, however, still survive. This great Irish poet so far outshone his fellow-minstrels that almost all the remains of Gaelic poetry, produced during some centuries after his time, are attributed to him. What is now spoken of as Ossian's may be taken therefore as embodying the chief characteristics of the bardic poetry of his own and several successive ages. Of those characteristics the most remarkable is a grandeur of imagery at times amounting to sublimity, great graphic power, the art of raising an entire picture by one well-chosen word, considerable originality, and I believe great harmony. To illustrate these qualities as they deserve would not be possible within moderate limits, but the following passages will serve to give some idea of the manner of these poets, the vividness of their pictures, and the simplicity of their language:—

“Early one foggy morning I and Fionn, Feargus, Faolan, Osgur of dire deeds, Diarmuid Donn, and Conan Maol, went to chase the deer in the Vale of Thrushes; we were delighted at seeing the swiftness of the hounds in the glen. Fionn had Sgeolan and Bran; each two men of the Fenii had a hound between them. We came to a glen of beautiful trees; the birds in flocks sang melodiously. We set free our hounds; the sound of our dogs in the cliffs was more delightful to us than the song of harps.

“A doe was started in the wood; one of her sides was white as a swan upon the water; the other was dark as a shoe. Through the brake she ran swifter than the flight of a hawk. We wondered greatly to see the speed of the doe. She outstripped the best hound of the children of Baoisgne, even Bran who never missed her prey. Though the chase began in the dusky hour of morning, not a hound had returned at the hour of rest. We mourned over our lost hounds. Deardagh said: ‘The chase which we began early in the morning was not a natural one.’

"Soon after Bran came back, tired and wet. She lay down before Fionn, panting; her cry was shrill and loud. The son of Cumhal said, 'I know by your cry that our heads are in great danger.'

"When he had said this there came to us a lovely woman of fair skin; her golden hair in heavy folds fell down to her feet; it swept the dew from the grass. A crown of gold encircled the head of this lovely maid of modest countenance. She shed bright light over all the Fenii from a golden star which hung from her side; her cheeks were like wild roses; her bosom was whiter than snow; on her brow was no frown; her eyes were clear, without mist; low and sweet were the tones of her voice."

This animated woodland scene is not, however, more real than the following sketch:—

"Fionn heard the weeping of a woman; she sat on the banks of a lake; there the young damsel wept; her face and her figure were lovely.

"Her cheeks were redder than the rose; her mouth was like two berries; as the blossom was her chalky neck; her bosom was as fair as the lime.

"The colour of gold was on her hair; her eyes were like frosty stars; hadst thou beheld her form, thy affection thou wouldst have given to the woman."

The songs of enchantment, as they are called, also present some pictures of great clearness and beauty. We are hardly transported more completely into the region of fairy-land by the "Tempest" itself than by the mysterious slumber and ærial music of such a scene as this:—

"Not long after these gentle sayings of the two, they heard spiritual music which caused them to feel sleepy; sweetly it sounded at their sides, and after it there went forth a great noise and sound.

"Oh gentle queen, is this music thine? Are the musicians

belonging to thee who play sweet sounds by my side? I should never think thy company tedious; do not wrong me by thinking so.'

"There are no players of music with me but thou and Daire, truly; nor is there any one else with me: I promise thee it is true.'

"The music and the noisy clangour grew louder in the holes of the ears of the three: they were sinking into heavy trances: they had not strength to stand.

"It was not long ere they all fell prostrate: the three so kind went into heavy trances like those of death.

"When they came out of their swoon, and recovered their shapes, with colour, form, and appearance, they saw near them a beautiful golden mansion of power and mastery.

"They also saw encircling them a vast, blue-waved, powerful sea; swimming over it there came a bulky hero and an amiable woman.

"Daire said, 'I am afraid, O Fionn, and thou, flower without gloom, that the two who approach us by swimming will be the cause of melancholy to us.'

"That hero and the woman seized upon the three and held them closely: they took them to the golden mansion: direful to the three was that swimming."

A very fair sample of the poems of this period may be found in "*Manos the Great*." It consists of a conversation between Ossian and St. Patrick, which, if it does not prove the saint to have been either Catholic or Protestant, or, as Mr. Whiteside says, a member of the Church of England, at least shows him to have been a perfect gentleman and a very long-suffering Christian. The poet begins by telling the saint that he hates his psalm-singing. St. Patrick replies that lays of heroes are good, but that psalms, which are the praises of God, are better; a proposition which excites the ire of Ossian to the utmost.

"I have heard," he says, "music more melodious than your music,
 Though greatly thou praisest the clerics:
 The song of the blackbird of Letter Lee
 And the melody which the Lord Fionn made:

"The very sweet thrush of Gleann a Sgail,
 Or the dashing of the barks touching the strand,
 More melodious to me was the cry of the hounds,
 Than of thy schools, O chaste cleric."

He is, however, mollified by a little judicious flattery, and being earnestly requested, he narrates in some very graphic verses the great conflict between his chieftain Fionn and Manos. The poem closes by the poet lamenting his decrepitude and change of circumstances in some lines which (though his horror of the saint's psalms breaks out again very ludicrously) are full of beauty and pathos. This demi-dramatic structure is very common in the poems of this era, but the *dramatis personæ* always remain the same. They are referred by some to the eighth, ninth, and tenth centuries, but others with much more probability place them as late as the eleventh and twelfth.*

During the early occupation of Ireland by the English, both music and poetry are said to have flourished without check; but it seems certain that the

* Any one desirous of studying the subject touched on above, will find ample materials in the following works:—Walker's "Historical Memoirs of the Irish Bards," Hardiman's "Irish Minstrelsy," Miss Brooke's "Reliques of Irish Poetry," "Publications of the Ossianic Society, Dublin," Simpson's "Poems of Oisín," O'Daly's "Poets and Poetry of Munster," Four Reviews of "Hardiman's Minstrelsy" in the third and fourth vols. of the *Dublin University Magazine*. These last especially will repay perusal.

bardic character began at this time to lose some of its dignity. This character now united that of the jester of an English court with that of the troubadour of Provence. The chanting at festivals of heroic lays was, however, still their principal duty, and from this we do not know of their having declined until we are informed by Spenser, that in his time they had begun to employ their powers in praise of each "thief and wicked outlaw which hath lived all his lifetime in spoiles and robberies." This assertion has been repeated until its truth is no longer questioned; but it should be remembered that these expressions are what would naturally be used by an English courtier, highly favoured by his queen, to characterise any resistance to English authority.

Spenser had written some verses which pleased Queen Elizabeth, and she, in the grand manner of the Tudors, directed her treasurer to reward the poet. "Give him," she said, "reason." The treasurer, however (who hated Spenser), took no further notice of him. Soon after, the queen received the following petition from her poet:—

"Your highness ordered on a time
I should have reason for my rhyme.
From that time unto this season
I have had nor rhyme nor reason."

Reason, however, he did at last obtain, or what was then deemed so—a grant of spoliated lands in Ireland. Bearing this in mind, and also that Elizabeth had procured acts of parliament to be passed to suppress the bardic order, the remarks of the poet will, perhaps,

bear a different construction, and the fact appear to be that what he stigmatizes with such bitterness were, in fact, exhortations of the bards to those who directed these last struggles of the Irish people for their independence.

While speaking in this strain, however, Spenser pays a high tribute to the poetic power displayed in the productions he reprobates. I offer no apology for quoting the whole of this curious and interesting passage. While the political views of the courtier are open to suspicion, the reluctant testimony to the genius of the bards of such a witness as the author of the "*Fairy Queen*," is enhanced by the animosity which he evinces in speaking of their character. The extract, I should mention, occurs in the work entitled a "*View of the State of Ireland*," in which Spenser, under the name of Irenæus, gives to his friend Eudoxus his impressions of Ireland and her people.

"*Eudox.* Methinks, all this which you speake of, concerneth the customes of the Irish very materially, for their uses in warre are of no small importance to be considered, as well to reforme those which are evill as to confirme and continue those which are good. But follow your owne course, and shew what other customes you have to dislike of.

Iren. There is amongst the Irish a certaine kind of people, called bards, which are to them instead of poets, whose profession is to set forth the praises or dispraises of men in their poems or rymes, the which are had in so high regard and estimation amongst them, that none dare displease them for feare to runne into reproach thorough their offence, and to be made infamous in the mouthes of all men. For their veises are taken up with a generall applause, and usually sung at all feasts and meetings by certaine other persons, whose proper function that is, who also receive for the same great rewards and reputation amongst them.

Eudox. Do you blame this in them which I would otherwise have thought to have beene worthy of goode accompt, and rather to have beene maintained and augmented amongst them, than to have beene disliked?

* * * * *

Iren. It is most true, that such poets as in their writings doe labour to better the manners of men, and thorough the sweete baite of their numbers, to steale into the yong spirits a desire of honour and vertue, are worthy to be had in great respect. But these Irish bards are for the most part of another minde, and so farre from instructing yong men in morall discipline, that they themselves doe more deserve to be sharply disciplined; for they seldom use to choose unto themselves the doings of good men for the arguments of their poems, but whomsoever they find to be most licentious of life, most bold and lawlesse in his doings, most dangerous and desperate in all parts of disobedience and rebellious disposition, him they set up and glorifie in their rithmes, him they praise to the people, and to yong men make an example to follow.

* * * * *

Eudox. But tell me (I pray you) have they any art in their compositions? or be they anything wittie or well-favoured as poemes should be?

Iren. Yea truly, I have caused divers of them to be translated unto me, that I might understand them, and surely they favoured of sweet wit and good invention, but skilled not of the goodly ornaments of poetry; yet were they sprinkled with some pretty flowers of their naturall device, which gave good grace and comelineesse unto them, the which it is great pitty to see so abused, to the gracing of wickedness and vice, which with good usage would serve to adorne and beautifie vertue.”*

* The following curious anecdote of the mode in which Spenser's countrymen at this time employed poetry “to better the manners of men” has been kindly communicated to me. It supplies a striking commentary on the above passage. “One Ænghus Daly, who was termed the Bard Ruadh or Red Bard, and also Ænghus na-n-aer, or Angus of the Satires, was employed by Mountjoy and Sir George Carew to satirize the good Irish families, and for this purpose made a tour of Ireland. As we all like attacks on our

In illustration of this period, and disproof of the depreciatory portion of these remarks, I regret that I am obliged to confine myself to some stanzas of the elegant translation by Clarence Mangan of the "Dark Rosaleen," one of the passionate outpourings of the patriotism of this tempestuous age. It is in the form of an Ode to Ireland, which (owing probably to the penal enactments of Elizabeth's parliament) was commonly addressed by the poets of the time as a beautiful and suffering girl. The supposed speaker is the celebrated Hugh O'Donnell, by whose bard it was composed, and the allusions to "Wine from the royal Pope" and "Spanish ale," are of course merely figurative phrases under which the poet's fears rather than his fancy typified the hope of foreign aid to the breaking powers of his countrymen.

" Oh! my dark Rosaleen,
Do not sigh, do not weep!
The priests are on the ocean green,
They march along the deep.
There's wine from the royal Pope,
Upon the ocean green;
And Spanish ale shall give you hope,
My dark Rosaleen!
My own Rosaleen!

friends, he was listened to in his progress by A while he was attacking B, C, and the rest of the alphabet. At last, however, he came to the house of O'Meagher of Ikerrin in the county Tipperary, and when there he added to his poem a verse in that chieftain's praise. One of the servants of O'Meagher, irritated by the thought that his master's name should be disgraced by the praise of a hireling who had libelled all the good Irish families, stabbed him, and this was the end of *Ænghus* of the Satires."

Shall glad your heart, shall give you hope,
Shall give you health, and help, and hope,
My dark Rosaleen !

“ Over hills, and through dales,
Have I roamed for your sake ;
All yesterday I failed with sails,
On river and on lake,
The Erne, at his highest flood,
I dashed across unseen,
For there was lightning in my blood,
My dark Rosaleen !
My own Rosaleen !
Oh ! there was lightning in my blood,
Red lightning lightened through my blood,
My dark Rosaleen !

“ Over dews, over fands,
Will I fly for your weal ;
Your holy delicate white hands
Shall guide me with steel.
At home in your emerald bowers,
From morning's dawn till e'en,
You'll pray for me, my flower of flowers,
My dark Rosaleen !
My fond Rosaleen !
You'll think of me through daylight's hours,
My virgin flower, my flower of flowers,
My dark Rosaleen !

I could scale the blue air,
I could plough the high hills,
Oh ! I could kneel all night in prayer,
'To heal your many ills !
And one beamy smile from you
Would float like light between
My toils and me, my own, my true,

My dark Rofaleen !
My fond Rofaleen !
Would give me life and foul anew,
A fecond life, a foul anew,
My dark Rofaleen !

“ O ! the Erne fhall run red
With redundance of blood,
The earth fhall rock beneath our tread,
And flames wrap hill and wood,
And gun-peal, and Slogan-cry,
Wake many a glen ferene,
Ere you fhall fade, ere you fhall die,
My dark Rofaleen !
My own Rofaleen !
The Judgment hour muft firft be nigh,
Ere you can fade, ere you can die,
My dark Rofaleen ! ”

Having mentioned Mangan's name I cannot refrain, though at the risk of violating the order of time, from dwelling for a moment on the ftory of a life fo delicately pure—fo deeply wronged, fo flighted by moft of his countrymen, fo unutterably fad—the complement to that trio of mifery in which Savage and Chatterton were firft and fecond.

James Clarence Mangan was born in an humble rank in life in the beginning of the prefent century. The flender education of his childhood was obtained in the Liberties of Dublin, near Chriftchurch Cathedral. Then he entered the battle of life ; and never furely were its “ flings and arrows ” fhowered on one lefs fitted to fuftain or to return them. His character is thus beautifully delineated in a fingle fentence, and in worthy language, by one who knew and loved him

well. "He was shy and sensitive, with exquisite sensibility and fine impulses: eye, ear, and soul, open to all the music, beauty, and glory of heaven and earth: humble, gentle, and unexact: craving nothing in the world but celestial glorified life—seraphic love."

His "eye, ear, and soul," were not however destined to feast on many of the forms and sounds of beauty save such as are disclosed to the inward eye and heard in solitude and silence. For seven long years he drudged as a scrivener. He then rose in life and became an attorney's clerk. During this time he supported out of his scanty wages a brother, sister, and mother. After ten years in all of this work he vanishes, and of the blank which occurs here in his history nothing is known, except that at its commencement he was a buoyant youth, and at its close, though still a youth, bowed, stricken, grey-haired. One thing more is also vaguely known—that his genius had raised him to a society above his own, and the delicate beauty of his countenance had won for him the patronage of a beautiful girl, of whom we know nothing but the character. She cast her spell over his noble, generous, and trustful heart, amused herself with it after her kind, and then broke it.

The whole tale is told in a few sweet lines of his very simply and nobly—without complaint, without bitterness:—

"I saw her once a little while, and then no more—
'Twas paradise on earth a while, and then no more.

* * * * *

The shallop of my peace is wrecked on Beauty's shore—
Near Hope's fair isle it rode a while, and then no more."

The name of the lady is unknown. Mangan never uttered it, nor in any way exposed to scorn what had so deeply and cruelly wronged him.

He was now about thirty, and by the friendly intervention of three gentlemen, whose names are as well known as they are highly respected by most of us, he obtained an engagement in the magnificent library of Trinity College. How serenely happy such a man might have been in such a place—among learned men, his friends, and amid the lore he loved so deeply—is easily conceived; but his fair friend had done her work well, and Clarence Mangan was now an opium-eater. Brandy supplied the place of his proper food. The rest is almost too painful to dwell upon. By such stimulants as these he sustained the force of his genius for some years, and filled the Irish magazines and papers—the *Dublin University*, the *Nation*, and the *United Irishman*—with exquisite translations from many tongues. At length his constitution, saturated with the poison, and unsupported by sufficient nutriment, began to give way. A few staunch friends endeavoured to aid him in his extremity. Suddenly he disappeared, and was after some days found concealed in a house in Bride-street. At his urgent request he was conveyed to the Meath Hospital, and there, on the 20th of June, 1849, while a friend was, by his wish, reading to him one of the penitential hymns of his Church, his gentle, unrepining spirit passed away to that land for which, in his sweetest verses, he yearns with so deep and passionate a longing :—

“ O! undeveloped land,
Where to I fain would flee,
What mighty hand shall break the band
That keeps my soul from thee ?

“ In vain I pine and sigh
To trace thy dells and streams :
They gleam but by the spectral sky
That lights my shifting dreams.

“ Ah ! what fair form flitting through yon green glades
Dares mine eye ? Spirit, oh ! rive my chain !
Woe is my soul ! Swiftly the vision fades,
And I start up—waking—to weep in vain.”

Mangan wrote without effort, and the description of his poetry given by himself in his terrible picture of “The Nameless One,” is, as a general criticism, the best, perhaps, that could be given. “His soul,” he says, “had been mated—

“ With song which alway, sublime or vapid,
Flowed like a rill in the morning beam,
Perchance not deep, but intense and rapid—
A mountain stream.”

Yet there is no absence of finish perceptible, and such was his instinctive delicacy that I believe hardly a word will be found in his poems that could offend the most sensitive ear or the most fastidious refinement of taste. Pure, delicate, soft, and lucid as the depths of those blue eyes of which his admirers love to tell us, his poetry, nevertheless, gleams sometimes (as in “Rosaleen” and the “German’s Fatherland”) with an intensity that startles, coming from so gentle a soul. His worst fault—a certain haziness of thought which,

against his better nature, he at times affects—was probably caught from his familiarity with his German originals, but will, I think, be found to be more than atoned for by such singular sweetness of versification as is displayed in the “Lady Eleanora Von Alleyne.” But his chief title to admiration must always lie in the lithe and graceful pliancy of his diction and perfect chastity of every thought.

From this brief notice of Mangan, I must now return to close my very imperfect sketch of the early Celtic literature.

The century which followed Elizabeth produced a few remarkable bards, but the glory of their calling had departed. They sang no longer to their chieftains the great deeds of their ancestors. Their lays became mere personal panegyrics. At length the tie of bard and chieftain itself was broken, and the last representative of the race was little more than a strolling minstrel—a troubadour received, no doubt, with high honour by all at whose houses or castles he chose to stay, but permanently resident with none. This last of the bards was the great Carolan. This singular and various genius was born about the year 1670 at Nobber, in Westmeath, and soon began to produce the first sounds of that divine music which was destined to immortalize his name. He was also a poet of some eminence. He wandered from province to province, and everywhere was splendidly received. In return he composed an air and words in honour of each of his entertainers. He too, it should be observed, like the bards of the age of Elizabeth, employed a harper, who

accompanied him, notwithstanding his proficiency in music. The history of his life is full of curious anecdotes; and his love for Bridget Cruise, the unrivalled sweetness of the air in which the passion awakened by her charms is recorded, and his strange recognition of her (after years of absence and blindness) by the touch of her hand, invest his wandering life with an air of romance. His poetry, too, contains some passages of delicacy and pathos—some of great geniality and humour; but it is necessary to hasten on to a new race of poets. Of the bards, properly so called, we now take our leave, and in doing so I shall only ask you to observe that during the immense period over which we have passed no tendency towards the sustained efforts of any flight higher than the ballad or lyric can be discerned.

The last century cannot be said to have contributed anything to this species of poetry save some Jacobite songs, and some such pieces as that sweet lament called “The Fair Hills of Pleasant Ireland.” Poets, indeed, it did produce. Congreve and Parnell are said to have been Irishmen. Goldsmith and Sheridan were certainly Irishmen. But though Parnell and Goldsmith possessed feeling, they are in outward garb as English as Grey; and Congreve and Sheridan are as arid in poetry as they are dazzling in wit. In fact, no lyrical Irish as well in form as essence, appears till the greatest of all breaks suddenly to light in Moore. His well-known boast was as just as it is beautiful. He it was who re-awakened the harp of Ireland, “and gave all its chords to light, beauty, and song.”

Of Moore, however, I feel that it would be idle to

ſpeak here ; I aim merely at giving a general picture, and his figure is one too familiar to you all to gain any vividneſs from a momentary touch ; I ſhall, therefore, pauſe only at his contemporaries.

Among theſe, and only overſhadowed by him, is a cluſter of poets poſſeſſing in the very higheſt degree the chief excellencies of the national poetry. Earlieſt and firſt of theſe is John Banim, beſt known as a noveliſt, but whoſe delicate knowledge of Iriſh character, vigour of expreſſion, and depth of feeling, placed him high as a poet too, notwithſtanding a certain ruggedneſs both in ſtructure and verſification, and great unevenneſs in the quality of his thoughts. The ballad of “Soggarth Aroon,” in which the attachment of the Iriſh peaſant to the Catholic prieſthood is pourtrayed with the moſt touching ſimplicity, will be found to contain an excellent exemplification of his power. Its ſtyle and ſpirit may be collected from a few of the cloſing ſtanzas :—

“ Who, in the winter’s night,
 Soggarth aroon,*
 When the cold blaſt did bite,
 Soggarth aroon,
 Came to my cabin-door,
 And on my earthen flue
 Knelt by me, ſick and poor,
 Soggarth aroon ?

“ Who, on the marriage-day,
 Soggarth aroon,
 Made the poor cabin gay,
 Soggarth aroon—

Prieſt dear.

And did both laugh and sing,
 Making our hearts to ring,
 At the poor christening,
 Soggarth aroon?

“ Who, as friend only met,
 Soggarth aroon,
 Never did flout me yet,
 Soggarth aroon?
 And when my hearth was dim
 Gave, while his eye did brim,
 What I should give to him—
 Soggarth aroon ? ”

John Philpot Curran is also among the poets of this era. He has not, indeed, written enough to challenge criticism ; but what he might have done is shown by the metrical power displayed in the poem of “ The Defenter’s Meditation.” The story of its origin is thus told in the life of the orator by his son :—

“ As Mr. Curran was travelling an unfrequented road, he perceived a man in a soldier’s dress sitting by the road-side, and apparently much exhausted by fatigue and agitation. He invited him to take a seat in his chaise, and soon discovered that he was a defenter. Having stopped at a small inn for refreshment, Mr. Curran observed to the soldier that he had committed an offence of which the penalty was death, and that his chance of escaping it was but small. ‘ Tell me, then, (continued he,) whether you feel disposed to pass the little remnant of life that is left you in penitence and fasting, or whether you would prefer to drown your sorrow in a merry glass ? ’ The following is the defenter’s answer, which Mr. Curran, in composing it, adapted to a plaintive Irish air : ”—

“ If sadly thinking, with spirits sinking,
 Could more than drinking my cares compose,
 A cure for sorrow from sighs I’d borrow,
 And hope to-morrow would end my woes.
 But as in wailing there’s nought availing,
 And death unfailing will strike the blow,
 Then for that reason, and for a season,
 Let us be merry before we go !

“ To joy a stranger, a way-worn ranger,
 In ev’ry danger my course I’ve run ;
 Now hope all ending, and death befriending,
 His last aid lending, my cares are done :
 No more a rover, or hapless lover,
 My griefs are over—my glass runs low ;
 Then for that reason, and for a season,
 Let us be merry before we go ! ”

Then follow Wolfe, the gifted author of the “ Burial of Sir John Moore ; ” and Gerald Griffin, the yet more gifted author, who at twenty-one produced the greatest of Irish novels, “ The Collegians.” The former, though he was prevented by an early death from giving much to the world, yet has left a ballad behind which won the highest praise of Lord Byron, and was for a time attributed by some to that noble poet, by some to Coleridge, and by others to Campbell. Griffin still lives in many poems of exquisite sweetness, delicacy, and sadness. The following brief model of easy alliterative melody is from his well-known poem of Gille Macree :—

“ I might have said,
 My mountain maid,
 Come live with me, your own true lover—
 I know a spot,
 A silent cot,
 Your friends will ne’er discover,

Where gently flows the waveless tide
 By one small garden only,
 Where the heron waves his wing so wide
 And the linnet sings so lonely."

At this time too lived Callanan, the mountain-loving poet of the South, in whom the adoration of nature seems absolutely at his height. His addresses to spots he loved were more like the impassioned utterances of a lover to his mistress, than calm affection for haunts we have long known. His poem of Gougane Barra is the finest example of this devoted love. It would, however, be difficult to read any portion of his poems without being struck by this and the almost Amœbæan softness which it seems to impart. A good example of both may be found in his poem of "Avondhu."

Lysaght, and the stirring poet of the North Drennan, though in point of subject prior to those of whom I have spoken, were of this age. The former has written many political songs full of life and gaiety, and his "Kate of Garnavilla" is a singular example of the pleasure that may be given by the mere stringing together of musical words. The latter is on the contrary stern and passionate, and the march of his verse steady and dignified. The opening lines of the "Wake of William Orr" are in his best style.

"Here our murdered brother lies;
 Wake him not with woman's cries;
 Mourn the way that manhood ought;
 Sit in silent trance of thought.
 Write his merits on your mind:
 Morals pure and manners kind:
 In his head as on a hill,
 Virtue placed her citadel.

Why cut off in palmy youth?
 Truth he spoke and acted truth.
 Countrymen, unite, he cried,
 And died—for what his Saviour died.”

His song “When Erin first rose” is, however, that by which he is now best known, and, though its language is occasionally rather stiff, it contains many lines of unquestionable power and beauty. But we must pass on to another race of poets—the race which counts among its chieftains, Davis, Ferguson, Mangan, and M‘Carthy.

The pure and simple ballad—a rapid nervous narrative in rhyme—found a consummate master in Thomas Davis:

“In his hand
 The thing became a trumpet, whence he blew
 Soul-animating strains.”

To him had been vouchsafed in an unusual measure the “powers of speech that stir men’s blood.” His youth and early manhood were passed in gathering and hoarding knowledge; and it was not till late in life that the springs of lore and fancy that were in him—of hopes and memories and sad and noble thoughts—burst into light. But then they overflowed like subterranean fires—wave after wave—in a torrent of resistless power. He felt within him thoughts that must be spoken, and so he spoke right on, heightening some part of his picture by every touch, but rarely if ever deigning to use a colour which does not intensify the whole. When embellishments are used by him they seem to force a way by native vigour through a reluctant soil, or to hang like

flowers on the margin of a rushing stream—drawing life and freshness from its waters but offering no impediment to its career. This directness of diction is seconded (if not produced) by a sincerity of soul—an earnestness and purity of purpose, and an intrepid love of what he considered truth, which at once disclose the secret of his power. Equally direct, and, as a source of his poetic efficiency, almost equally potent, was his passionate devotion to his country and all her people. He loves to let his genius dwell in vivid dreams among the few but precious relics of the ancient grandeur of Ireland and the records of her former glories. One of these—on which Irishmen dwell with natural pride, is accordingly the subject of the poem in which his powers are in my opinion displayed in their highest excellence—the ballad of “Fontenoy.”

It would be superfluous to advert, before such an audience, to the political events which, in the half century previous to that celebrated battle, had driven into the ranks of Louis of France, and placed under Marshal Saxe, that band of exiles who (with Lord Clare at their head) formed what is known to history as the Irish Brigade. The incidents of the battle itself are narrated by the poet so clearly and with such historic accuracy as to need no words but his own.

“FONTENOY.

“Thrice, at the huts of Fontenoy, the English column failed,
And twice the lines of St. Antoine the Dutch in vain assailed;
For town and slope were filled with fort and flanking battery,
And well they swept the English ranks, and Dutch auxiliary.
As, vainly, through De Barn’s wood the British soldiers burst,
The French artillery drove them back, diminish’d and dispersed.

The bloody Duke of Cumberland beheld with anxious eye,
 And ordered up his last reserve his latest chance to try.
 On Fontenoy, on Fontenoy, how fast his generals ride,
 And mustering come his chosen troops, like clouds at eventide.

“Six thousand English veterans in stately column tread,
 Their cannon blaze in front and flank—Lord Hay is at their head;
 Steady they step adown the slope—steady they climb the hill;
 Steady they load—steady they fire, moving right onward still,
 Betwixt the wood and Fontenoy, as through a furnace blast,
 Through rampart, trench, and palisade, and bullets showering fast;
 And on the open plain above they rose, and kept their course,
 With ready fire and grim resolve, that mocked at hostile force:
 Past Fontenoy, past Fontenoy, while thinner grow their ranks—
 They break, as broke the Zuyder Zee through Holland’s ocean banks.

“More idly than the summer flies, French tirailleurs rush round;
 As stubble to the lava tide, French squadrons strew the ground;
 Bomb-shell, and grape, and round-shot tore, still on they marched
 and fired—

Fast from each volley grenadier and voltigeur retired.
 ‘Push on, my household cavalry!’ King Louis madly cried:
 To death they rush, but rude their shock—not unavenged they died.
 On through the camp the column trod—King Louis turns his rein:
 ‘Not yet, my liege,’ Saxe interposed, ‘the Irish troops remain;’
 And Fontenoy, famed Fontenoy, had been a Waterloo,
 Were not these exiles ready then, fresh, vehement, and true.

“‘Lord Clare,’ he says, ‘you have your wish, there are your Saxon foes!’
 The Marshal almost smiles to see how furiously he goes!
 How fierce the look those exiles wear, who’re wont to be so gay,
 The treasured wrongs of fifty years are in their hearts to-day—
 The treaty broken, ere the ink wherewith ’twas writ could dry,
 Their plundered homes, their ruined shrines, their women’s parting
 cry,
 Their priesthood hunted down like wolves, their country overthrown,
 Each looks as if revenge for all were staked on him alone.
 On Fontenoy, on Fontenoy, nor ever yet elsewhere,
 Rushed on to fight a nobler band than these proud exiles were.

“ O’Brien’s voice is hoarse with joy, as halting, he commands,
 ‘ Fix bayonets—charge!’—Like mountain storm rush on these fiery
 bands.

Thin is the English column now, and faint their volleys grow,
 Yet, mustering all the strength they have, they make a gallant show.
 They dress their ranks upon the hill to face that battle-wind—
 Their bayonets the breaker’s foam; like rocks, the men behind!
 One volley crashes from their line, when, through the surging
 smoke,

With empty guns clutched in their hands, the headlong Irish broke.
 On Fontenoy, on Fontenoy, hark to that fierce huzza!
 ‘ Revenge! remember Limerick! dash down the Sacfanach!’

Like lions leaping at a fold, when mad with hunger’s pang,
 Right up against the English line the Irish exiles sprang:
 Bright was their steel, ’tis bloody now, their guns are filled with gore;
 Through shattered ranks, and severed files, and trampled flags they
 tore:

The English strove with desperate strength, paused, rallied, staggered,
 fled—

The green hill-side is matted close with dying and with dead.
 Across the plain, and far away passed on that hideous wrack,
 While cavalier and fantasin dash in upon their track.
 On Fontenoy, on Fontenoy, like eagles in the sun,
 With bloody plumes the Irish stand—the field is fought and won!”

In a very different key is written the sad, sweet lyric
 called “ The Lost Path,” in which the spirit of the poet
 of Fontenoy is present still, but chastened by the uses
 of adversity and all but broken by a burden of sorrow
 too great for him to bear. The ringing notes which in
 the ballad stir the soul to its lowest depths here seem
 just to reach the ear, and then to recede like departing
 music.

“ Sweet thoughts, bright dreams, my comfort be,
 All comfort else is flown;
 For every hope was false to me,
 And here I am alone.

What thoughts were mine in early youth !
 Like some old Irish song,
 Brimful of love and life and truth,
 My spirit gushed along.

“ I hoped to right my native isle,
 I hoped a foldier’s fame,
 I hoped to rest in woman’s smile,
 And win a minstrel’s name.
 Ah ! little have I served my land,
 No laurels press my brow,
 I have no woman’s heart or hand,
 No minstrel honours now.

“ But fancy has a magic power,
 She brings me wreath and crown,
 And woman’s love, the self-same hour
 She smites oppression down.
 Sweet thoughts, bright dreams, my comfort be,
 I have no joy beside ;
 Oh ! throng around, and be to me
 Power, country, fame, and bride.”

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, I must here pause to say that I hope it will be distinctly understood that I stand here for no purpose but to ask your attention and admiration to the genius of our countrymen. With their creed, their principles, or their politics, I have nothing here to do. For this reason I have not hesitated to select from these poems—whatever was their political purpose, whatever is their political tendency—just such passages as appeared to me best to illustrate the peculiar endowments of the writers, implicitly trusting to you not to misconceive me. I have, too, assumed that there was one sentiment which all of you would entertain in common with the poet—pride, I mean, in every Irish honour.

I knew that those whom I should address, while they were incapable of vulgar gasconade, were as far above that wretched affectation which fancies that it becomes "English" by being ashamed of its own, and would sink a nationality of which it may justly be proud to join in the growing cant of imperialism. I know that there are few, if any, who hear me, to whom allegiance to a just government and loyalty to our Queen do not seem a sacred duty—a sacred sentiment—but I know that there are present none to whom their country is not a subject of deep affection, and her achievements of proud remembrance. There is no inconsistency; and the heart of an Irishman is not in its right place which does not throb faster at the recollection of days like Fontenoy when Irish troops swept their foes before them, and on hard-contested fields put to the blush even the dogged resolution of English courage and the gay and festive gallantry of the boldest blood of France. In the spirit of these poems I go thus far and no further. Before an Irish audience such sympathy seems to me perfectly legitimate. I neither feel nor wish to awaken any other.

It is with regret that I leave with so little notice and so little example the volume which contains the "Geraldines," "Sweet and Sad," "The Sack of Baltimore," and "The Battle Eve of the Brigade," even though it be to pass on to one so well worthy to be placed by the side of Davis as the author of the "Welshmen of Tyrawley."

I must frankly confess myself unable to offer you any adequate estimate of the poems of Samuel Ferguson.

Familiar as most of them are to readers of poetry, the modesty of their author has denied to himself the enlarged fame, and to the public the increased gratification, which a complete edition of his works would confer on the one and on the other. To pass a fair judgment on the works of any writer those works must be read as a whole. Other reasons, too, make me feel that my criticism would not be reliable. Some here who enjoy the happiness of social intercourse with him will understand how painful and ungracious would be the task of touching the blemishes (if blemishes there be) of one himself so incapable of censorious judgment—so deeply imbued with the spirit of large-hearted and genial admiration. Beauties, too, unquestionably his would, I am conscious, appear fanciful to those who have no personal acquaintance with the cordial humour, the wide, unfaded charity, the overflowing measure of love to man and nature, which fill and animate the heart from which those beauties sprang. His leading excellencies, however, will be found to be admirably exemplified in one of his earliest poems, “The Forging of the Anchor.” Noble as it is, this is in my judgment by no means the finest, or even most spirited of his poems; but from its opening lines some idea will be formed of the poet’s graphic skill, his geniality of nature, his marvellous rhythmical power, his steady nervous progress towards his end, and the consummate art with which every word and epithet is made to do its work in welding the whole into one compact mass:—

“ THE FORGING OF THE ANCHOR.

“ Come, see the Dolphin’s anchor forged—’tis at a white heat
now ;

The bellows ceased, the flames decreased—though on the forge’s
brow

The little flames still fitfully play through the fable mound,
And fitfully you still may see the grim smiths ranking round,
All clad in leathern panoply, their broad arms only bare—
Some rest upon their sledges here, some work the windlafs
there.

“ The windlaf strains the tackle-chains, the black mound heaves
below,

And red and deep a hundred veins burst out at every throe :
It rises, roars, rends all outright—O, Vulcan, what a glow !
’Tis blinding white, ’tis blasting bright—the high sun shines
not so !

The high sun sees not, on the earth, such fiery fearful show ;
The roof-ribs swarth, the candent hearth, the ruddy lurid row
Of smiths that stand, an ardent band, like men before the foe.
As quivering through his fleece of flame, the sailing monster, slow
Sinks on the anvil—all about the faces fiery grow.

‘ Hurrah ! ’ they shout, ‘ leap out—leap out ! ’ bang, bang, the
sledges go :

Hurrah ! the jetted lightnings are hissing high and low—
A hailing fount of fire is struck at every squashing blow,
The leathern mail rebounds the hail, the rattling cinders strew
The ground around : at every bound the sweltering fountains
flow,

And thick and loud the swinking crowd at every stroke
pant ‘ ho ! ’

“ Leap out, leap out, my masters ; leap out and lay on load !

Let’s forge a goodly anchor—a bower thick and broad ;
For a heart of oak is hanging on every blow, I bode,
And I see the good ship riding, all in a perilous road—
The low reef roaring on her lee—the roll of ocean poured
From stem to stern, sea after sea : the main-mast by the board ;

The bulwarks down, the rudder gone, the boats stove at the chains!

But courage still, brave mariners—the bower yet remains,
And not an inch to flinch he deigns, save when ye pitch sky high;

Then moves his head, as though he said, ‘Fear nothing—here am I.’”

I have already spoken of the works of Clarence Mangan, and his untimely death, otherwise his place in this sketch would be here, side by side with the author of the “Waiting for the May.” The latter is still among us, and is every day giving proof of a refining and maturing of those powers to whose early exertion we are indebted for that ode which so naturally connects itself with his name. I have the more pleasure in reproducing it because, by an error (unconscious of course), a recent collector has attributed to another the fame of its authorship. It is almost superfluous to ask attention to the varied sweetness of its numbers, to the easy simplicity of its expression, and to the graceful freedom which results from both:—

“SUMMER LONGINGS.

“Ah! my heart is weary, waiting,
Waiting for the May—
Waiting for the pleasant rambles
Where the fragrant hawthorn brambles,
With the woodbine alternating,
Scent the dewy way:—
Ah! my heart is weary, waiting,
Waiting for the May.

“Ah! my heart is sick with longing,
Longing for the May—
Longing to escape from study,
To the young face fair and ruddy,

And the thousand charms belonging
 To the summer's day :—
 Ah ! my heart is sick with longing,
 Longing for the May.

“ Ah ! my heart is sore with sighing,
 Sighing for the May—
 Sighing for their sure returning,
 When the summer beams are burning,
 Hopes and flowers that dead or dying
 All the winter lay :—
 Ah ! my heart is sore with sighing,
 Sighing for the May.

“ Ah ! my heart is pained with throbbing,
 Throbbing for the May—
 Throbbing for the sea-side billows,
 And the water-wooing willows ;
 Where in laughing and in fobbing
 Glide the streams away :—
 Ah ! my heart, my heart is throbbing,
 Throbbing for the May.

“ Waiting fad, dejected, weary,
 Waiting for the May—
 Spring goes by with wafted warnings,
 Moon-lit evenings, sun-bright mornings ;
 Summer comes, yet dark and dreary
 Life still ebbs away :—
 Man is ever weary, weary,
 Waiting for the May.”

Mr. McCarthy's "Summer Longings" are, however, by no means confined to his "Waiting for the May." On the contrary, a yearning for the advent of spring and early summer—an intense appreciation of their glories, and great felicity in telling of their beauty,

prevail throughout his poetry. In "Kate of Kenmare," he mentions as a gift of the poet—

"A fervent and dutiful love of the beautiful."

It is, indeed, such a love that seems to inspire the description of the approach of Spring in "The Awakening," in which the vivifying influence of that season is so happily personified:—

- "A Lady came to a snow-white bier,
Where a youth lay pale and dead;
She took the veil from her widow'd head,
And, bending low, in his ear she said—
Awaken! for I am here.
- "She passed with a smile to a wild wood near,
Where the boughs were barren and bare;
She tapped on the bark with her fingers fair,
And called to the leaves that were buried there—
Awaken! for I am here.
- "The birds beheld her without fear
As she walked through the dank-mossed dells;
As she breathed on their downy citadels,
And whispered the young in their ivory shells—
Awaken! for I am here.
- "The pale grass lay with its long locks sere
On the breast of the open plain;
She loosened the matted hair of the slain,
And cried, as she filled each juicy vein—
Awaken! for I am here.
- "The rush rose up, with its pointed spear;
The flag, with its falchion broad;
The dock uplifted its shield unawed,
As her voice ran clear through the quickening sod—
Awaken! for I am here.

“ The red blood ran through the clover near,
And the heath on the hills o’erhead ;
The daisy’s fingers were tipped with red,
As she started to life, when the Lady said—
Awaken ! for I am here.

“ And the young year rose from his snow-white bier,
And the flowers from their green retreat ;
And they came and knelt at the Lady’s feet,
Saying all, with their mingled voices sweet—
O Lady ! behold us here.”

The fine taste which guides Mr. McCarthy in the treatment of his more fanciful subjects, and prevents him from becoming what the cant of the day calls spasmodic, is, to my mind, one of his highest excellencies. As in Tennyson’s “ Talking Oak,” the enduing of a non-sentient object with emotions and intelligence is with masterly dexterity kept from ever becoming grotesque, so in our poet the clover is given red blood, and the flax is “ fair-haired, blue-eyed,” without disturbing our perfect acquiescence. In one passage the flowers are even bidden to a bridal breakfast, and the primrose comes actually tricked out in a straw hat without provoking more than a half-admiring smile at the audacity of the notion and the playful dexterity with which it is passed off:—

“ All the guests are in their places—
Lilies with pale, high-bred faces—
Hawthorns in white wedding favours,
Scented with celestial favours—
Daisies, like sweet country maidens,
Wear white scalloped frills to-day.
’Neath her hat of straw the peasant
Primrose sitteth,
Nor permitteth

Any of her kindred present,
 'Specially the milk-sweet cowslip,
 E'er to leave the tranquil shade;
 By the hedges
 Or the edges
 Of some stream or grassy glade,
 They look upon the scene half wistful, half afraid."

To appreciate properly the difficulty of such an achievement as this I would ask you to recall for yourselves some of the many instances in which it has been clumsily attempted, as in such a passage as that in which Alexander Smith speaks of the "Earth's great heart and granite ribs."

I would place McCarthy's songs of love and of summer above either his political songs or his longer ballads. The political songs—for example, "Advance" and "The Sword and Pen"—are spirited, no doubt, but want, in my opinion, that metallic ring which penetrates through ear and heart in the best ballads of Davis and Ferguson, and stirs the blood through the impassioned lines of that great "Single song," "The Memory of the Dead."

The longer ballads contain many passages of great beauty, but they have not that intensity, that absorbing interest, that makes the reader a sharer in the wrongs of Willie Gilliland and charge in the ranks of the exiles of Fontenoy. His stories, however, are always well told, and among their many beauties few better examples can, I think, be found than the description of John McDonnell's hound in "The Foray," and the touching and terrible picture, in the fourth canto of the "Voyage

of St. Brendan," of the abduction of Ethna when on the eve of taking the veil.

Any analysis of McCarthy's poetry—even so imperfect a one as the present must necessarily be—should not close without an allusion to that strange production of his earlier years, called "A Lament." The line "Sad is the knowledge that cometh with years," though occurring far on in the poem, may be taken as its germ. It treats of a transition incident to all—of the time when

" Youth's illusions
One by one
Have passed like clouds
The sun shone on."

The gloomy impression left by the description of those days when "hope had a meaning" is relieved by the review of the tales of chivalry and romance, of knights and ladies, fairy castles and enchanted forests, which rose and faded before the delighted eyes of our childhood. But the glimpse of the pageant is not suffered to affect the purpose of the poem. Two stanzas bring us back to the key which pervades the beginning, and which is here, as it were, finally insisted on by a repetition of the opening lines :—

"The dream is over,
The vision is flown,
Dead leaves are lying
Where roses have blown—
Withered and strewn
Are the hopes I cherish'd,
All hath perish'd
But grief alone."

I before claimed for McCarthy the faculty of being fanciful without becoming spasmodic. That he can delineate a sorrow not the less touching that it is common—not the less actual that it has its source in ourselves, and not in external things, as he has done in the “Lament,” shows an equal skill in shunning the false sentimentality—the cheap Byronism—which at first sight seems inseparable from such a subject.

If the limits of a lecture permitted, a crowd of other names which merit a distinct and minute review would still demand attention. It is indeed painfully tantalising to turn away from them—from the gifted daughters of the house of Sheridan, from the kindly translator of “Faust,” from the melodious cadences of the author of “Kate of Araglen,” from the whispered name of the writer of “Dear Land,” from the ringing numbers of the bard of “Ninety-eight.” To these a host of others might be added—the ingenious Lover, the harmonious Waller, Lever and Mahony, Blacker and Duffy, Wilson and Starkey—but I must content myself with having spoken in detail of those who, in Homeric phrase, “overtop the rest by their heads and lofty shoulders.” One other there is, however, who deserves particular mention, and whom I mention with the greater pleasure, because, for some reason, justice is not done to his talents; I allude to Michael Joseph Barry. As his chief powers, vivid and nervous description, and extreme softness, blended in easy flowing verse, are combined with singular felicity in one poem in particular, a few stanzas will serve (for I can hope no more) the purpose of suggestion. The lines are from

his requiem over those who fell in the Crimea, which may be found among his “Lays of the War:”—

“We have had our song of triumph! It has hardly died away—
Ah! the sound of sadder music follows soon the exultant lay.
Let the sighing breezes waft it over land and over wave,
Where our noble dead are sleeping—a Requiem for the Brave!

“There is grief, too deep for language—there is grief, too deep
for tears—
There is grief, that knows no solace in the long, long, lapse of
years—
Grief that, in the heart’s dark chamber, shrines the dead with
pious care,
And whose life is one long vigil o’er the relics cherish’d
there.

“But besides that speechless anguish, there is grief serene and
high,
As the sorrow of immortals over those who grandly die!
A grief that has both voice and tears, yet rises calmly strong,
And breathes a nation’s sympathies in chaunt of solemn song.

“In her halls the high-born lady muses, full of haughty grace,
And a pensive shadow softens the proud beauty of her face;
Whither now her thoughts are straying it were easy task
to tell,
Though we heard not the half-spoken words—‘How glo-
riously they fell!’

“The young village maid is sitting by her humble cottage door;
Ah! her thoughts are wandering likewise to that far Crimean
shore,
The big tear is trickling, heavily and slowly, down her cheek,
‘May God pity those who loved them!’ all the tribute she can
speak.

“ The strong swarthy smith is brandishing his massive sledge
 in air,
 And he flings it on the anvil, with his brawny arms all bare ;
 And he pauses for a moment, and resumes his toil again,
 With the brief and pithy sentence—‘ Well, they did their work
 like men ! ’

“ The old man, with hair of silver, as he gladdens in the glee
 Of the golden-headed grandchild that sits laughing on his
 knee—
 Lays his hand upon the baby-brow, and says, with aspect grave—
 ‘ God grant, my little darling, you may one day prove as brave.’

“ With firm step and gallant bearing, the brave boy hangs o’er the
 tale,
 And his eye is flashing haughtily—his cheek grows red and
 pale—
 And his heart beats strong and rapid, as he thinks, with thick-
 ening breath,
 He, too, could fling bright life away, for such a gallant death.

“ Such the thoughts half-uttered hourly, throughout these impe-
 rial isles—
 Noble thoughts, that steal in sadly, ’mid our wonted household
 smiles—
 Telling more than high-flown sentences, or grand heroic lay,
 How we sorrow for our heroes, who are sleeping far away.”

Such is the ballad and lyrical poetry of Ireland :
 replete with fancy and eloquence, tendernefs and emo-
 tion, but so far evincing no tendency to expand, at
 least in the direction of the higher forms of poetry.
 Yet it is to be found in every other mental effort of the
 race in forms the most alluring. At one time we trace
 it in the fine wit, the racy humour, and turns of the
 softest sentiment, in which her numerous comic writers

abound ; at another, the same qualities of fancy, refinement, and tenderness assume a garb more sensuous, but not less enchanting, and make their voices heard in all their wild and various sweetness, as they breathe every note of passion in the unrivalled melodies of our country. But it is in the eloquence of Ireland that this stirring, subtle spirit spreads all her beauties, and rises at last to the “ bright consummate flower.” This it is that sparkles over the pages of Curran and of Sheridan, of Canning and of Shiel, the same that burst in a stream of fire from the holy lips of Grattan, that lighted the gloomy grandeur of the genius of Burke, and was suffered to hang its light wreaths at times around the massive eloquence of Plunkett.

Will the genius of Ireland rest here ? Are the laurels she has won enough for her, or is she now about to enter a new realm of song—one demanding more enduring toil than she has known, but yielding also a more enduring fame ? I would gladly open the consideration of so interesting a problem, but the time which it is permitted us to remain together has more than elapsed, and I must leave its solution to other and abler hands.

I have but one word more to add. To any of you to whom such a speculation may seem unsuited, tasteless, or barren, I still recommend the study of these strains as pregnant with feelings congenial to every mood of the human mind. It is true that they are but drops in that majestic tide to which the poets of every age and clime since man was made are tributary. Yet so various is their tone—so versatile their genius—so comprehensive the scope of their sympathy, that I do not

hesitate to advocate the perusal of them on the same ground on which I would urge the study of poetry at large. I do not hesitate to say, Read them, if the sweetness, the grandeur, the simplicity of nature, have any charms for you. Read them if you would increase that inward treasure which unseen, and most when it is unseen, yet sheds over every thought and word a spirit of refinement and sense of gentle power. If you would study the history of your country in its most delightful form—if you would live in fancy over those days when this island was the home of sanctity and literature, and the early matin notes of her awaking music rose from every hill and valley—if you glory in what is glorious, if you sorrow over what is sad, in her annals—if you would sound the depths of the genius and passions of her people, and cherish towards her errors still a just tone of charity, forbearance, and mercy, read her story in the records of her poetry. If none of these motives actuates you, still you will seek in vain to engage your hours more innocently—more delightfully—more elegantly—than in gathering—

“ These scattered wild flowers of our native land—
These simple pebbles from the Irish sea.”

186, FLEET STREET,
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