

## THE AGE OF DR. JOHNSON

### PRELIMINARY SURVEY

THE second half of the 18th century has well been called by five or six different literary historians, both French and English, "the age of Johnson." It is certainly true that all this period was under the influence of Dr. Johnson, and that even after his death that influence for some time continued. In treating other periods of literary history, I have made it a rule to take the poetry first, then the prose, and so on. But in dealing with the second half of the 18th century I think that first of all it is necessary to consider Johnson—biographically and otherwise. We shall therefore talk about him before we begin to treat of the literary movement of this time in detail.

The student must recollect, however, that Johnson, with all his enormous influence, really represented only one side of literature, in the 18th century. Johnson was classical and conservative in the most extreme form;—he was the champion of every literary prejudice of his time;—he was the acknowledged enemy of romantic feeling in literature. And the evolutionary history of literature in his period is really the history of the great literary fight for liberty, for romantic feeling, for conventional emancipation, against the power of Johnson and the classic tradition behind him. We can give our sympathy to both sides in this battle; but I think you will agree with me as to the fortunate victory of romanticism. The 19th century literature would indeed have very little to show if the party of Johnson and the party of conservatism had been succeeded in fixing English taste. The victory of the romantic had results on the other hand which have reached even to Japan and which will probably be felt sooner or later in Japanese literature itself.

Another fact that the student should bear in mind is the

extraordinary greatness of the changes which took place during the fifty years under consideration. When we enter the age of Johnson, we are still in the artificial and frozen atmosphere of Pope's school. But we leave this age in company with Sir Walter Scott, and Wordsworth, and Coleridge and the founders of the first splendid new school of modern poetry. When we begin the second half of the century, prose literature is still content with picaresque romance, or romance of the impossible, and the real novel of living manners, of contemporary society, is only about to be discovered. At the close of the age of Johnson the English novel has been brought to the highest possible perfection—so that even to-day every popular novelist must study the masters of Johnson's time. And lastly we find English comedy at its best after a long period of barrenness and silence. True, there is not much of it; and it is the last flicker of the dramatic torch. But it is fine; and it is still able to keep the stage which is the best possible test of its merit. I have myself as a boy in London attended performances of the play of Johnson's time; and I remember that the theatres were so full that it seemed a wonderful thing how anybody could either enter or squeeze his way out again. This means that such drama is still popular: classic plays of the older kind do not crowd the theatres.

One more great change in literature occurred during these fifty years—the change in the conception of history. True history, great history was unknown in England before the time of Johnson. I do not mean that histories had not been written before then; and I do not mean that such histories did not possess literary merit. I mean only that great history, scientific history, history demanding exact scholarship, methodical research, and artistic presentation, all combined—I mean that such history was first produced in the age of Johnson. And it was the greatest history of its kind ever done. It is as valuable to-day as when it was written; it has never been equalled and it is difficult to believe that it can ever be surpassed. I am referring, of course, to the great work of Gibbon in particular. Now consider from these facts what a wonderful fifty years

the age of Johnson represents. The triumph of romantic feeling in poetry; the production of good drama; the development of the English novel; the perfection of historical method: all these together took place within considerably less than the lifetime of one man. We shall now talk about Johnson himself and then discourse about the literature of his time under separate divisions.

### DR. JOHNSON

As Ben Jonson was the first of the line of the "literary kings," so Dr. Samuel Johnson<sup>1</sup> was the last. With the quick growth of the scholarly class, the development of a general taste for letters, and the enormous multiplication of books, literary kingship became after him out of the question. A "literary king,"—that is, a dictator in the world of letters,—was only possible when the world of letters was much smaller than it is now, when great ability was comparatively rare, and when one man could really sway a majority in public opinion, as to what constituted good reading.

I shall not attempt a biographical sketch of Johnson: I presume that you know the principal fact of his career,—how he began life as schoolmaster,—how he then went to London, in order to make living by writing,—and how he there became, after a few years, the greatest literary dictator that English letters have ever known. It is the last fact that now chiefly concerns us. How did this country schoolmaster from Lichfield succeed in making himself a Power in London, without social or political influence of any kind to help him? And how are we to understand that this man emerged as conqueror from a contest with the world in which much more talented men had perished? For Johnson was not a great genius by any means; and he succeeded in doing what many men of genius had died while attempting,—namely, to make a living by writing. The answer is short, and surprising: *Character*.

<sup>1</sup> Samuel Johnson (1709-1784).

Character may mean a great deal in this world — as the case of Swift shows not less than the case of Johnson. But the value of character to its own possessor must depend a good deal upon public opinion. A perfectly honest, upright, and intelligent man may be hated for his character,—may find himself condemned to poverty and to contempt because of his very truthfulness. It is very much of a question in such cases how the man stands in relation to the sentiment of his epoch. The public will support the person who represents its opinions in the most powerful way,—as Macaulay, for example, supported them. But the public will try to crush any man who opposes its current opinions, and he has little chance of even being able to keep himself afloat. Now the success of Johnson was to a certain degree accidental:—he represented sincerely with all his force of sincerity both the good and the bad ideas of his age. This was a happening only. But the happening assumed its after-importance because of the personal character of the man.

Johnson, like Swift, had the power to make men afraid of him. This, in itself, is not necessarily a good, though it may be a very useful, quality. It depends upon the motives and impulses that direct it. Swift made men afraid of him, much more than Johnson; but he could not make men love him—he despised them too much for that. Johnson was able to command both fear and love, and the latter even more than the former. Swift's capacity of terrorizing was largely owing to public knowledge of his terrible malice. Johnson had really no malice in his soul; and his ability to make people afraid was not caused by any fear of vengeful action on his part. He had immense courage and determination in always stating publicly what he really believed to be the truth; and nothing in the way of society or rank, or wealth, ever influenced his utterances in the slightest possible degree. To a king or to a farmer he spoke his mind in exactly the same way; and this was quite enough to make people afraid in the 18th century. Indeed I believe that it is enough to make people equally afraid in the 19th century. To tell the truth,—bravely to express

one's honest opinions about right and wrong upon all occasions,—is really one of the most difficult things in the world. Even kings cannot always afford to do it. But Johnson could; and the world still admires him for it,—just as it admires him for other admirable things. Once the public anywhere knows of some man who is not opposed to its best interests, who cannot be bribed or intimidated, who loves to tell the truth upon every possible occasion,—who may be relied upon to speak for law, and justice, and morality, no matter what may be the consequence to himself,—that public will certainly look to such a man as a kind of natural protector, ideal champion, model hero. Such was the case with Johnson. He had both the respect and the absolute confidence of the English people.

Personally, everything was against him. He was a very big, fat, clumsy man—with ugly red spots upon his face, as well as the disfiguration caused by smallpox. He had no society training—no knowledge of fine courtesies, and no inclination to learn them. He thought that all politeness was humbug which did not spring from a sincere wish to be agreeable. He was rude in his address, harsh in his speech, and full of eccentricities. He had been mistaken for a watchman or a policeman of the old-fashioned kind; and he might have been mistaken for a farmer. But nobody would have taken him at first for a gentleman. Certainly he was thus under great disadvantages in the city of London.

Then his terrible way of saying things was certainly not calculated to please conventional people. A lady asks him, in reference to a naked statue, “Doctor, don't you think that statue very indecent?” “No, Madam,” answers Johnson — “but your mind is.” Or a mother goes to him for advice about what subject it were best that her little boy should be taught first. “Madam,” answers Johnson, “that is like asking whether you should put on the boy's stockings first or his trousers first, and waiting to think about it;—and while you are waiting, Madam, the child's breech is cold!” Naturally society thought this country schoolmaster something of a monster. And at table his action by no means tended to better this opinion. He

was an ugly eater, devouring his food with a great noise, and at a tea-party had been known to drink without shame twenty-four cups of tea. (You must remember that an English tea-cup is almost as large as a Japanese rice-bowl and that in the early 18th century cups were even larger than now). Moreover he never allowed anybody, where he happened to be present, to talk more than himself. He insisted upon being the king of the conversation, and made everybody unhappy who dared to oppose him in argument. Even at the table or in the parlour of a nobleman he still treated people just as he used to treat a little boy in his country school,—excepting that he did not whip them with a rod, but only with his terrible tongue.

After a time, however, people discovered three facts about Johnson's apparent roughness. First, that it was always sincere and good in a moral sense; that is to say, he meant well. Secondly, that there was always a wonderful deal of strong sense in his harshest replies:—they made people think about things in a new way. And thirdly, that this bear had a very tender heart. He had only once made his wife cry—on the day she married him, and in order to show her that he intended to be a master; but she had never had another moment of sorrow in her married existence. He had a cat, which he treated with a strangely considerate kindness—always himself purchasing the cat's food, for fear that the servants might not wish to take such trouble for the sake of an animal. He opened his purse, slender as it was, to almost any poor man of letters who came to him for assistance. And with children he was always tender and playful in an extraordinary way. So society concluded that the bear was a good bear and should be allowed to growl as much as it wanted.

Thereafter it growled to the end of the century or within a few years of the end; and all England listened with extreme pleasure to the growl. Gradually a circle of artists, men of letters, knights, divines, in short the best Englishmen of culture from every class gathered about the ex-schoolmaster, and honoured him and submitted to his dictation, to his arrogance, to his every whim, just as if they were only so many school-

boys. Dr. Johnson actually became for a generation the schoolmaster of the whole English nation—teaching people what was right, telling them what he thought was wrong, justifying their prejudices to the same extent that he shared them, and instructing them particularly as to how they should write, how they should read, and how they should accept the Christian religion as a useful moral convention in its outward observances. So that he had actually—while always remaining a poor man—more real power than the King himself.

Now a beautiful thing about Johnson is that all this power never spoiled him—never made him foolishly proud—never made him vain of his own performances—never made him less tender to the humble persons with whom he shared the hardships of his first years of literary struggle. There is no test of character like the test that power gives; and in Johnson's case it brought out nothing mean. He has justly been called "the good and great man," and if you read the wonderful *Life* of him by Boswell, I am sure that you will share to some extent this opinion of his contemporaries.

Now as for his relation to the literary movement. It was not altogether good. In two ways Johnson's influence must be recognized as obstructive. One of these was his strong conservatism in matters of literary method and form. The other was in his attitude as a critic to matters outside of the real province of literature as art. Even to-day the influence of Johnson has not disappeared from English criticism, and various great English journals and magazines are yet conducted very much as Dr. Johnson thought that all journalism should be conducted. I shall first speak of his influence as a critic.

Johnson was not perfectly well equipped for criticism. He was not an artist in the finer sense; and he had scarcely any romantic feeling in certain directions. His book of *The Lives of the Poets*<sup>1</sup> is still delightful reading; but as criticism it is almost entirely worthless. The poets whom Johnson thought immortal nobody reads at the present time—with perhaps two exceptions. He thought a great deal of form—more of form

<sup>1</sup> *The lives of the English poets 1779-81.*

than of the sentiment; and this explains a good deal of his bad criticism. In this respect he was true to the real classical 'spirit. Of course Johnson's criticism could not long exert influence so far as we are concerned with his judgment of the literary value of a book. But his criticism exerted a prodigious influence in regard to the attitude that many were to take toward literature not in accordance with established moral conventions. As a moral critic Johnson was absolutely despotic; and his power still lives. It was carried too far—though he certainly meant well. But such restrictions as he would have placed, and actually did place, for a time, upon literary productions, are of a nature to prevent any real progress. Two or three Johnsons reigning in succession, would freeze and paralyze any literature.

The first thing that Johnson did when a new book came into his hand was to ask himself, "Is this a good book?"—"Is it a moral book?" "Is it a Christian book?" If he satisfied himself that it was morally unimpeachable, — then he would ask himself, "Is this book well written and properly constructed according to the great principles and unities of classicism?" And only after the book had passed both tests, would Johnson believe himself ethically and æsthetically justified in praising it.

You will perceive that this is the criticism of the country schoolmaster, not of the university professor: it is the method of the teacher who must first concern himself about the morals of his little boys, and, only afterwards, about their knowledge of reading books and grammars. But is it a bad system? It is *narrow*, it is *small*: but we cannot say that it is bad, and you must recognize that it is absolutely safe, so far as the teacher himself is concerned. Yet a system which may be very good for one condition of things may prove to be very bad when applied to a higher condition of things. Here, however, let me beg of you to listen attentively for a moment, so that you will not have occasion to judge Johnson unfairly.

To estimate the value of a book by its moral excellence cannot in itself seem a bad way of judging. But the trouble is that men are not uniformly agreed as to what constitutes moral value. A fanatic will naturally consider many things



absolutely moral which a more liberal mind will find to be cruel and unjust. A moral judgment, to be worth anything, must depend upon the character of the man who makes it, and upon the intellectual power of that man, for its importance. Now Johnson was not a fanatic — not a zealot. He did not think Christianity was the only religion which had any good in it, and did not believe in sectarian disputes of any kind. He thought that only the fundamental moral teachings and fundamental doctrines of religion should never be criticized or attacked; it seemed to him that their value had been fully established by human experience; and he would not even allow certain kinds of metaphysical discussion that seemed to him dangerous to religion—such as the question whether animals have souls. But, if you remember that this was in the 18th century, you will see that it does not imply any great religious prejudice, but on the contrary a remarkably tolerant spirit. Indeed, Johnson was very tolerant in religious matters, though less so in moral matters. But the reason of this tolerance was the largeness of Johnson's mind—his power of seeing things differently from other men. The same intellectual power did not belong to his followers; and when those smaller-minded men tried to follow his principles, the result was prudishness and prejudice and intolerance of the most positive English kind. Johnson's influence was bad—not as he used it, but as others used it after him.

As to the other method of judging literature—judgment by classical standard—time has well shown that Johnson was quite wrong. He was wrong chiefly because he could not help it. Having himself no romantic feeling whatever, no sense of beauty in certain directions, he could not even conceive of merit outside of certain fixed rules. Within those rules he could judge well, outside of those rules he often judged very badly. And when he did not judge badly, as to works done against the rules, it was because his prodigious common sense enabled him to see their value of opinion or values of fact,—but not values of beauty. Now his followers did not have his power or practical perception; and they followed his principles

in a much narrower and blinder way. Thus we may say that his influence was opposed to the literary development of his age. The really surprising thing is that Johnson should sometimes have been just and correct in his estimates of books essentially opposed to his own ideal of art. With such opinions, correct estimates could scarcely be expected, yet Johnson did make surprisingly correct estimates on certain occasions.

Johnson's place in literature you must not think of as the place occupied by a *writer*,—but as the place occupied by a *talker*—a conversational autocrat. When a new book appeared, the people said, “What does Dr. Johnson think of the book?”—If he said it was a good book, everybody believed him. If he said it was bad, it was likely to be damned—except in one or two extraordinary cases which we shall have presently to consider. In matters of politics and of social reform also Dr. Johnson's opinion was anxiously looked for,—exactly as in these days men want to know the opinion of the *London Times* about some great event. But Dr. Johnson very seldom gave himself the trouble to write his opinions; he only spoke them—and his friends spread the news all round. He hated to write: it gave him a great deal of physical pain to write. And the bulk of his work is mainly represented by his great *Dictionary*<sup>1</sup> in two volumes. Otherwise Johnson's literary work proves to be quite small. There is the story of *Rasselas*<sup>2</sup> written in the time of two weeks, we are told, in order to pay the expense of his mother's funeral;—there is *The Lives of the Poets*, which can be pressed into an exceedingly small modern volume; there is the single tragedy of *Irene*;<sup>3</sup>—and there are the various moral essays contributed to his weekly periodical in imitation of Addison and his *Spectator* literature. But all this is very slight as to mass compared with the extraordinary fertility of his contemporaries. You can easily put Johnson's work into a single volume—excepting the *Dictionary*. Therefore it cannot be said that he affected English literature much in his writings.

<sup>1</sup> *A dictionary of the English language* 1755. — ed. H. J. Todd (1818) — ed. R. G. Latham (1866).

<sup>2</sup> *The Prince of Abissinia (Rasselas), a tale* 1759.

<sup>3</sup> *Irene, a tragedy* 1749.

And perhaps it was much better that he did not, for the truth is that Johnson's style is very bad—bad, not in the sense of incorrect, but decidedly bad as regards good taste and pure English. In fact, one of the adjectives which we to-day apply to a pretentious, bombastic, affected style is “Johnsonian.”

Dr. Johnson had taken for his model in style one of the most charming, most scholarly, most delightful of all English prose-writers,—Sir Thomas Browne. But Johnson could not imitate the fine elements of Browne's style, though he could very well imitate its Latinism. For Browne was by nature a glorious poet and romantic dreamer, though he wrote only in prose. Johnson could see the form — not the spirit: and he often reads like a mere parody of Browne. As Professor Dowden has very clearly pointed out, Johnson never got beyond the classical rules of the French Jesuits; and any one, without romantic feeling, who adheres to that system, is inevitably condemned to remain the slave of form. Johnson took the Latin authors for his models, and the rules of Aristotle for his rhetorical guides, but the result was utterly sapless. When Sir Thomas Browne chose a Greek or Latin word in preference to an Anglo-Saxon one, he did so, not merely for the sake of sound or conventional dignity, but because such a word could appeal to the *imagination* of his readers as no Anglo-Saxon words could have done.

Imagination has everything to do with beauty of style; and Johnson was singularly barren of imagination. To sum up the characteristics of his style, we may say that it is remarkable first for a great excess of Latinism,—long pedantic words, chosen chiefly by reason of their sonorities; secondly, for a great use of antithesis, — use of contrasts in balanced phrase—studied partly from Browne, but much more from the Latin writers; and thirdly, for a certain massive dignity and reserve which really reflects the personal character of the man. It is not without impressiveness, this rumbling, thundering style; but it soon becomes tiresome; and its egotism eventually offends us. Nevertheless, although no style could be a worse model for the student of English, Johnson's influence was so

great that up to the middle of the 19th century he was still read and studied as a stylist; and the essays of his *Rambler*<sup>1</sup> and *Idler*<sup>2</sup> were regularly placed in the hands of young people for obligatory reading.

Before reading the subject of Johnson, let me call your attention to one very interesting survival of his influence in English journalism. You have all heard of, and most of you must have occasionally read something of, the London *Spectator*,<sup>3</sup> — a weekly newspaper which has lately been speaking rather badly about Japan and Japanese politics. You must not suppose that these expressions of opinion, however, really represent the prejudices of one man, nor that the conduct of the paper is a personal or individual matter. This very old paper follows a policy that has been unchanged from Johnson's time,—the policy of expressing the opinions of cultivated conservative as fully and as fairly as possible. Fifty years ago the opinions of that paper were just as they are to-day; and they have always been very much like the opinions of Dr. Johnson. England wants a paper to champion all its prejudices,—to champion them with scholarship and dignity; and that is the paper which does it. And with all its faults it is a wonderfully good paper in certain ways: it gives evidence of a toleration in literary and in religious directions which is quite remarkable, considering its professed opinions. *The Spectator* will take up a subject or a book which it hates, and will express its dislike of that book or subject; but it will not lie about the book, and will try to state fairly whatever real merit there exists. And when it is wrong, it is not ashamed to apologize,—just as the great Dr. Johnson himself would apologize to a working man whom he had unwittingly found fault with for no good reason. I only mention the newspaper to give you an idea how much the influence of Johnson is still alive—showing you that it now reaches even to the other side of the world both for good, and, I am sorry to say, for evil.

<sup>1</sup> *The Rambler* 1750-52.

<sup>2</sup> *The Idler* 1758-61.

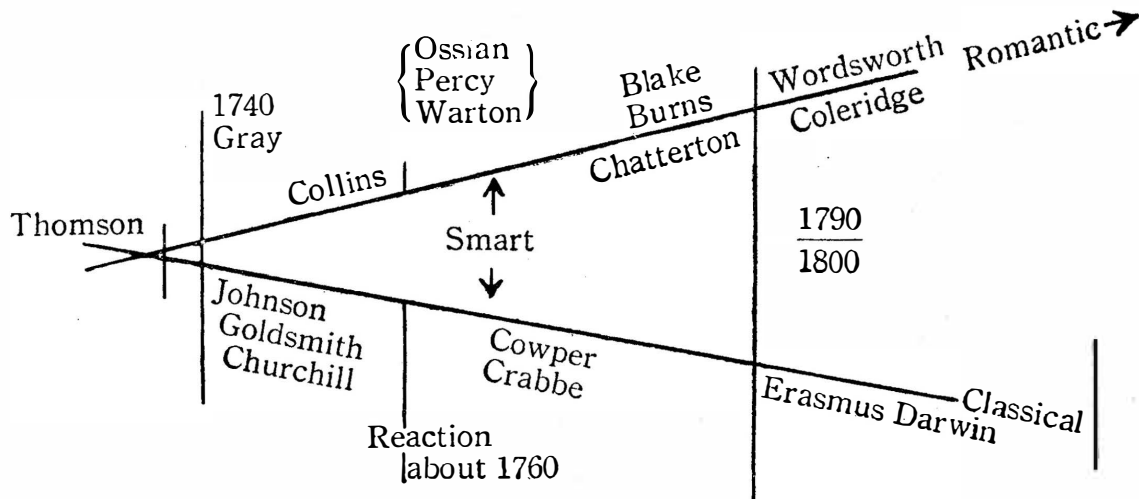
<sup>3</sup> *The Spectator*; a weekly review of politics etc. 1828-

## THE POETRY OF JOHNSON'S AGE

## GENERAL SURVEY

When Johnson wrote his *Lives of the Poets*, he did so with a determination to oppose the romantic movement which had begun with Thomson and to uphold all the formality and conventions of the classic school. His judgment as to the comparative merits of the two schools was as wrong as could possibly be; but he had such power that he actually provoked a reaction—a classical reaction—against the romantic accident which, rather than anything else, prevented him from accomplishing his object,—which was to reinstate all the conventions of the age of Pope as ruling forces in literature.

In order to explain more fully the history of this reaction in poetry, and of the accidents that conquered it, we will proceed to make some illustration of the general movement in poetry during the second half of the century. And, first, I shall draw a little diagram:—



The above diagram will show you that the course of poetry, just before issuing from the classic age of Pope into the age of Johnson, branched off into two streams. Thomson represents the point at which the river divided. The upper branch represents the romantic school of poetry; the lower branch, the classical tradition. The movement begun by Thomson ended triumphantly in Wordsworth and Coleridge, whose first work

was published in 1798. The tradition which Johnson fought for struggled on to the last decade of the century, which ended with *The Botanic Garden* of Erasmus Darwin, the last great representative of artificiality and of what we may call Popism. So much for the general outline. Now for the history.

## I. THE ROMANTIC FLOW

Try here to understand clearly, first of all, what the romantic movement was. Do not think that it means any particular kind or mode of expression in poetry, do not think that it even means a school—in the strict meaning of a term implying rules and forms. If it was distinguished by any one quality, more than by any other,—that quality was natural feeling, imagination, sentiment. But we cannot define romanticism into anything of fixed form. The romantic movement was a struggle against fixed forms, against rules, against conventions that hampered literature. It was a battle for freedom from a tyrannous system of rhetoric. That it should have been called *romantic* signifies nothing more than this:—that those who wanted freedom in literature looked back with longing to the freedom enjoyed by the old writers of real romances—the great poets of the 13th, 14th, and 15th centuries. That is all. Dismiss from your minds as much as possible the idea that romanticism means either a school or a style. On the contrary, it means absolute freedom in the choice of forms and of subject—the right to speak one's sincere thoughts, to utter natural feelings in any kind of verse or of prose, without obeying any established and conventional rules.

The next great romantic poet after Thomson was Gray.<sup>1</sup> Gray, you know, was a great scholar, who spent his whole life in the university, and who was probably the most learned man of his generation. Gray, like Thomson, felt that the verse forms of Pope and his school were killing real poetry. Such verse had served a useful purpose: it had taught men some-

<sup>1</sup> Thomas Gray (1716-1771).

thing new about what could be done by mere choice of words; and its long tyranny had obliged men to be exact and precise in poetical composition. But the classical school ignored a great fact well perceived by the ancients, namely, that particular forms of verse are suitable only for particular subjects. If you attempt to treat all subjects in the same kind of verse, certain kinds of poetry must die—on the same principle that you cannot cultivate every kind of plant in a hothouse, under glass. But Gray, finished scholar as he was, could not quite free himself from all the weight of classical opinion;—the very atmosphere of his university was classical; and he could hope for little sympathy by attempting extreme innovation. He did just what was safe for him to do,—just what he could defend upon scholarly ground; but he did not do anything more. He adopted new forms; but in these new forms he preserved a great deal of the artificial and pseudo-classical feeling. I mean, for example, that he continued to use the conventional imagery of Pope's day—the shepherdesses and the shepherds, the Cupids and the Muses, the clipped garden scenery and the conventional fountains. But he did this with extraordinary art; and he introduced effects of melody almost worthy of those Greek poets whom he knew so well. When he became classic he was so perfectly classic as to surpass all his predecessors; when he became romantic no one could venture to dispute the correctness or elegancy of his forms,—indeed nobody was capable of criticizing effectively so great a scholar—though Dr. Johnson tried it. As for painstaking, Gray was certainly the most careful poet in the whole history of English literature, and his carefulness produced wonderful results. It is said that he took fourteen years to compose one of his shorter poems, the famous *Elegy in a Country Church-yard*,<sup>1</sup> and that single poem helped to produce the romantic movement in French literature. From the *Elegy in a Country Church-yard* Lamartine especially derived his inspiration for the most celebrated of his quatrains; and Chateaubriand likewise derived directly from Gray. Then, another thing that Gray did was

<sup>1</sup> *Elegy written in a country church-yard* 1750, 1768

to suggest new subjects for poetry such as had not hitherto been even thought of. He was the first great man of letters to study the Scandinavian literature in England; and several of his grand compositions are upon subjects taken from the Norse mythology. His odes were as great as his elegies; indeed everything that he touched became beautiful, and beautiful with the exquisite finish of an antique gem. It made little difference whether he was discussing the mystery of human life and vanity of earthly ambition or lamenting the death of a pet cat—the utterance was something altogether original, dignified, and rarely beautiful. But Gray was really, as Milton had been, too much in advance of his age to be immediately influential. People could not really understand him. His influence began only about fifty years later. One of his poems, half classical, half romantic, in the way that I have already suggested, may be quoted in this relation. You will find it exquisite like Pope, but the exquisiteness is of a new kind—the same kind afterwards to blossom in what we call to-day “society verse” :—

## ON THE DEATH OF A FAVOURITE CAT

'Twas on a lofty vase's side,  
Where China's gayest art had dy'd  
The azure flowers, that blow;  
Demurest of the tabby kind,  
The pensive Selima, reclin'd,  
Gazed on the lake below.

(The cat is sitting upon the edge of a large porcelain vase, from China, in which there is water, and gold-fish swimming in the water. The beauty of the adjectives here you should especially notice. “Tabby,” you know, is a general name for cats; “Demure” has the sense both of “serious” and “modest,” and is used particularly in relation to the sex of the cat; “pensive” here means meditative, and gives us at once the suggestion of the motionless way in which a cat rests, with wide open eyes, as if thinking. The word “azure,” as used here, tells us exactly what kind of porcelain vase the author means; old-fashioned



china ware with some design of landscape gardens, trees and houses, all in blue.)

Her conscious tail her joy declar'd ;  
 The fair round face, the snowy beard,  
 The velvet of her paws,  
 Her coat, that with the tortoise vies,  
 Her ears of jet, and emerald eyes,  
 She saw ; and purr'd applause.

Still had she gazed ; but 'midst the tide  
 Two angel forms were seen to glide,  
 The Genii of the stream :  
 Their scaly armour's Tyrian hue  
 Thro' richest purple to the view  
 Betray'd a golden gleam.

The hapless nymph with wonder saw :  
 A whisker first, and then a claw,  
 With many an ardent wish,  
 She stretch'd in vain to reach the prize :—  
 What female heart can gold despise ?  
 What Cat's averse to fish ?

Presumptuous maid ! with looks intent  
 Again she stretch'd, again she bent,  
 Nor knew the gulf between.  
 (Malignant Fate sat by, and smiled.)  
 The slipp'ry verge her feet beguiled,  
 She tumbled headlong in !

Eight times emerging from the flood  
 She mew'd to ev'ry wat'ry God,  
 Some speedy aid to send :—  
 No Dolphin came, no Nereid stirr'd ;  
 Nor cruel *Tom*, nor *Susan* heard—  
*A fav'rite has no friend !*

From hence, ye beauties undeceived,  
 Know, one false step is ne'er retrieved,  
 And be with caution bold :  
 Not all that tempts your wand'ring eyes

And headless hearts, is lawful prize,  
Nor all, that glisters, gold!

This exquisite little thing is not an imitation of Pope's school, — but rather a parody of its manner, and really surpasses anything which the Pope's school did. But, of course, the mere finish of the piece is not the principal beauty of it: its cleverness best appears in what we call the "tone," which is the tone of "society verse." By the canons of "society verse" you may write about the most trifling sorrow or accident, on condition that you treat the matter lightly, mockingly, and at the same time with elegance and grace. The whole spirit of such verse is to conceive real emotion, and nevertheless to suggest it by the way that you laugh. No doubt Gray was really very sorry for his cat, and scolded the servants for their carelessness; but he only jests and moralizes about his loss as a poet—which was just as it should be. I have selected this piece from Gray as the lightest thing that I know; but his greater work is of so fine a character that it calls for most serious study — quite as much, indeed, as the work of Milton does. And a surprising thing is the great variety of this work within a very small bulk. You find Gray writing it with equal skill in octosyllables, in deca-syllables, in old-fashioned verse of fourteen syllables, and in the most complex forms of the sonnet and of the ode. No poet between Milton and Tennyson shows equal finish joined to such a variety of form.

Next to Gray can be placed Collins. No less than four of the poets belonging to the romantic movement of the 18th century were mad, or died mad. The four thus afflicted by insanity were Collins, Smart, Cowper, and Blake—whose madness, however, had only a very mild and gentle form, and rather helped than injured their work as a poet.

William Collins<sup>1</sup> who studied at Oxford, but without taking a degree, was a friend of Johnson in spite of literary position. He died at the early age of 37, before he could have matured his powers fully; and his life was unfortunate in all

<sup>1</sup> Williams Collins (1721-1759).

respects. Few great talents have struggled under greater difficulties. His financial and other troubles may have helped to bring about his madness; but it is probable that he had some fits of insanity even during his student life, and that this was the cause of his being unable to take a degree. The bulk of his work is quite small; and some of it, especially, perhaps, the *Eclogues*,<sup>1</sup> quite worthless. His fame rests almost entirely upon his *Odes*.<sup>2</sup> these are often grand, always great, and belong to the highest range of poetry. Probably you have all read his ode *The Passions*;<sup>3</sup> for that is to be found in almost every representative collection of English verse. And it is by his odes that Collins specially belongs to the romantic school. But, like Gray, he could not get rid of all the convention of his age,—he sang in romantic measures, but he kept too many of the artificial personifications and the symbolisms of the classic school. And this gives to his work a certain unevenness. It is not all equally good, even as regards the odes. The most that we can say for Collins is that his very best belongs to the very best of English prosody.

After Gray and Collins there was a kind of reaction,—as I told you before; and this reaction is represented even in the work of such poets as Akenside<sup>4</sup> and Beattie,<sup>5</sup> although both of these occasionally wrote in romantic forms. Even within such forms their verse became frozen, stiff, lifeless,—altogether worthless. It is not necessary to give much attention to the representatives of the reaction, nor to many other minor poets of the time, indifferently representing either side. Only remember that these names marked the reaction toward classicism. The triumph of the classic school seemed imminent, but that triumph was checked by a series of unlooked-for events.

The first of these events was the sudden public interest excited in the public mind by the old ballads,—the old street songs and love songs of the common people. The first collection and publication of these songs was made in the year 1765

<sup>1</sup> *Persian eclogues* 1742—2nd ed. *Oriental eclogues* 1757.

<sup>2</sup> *Odes on several descriptive and allegoric subjects* 1746.

<sup>3</sup> *The passions, an ode* 1750.

<sup>4</sup> Mark Akenside (1721-1770).

<sup>5</sup> James Beattie (1735-1803).

by Bishop Percy,<sup>1</sup> — and the result you are doubtless acquainted with in the form of those three famous volumes known as Percy's *Reliques*.<sup>2</sup> Percy's work had a great influence not only upon English, but also upon German and French poetry. Percy's work, as an editor, was very bad; he changed the text of a popular song whenever he thought that he could improve it; and he added verses of his own to ballads which he had found in an imperfect state. No editor of to-day would be forgiven by the literary world for doing such a thing. But in Percy's case, this was only the result of ignorance, not of trickery: he was a pioneer in a new country, and did not exactly know what to do. And in spite of his great errors, the book remained full of such beauty that it was able to change the character of three different literatures. For you must remember that it was not in England only that people were tired of the classic school and its dry, exact, lifeless, withering rule; —there was going on simultaneously a movement toward romanticism in France and in Germany. Now to everybody weary of dead convention and artificial decoration, Percy's *Reliques* offered exactly the kind of inspirations wished for. This book taught people that true poetry might be independent altogether of classical rules,—that true poetry springs from the hearts of even uneducated folk under the stress of great emotion,—that the peasant may under certain circumstances even surpass a poet laureate in true lyrical expression,—that naturalness and absolute sincerity are more important to poetry than any knowledge of the rules of Aristotle or of Aristotle's mediæval followers. Consequently the ballads which Percy collected were able to inspire such great German singers as Uhland and his followers, and indirectly affected later on the work of the French romantic school. Percy was not the only worker in this field: after him, D'Urfey<sup>3</sup> and Evans<sup>4</sup> both published collections, and collections better edited than Percy's. Remember,

<sup>1</sup> Thomas Percy, Bishop of Dromore (1729-1811).

<sup>2</sup> *Reliques of ancient English poetry* 1765 (1839, 1876-77).

<sup>3</sup> Thomas D'Urfey (1653-1723) *Wit and mirth: or pills to purge melancholy, being a collection of . . . ballads and songs* 1719 (1872).

<sup>4</sup> Thomas Evans (1742-1784) *Old ballads, historical and narrative, with some of modern date* v.d. (1777, 1784, 1810).

too, that Walter Scott's first great poetical inspiration was drawn from Percy and the ballad collectors who imitated him.

Dr. Johnson was not at all pleased by the appearance of the ballads and still less by the interest which they excited. He said, and it is no credit to him, that anybody could write a ballad, thereby showing his utter inability to understand the existence of poetry outside of mere form. Still he thought that the public would come round to his way of thinking. But the second event which opposed his influence, and which really took a more serious shape than the publication of the ballads, he did not at first perceive the force of. About two years before Percy's collection was published, there had appeared some mysterious composition called *The Poems of Ossian*.<sup>1</sup> These were not in verse, but in prose, — they profess to be translations from the ancient Gælic. One thing about them greatly charmed the public. The prose was of the very simplest possible description, not composed according to any classic rules, and nevertheless very musical, very sonorous, and full of rude but deep sentiment, — sentiment of nature and sentiment of passion. These *Poems of Ossian* (Ossian appears to have been really a Celtic poet) appeared by instalments—one small volume at a time. Presently it was discovered that they were the production of a Scotch schoolmaster called James Macpherson.<sup>2</sup>

Of course the public wanted to know what Dr. Johnson thought of this newly discovered poetry; and he was forced to give it more attention than he thought it really deserved. Closely examining the composition he recognized that the best of it showed evidence of a close study of the English of the Bible; and secondly, he observed that the so-called poems, professedly a work of barbarians and hunters, showed no acquaintance with those wild animals which barbarians and hunters know very much more about than civilized men. He came to the conclusion that the whole thing was an impudent forgery; and he said so. The author of the poems said that Dr. John-

<sup>1</sup> *Fragments of ancient poetry (by Ossian)* 1760; *Ossian's Fingal, an ancient epic poem* 1762; *Ossian's Temora, an ancient epic poem* 1763.

<sup>2</sup> James Macpherson (1736-1796).

son was a liar. Dr. Johnson answered him effectively about as follows:—

“You say that your rubbish is a translation from the ancient Gælic. Produce the original manuscript.”

Instead of producing the MS., Macpherson sent word to Dr. Johnson that he would give him a beating as soon as he could get near him. Then Dr. Johnson bought a very big stick and waited for him; but Macpherson never came, and he never was able to produce the MS.. In short he convinced himself of being both a liar and a coward. One would suppose that this fact should have ended the matter. But it did not. The same public that always listened to Dr. Johnson when he was wrong, would not now listen to Dr. Johnson when he happened to be right. They bought thousands and thousands of the copies of *The Poems of Ossian*; they made Macpherson rich; they gave him a grave in Westminster Abbey when he died. Nor was this all. Everybody both in England, in France and in Germany, expressed delight with *The Poems of Ossian*. Among the great men who admired the book abroad, may be mentioned the poets Goethe and Schiller in Germany, Lamartine and Chateaubriand in France, — and among men of intellect outside of literary circles, Napoleon, who declared *Ossian* the greatest of literature. For a time, even in the country of Dr. Johnson it was seriously doubted whether Homer and the great Greek authors could compare with *Ossian*. The whole world was not only deceived and doubly deceived, but strangely fascinated by this impudent forger.

To-day, it is true, we can find very little merit in Macpherson's work. What then accounts for the absurd popularity which it once enjoyed? Almost nothing except the fact that it happened to appear at a time when the romantic movement was struggling for life and death, when the people were utterly tired of classic forms. Then, reading *Ossian*, almost everybody discovered in it, not so much what he really wished for, but the *suggestion* of what he wished for. The whole thing was a craze,—much like the modern craze on the subject of the poet Whitman. Both *Ossian* and Whitman really give nothing, but

both have been able to suggest a great deal. In Macpherson's case the suggestion was better than in Whitman's. For Macpherson was an educated man, and he really had read old Scotch poems, old Gælic compositions which inspired his work. Moreover he could write well—let us say, beautifully at times, and a good elocutionist can still make a fine effect by the reading of *Ossian*. When I was a boy, students were still taught to recite *Ossian*; and many famous and popular books of oratory then contained pages from Macpherson's forgery. I think that part of the success of the book was due to the fact that Macpherson wrote it with a view to its being *oratorically read*. It is impossible to deny a certain beauty to those lines which begin the famous *Address to the Sun*:—

O thou that rollest above, round as the shield of my fathers',  
Whence are thy beams, O Sun, thy ever-lasting light?

The influence of the imaginary *Ossian* did more to break the influence of Dr. Johnson than any other event of the century. And Dr. Johnson was right. But it was a very lucky thing that his influence was thus broken. It is true that good does not generally come from deceit and pretence and lying,—not as a general rule; but sometimes even deceit and lying may produce something good to the world. There is an example of it. Macpherson was a liar, a forger, a detestable humbug, and he was opposed to a good and great man fighting for truth—yet the good and great man lost the battle, and the humbug unwittingly did a great service to literature. I do not mean that he is to be thanked—not at all; but the fact must be acknowledged.

Another strange humbug of the same time was Thomas Chatterton.<sup>1</sup> Chatterton, however, was only a child—perhaps the cleverest child that ever lived in England or anywhere else: but he was a great liar, a great trickster; and it took about a hundred and thirty years to find him out. Chatterton was composing poetry at a time when other little boys were scarcely able to talk. When still a little boy he pretended that he had

<sup>1</sup> Thomas Chatterton (1752-1770).

discovered some ancient MSS. of the 15th and the 16th century, called the Rowley MSS. by reason of the place where they were said to have been found. There were no such MSS.. He sent copies of these imaginary poems to different newspapers and magazines; and the editors were astonished and delighted and published them with joy and thankfulness. More and more of these poems were by degrees put into print.

Remember that the poems were not at all bad. They very much resemble the Elizabethan poets—and that is high praise. At the age of 15 Chatterton imagined that he could make a living by literature and in London. But he had begun, greatly to his own disadvantage, by a forgery; and nobody knew anything about his real abilities. *The Rowley Poems*,<sup>1</sup> yes: everybody knew how beautiful they were; but nobody knew anything about the talent of Thomas Chatterton. And the boy was very amiable, very sensitive, very shy, and very proud. He could not push his way into any position without help; and he was too shy and too proud to ask for it in the proper direction. I have no doubt that the terrible Dr. Johnson would have helped him, — though he would also have given him a severe lecture in regard to those *Rowley Poems*. But he did not ask, and finding himself starving in London he committed suicide. Without any doubt he was an astonishing genius; and it is much to be regretted that such a mind was destroyed while it was yet only in the bud. Chatterton's work had no such influence as Macpherson's, but it did a certain amount of service to literature by turning public attention once more back to the beautiful and warm freshness of the Elizabethan poets whom he imitated. How he imitated them and where he got his inspiration from, was only discovered a few years ago through the patient labour of Professor Skeat, — perhaps the greatest of the English etymologists, and a supreme authority in regard to Middle and Tudor English. Imagine that it required the great science of a man like that to prove the forgery of a little child; and thus you will be able to feel what a won-

<sup>1</sup> *Poems supposed to have been written at Bristol by Tho. Rowley and others in the XVth century a 1770* (ed. T. Tyrwhitt 1777).



derful being Chatterton was. Remember that the age at which Chatterton began to compose his poems was the age of 7 years. And most of the wonderful trickery was done before he reached the age of 12 years. Had he lived it is not improbable that he might have become the genius of the very highest order; perhaps another Shakespeare, for he gave proof of dramatic talent. But except as a phenomenon, I do not wish to interest you very much in Chatterton. No work produced between the ages of 7 and 12 years could be really great literary work; and the most which can be said for it in Chatterton's case is that it was often very pretty.

One more important event, which aided the romantic movement was the publication of Warton's *History of English Poetry*.<sup>1</sup> There were two Wartons—brothers: the eldest, Joseph Warton,<sup>2</sup> was a man of letters who is best known to literature as the editor of Pope's works. Both brothers were Oxford men. The other, Thomas,<sup>3</sup> became a Professor at Oxford; and while there he composed his excellent *History of English Poetry*. As a man of letters he was very much greater than Johnson—a better scholar, a better thinker, and a more tolerant spirit. He possessed exactly those literary qualifications which Johnson lacked such as the capacity to judge poetry independently of the form, the time, or the belief of the writer; the power to appreciate Middle English works very thoroughly; and a liberal appreciation of merit of all kinds, from the earliest period of true English to the age of Queen Anne. This is still an excellent book for students; every great critic still praises it. But it had little weight, except for the romantic themselves in Johnson's time, for Johnson's influence was much larger than Warton's. We may even say that Warton was too good for his age. Even now a hundred people read Johnson for one that reads Warton.

So there were four obstacles in the way of classic triumph—the popularity of Percy and the collectors of the ballads; the

<sup>1</sup> *The history of English poetry from the close of the eleventh to the commencement of the eighteenth century. To which are prefixed dissertations.* 3 vols. 1774-81 (1840).

<sup>2</sup> Joseph Warton (1722-1800).

<sup>3</sup> Thomas Warton (1728-1790).

astounding success of *Ossian*; the interest in 15th century poetry aroused by the forgeries of Chatterton; and lastly the excellent *History of English Poetry* by Thomas Warton. It is as remarkable as it is unfortunate that the best of the four works mentioned should have had the least influence. The great power that opposed Johnson was *Ossian*, next to *Ossian* the influence of the ballads. But the really beautiful and scholarly criticism of the Oxford Professor affected only a very small number of cultivated minds. Another queer thing is that Warton himself wrote not romantic, but classic poetry — in the very best style of the Pope school. In his history he is quite a romantic; but when he put himself before the public as a poet he did not venture to depart from the conventions of classicism.

Nevertheless, the classical power thereafter steadily began to decline. And a very curious thing happened at this period in the case of a curious poet called Christopher Smart.<sup>1</sup> Smart was a friend of Johnson, and, strictly speaking, a very classic verse-maker. He wrote a great deal of tiresome and worthless heroic verse, until one day he suddenly went mad. While he was mad he began to write religious poetry in a romantic form. What he then produced is among the very best examples of 18th century romantic poetry. You can imagine how strange the conservatism of the time was, from the fact that when Smart's verses were published in a "complete" edition after his death, this very poem was left out. Neither Johnson nor anybody else of that time could have seen anything good in it—at least no good classic could have done so. In our own time, the poet Robert Browning first called public attention to it in an effective way: and you will find extracts from it published in the anthology of Palgrave. It is called *A Song to David*,<sup>2</sup> and it is really worth a special lecture.

I have already given one lecture upon it;<sup>3</sup> and to-day I shall only quote one or two of the hundred six-line stanzas compos-

<sup>1</sup> Christopher Smart (1722-1771).

<sup>2</sup> *A song to David* 1763 (1819, 1895, 1898, ed. Tutin; 1901, ed. Streatfeild; 1924, ed. Blunden).

<sup>3</sup> Printed in *Some Strange English Literary Figures* edited by R. Tanabe.

ing it. The excellence of this composition is excellence of a very complex kind — being musical, majestic, and intensely original at the same time. Perhaps the most remarkable fact in the structure of the verses is the way in which the simplest Anglo-Saxon words are mixed with the choicest and rarest Latin terms. Mixtures of this kind are very dangerous to attempt; and that Smart succeeded with such a mixture is astonishing. But succeed he certainly did. I suppose you know that this is really a poem upon one of *The Psalms*—the famous song of praise attributed to King David:—

Strong is the horse upon his speed;  
 Strong in pursuit the rapid glede,  
                   Which makes at once his game;  
 Strong the tall ostrich on the ground;  
 Strong through the turbulent profound  
                   Shoots xiphias to his aim.

Strong is the lion—like a coal  
 His eyeball—like a bastion's mole  
                   His chest against the foes:  
 Strong the gier-eagle on his sail,  
 Strong against the tide, th' enormous whale  
                   Emerges, as he goes.

Glede—old English for hawk.  
 Xiphias—the sword-fish.

Gier-eagle—largest kind  
 of eagle.

Even in those two stanzas<sup>1</sup> you will see what strange effective foreign words are used in combination with simple English words of one syllable. “Xiphias” is Greek; but what word could give a finer effect in this line, especially when coupled with the simple word “shoot”? “Profound” is a fine Latin term for the sea; and “turbulent” has here the tumultuous signification that exactly suggests the roaring of waves. There are, as I have said, about one hundred such verses; and most of them are jewels—although a few show that the man who wrote them was a little mad at the time. In his madness

<sup>1</sup> Stanzas LXXV & LXXVI.

only he became thus great. After getting well again he became just as commonplace and as tiresome as he had been before.

Really the next great romantic poet to notice is Burns.<sup>1</sup> Burns made an immense revolution in the English notions of lyrical poetry. You know that he was a peasant,—a Scotch peasant,—and that he wrote not in the King's English, but in the dialect of his native province. It was just as if, here in Japan, some peasant from the most remote district should come up to Tokyo with a MS. of songs written in his own provincial idiom, and with that MS. change the whole poetical literature of the country for 150 years. It was a very wonderful thing. And still more wonderful, the fact that when this man tried to write poetry in pure English, he could only write a trash. As an English poet Burns is not even worth mentioning. But as a dialect poet, a peasant poet, he was one of the very greatest singers that the world ever produced. Presently we shall consider the reasons of this greatness.

You must remember the facts of the life of Burns in order to understand what to think of him. As I have already told you, he was a peasant, a farmer—the very poorest kind of a farmer, with very little schooling of any sort. His family, with all their efforts, could not earn more than 7 pounds a year. Seven pounds at the present rate of exchange signifies a sum of about 70 *yen*: 70 *yen* represents very little indeed even for the support of one person; but when you remember that a large family had to live upon this money, you will begin to see that the condition of Burns was quite as unfortunate as the condition of the poorest peasant in the poorest part of Japan. Indeed a small Japanese farmer is a great deal better situated than Burns was; for he can do without fire in winter, and he can do without such heavy and costly clothing as the severe climate of Scotland required. To live at all, Burns and his family had to work from before the rising of the sun until after sunset,—desperately, and with all their strength. Every night when they came back from the fields, their exhaustion was so great, that they could only, after eating the simplest of food,

<sup>1</sup> Robert Burns (1759-1796).

throw themselves down to sleep. Meat was not tasted in that house. And every evening the young man less robust, perhaps, than his forefathers, was troubled with frightful pains in the head, as a consequence of over-work. Such was the whole of his youth and early manhood. How did he find time to read or to write? He found time to read only while he was eating;—he used to sit at the table with a book in one hand and a spoon in the other, eating and reading as fast as he could,—for there was little time even for a meal. Had it not been for the Sunday law prohibiting labour on the 7th day of the week, very possibly Burns would never have been able to write at all. But he managed to read a little every day at his meals, and to write a little on Sundays, and while working in the fields he used to sing to himself, composing new songs in his mind to the old popular Scotch tunes which he knew.

Does it not seem as if every possible disadvantage had been put into his path? Yet this, which I have told you, was not all. Burns did not spend all his Sunday time and Holiday hours in writing; he was young; he wanted amusement; he wanted to have a little pleasure in this unhappy world. For the Scotch peasants the only possible pleasures were coarse and dangerous—drinking, dancing, card playing, or making love to peasant girls. Burns was handsome, the girls liked him: he was also young, and inclined to be rash. He seduced a girl of a neighbouring house, gave her a child, and incurred as a consequence the ill will of the neighbourhood, for the peasant class is not without a solid code of morals. He tried to act honestly by the girl, wanted to marry her; but the father would not give her to him, disgraced though she was,—believing that he could not support her. On the other hand he threatened a legal prosecution, which would have resulted in utterly ruining Burns as he would not have been able to pay the money for the support of the child exacted by the law in such cases. Subsequently the farmer was persuaded to take a more generous view of the matter; but in the meantime Burns was practically bankrupt. His only chance, he thought, was to go to the West Indies in some humble capacity of assistant upon a plan-

tation. But even to go to the West Indies required a great deal of money: how was he to get the money? For the first time he thought about the songs which he had written. If he could get these printed, some people would buy them, because they were written to popular airs, and some of them had already become well known among the peasantry. The songs were printed: the literary world was surprised and pleased; the book had a much larger sale than Burns could have hoped for; and all at once, he found himself with a good sum of money in his pockets, his debts paid, and a reputation established. Rich men and women in Edinburgh wanted to see him; society was ready to open her gates to him. Now he could marry, without fear; and he did so. He also bought a farm. Then he went to the great city—which was a serious mistake. Flattered insincerely by people who regarded him only as a curiosity,—admitted into circles for which he had not received the proper training,—he easily became the victim of his own natural vanity, and committed a great many blunders, due to ignorance, which lost him the good will of those who could have served him. His chance in life was lost forever. He even lost for a time his natural power to write beautiful songs: he wanted to be thought a great gentleman, and to write in the style of the classic school. He had to go back to his farm,—back to the old hideous struggle with poverty and cold and want of every sort. A Government position, yielding about 60 pounds a year, was obtained for him; but he could not keep it. At an early age he died, broken down by work and by the unfortunate habit of drink to which he had fallen a victim.

A very miserable life this; but never was a man more excusable for his faults and his failures than Burns. You will see that for yourselves, without any need of explanation. Stronger men than Burns might well have done worse under the same circumstances. He had, in spite of an impulsive nature, almost every fine quality of the heart: his faults were chiefly of the head. Time would have remedied most of these weaknesses if Burns could have been able to live in some happier and easier way. But he died before he was yet at the age

when a man begins to understand the common laws of social existence—the laws of life.

And this was the man who brought to English literature a totally new lyrical spirit,—a precious quality of song which subsequently affected many other literatures besides the English. What did he sing about? About the things only which everybody knows, which everybody feels—the things which we commonly call “commonplace”: the joy of life, the pleasure of a bright day, the pain of labour, the feelings of the peasant in regard to the hardship of his lot, the qualities of manhood,—the spirit of democracy in the largest and the most human sense, and also the pleasures of the country-folk,—drinking, dancing, and making love. Also he wrote about ghosts and goblins and devils—reflecting the humour and the grotesqueness of certain popular superstitions, and he wrote healthy satires upon religious fanaticisms; for, although profoundly religious in the best sense, Burns hated religious convention and religious cant. There is a great variety of subjects in his poetry; but it is true that loving and drinking and joyous revelry are the dominant themes. And is it not curious that, in spite of his miserable life, we find no pessimism in his verses? Burns was essentially an optimist,—a believer in the good and the beauty of the world which treated him so harshly.

I need scarcely tell you that the originality of Burns could not consist in his choice of subjects—subjects old as the human world. With great genius the subject matters very little indeed. The world most loves to hear about what it understands, what everybody knows, what everybody feels. Millions of people feel the joy of a bright day, the pleasure of a festival evening, the pleasure of looking at a pretty face—there is nothing new about all that. Millions of people also feel that true manhood is not a question of rank or title or scholarship, but is something which belongs to the heart—something which our best emotional nature produces quite independently of mere intellectual power. Millions and millions have felt all these things. But very few have been able to express the common feeling. It was in his power to tell the feelings of millions of

men in the simplest possible way, but with great forth and truth and pathos, that the genius of Burns revealed itself. For example, no one supposes that a common labourer thinks of arguing philosophically or otherwise upon that which makes a man worthy of respect. The average common labourer would be very much puzzled to answer such a question as "What kind of a man do you think is the best man?" He feels the truth; but he can scarcely express it except in a moment of great anger or great sorrow,—when pain gives him a strange power of rough eloquence. But when Burns wrote such a line as "The rank is but the guinea's stamp: the man's the gold for all that!"—when he wrote that, I say, he expressed the feeling of millions of men. Rank really, and title and scholarship, and intellectual attainment represent only the decorative and nominal values of men: it is the fine human nature beneath which is the gold.

You cannot read Burns without a glossary: even for English students it is hard work to read him. He does not properly belong to our study except as an influence; to consider him in any detailed study of his works would require a special lecture of very considerable length. I am not going to give quotations from him at the present time—they would not help the subject of this discourse. But remember that Burns is philologically of the highest interest. It is true that he wrote in a dialect. But we must not forget that this dialect was once the literary language of the English people. It is the old Northern tongue of the first great Anglo-Saxon poets—the language in which were written those wonderful early religious poems of which I spoke at the beginning of our lectures upon the history of English literature. As the Midland English gained ground, — driving the other forms of English out of official and educational use, the original Northern English became at last only a dialect, only the speech of peasants in the remoter districts. Burns, after hundreds of years, gave the Northern speech new life by writing in it: his example has been followed by multitudes of poets; and even to-day a great many compositions in the same language are produced by men of culture. I have no



doubt that an examination of some of the older country dialects in Japan might serve in establishing some curious philological relationship with forms of the language now to be found only in ancient records and in the earliest Japanese literature. In any event the history of Burns should teach every student one thing—that dialect is not to be despised, not to be thought of as something essentially vulgar or beneath the notice of a man of letters, on the contrary it is something of which the literary value to a man of real capacity cannot be over-estimated.

Before Burns there had been a number of lesser lights in Scotch poetry, — one of whom, Robert Fergusson,<sup>1</sup> wrote so much like Burns that you would find it quite difficult to distinguish between the works of the two men. Fergusson wrote very little and died young. Then there was Lady Barnard,<sup>2</sup> who wrote in the same dialect beautiful songs, some of which are still sung. I shall read in prose English one of these songs in order that you may the more easily perceive what was the new spirit that Scotch literature brought into English lyrical poetry towards the end of the 18th century. The song is entitled *Auld Robin Gray* :—

When the sheep are in the fold, and the cows at home and  
all the weary world to rest are gone, the woes of my heart fall in  
showers from my eyes, while my goodman sleeps soundly by my  
side.

When the sheep are in the fauld, and the kye at hame,  
And a' the warld to rest are gane,  
The waes o' my heart fa' in showers frae my e'e,  
While my gudeman lies sound by me.

Young James loved me well, and sought me for his bride;  
but saving a crown, he had nothing else beside. To make that  
crown a pound, my James went to sea; and the crown and the  
pound were both for me.

Young Jamie lo'ed me weel, and sought me for his bride;  
But saving a croun he had naething else beside:

<sup>1</sup> Robert Fergusson (1750-1774).

<sup>2</sup> Lady Anne Barnard or Lindsay (1750-1825)

To make the croun a pund, young Jamie gaed to sea;  
And the croùn and the pund were baith for me.

He had not been away more than two weeks, when my father  
broke his arm, and the cow was stolen away; my mother fell  
sick, and while young James was away at sea, auld Robin Gray  
came to court me.

He hadna been awa' a week but only twa,  
When my father brak his arm, and the cow was stown awa';  
My mother she fell sick,—and my Jamie at the sea—  
And auld Robin Gray came a-courtin' me.

My father could not work, and my mother could not spin; I  
toiled day and night, but I could not earn enough to support  
them; auld Robin supported them both, and kept asking me, with  
tears in his eyes, 'Oh Jennie, will you not marry me for their  
sake?'

My father couldna work, and my mother couldna spin;  
I toil'd day and night, but their bread I couldna win;  
Auld Rob maintain'd them baith, and wi' tears in his e'e  
Said, 'Jennie, for their sakes, O, marry me!'

My heart it said, 'no'; for I looked for James to come back.  
But the wind it blew high, and the ship it was wrecked:—Why  
did not James then die, or why did I live to say, 'Woe is me?'

My heart it said nay; I look'd for Jamie back;  
But the wind it blew high, and the ship it was a wrack;  
His ship it was a wrack—Why didna Jamie dee?  
Or why do I live to cry, Wae's me!

My father argued strongly with me, my mother did not  
speak; but she looked into my face in such a way that I felt as  
if my heart was going to break. So I gave him my hand, though  
my heart was in the sea; and auld Robin Gray was a husband to  
me.

My father urged me sair: my mother didna speak;  
But she look'd in my face till my heart was like to break:  
They gi'ed him my hand, tho' my heart was in the sea;  
Sae auld Robin Gray he was gudeman to me.

I had not been a wife more than two weeks, when as I was sitting in sorrow at the door, I saw my James's ghost — for I could not believe that it was really himself until he said: 'I have come home to marry you.'

I hadna been a wife a week but only four,  
When mournfu' as I sat on the stane at the door,  
I saw my Jamie's wraith,—for I couldna think it he,  
Till he said, 'I'm come hame to marry thee.'

O sorrowfully did we greet each other, and much we had to say! We only took one kiss, and we tore ourselves apart. I wish that I were dead; but I am not likely to die;—and why must I live to say, 'How unhappy I am!'

O sair, sair did we greet, and muckle did we say;  
We took but ae kiss, and we tore ourselves away:  
I wish that I were dead, but I'm no like to dee;  
And why was I born to say, Wae's me!

I go about like a ghost; and I do not care to spin. I dare not think about James; for that would be a sin. But I will try to do my best to be a good wife; for auld Robin Gray is kind to me.

I gang like a ghaist, and I carena to spin;  
I daurna think on Jamie, for that wad be a sin;  
But I'll do my best a gude wife aye to be,  
For auld Robin Gray he is kind unto me.

This little song composed about the middle of the 18th century long before Burns' voice had begun to reach men's hearts, is still sung to-day all over the English speaking world. Partly, you may say, on account of the music; that is true, but not only on account of the music. It has perfect beauty of its kind, because of its intense and touching truth. Here is the whole tragedy of a woman's life put into a few lines, without attempt at ornament—simply as a cry out of the heart. And that is not all that you should see in it. The same thing might happen anywhere as well as in Scotland: it might happen in exactly the same way in Japan, in Tokyo,—or, let us say, a little outside of Tokyo, in any one of those small villages which

we pass in our holiday walks. There is a Japanese farmer, his wife and an only daughter. She has with her parents' consent promised to marry a young man who has gone to sea, in order to make a little money against the wedding day. The old folks are very poor. The father and the daughter work in the fields; and they have a cow to help them. The mother weaves, as I often see a peasant's wife doing at the door of her little house when I walk about in the country. Well, one day, a misfortune upsets the whole existence of the household. The farmer breaks an arm or a leg; the mother falls ill and cannot weave; the cow dies or is stolen,—and the daughter alone cannot help her parents sufficiently to support them. In the same moment comes the news of the wreck of the ship on which her betrothed was engaged. Well, a good-natured farmer, of the neighbourhood,—a widower, we must suppose, comes and helps the poor folks with money and provisions, and he says that he wishes to marry the daughter. She, with the great grief of her loss still upon her, does not wish to marry the old man; but he is good and patient and loving; he continues to help the old folks, and once in a while only he repeats his offer to marriage. Would not the Japanese parents have acted just like the Scotch parents in the song? The father argues with the girl—kindly, but strongly: he thinks it is her duty to marry the friend who has been so good to them. The mother who has more influence knows better than to argue;—she only looks into the face of the daughter. The girl cannot bear the kind reproach of those eyes. So she marries the old man. And only a week or two after, back comes the young promised husband from the sea, safe and sound, with the money earned for the wedding day. All this is quite as Japanese as it is Scotch, because it is world literature. And what a cruel little tragedy it is! Now this was the kind of things that prepared the way for the singing of Robert Burns. It was the poetry of the heart—healthy, true, and universal. It belongs to what we call the literature of folk-song,—that is the songs of the folk or common people. From this song and many others of a like kind Burns learned how to sing; and he became the greatest folk-singer of England, and

one of the greatest folk-singers of the world. Indeed there is but one other modern singer at all to be compared with him,—namely, Béranger. But though Burns was not a better musician than Béranger, perhaps not even so good, he surpassed Béranger in the quality which I have called universal. However much the French singer's verses charm us, we always feel that those verses are only French human nature. It is not so with Burns whose feeling expressed all human nature. Some day, when I can give you a special lecture upon Burns, you will find that the best of all his work, like that little song by Lady Barnard, reflects emotions which are as much Japanese as they are Scotch, because they are supremely natural and supremely true. For the time being we must leave Burns and turn to another poet of the series.

I think we had better here consider Cowper.<sup>1</sup> Cowper, like Smart, belongs to both the romantic and classic movements: he occupies a kind of middle position, and it is more convenient to consider him here. By form Cowper, in the bulk of his work, showed classical sympathies. He wrote a good deal in rhymed couplets after the manner of the age, although he also wrote in excellent blank verse, in quatrains and in many other forms. But a queer thing to notice is that even the later followers of the classical tradition became more and more romantic in feeling towards the end of the century. By his birth Cowper belongs to a rather early period, but he did not take to poetry until he was fifty years old. Thus his work falls into the latter half of the century. Cowper was one of the mad poets whom I have already referred to; and, as in the case of Smart, his madness took a religious form. But Smart was religious chiefly when he was mad, and Cowper, on the contrary, came into the world with something of religious madness in his very blood. He was the son of a clergyman, and appears to have been rather severely brought up. He was a terribly nervous and sensitive child; and this sensitiveness made his early school-life, of which he afterwards gave a terrible picture in his *Tirocinium*,<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> William Cowper (1731-1800).

<sup>2</sup> *Tirocinium* 1784.

supremely unhappy. After the completion of his studies some good friends interested themselves in getting for him a good position in the Government service. They succeeded in nominating him for a position of secretary in connection with parliamentary work: but it was necessary that he should pass an examination to prove his competency for the post which would have paid him a very fine salary. Then occurred a strange incident showing the disordered condition of Cowper's nerves. He became so afraid of that examination that he actually tried to perform suicide rather than be examined. He put a rope round his neck and hung himself; but the rope was old and worn, and it broke under his weight. Then his friends came and saved him, but found him insane with fear and shame. He remained for a considerable time insane, and all the rest of his life had to be taken constant care of. He never married. At one time he was in love with a beautiful cousin, Theodora; and it is thought that he might have been able to marry her if he had had courage to woo her like a man. But he had no courage to do anything; and up to his fiftieth year he remained helpless as a child. His amusements were also of a juvenile kind,—making cages for rabbits, cultivating flowers in a very small garden, and things of that kind. Then some ladies interested in him, persuaded him to try to write poetry,—thinking that the writing of poetry would serve to compose his mind. Then he did exactly as was told him, like a mesmerized person. The result was *The Task*<sup>1</sup> and other things. A clergyman, called John Newton, also got control of him and put him to writing religious hymns. The hymns and the poems which he was thus induced to compose, always under direction, have become recognized as treasures of literature. The hymns are among the best of this character;—the poems give Cowper his great position in English literature. He is the great link between Thomson and Wordsworth. Of the rest of his life little more needs to be said except that he died mad,—religiously mad, almost despairing of his future.

Nothing is more strange than the fact that very little of

<sup>1</sup> *The task* 1784.

Cowper's religious gloom appears in his poetry. It does indeed appear in one of the last things that he wrote,—*The Castaway*—a poem about a sailor falling overboard at night from his ship, and struggling in the black immensity of the sea, certain to die, yet not able to die quickly, being a strong swimmer. Cowper compares his own soul to this sailor, whom he calls—“Such a destined wretch as I”—but this poem is quite an exceptional bit of black thinking. Usually Cowper was not only cheerful and tender in his poetry, but actually joyous. Sometimes he was even merry; he had a fine sense of humour,—as all of you know who have read his comical ballad of *John Gilpin*.<sup>1</sup> As for his importance in literature, he may be said to have been the strongest of inspiration to Wordsworth,—that is to say, to the great 19th century school of nature poetry. Chiefly classic his forms are; but not severely classic, and he departed from every tradition of the classic school in his classic treatment of subjects. You must remember that the classic rules were quite narrow on the matter of subjects and their treatment. No classic poet would have dreamed of describing common things exactly as seen and felt; nor would any classic poet have thought in Pope's time that it was lawful to introduce into poetry the naturalism of the country. But Cowper first taught to English poets that the most commonplace things might be beautifully treated in a natural way. Thomson had indeed given exquisite descriptions of nature, in a romantic way; but Thomson had not taken up the little details of country sights and sounds and smells. This Cowper did, he looked at a field, watched it for hours at a time, to observe what the animals were doing there—how they ate, how they rested, how they amused themselves. For instance, he tells us about the young horses, suddenly galloping around the meadow, kicking up their heels in the air, and whinnying: then stopping to graze a little; then running about again in a circle. This is what young horses have been in the habit of doing for ten thousand years; but poets had not thought of describing it before. Throughout Cowper's descriptive poems you will always find

<sup>1</sup> *The diverting history of John Gilpin* 1782.

scattered pictures of this kind,—supremely delightful pictures. And no pictures are more difficult to execute successfully. Wordsworth tried to imitate Cowper in this respect in the first edition of the *Lyrical Ballads* and he made himself ridiculous by failing on the side of good taste and moderation. Cowper never failed in these. But remember that he was 50 years old when he began to write poetry, having the experience of an ordinary lifetime to depend upon; and that Wordsworth began to write poetry while still a very young man.

I will not here detain you longer on the subject of Cowper. The next romantic poet we have to consider is Blake.<sup>1</sup> You will remember that I gave a lecture<sup>2</sup> on Blake last year; and I need not now attempt a very detailed notice of him, but he is a very important poet, and quite unlike any other figure in 18th century literature. Born in the middle of the century, he had nothing whatever in common with it. This is not because he must be considered as a mad poet, but because, quite aside from his undoubted madness, his artistic tendencies made it impossible for him to sympathize with the poetry of his time. He was trained to be an engraver; and he became a very good one. Early in life he married an excellent wife, to whom he probably owed most of his artistic successes; for she not only sympathized with his work, but shared in it. The work which I referred to consisted of a long series of books of poems, illustrated with beautifully coloured drawings. Blake composed the poems and designed the pictures; and his wife helped to colour them. The original books thus published are now among the treasures of the British Museum. Blake believed that his poems and his pictures were composed and designed under the direct inspiration of angels, ghosts, or of God himself. He was mad; but there was a mystical method in his madness, which produced most beautiful and eternally precious results. Otherwise he was a most good, honest, and kindly man,—never attempting to make more than enough money to enable him to carry on his artistic undertaking. Both he and his wife may

<sup>1</sup> William Blake (1757-1827).

<sup>2</sup> i.e. *On Poets*, Chapter XVIII "Blake the First English Mystic."



be said to have sacrificed everything in the world for the sake of what they believed to be art. In the 18th century they were chiefly thought of as poor crazy people: they are now known to have been very great and good people as well.

Now a word about Blake's literary position. His early sympathy carried him back to the time of Elizabethan singers. And he began his poetical career by imitating them — this means, of course, that he went back to the great romantic period of English poetry — detesting the conventions of the classic schools. Above all things Blake was *natural*—a lover of truth and simplicity and frank expression. Later on he became influenced by the strange prose of *Ossian*,—the humbug poetry of Macpherson. By mixing the new suggestions offered him by this book with the fine effects of the poetical prose of the Bible, he was able himself to produce prose finer than Macpherson's. Both as a prose-writer and as a poet, Blake is very important, but in poetry he always remained more of an Elizabethan than of anything else. In simplicity he most resembled, but far surpasses, Herrick.

With Blake's prose we are not here concerned. The best of his poetry is to be found in the *Songs of Innocence* and *Songs of Experience*.<sup>1</sup> The *Songs of Innocence* intended to represent the happy condition of the mind of a child before it knows anything about the pains of existence, or to represent the similar condition of mankind in an imaginary sinless world. The *Songs of Experience* are intended to represent the effect upon the mind of the knowledge of sin and sorrow. Besides these two books, Blake's poems include short pieces of a miscellaneous description and a short play of indifferent merit. All of the poetry is not equally good. Some of it is unintelligible, some of it positively mad. But the best of it is unique in English literature. It is not only beautiful,—it is very, very extraordinary. Indeed there is nothing else like it. You have in Blake a man who writes thoughts wide as the sky and deep as the sea in the language of the nursery,—in such baby rhymes as little infants are taught to learn by heart. As child poetry

<sup>1</sup> *Songs of innocence and experience* 1789-91.

many of his verses are so very simple and pretty that they are still taught to little boys and girls among the first reading lessons given in infant schools. But only the adult really understands the thought behind the simple verse. This is what particularly gives a unique character to the work of Blake; but he has also a sweetness of melody, a particular quality of music, unlike any other poet of the times.

In one sense Blake was not the earliest English mystic in poetry: there were poetical mystics even in the Elizabethan age. But Blake was certainly the first great and original English mystic in the world of verse. His smaller predecessors had been profoundly religious men in only the orthodox sense; and orthodoxy is the greatest of all checks upon original thinking. By orthodoxy I mean here belief in one of the old established Churches—whether Catholic or Protestant makes no difference. But Blake made a religion for himself; and his mysticism is entirely original. He was, indeed, at one time strongly influenced by Swedenborg, but he threw off all allegiance to Swedenborg, long before reaching his poetical maturity. His great originality, strength, depth, simplicity and sweetness continue to make him a great influence. I doubt whether there is one of the greater Victorian poets who has not been affected by him, but perhaps Rossetti shows the result more than any other.

And now we reach the end of the romantic branch in the flow of 18th century poetry. This romantic flow ends in Wordsworth, Coleridge and Southey. All these men can only be fully considered in a coming lecture on 19th century poetry; for their work lasts far into our time. But all were born in the 18th century; and all did some work in the 18th century. Wordsworth was born in 1770; Coleridge in 1772; Southey in 1774. As for Wordsworth, he lived and wrote, you know, almost up to the middle of the 19th century. But the triumph of the romantic movement must be dated from the appearance of the *Lyrical Ballads*<sup>1</sup> in the last decade of the 18th century. In this book Wordsworth and Coleridge published their early poems together. Wordsworth set forth in a rather pretentious and

<sup>1</sup> *Lyrical ballads* 1798; 2nd ed. 1800.

rather comical preface the doctrines of his imagined new school. These were an amplification of the method of Cowper. Wordsworth declared that he intended to take both inanimate and human nature for his themes—choosing only the real, the commonplace, and the vulgar by preference. He declared that the emotions of the commonest country woman were just as sacred and deep and suitable for poetry as the emotions of a queen or a princess. He did not think that the poet should describe only beautiful people or beautiful animals. On the contrary he was going to write about ugly people and stupid people and criminal people—also about ugly, common animals, donkeys, pigs, etc.. Coleridge did not altogether sympathize with Wordsworth's notions—which indeed, as Wordsworth expressed them in his preface, were *not* romantic, but what we should call to-day naturalistic or realistic. Carried out to its logical consequences, Wordsworth's doctrine would have given us the school of Zola; and nothing really was so far from Wordsworth's sincere intention. He mis-stated the romantic position; and he afterwards repented of it, very properly. But Coleridge announced that he intended to take up the subject of the supernatural and the mediæval, only putting or infusing something of human interest and human worth into both. This was a much more correct position. But the work of the two was published together. The book contained a number of miscellaneous poems by Wordsworth, such as *Betty Foy*, *Peter Bell*, *The Idiot Boy*, *We are Seven*, and the priceless and the immortal *Ancient Mariner*<sup>1</sup> of Coleridge. The world was not quite prepared for the book, so far as Coleridge's share in it was concerned. They scarcely noticed *The Ancient Mariner*. But they noticed the first attempts of Wordsworth to write about everyday things, commonplace things; and the critics yelled with derision. Really Wordsworth had written a great deal of nonsense,—ridiculous nonsense; and the review tore the book to pieces. Some of the cleverest satires and parodies ever written were composed upon that book. Wordsworth was too proud to be affected by the criticism at that time. He imagined that the fault must

<sup>1</sup> *The rime of the ancyent marinere, in seven parts* 1798.

have been with Coleridge and that he had made a great mistake in printing his own poetry together with that of so eccentric a man. But later on he was able to understand that he had really made some very serious mistakes, and when another edition of the *Lyrical Ballads* was published the worst of the nonsense which the critics had jeered at was suppressed. Later on Wordsworth and Coleridge did great things; which everybody praised. But the appearance of *The Ancient Mariner* in that first volume really signifies the beginning of the romantic triumph. Thereafter was founded what people still call the school of the Lake Poets; and when we come to treat of the 19th century poetry these will be the subject of the first lecture. Scott was already writing at this time; and he had published poetical translations of great value. But Scott also belongs much more to the 19th century than to the 18th century; and we must now go back to the time of Johnson, and follow the stream of expiring classical poetry to the last decade of the 18th century, when it ended with Erasmus Darwin.

## II. CLASSICAL POETRY

### FROM JOHNSON TO DARWIN

The subject of the classical decay need not occupy us so long as the much more important story of the romantic development has been doing. The narrative is brief enough, — although there were a great number of minor classic poets, during the second half of the century, very few of them are important enough to arrest the student's attention. Such a poet as Shenstone,<sup>1</sup> the author of *The Schoolmistress*,<sup>2</sup> is important much more because of the help which he gave to Bishop Percy, than because of his own work. Churchill,<sup>3</sup> a brutal satirist of great talent, has left nothing except the power of his wicked verse to admire. He is not the sort of poet that the

<sup>1</sup> William Shenstone (1714-1763).

<sup>2</sup> *The school-mistress, a poem* (anon.) 1742.

<sup>3</sup> Charles Churchill (1731-1764).

student need attempt to study except in connection with the special subject of satire. Savage,<sup>1</sup> a cunning rascal, who was able to deceive the good Dr. Johnson, and even to obtain his social support, is not worth considering at all, except as a proof that good Dr. Johnson could some time let his heart betray him into sympathy for the undeserving. There are scores of small poets who adhered to the classic. But really we need not concern ourselves with more than four names: these are Johnson, Goldsmith, Crabbe, and Darwin. Such a poet as Byrom<sup>2</sup> may be mentioned as his name bears a curious resemblance to that of a much greater poet who belongs to the 19th century; but you need not otherwise trouble yourselves to remember him. He wrote correct verse of an uninspired kind, and married a daughter of the great scholar Bentley, in whose praise he composed several verses.

As to Johnson's own poetry, there is not much to be said. It is intensely classical, pompous, and always correct; but it is seldom marked by any really deep feeling. Johnson cultivated the satire to some extent—not, however, in the personal way, — he was too kind a man for that, and preferred to attack general evils or follies rather than to make individuals needlessly unhappy. His satires have no other merit unfortunately than their correctness of form. But twice the doctor may be said to have done really fine things in verse. The best of these is his composition on *The Vanity of Human Wishes*<sup>3</sup> — these verses are truly noble, and the greatness of the subject makes the heavy and dignified verse appropriate as the dead march to a grand funeral. The other fine thing that Johnson did was his little elegy on the death of a doctor who happened to be his personal friend.<sup>4</sup> It is written, not in the couplet, but in very simple quatrain, and it still touches everybody who reads it, notwithstanding that two words which are used in it — “vulgar” and “coarsely” — have so changed their meaning since Johnson's time, that they shock us a little by their ap-

<sup>1</sup> Richard Savage (*d.* 1743).

<sup>2</sup> John Byrom (1692-1763).

<sup>3</sup> *The vanity of human wishes: the tenth satire of Juvenal imitated* 1743.

<sup>4</sup> *On the death of Dr. Robert Levett* 1783.

pearance in these beautiful lines. We should not like to-day to hear a man describe his dear friend as "coarsely kind," or his knowledge as "vulgar." But Johnson did not mean exactly what those words mean now. Like the composition on *The Vanity of Human Wishes*, this elegy is the expression of sincere and deep emotion. It was very seldom that the doctor allowed his big heart to express itself; but, when he did, the results were the very best of all that he was able to give us in the shape of verse.

Goldsmith<sup>1</sup> was scarcely less of a classical poet than Johnson; but he was altogether a much finer poet. He used the couplet, and obeyed classical conventions, but he had a delicate spirit of romantic feeling that made his verse beautiful in spite of the severe forms in which he thought himself obliged to clothe his thought. Thus in his *Traveller*<sup>2</sup> and his *Deserted Village*<sup>3</sup> you will find a feeling much closer to Thomson than to Pope, though the verse is Popesque enough at times. Again in spite of some critics we all continue to find pleasure in his artificial but beautiful ballad of *Edwin and Angelina*<sup>4</sup> — certainly the verse is conventional; the phrases of the old-fashioned Pope's school of poetry are sometimes used; but there is a tenderness and a beauty of feeling that you cannot discover elsewhere in the old school at all. However, Goldsmith is much more important as a prose-writer than as a poet; and we shall have to speak of him again. For the present it is enough to say that he did beautifully whatever he tried to do; and that his classical verse is not to be despised. It was much better than Johnson's, though not any more correct.

Crabbe<sup>5</sup> deserves a special lecture; and I hope to attempt this next term. For the present I must be brief, and I shall only say that he is the very greatest classical poet of the later 18th century. He is altogether an extraordinary figure in poetry. I told you that Cowper, who stands between the two schools, had introduced into English literature the use of com-

<sup>1</sup> Oliver Goldsmith (1728-1774).

<sup>2</sup> *The traveller, or a prospect of society* 1764.

<sup>3</sup> *The deserted village* 1770.

<sup>4</sup> *Edwin and Angelina* 1765.

<sup>5</sup> George Crabbe (1754-1832).

monplace detail as an element in poetry. He approached naturalism, without ever becoming a naturalist in the later meaning of the word. You must think of Crabbe rather as a realist and a realist of the very grimmest kind. There was not one particle of romance in Crabbe. He was a clergyman who lived in the country among poor people and saw life only as it really was—bitter, painful, tragical, often horrible. Using classic forms,—using the couplet just as Dryden had used it before Pope,—Crabbe attacked the convention of the old classical school, nevertheless, in a totally new way. He said, in the plainest possible manner, “You have been talking about the country as a kind of paradise, full of love and health, and happiness. But that is all nonsense. You do not know anything about the real life of the country, the hardships and the misery of the peasant.” And then he proceeded to describe that life exactly as he had studied it. For this reason, there is not an English poet whose work gives the reader more pain than Crabbe’s. Yet, in spite of the pain, and the tiresome old-fashioned verse, and the total absence of all romance, Crabbe interests and more than interests. He has been called “a Pope in Worsted Stockings,” such stockings being worn at that time only by peasants—which is very much like saying that he was a rude and rustic, but great poet. This is true. If you once begin to read him fairly, without prejudice, you will see that he deserves to obtain what no other classical poet of the age, except Johnson, at all obtains—the reverence of the romantic school. Johnson got respect from his enemies only because of his fine character; but Crabbe more than respect, both on account of his character and of his verse. Whoever learned to laugh at the faults of the classic poet, never laughed at Crabbe. There was too much great art there—art of a dark but profound kind: the art of the realist. The first work of Crabbe with the exception of a composition called *The Library*<sup>1</sup> was revised by Johnson himself; and it is rather remarkable that Johnson should have expressed such a warm interest in the work of a man so very different in his methods from those

<sup>1</sup> *The library* 1781.

classic masters whom Johnson had been accustomed to admire. This first work was called *The Village*.<sup>1</sup> It contained a clear exposition of Crabbe's poetical convictions, and those convictions were never departed from in the course of a long lifetime.

*The Village* was a powerful description of the miseries of the life of the English peasant, and after nearly a hundred years one must acknowledge that the verses of Crabbe are still, to a great extent, terribly true. Here there was no cabinet poetry—no talk of the beauties of nature, of nymphs and goddesses and fairies; nothing but pitiless and cruel fact set forth in correct, vigorous, and undecorated verse. Afterwards Crabbe went on to describe all the details of English country life. He went to the poor-houses (establishments where people too old to work are maintained by public charity), and he told us the history of each of its inmates. He went to the prisons and related the story of each criminal within their walls. He also narrated the history of various marriages in his parish,—of many deaths,—of many domestic misfortunes. And he did this with the severe naturalism of a great realist. For about twenty years he stopped writing;—then, in his old age, he produced another series of a like study of exactly the same sort,—entitled *Tales*.<sup>2</sup> But remember that he was not a pessimist. He was only a man who described life as he saw it, and he saw the good as well as the bad side. Many of his sketches are extremely painful; but a number are quite pretty, and all are interesting. We must return in another lecture to the subject of Crabbe. His influence was not great in his own time, and he can scarcely be said to have had any successful imitators until our own days. Lately one English poet, Mr. Robert Buchanan, followed the example of Crabbe by producing a terrible set of poems describing the miseries of the English poor. These are not without merit. But I do not think that Buchanan has been able to approach Crabbe. One reason is that Buchanan is too emotional. Crabbe never expressed his own emotion, though

<sup>1</sup> *The Village* 1783.

<sup>2</sup> *Tales* 1812.



he is able to awaken that of his readers. Buchanan weakens his work by putting too much of himself into it.

One more figure remains to be considered in the history of the decline of classic poetry,—and this is the most interesting figure of any in a certain way. I mean Erasmus Darwin.<sup>1</sup> Erasmus Darwin really killed classic poetry—made its coffin, and drove in the nails. He was not a great poet,—though he was able to make verse even more correct than the verse of Pope. But he was a very great man of science and a very wonderful and lovable person. He was the grandfather of Charles Darwin, whose modern discoveries in natural history did so much to change the course of thought in modern Europe. Nevertheless, great as Charles Darwin certainly was, I doubt whether he could be called as great as his grandfather; for Erasmus Darwin anticipated almost every discovery which Charles Darwin made, and anticipated it chiefly by power of reason and constructive imagination at a time before there were good microscopes, good scientific instruments, or any great opportunities for travel and research such as are open to men of science now. He was only a country doctor, who passed his whole life in one place, and made all of his discoveries in his own little study.

Erasmus Darwin was born in 1731, at Eton, but his people soon after removed to the town of Lichfield, the birthplace of Dr. Johnson; and at a comparatively early age the boy showed great aptitude for the study of medicine and was educated for the profession as well as opportunity permitted. After having obtained his degree in medicine, he established his office in Lichfield; and there he soon became not only the fashionable doctor of the place, but the most influential member of its society. This was owing to the strange mixture of charm and force in his character. A curious fact is that he very much resembled Dr. Johnson, whom the people of Lichfield could well remember. Like Johnson, he was a very big, fat, ugly man,—with a strong good-natured face deeply pitted by smallpox; and like Johnson, he was naturally dictatorial,—inclined to

<sup>1</sup> Erasmus Darwin (1731-1802).

play the master with everybody, and to express his sincere opinions without regard to anybody's prejudices. But he was trusted and liked, and he deserved it. Presently the society of Lichfield boldly proclaimed that their Dr. Darwin was in all respects a greater man than Dr. Johnson. He was equal, they said, to Johnson in learning; and he was much superior to Johnson in genius. This praise was really deserved. Darwin was very much more learned than Dr. Johnson, and he was far in advance of his time as a scientific thinker. The little town of Lichfield has a right to be proud of him; and, although Lichfield was only a small country town, it had a great cathedral, a great bishop, and a number of very wealthy and cultivated residents. It was an aristocratic little place; and it remains so even to this day. There were many men and women of letters there—not perhaps very great, but all very earnest, in the pursuit of knowledge and of culture. These formed a little literary society which was called “The Darwinian Sphere,” and they produced a great deal of mediocre poetry and prose in the taste of the classic school. It was one of the great afflictions of this society that Dr. Johnson never took any notice of Dr. Darwin. The society accused Johnson of jealousy and pride; but he remained perfectly silent and indifferent. Perhaps Johnson disliked to have an imitator, or acknowledged rival;—perhaps the two men secretly detested each other, because of being too much alike in character. They never came together. If they had done so the result could not have been good; for Johnson must have detested the theories of Dr. Darwin as being contrary to religious teaching and Dr. Darwin must have thought of Dr. Johnson as a bigot and a narrow-minded conservative. Both were excellent men; but they were certainly not made so as to be in sympathy with each other under any circumstances. However, Dr. Darwin could not complain: he had all Lichfield for his little kingdom; and he ruled it despotically for more than fifty years, dying in 1802, regretted by all who knew him.

A word about Darwin's scientific works will be necessary to offset what we have to say in condemnation of his poetry.

His great work in prose was entitled *Zoonomia*.<sup>1</sup> This was nothing less than an attempt to explain the whole infinite process of nature by a general law. It was a very great attempt, indeed, and it must be ranked with the scientific work of Gœthe and Lamarck in the same direction; but it reached truths which were not clearly perceived by either the great German or the great Frenchman. In fact the theory of Natural Selection is the only theory of the philosophy of modern evolution which Dr. Darwin did not in some way vaguely anticipate. You are, of course, aware that his grandson discovered this theory, which is now generally accepted by all competent thinkers. To give you an idea of Dr. Darwin's philosophy, I shall mention only one of his teachings. He said that all differences in the shapes, colours, powers, and habits of animals or plants might be accounted for by the conditions under which these had multiplied and developed; but that all animals, all living organisms, had been evolved from "a similar living filament." As a general truth, indistinctly enunciated, there is little fault to be found with this statement. Nineteenth century science knows a little better, because it has obtained better microscopes and a larger knowledge of chemistry. But the result of its researches is very nearly the same declaration. All living forms have been evolved from a similar simple cell; and any practical physiologist can prove to you, with a microscope, that all living bodies are constructed of a fundamentally similar cell. Substitute the word "cell" for Darwin's "filament"; and you have the truth. But I need scarcely tell you that the man capable of such a theory in the 18th century was far beyond his age. His *Zoonomia* did not attract much scientific attention;—indeed it might have been quite forgotten but for the wonderful work of his grandson. However, the doctor never imagined himself to be so far in advance of the time. He only imagined that if he had written in poetry instead of prose he would have obtained a wider audience. Then he undertook to write in poetry, and he produced in two volumes his extraordinary composition entitled *The Botanic Garden*.<sup>2</sup> It was pub-

<sup>1</sup> *Zoonomia, or the laws of organic life* 1794-96 (1801, 1802).

<sup>2</sup> *The botanic*

lished in two parts; the first appeared, entitled *The Loves of the Plants*, and the second part *The Economy of Vegetation*. But really the second volume was the first part; the doctor publishing the end of the book before the beginning. *The Botanic Garden* appeared between 1789 and 1791.

This great composition is nothing less than the whole of the botanical system of Linnæus in heroic verse of the most perfectly correct form. Indeed the form is too correct. And excess of correctness is not the only excess. There is an equal extravagance of antithesis, and a still greater extravagance in the use of mythological imagery. The whole thing is a vast mass of personification,—every flower, called by its Latin name, being represented as a person with peculiar habits and characteristics. Indeed the thing reads like a grand parody of Pope—like a satire upon the classical school of verse. For a time it was popular enough. The doctor was paid £ 900 for it—equal to 9,000 *yen* to-day. But this work really killed classical poetry. It showed, in a way that never had been shown before, all the artificial and insincere character of classic poetry, and it showed this by exaggerating every excellence and correctness of Pope. You could not say that any line of this poem was not according to classic rules. And yet the thing was ridiculous. After the time of Dr. Darwin nobody dared to attempt any more composition in the style of Pope. *The Botanic Garden* has never been reprinted and probably never will be. But it is probable that we shall have new editions of the *Zoonomia*, for that book will always be interesting to the student of scientific history.

Among the literary circle of Lichfield, surrounding Dr. Darwin as planets turn about the sun, there were several persons whose names cannot be omitted in any mention of the age of Johnson. There was for example Thomas Day,<sup>1</sup> author of *Sandford and Merton*,<sup>2</sup> a book for boys, which every boy was obliged to read, whether he liked it or not, even in the

*garden; a poem in two parts (I. The economy of vegetation, 1791. II. The loves of the plants, 1789) 1791.*

<sup>1</sup> Thomas Day (1748-1789).

<sup>2</sup> *A history of Sandford and Merton* 1783-89.

time of my own childhood. Then there was Richard Edgeworth,<sup>1</sup> father of the future novelist Maria Edgeworth. Also there was the handsome and unfortunate young Major Andre,<sup>2</sup> afterwards executed as a spy during the American civil war. A great deal of sympathy has already been felt for this young officer, whose ignominious death does not seem to have cast any shadow upon his real character. And there was Miss Anna Seward,<sup>3</sup> a beautiful girl, who wrote much poetry, and who adored Dr. Darwin just as Boswell adored Samuel Johnson. Like Boswell she wrote the life of her intellectual idol.<sup>4</sup> Nobody now reads Miss Seward's poetry; but her life of Dr. Darwin is a very interesting and amusing book in its way, although not comparable to the work of Boswell. It is written in a most artificial and extravagant style; but through all the disguise of fashion in language, you can see the charming character of the young woman, who gives us a glimpse into the quaint and delightful Lichfield of the 18th century.

### THE HISTORIANS

We have seen that the age of Johnson witnessed the beginning of romantic poetry, the birth and full development of the English novel, and the perfection of English prose which, as I have already said, has not been surpassed even by the masters of the 19th century in clearness, precision and polish. But the splendour of this prose was particularly shown in history; and the third great fact for the student to remember is that really great history was first written by Englishmen in the age of Johnson. This history, in its best example, has never been surpassed and perhaps it never will be equalled. Properly speaking, history, philosophy and science do not intrinsically belong to literature. I should always insist upon considering literature the art of expressing emotion, sentiment, thoughts

<sup>1</sup> Richard Lovel Edgeworth (1744-1817).

<sup>2</sup> John Andre (1751-1780).

<sup>3</sup> Anna Seward (1747-1809).

<sup>4</sup> *Memoir of the life of Dr. Darwin* 1804.

as they exist in real life: I should say that literature in the true sense must always be a picture of life whether the form be poetry, fiction or drama. But a work of science or philosophy or history may belong to literature when written so that it produces the effect of real literature upon the reader's mind. The greatest English histories do this,—and the same may be said of the best French histories. And the English 18th century historians are related to literature quite as much as to science—indeed, in the case of two, the literary relation is the only important one. There were three great historians in the age of Johnson; they lived and worked almost at the same time. These were Hume, Robertson, and Gibbon. Hume<sup>1</sup> wrote *The History of England*,<sup>2</sup> Robertson<sup>3</sup> *The History of Scotland*,<sup>4</sup> Gibbon *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*<sup>5</sup>—a title very much smaller than the fact which it represents; for Gibbon's *History* is really a history of the whole world from the age of Augustus to the Middle Ages and beyond—almost to the time of the Renaissance. An enormous undertaking that only enormous faculties could have successfully carried out. No other man has yet attempted to do anything upon the same scale; and it is quite certain in view of the present tendency and necessity for specialization that no man will ever again venture upon so huge a task. But the still more astonishing fact is that this *History* of Gibbon, which after a hundred years still remains the best of all histories, is quite as much of a literary monument as a work of science. Even if Gibbon had been a bad historian, his mastership of style would keep his pages forever alive. But he was even greater as an exact scholar than as a pure man of letters. The combination is astonishing and rare. Hume and Robertson can live only as historians, by their style;—their histories are so faulty and untrustworthy that we need not mention them any further as historians and

<sup>1</sup> David Hume (1711-1776).

<sup>2</sup> *The history of Great Britain (under the House of Stuart) 1754-57; The history of England under the House of Tudor 1759;—from the invasion of Julius Caesar to the accession of Henry VII 1762;—to the Revolution in 1688 1763.*

<sup>3</sup> William Robertson (1721-1793).

<sup>4</sup> *The history of Scotland during the reigns of queen Mary and of king James VI etc. 1759 (1813).*

<sup>5</sup> *The history of the decline and fall of the Roman empire 1776-88 (1846, 1869).*

we shall consider Hume separately elsewhere. But Gibbon in himself is the supreme representative of 18th century science of scholarship in its grandest form; and his place in literature is so closely connected with his researches in learned fields that we cannot separately consider the historian and the stylist.

Edward Gibbon was born in 1737 and died in 1794. The facts of his life can only be briefly touched upon here: his own most interesting autobiography<sup>1</sup> is one of the books which you should find sincere pleasure in reading;—it will give you a much better idea of the man than a brief lecture could possibly do. Suffice to say that Gibbon was of good parentage, the son of a wealthy family, a gentleman by rank, well educated and rich. He often expressed his conviction that he was a very fortunate person. Had he not been rich and very well educated, he could not have attempted what he did attempt. There was not in those days the opportunities which professional historians can now obtain through great libraries and the help of Government archives, which are placed at their disposal. Moreover, thousands of books had to be bought—procured from foreign countries at great prices—which nowadays even the poorest student can consult in the Government libraries of European countries. However, wealth and education alone could not have made a Gibbon. Immense natural faculty for the acquisition of language, immense patience to acquire them, and extraordinary love of exactness, and a patience indomitable in tiresome research—all these were necessary. Gibbon was born with such powers, and circumstances only assisted to bring them out. I suppose you remember that he was educated but partly in England, more in Switzerland and in France; that he spoke and wrote French quite as well as English—actually publishing some of his first essays in that language; also that he became a Roman Catholic at the age of 16, then was reconverted back to Protestantism; then became a free thinker and so remained to the end of his life. It was not a very eventful life, being mostly spent in libraries and study-rooms. For a short time Gibbon was an officer of militia, in his youth; but

<sup>1</sup> *Autobiography and correspondence a 1794* (1796, 1854).

toward middle life he began to get fat, and at last he became so fat that when he knelt down he could not easily get up again. There is a story about his kneeling down in the presence of a lady and not being able to rise until help was sent for. He never married, really giving up all the pleasures of life for the single object of his *History*. And yet with a queer pride, he did not like to be called a historian; he thought that it was quite enough to be called a gentleman. But this was one of the little follies of the time, and he could not be blamed for it. Even to-day in English aristocratic circles there is a lingering feeling that literature is not exactly the kind of pursuit which a nobleman should follow. We can trace such notions straight back to the Middle Ages when it was thought disgraceful for a warrior to be able to read and write. Only in the very last years of Gibbon's life did startling events occur to disturb his peace. The revolutionary upheaval in Switzerland obliged him to fly from that country, where he lost considerable property. He did not long survive after his return to his own country.

To consider Gibbon's work as a task, it is not enough to tell you that the mere collection of material for it occupied more than 15 years, nor that another 15 years were spent in mental digestion and preparation of that material. This would give you no particular impression of what had to be done. Gibbon had to establish a new science of history by himself; he had no predecessors; he had to invent every plan. He had also to read and to read scientifically all the Latin authors, the Greek authors of the Byzantine Empire, the historians and chroniclers of the Middle Ages; the mere list of authorities which he was obliged to read in mediæval Latin and later Greek would make a large book. He had also to read books in the Persian, the Arabic, and other Eastern languages—he had to read for the later part of his *History* all accessible histories in all the languages of Europe. And is it not wonderful that in all his reading of these tens of thousands of books in different languages, and quotations and references almost innumerable, he has never been convicted of a single serious mistake that could not have been avoided by a writer in his time? Many



and many have been the editors of Gibbon who tried to point out mis-statements, falsehoods, contradictions; but in nearly every case these editors themselves have been proved wrong. Time has indicated the accuracy of Gibbon after a manner that seems to us little short of miraculous.

The great historian Freeman said of Gibbon in our own time: "Whatever else is read, Gibbon must be read too. He is the sole historian of the 18th century whom modern research has neither set aside nor threatens to set aside." And, although Roman Catholics have a particular reason to dislike Gibbon, a great Catholic prelate some years ago bravely acknowledged that the only real history of the early church is the *History* of Gibbon. Now to speak ill of Gibbon's *History* is either a proof of religious prejudice or want of culture. In former times the prejudice only would have accounted for attacks upon the work.

I must say a word on the reasons for this prejudice. It was chiefly provoked by the 15th and 16th chapters of the first volume of the *History*, dealing with Christianity. Gibbon was an open free-thinker; and he had some dislike to Christianity. Besides he belonged to the age of the great French sceptics—the Encyclopaedists, Voltaire, Diderot, etc.,—and his sympathies were altogether with the French tendencies of the time. The English public were, however, easily offended by any attempt to express in its language the tone of sceptical thought then fashionable in France. When Gibbon discovered this, he did not retract anything which he had written; but he somewhat modified the tone of his criticism of Christianity so as to avoid giving needless offence. But the prejudices which his mockery first aroused are not even yet dead; and very religious persons are still inclined to denounce Gibbon in a fashion which only proves ignorance, if it proves anything. The wise way to accept Gibbon's work is to consider it quite independently of the personal opinions of the historian. As history, it is the best of its kind; and if you are religious and at the same time a person of culture, you can easily recognize this fact. On the other hand, if you are sceptical, you will find yourself in perfect sympathy with Gibbon at all points. And I may state my own

belief that the final judgment upon Gibbon's work has yet to be made. He considered the civilization of the 18th century inferior to the great civilization of antiquity; and there are many good scholars who would probably declare the same thing in regard to the European civilization of the 20th century. Formerly it was the custom of English historians to represent the civilization of Christianity as far superior to the civilization of paganism; and Gibbon gave great offence by daring to take the opposite view—a view in which Hume partly joined him. But with the widening of modern scholarship, the modern tendency seems to be in the direction of Gibbon's thought. The more we learn of the ancient civilization, the more we are astonished to find how much the Greeks and the Romans surpassed us in many things, however much we may be otherwise in advance of them.

And now I want to talk to you about Gibbon's style—the supreme expression of classical style,—the supreme prose of the 18th century,—the nearest approach ever made in English to the majestic sonority and rolling music of the old Greek and Roman writers. First of all I shall speak of the style only as regards general construction. Afterwards I shall try to illustrate its peculiar economy and strength. No one before ever wrote like Gibbon; and the nearest approach to his splendour of language was in the pages of Sir Thomas Browne. But that was a much older form of English. No man will write like Gibbon again; the fashion has passed and we cannot regret that it has passed, for in some ways, representing a climax of perfection, it was not a stimulant to further progress. But we must admire it in exactly the same way that we admire a Roman aqueduct, or a Greek marble theatre—notwithstanding that modern hydraulics have rendered the first useless and that the second would be totally inadequate to modern theatrical requirements.

The first thing, then, to notice about Gibbon's style is that it makes the nearest possible approach to the blank verse which is consistent with fine prose. Just like poetry, it can be measured—scanned, to use the technical term. You can divide

it into feet; and you will find that the phrases can be scanned under the same rules as a line of verse. Every phrase is not of exactly the same length; but there are few departures from the general rule that in all the work there are only about three forms of phrase, and that each form has its own rhythm. So much for short phrases. Sentences commonly occur by succession of three different kinds. You have first a short phrase, making a complete sentence in itself. Next you have a sentence of two phrases, sharply distinguished by rhythm, and often antithetically balanced. Then you have a long, rolling sentence, consisting of a varying number of independent sentences or phrases, ending with a phrase which nearly always recalls the rhythm of a Greek hexameter. And this varying succession of different forms of sentences, always ending with the same grand rolling sound, has all the effect of splendid poetry.

Examples are not difficult to find—you need only open any volume at any page of the *History* to find them. I know there are numerous exceptions to the general rule which I have suggested: indeed, without exception, such a rule would have made the prose too monotonous. But leaving the exceptions aside, I do not think that there is a single page of Gibbon devoid of the poetic perfection which I have indicated. I am going to quote to you a few examples of this wonderful style—taking them here and there from the 7th volume of the *History*. Here is a passage describing the revolt of the Western Tartars against Timour.

The new khan forgot the merits and the strength of his benefactor, the base usurper, as he deemed him, of the sacred rights of the house of Zingis. Through the gates of Derbend, he entered Persia at the head of ninety thousand horse; with the innumerable forces of Kipzak, Bulgaria, Circassia, and Russia, he passed the Sihoon, burnt the palaces of Timour, and compelled him, amidst the winter snows, to contend for Samarcand and his life. After a mild expostulation and a glorious victory, the emperor resolved on revenge; and by the east, and the west, of the Caspian and the Volga, he twice invaded Kipzak with such mighty

powers, that thirteen miles were measured from his right to his left wing. In a march of five months, they rarely beheld the footsteps of man ; and their daily subsistence was often trusted to the fortune of the chase. At length the armies encountered each other ; but the treachery of the standard-bearer, who, in the heat of action, reversed the imperial standard of Kipzak, determined the victory of the Zagatais ; and Toctamish (I speak the language of the Institutions) gave the tribe of Touschi to the wind of desolation.

That is to say, to the Wind of Death ; for even the grim Timour could be a poet on occasions. The above quotation is but one of a thousand possible, showing how the most enormous event can be described by Gibbon within a few musical sentences. I take another example referring to the conquest of China by Kubla Khan, whose name Gibbon spelled, according to the fashion of the time, Cublai,—the same name made famous to multitudes knowing nothing of Far Eastern history by the celebrated dream poetry of Coleridge, beginning :—

In Xanadu did Kubla Khan  
A stately pleasure-dome decree :  
Where Alph, the sacred river, ran  
Through caverns measureless to man  
Down to a sunless sea.

When the fleet of the *Song* was surrounded and oppressed by a superior armament, their last champion leaped into the waves with his infant emperor in his arms. “It is more glorious,” he cried, “to die a prince than to live a slave.” A hundred thousand Chinese imitated his example ; and the whole empire, from Tonkin to the great wall, submitted to the dominion of Cublai. His boundless ambition aspired to the conquest of Japan ; his fleet was twice shipwrecked ; and the lives of a hundred thousand Moguls and Chinese were sacrificed in the fruitless expedition.

You will notice that the termination of the longer sentences in these quotations always end with the rolling sound ; and Gibbon never neglects an artistic opportunity to produce this effect,—sometimes greatly enhancing it by a splendid quota-

tion. For example, when Mahomet II. captured Constantinople, his feelings after the storming of the city are thus briefly but memorably narrated:—

A melancholy reflection on the vicissitudes of human greatness forced itself on his mind; and he repeated an elegant distich of Persian poetry: “The spider has woven his web in the imperial palace; and the owl hath sung her watch-song on the towers of Afrasiab.”

One more illustrative quotation — suggesting the whole history of a life within a few splendid sentences: these form the introduction to the great story of the patriot Rienzi:

In a quarter of the city, which was inhabited only by mechanics and Jews, the marriage of an innkeeper to a washerwoman produced the future deliverer of Rome. From such parents Nicholas Rienzi Gabrini could inherit neither dignity nor fortune; and the gift of a liberal education, which they painfully bestowed, was the cause of his glory and untimely end. The study of history and eloquence, the writings of Cicero, Seneca, Livy, Cæsar, and Valerius Maximus, elevated above his equals and contemporaries the genius of the young plebeian; he perused with indefatigable diligence the manuscripts and marbles of antiquity; loved to dispense his knowledge in familiar language; and was often provoked to exclaim, “Where are now these Romans? their virtue, their justice, their power? why was I not born in those happy times?”

See how the last long sentence roils like poetry—how even the Latin names cited have been so arranged that the most musical sounding is put last. In no case does Gibbon ever forget to be melodious. And this is very properly a style comparable to the motion of waves;—the sentences come by billowings and surgings, as waves break and pass. We compare fine poetry of certain kinds to the motion of waves; but it is not often that we can find a prose style equally grand, equally suggesting the chant of the sea. However, neither in the case of blank verse nor of prose does this comparison imply monotony. If you have watched the sea wave, — if you have learned to know it as a swimmer does, you must recognize that the wave

motion is never absolutely regular. People do talk about something or other occurring "regularly as the breaking of waves on the shore," but those who make this comparison would not seem to have watched sea waves. Waves do not come regularly. The motion is never twice the same. But you will see a great wave come and break,—then a smaller one,—then, perhaps, three large ones in rapid succession, then, after an interval, several smaller ones,—then, perhaps, a very large one. In some parts of Europe the sea-coast people say that the seventh wave is always the largest; in other parts of Europe they say the ninth wave—a statement accepted by Tennyson. But the fact that in different countries and even upon different coasts in the same countries there are different statements as to whether it is the seventh or the ninth wave that is heaviest,—this proves that notwithstanding the experience of thousands and thousands of years men have not been able to learn accurately the laws of wave rhythm, and that wave motion has only an apparent regularity. Gibbon's style also has a regularity much more apparent than measurable;—it resembles in almost all respects the nearest possible approach to wave rhythm in prose.

Nevertheless there are certain laws of measurement to be observed in his composition—laws relating to dimension. There are no prodigious sentences,—no tidal waves in this undulating prose. The fluctuations vary from a single line to six or seven; and a fair average of five or six lines represents the volume of the greater number among the longer sentences. Gibbon would not ever have ventured upon such long sentences as even Macaulay occasionally wrote: he would have found these contrary to pure classic taste.

As for the musical part of his work, this style can be managed only by an excellent scholar, perfectly acquainted with the phonetic value of all words derived from Greek or Latin, not less than of English words derived from other sources. It requires what is musically called "a good ear" to be able to write correct poetry; and Gibbon's prose needs, perhaps, even a finer ear than ordinary forms of blank verse.

The next thing which I want to say about Gibbon's style

is in relation to its economy. In this it also resembles the best kind of classic poetry. Having before him a fixed measure into which he must compress his thoughts to the best advantage, the classic poet is obliged to be very sparing and choice in his use of words. If the first essential of good writing be, as critics have said, "to have something to say," certainly the next most essential thing is "to know what *not* to say." No man, not even Pope, ever knew this better than Gibbon. See, in the last quotation which I gave you, how the whole story of the difficulties under which Rienzi obtained his education has been conveyed to the reader by the use of a single adverb "painfully." Everywhere, on every page of his *History*, you can find instances of this sort of economy. For example, Pope Gregory VII. is referred to as one "who may be *adored* or *detested* as the founder of the papal monarchy." How much is implied by that antithetical use of those two verbs?—the signification is, of course, that by the Roman Catholics he may well be adored, and that by all the enemies of the ecclesiastic power he may justly be detested; and either sentiment signifies no small tribute to the great capacities of the man. A little further on the story of early papal elections is thus suggested in a single sentence:—

The chair of St. Peter was disputed by the votes, the venality, the violence, of a popular election.

Those three nouns tell us more than three newspaper columns would tell us to-day. The candidates were voted for; the votes were influenced by bribes; the bribery proving insufficient for the object desired, fighting resulted;—we do not need to be told anything more from the historical point of view. Again we are told of a pope, who instituted what is now called "a jubilee," that he "*watched* and *irritated* the devout impatience of the faithful." "Watched" means that he attentively observed how impatient they were to obtain the religious privileges. "Irritated" means that it was his policy, successfully carried out, to make them still more impatient, — still more anxious to get what he would only give at his own

high terms. And how much is told in the following brief statement:—

The venerable father of the Colonna was exposed in his own palace to the double shame of being desirous, and of being unable, to protect a criminal.

That is to say, that notwithstanding his rank and wealth the great lord could not do as he pleased even in his own house;—that he wanted to protect a criminal,—which was a shameful thing to do; and that he had not even the strength to protect him,—which was also a great shame to one in so high a position; thus he was at once both morally and socially disgraced. But how many words I have wasted to say what Gibbon has said in a single line. Another example concerning Rienzi:

The ambition of the honours of chivalry betrayed the meanness of his birth, and degraded the importance of his office; and the equestrian tribune was not less odious to the nobles, whom he adopted, than to the plebeians, whom he deserted.

Although a man of the people and trusted by the people, Rienzi wanted to get himself made by political power a knight and a gentleman;—and this eagerness of his to be called a gentleman only proved that he was ashamed of his humble parentage and that he was not worthy to act for the people as their trusted leader and therefore both parties learned to hate him—the noble man, because he was a vulgar person who wished to mix with them; and the common people, who saw that he wanted to be friends with the nobles, soon perceived that he was not their faithful and honest friend. But this is a very long way and a very clumsy way of stating what Gibbon has put into four lines. One more example of economic method, incessantly used by Gibbon, is suggestion by two words of antithetical or different meaning in reference to an act or a person. A conqueror, after having his enemies in his power, dismisses them with words of friendly warning. Why does he do this? Gibbon finds that three historians declare he did it out of goodness of heart; while three other declare he



did it out of fear. Gibbon wastes no words upon the existence of such historical contradiction, and sums up the whole known facts of the matter in one phrase:—

The prudence or the generosity of the king forbade him to take further advantage of the suppliant enemy.

Everything is told by the words “prudence” and “generosity.” Which was it? No mortal man knows; you may guess for yourselves—the historical fact alone is really necessary to state. But I would not like to have you think that this grand economy of words ever means inattention to small details of history. Gibbon is economical of language; but he tells us everything that can be told—if he has to mention the building of a castle he will give you all the details of the work in the most astonishing and vivid way, with a few brief sentences,—as the following quotation will show.

Of a master who never forgives, the orders are seldom disobeyed. . . . . The lime had been burnt in Cataphrygia; the timber was cut down in the woods of Heraclea and Nicomedia; and the stones were dug from the Anatolian quarries. Each of the thousand masons was assisted by two workmen; and a measure of two cubits was marked for their daily task. The fortress was built in a triangular form; each angle was flanked by a strong and massy tower; one on the declivity of the hill, two along the sea-shore; a thickness of twenty-two feet was assigned for the walls, thirty for the towers; and the whole building was covered with a solid platform of lead.

That is describing a castle and the building of it, and the preparations for the building and the discipline of the workmen all in four sentences. Nor would it be possible to say that the description is inadequate, or leaves us with any doubt as to the real form and strength of the structure. That is economy; and yet the economy of Gibbon in language is not carried at any time to the point of dryness. If a story be worth telling, he will interrupt his narrative in the most serious passage in order to tell it; and if he finds that the follies of a king may be of value as moral warning, he will give us every detail

of such follies — whether in the form of banqueting or any other extravagance. There is yet another point to be noticed about Gibbon's economy of language in narration. This is his use of the potential mood. Suppose that a tradition or a statement happens to be at once doubtful and yet not impossible, the historian ordinarily would give you dozens of tiresome pages recounting all the authorities, together with the reasons for believing, and the reasons for disbelieving. But Gibbon never tires our patience in this way: he saves all trouble by using the potential forms "may," "might," "could," "would," or "should," instead of saying "was," "did," etc. For example there is a story that a man of tremendous strength performed a wonderful feat of arms; but some critics have denied the possibility of such a feat. Gibbon would say not, "He did this," but, "He might have so done." All through Gibbon's *History* you will notice this cautious use of the potential mood. Nor has any other historian ever succeeded in using that mood to such advantage.

I think I have now said enough to suggest to you the literary marvels of Gibbon—his immense significance as a prose-writer. Even the best scholars and critics of our own time are puzzled to understand how any man could have undertaken to write in such a style,—a style so close to poetry,—without becoming tiresome. It is not an easy thing to do even within the space of two pages; but imagine that this style has been triumphantly managed through seven volumes of between five and six hundred pages of small type; and you will have some notion of the labour and the genius which the performance required. It is for this reason that Gibbon will never perish from English literature, but there is also another reason for his immortality. This is one of the great works which, like Shakespeare's great plays, can be read over and over again, each time with additional pleasure and profit and wonder. No one can ever become tired of the real Gibbon. But I should not blame anybody for becoming tired of epitomes of Gibbon whether it be a "student's Gibbon" or any other condensed form of the *History*. Such publications are no doubt very use-

ful in the mere study of the skeleton of history; but that is not Gibbon, and it has nothing to do with literature or with art.

A word about the other historians may now be ventured. Robertson is scarcely read—though he has merits of style, and was a charming man and a wonderful worker. He wrote, besides *The History of Scotland*, many other histories; and he was at one time thought to be almost equal to Gibbon. So literary reputation comes and goes, except in the case of the very strongest. But in the case of Hume we cannot say the same thing. Though his *History of England* is scarcely good history, it is very good English; and he further deserves literary notice because of his remarkable collections of historical essays. These essays have a particular charm;—I would call the students' attention especially to one entitled *On the Populousness of the Antique World*.<sup>1</sup> If you compare that with the first grand chapter of Gibbon's *History*, I think you will find that Hume compares more favourably with the giant of history than might be expected. But it is only within small spaces that he shows his best in historical writings. Otherwise his importance relates rather to the domain of philosophy and ethics, and there we will have occasion to speak of him again.

## THE PROSE OF THE AGE OF JOHNSON

### DEVELOPMENT OF THE ENGLISH NOVEL

The most important of all the literary development in the second half of the 18th century was that of the true novel. Poetry ranks higher than prose; but, although the 18th century witnessed the beginning of the romantic triumph in poetry, it did not witness the full blossoming of that movement. On the other hand, in prose, the fullest perfection of the art was reached in the novel even while Johnson was still alive. No better novels have ever been written than some of the novels produced in the 18th century. Therefore I say that the de-

<sup>1</sup> *On the populousness of the antique nations* 1752.

velopment of the novel is the most important of the literary events of the half century.

I hope that you remember what I told you about the old English romance in prose,—the enormous romances in ten or twelve great volumes followed by the picaresque romance. You should recollect that the great romances in prose were suggested by French literature, and the picaresque romances by the Spanish. I told you how these latter grew into such stories as the novels of Defoe, and the stories of Swift. After Swift there was little done in the way of romance of adventure, except by a man called Paltock. All that is necessary to remember for the time being is the general course of this development. I want to show you how the English novel,—the true novel,—is related to the picaresque work that preceded it.

All the old books of the latter class were written in the first person. They took the shape of personal narratives. Defoe followed this Spanish method,—all his stories being written in the first person : so did Swift. *Gulliver's Travels*, for example, is all written in the first person. Only in a loose way can any of these books be called novels. More strictly speaking they are romances. The difference between a novel and a romance chiefly lies in the fact that the novel gives us pictures of real life and society, contemporary life, and deals especially in sentiment,—that is love, etc.,—whereas the romance may be a work of pure imagination, referring to impossible incidents, and having its scenes laid in any time or place, or even outside of time and place altogether. Up to the time of Johnson we may say that the true novel had not appeared,—not even in a rudimentary shape.

The first true novel of manners, — the first real novel of sentiment, — was the work of Samuel Richardson ;<sup>1</sup> — and he appears to have discovered his method almost by mere chance. Richardson, born in 1689, was a printer ; and he was more than 50 years of age when he became by chance a novelist. He had always been very clever at writing letters ; and the printing house in which he worked knew this fact. One day the head

<sup>1</sup> Samuel Richardson (1689-1761).

of the firm asked him to write a little book of letters, as a guide for uneducated people. You have no doubt seen modern books of this sort,—such as “The Complete Letter-Writer,” showing people how to write a letter upon almost any ordinary subject. This was Richardson’s first literary work. While he was engaged in it the thought suddenly occurred to him, “Why could not a good story be told in the shape of correspondence—in a series of letters?” He had, perhaps, observed that Swift and Defoe and many others had written in the first person, and letters are written in the same way. A French author called Marivaux had already produced a kind of novel in the form of letters; but Richardson could not read French, and he never saw the English translation of this book. Out of his own head he obtained the plan of a novel,—the story of a servant girl who had become the wife of her employer, furnishing a basis; and he produced at length the book which immediately made him famous: *Pamela; or Virtue Rewarded*.<sup>1</sup> The whole book is in the form of letters. These letters tell the story of a girl’s struggles in the world, her temptations, her emotions, her sorrows, and at last her happy marriage. Pamela is a servant girl; and very beautiful, very clever, and very virtuous,—but with just a little bit of worldly cunning in the virtue. She wins the esteem of a man who at first tried in vain to seduce her, and she at last compels this man to marry her. The book has great faults, as well as great merits; but it is the first real English novel of sentiment, and it delighted the public of that age. But remark how little of an advance in form it offers. All the story is told in the shape of letters, and is written, like the picaresque romance, in the first person.

Encouraged by the success of *Pamela*, Richardson next produced *Clarissa Harlowe*.<sup>2</sup> This is the best of all his novels. It is the story of a lady, whereas the story of *Pamela* had been the story of a servant. Richardson did not know enough about

<sup>1</sup> *Pamela; or virtue rewarded. In a series of familiar letters from a beautiful young damsel to her parents* 1739-40.

<sup>2</sup> *Clarissa; or the history of a young lady, comprehending the most important concerns of private life, and particularly shewing the distresses that may attend the misconduct both of parents and children in relation to marriage, published by the Editor of Pamela* 1747-48.

the highest form of society to represent a lady of the finest class; but he knew enough about the woman who belonged to the society just above the middle class to make a very faithful picture. The story is tragical, and the reader is made to suffer a great variety of emotion during the perusal. As a picture of 18th century manners this book is very remarkable. But, like *Pamela*, it is all written in the form of letters. The only difference is that in *Clarissa Harlowe* we have two sets of letters, —one written by the man who is a thorough rascal, and the other set by the unfortunate girl whom he outrages. Not even in our own time has this method of making a novel been altogether abandoned, though it is now almost universally condemned by good critics. To mention only one later example, I may cite the case of Wilkie Collins, most of whose novels of the best class are also written in the shape of letters. I think that some of Collins' novels have been translated into Japanese. *Armada*, for instance, is a work entirely constructed after the manner of Richardson.

Once more Richardson attempted a new departure, producing *Sir Charles Grandison*.<sup>1</sup> In this book he tried to portray what he imagined to be a perfect gentleman and a perfect man of the world. In this he was not successful. He understood women very much better than men; and of the really aristocratic society he knew nothing at all. Sir Charles Grandison is rather the stage caricature of a gentleman than a gentleman in the true sense. In Richardson's time the book was admired: but to-day we laugh at it. However, we do not laugh at *Clarissa Harlowe* nor at *Pamela*. Especially the former as a study of woman's character will always be regarded by good judges as a wonderful piece of work. But all the three books are written in the first person, and in the form of letters. The man who made the first perfect novel—perfect as to form and truth and life—was not Richardson, but Fielding. And Fielding drops the first person. He wrote novels just as Thackeray wrote novels in the century after his.

<sup>1</sup> *The history of Sir Charles Grandison in a series of letters published from the original by the editor of Pamela and Clarissa 1753-54.*

The extraordinary suddenness of the appearance of this novel literature is worth noticing. In the Elizabethan age the sudden development of the drama offered another phenomenon of the same kind. Great books and great men everywhere come suddenly, take us by surprise, though we may be able in all cases to trace back either the book or the man through some long process of development. Between 1740 and 1776 there suddenly appeared, in successive groups, 15 great novels,—although before that time, there had, strictly speaking, been no novels at all. And this was not merely the result of imitation—I mean that the successors of Richardson were not mere imitators. There was something spontaneous in the work;—no less than 5 different novelists writing at the same time. These first five were Richardson, Fielding, Fielding's sister Sarah, Smollett, and Sterne. Of all these Fielding was incomparably the greatest.

Fielding<sup>1</sup> was physically a very fine man, much taller than the common,—a gentleman by birth and education,—and a great lover of joyous amusements. He might have been a magnificent officer, had he entered the army; but, without a fortune, the army was not likely to prove in those days a happy career. Fielding studied law instead. But to succeed in law requires influence, friends, time and patience, as well as talent, and Fielding was rather impatient of waiting, so he tried to make a fortune by literature. The stage was then, as it is now, the great attraction of young authors;—one could make more money out of a successful play than out of half a dozen novels. Fielding wrote no less than 28 plays in rapid succession. They were nearly all failures. His talents did not appear to lie in dramatic production. Suddenly Richardson's novel *Pamela* fell into his hand. He did not admire it at all—on the contrary it disgusted him. He thought it sentimental, mawkish, untrue to life, unmanly. He was himself too strong a man to be pleased by womanish things: he had no sympathy with tears, hysterics, and matters of that kind. Yet the whole world was admiring that book; and Fielding knew that he could write a better one.

<sup>1</sup> Henry Fielding (1707-1754).

Out of mere indignation he sat down to produce a parody upon *Pamela*, entitling his work *The History of Joseph Andrews*.<sup>1</sup> You know that in the story of Joseph in the Bible, Joseph is represented as a very moral young man who refuses to allow the wife of a king to make love to him. We still call an extremely modest young man a young Joseph. That was why Fielding proposed to call the hero of his parody *Joseph Andrews*; and in the beginning of the book Joseph Andrews is represented as being made love to by a lady of quality. In Richardson's book the whole interest lies in the attempt of a man to seduce a woman and her cleverness in resisting;—Fielding wanted to satirize Richardson by making the interest in Joseph Andrews lie in the attempt of a woman trying to seduce a man. But before he had more than half finished the book, Fielding gave up this idea. The characters had become alive under his pen; and he was too much pleased with the discovery of his literary power to continue the narrative merely as a satire. He became almost serious; and when the book was done, it was the most splendid novel of a humourous kind that English literature had yet created. But it did not succeed in dethroning Richardson,—Richardson was still idolized by the women, and the Fielding admirers were rather among the cultivated literary circle, who could appreciate the superiority of the workmanship. The next novel that Fielding produced was not so good; it was rather a satire than a real novel, and was called *The History of Jonathan Wild*.<sup>2</sup> Fielding was angry because the public had given so much praise to a picaresque literature dealing with mere roguery and rascality; and he said that a man might write in the most epic style about the worst subject, and produce the same kind of effect. Then he undertook to write the history of a highway robber who had been hanged in prison some years before, and whose name was really Jonathan Wild. But he made his imaginary Jonathan much more wicked and much more clever than the real person. Every sentence of this book is better irony — mocking the corrupt

<sup>1</sup> *The history of the adventures of Joseph Andrews, written in imitation of the manner of Cervantes, author of Don Quixote* 1742.

<sup>2</sup> *The life of Mr. Jonathan Wild the Great* 1743.



taste of a public devoted to the literature of mere sensation. As a piece of irony, it is almost worthy of Swift; but it does not define Fielding's real place as a story-teller. This was established by the appearance a few years later of *Tom Jones*,<sup>1</sup> — the best of all his books, the best novel of the 18th century, and probably the best novel ever written since or before. This great masterpiece is thought by some to have been a kind of reply to Richardson's *History of Sir Charles Grandison*, and certainly it made Richardson, for some reason or other, very angry. But it was so incomparably superior to the work of Richardson, and so utterly different in all respects, that we may doubt whether it was really written with any purpose of antagonism. Books written as attacks upon somebody or something, are very seldom of the greatest; but *Tom Jones* is matchless. For the reader of to-day, its pictures of the 18th century seem a little rough, but that is only because the life was really much more rougher then than now.

However rough it may seem, it is impossible not to delight in the book, and to feel a strong liking for the man who wrote it. No manlier book was ever written. In the person of Tom Jones Fielding undertook to give a true history of the life of an ordinary man—not a great gentleman, nor yet a common person, but an ordinary, healthy, fairly educated man, who has to make his way through life as best he can,—without a fortune, without friends, with nothing but common sense to help him. Any ordinary man is likely to make mistakes in struggling with the world—moral mistakes, mistakes of confidence, mistakes of indulgence,—but he learns from his mistakes, and if he have a good heart, he is almost certain to come out all right when the struggle is over. *The History of Tom Jones* is the history of a young man's mistakes and successes, loves and hates, joys and sorrows. The characters in this book live with a life almost as real as that of Shakespeare's persons, and a delightful thing about the volume is its splendid optimism, its sinewy health, its breezy joy. Whoever reads it will find himself happier for the experience; and everybody ought to read

<sup>1</sup> *The history of Tom Jones, a foundling* 1749.

*Tom Jones*. Nobody can claim a knowledge of English prose literature unless he has read this wonderful book.

One more novel Fielding produced—quite different from each of the preceding three: this was *Amelia*.<sup>1</sup> The last novel of Fielding is again quite unlike its predecessors; it is less strong, less animated: but it makes up in great part for these defects by a tenderness which the previous work of Fielding would not have led us to suppose him capable of. *Amelia* is the story of the life of a married woman; and the heroine is the most beautiful of all Fielding's characters of women. About this novel opinions have differed greatly; but the judgment of Thackeray is a good guide, and it is noteworthy that this was the novel which particularly influenced his work. You may remember that Thackeray even gave the same name to one of his most charming female personages. At the same time I must observe to you that Thackeray did not like the moral tone of *Tom Jones* and of *Joseph Andrews*; it was, in his opinion, much too rough for the 19th century. But Thackeray's women are perhaps the most delightful in all English fiction; and it means a great deal to say that Thackeray was inspired for his portraiture by Fielding's *Amelia*.

It will not here be necessary to speak of Fielding's miscellaneous work: the four great novels represent sufficiently well his place in English literature. And that place is the highest possible in a new art. Fielding still remains the greatest of English novelists, and his *Tom Jones* the greatest English novel. His last years were years of great suffering, caused by the hardships of his younger days. No man had a finer bodily constitution; but he had worked prodigiously, and amused himself prodigiously also, while suffering almost always from want of means to live comfortably. Hard work alone will break down any strength; but if you add to this hard work the exhausting forms of reckless amusement,—drinking, banqueting, and late hours of festivity,—you have a condition under which even a giant must break down. And Fielding broke down. In his latter years he obtained a position as magistrate,

<sup>1</sup> *Amelia* 1751.

which gave him a good salary. But he was obliged after a few years to leave England for a warmer country, and he never returned. He was greatly regretted, because greatly loved, by those who knew him. Even his faults were those of a generous and truthful nature; and his follies never injured anybody but himself. You can feel the charm of his character in his books: it is impossible to read them without liking the man.

So much cannot be said for the third great novelist of the time, Tobias Smollett.<sup>1</sup> If we judge this man by his books, we must believe him to have been one of the most detestable persons of his century. Very probably he was. He came of very good parentage, allied to the aristocracy, but he had no personal means, and was obliged to make his own way in the world. Having studied medicine, he was able to obtain a place as surgeon on a man-of-war, and in this capacity he found the way to the West Indies, where he tried to settle down. There he married a young woman whom he supposed to be very rich; but in this he was deceived, and after a few years he returned to London where he tried to live by writing stories and practising medicine at the same time. His first book, *The Adventures of Roderick Random*,<sup>2</sup> is really an account of his own experiences in the navy and in the West Indies, given in the shape of a novel. It is at once a repulsive and yet attractive book—repulsive because of the brutality of the characters and the facts; attractive because of the extraordinary interest and furious vigour of the narrative. You detest almost everybody in the story and yet you cannot deny that the story is good and told with prodigious cleverness. Smollett's genius would appear to have had something in it of the same element which afterwards made Dickens famous in a finer way,—the capacity for observing human peculiarities, and exaggerating them so as to present them somewhat like caricatures. Dickens made his caricatures often lovable, almost always agreeable. Smollett could not do this. He painted the brutalities of his day so as to make them appear much more hateful than they possibly could have been

<sup>1</sup> Tobias George Smollett (1721-1771).

<sup>2</sup> *The adventures of Roderick Random* 1748.

in the nature of things. Life at sea has always been, and still remains, somewhat rough; but we cannot believe that it was ever quite so rough as Smollett describes it,—except upon a pirate-ship, or among buccaneers. Undoubtedly Smollett was attracted by the ugly and the brutal. In his next great novel, we find the very same tone,—*Peregrine Pickle*.<sup>1</sup> In a third and a fourth publication—*The Adventures of Count Fathom*<sup>2</sup> and *The Adventures of an Atom*<sup>3</sup>—the malice and coarseness of Smollett's real character are still more plainly manifested. These books, written in the old picaresque style, are very brutal and very nasty satires, in which the writer is gratifying personal feeling as well as endeavouring to ridicule the faults of his time. They do not rank with his first two productions. A much better book—the best of all that he wrote—is *Humphrey Clinker*;<sup>4</sup> and this was produced only a little time before his death. All his life Smollett was quarrelling, hating and violently abusing people, either in books or in newspapers. He must have been a most disagreeable as well as a most unhappy man. That he had genius is certain, but it was the genius without any sense of beauty. A good proof of the fact is that when he was sick, and had to travel in Italy for his health, and obtained an opportunity to study, at Rome, and in Florence, and elsewhere, the wonders of Roman and Greek art,—the work of the Renaissance in painting and in architecture,—he could find nothing to admire. He only abused everything that he saw, whether cathedral, painting or statue. This part of his writing is very curious; it is a complete revelation of insensibilities to the beautiful. It was finely satirized by Sterne, who called Smollett by the now immortal name of “Smelfungus” and observed that he ought to have expressed his opinions about art *only* to his doctors.

It would not be amiss to say that as Richardson portrayed the feminine sentimentality of his time, and Fielding the manly

<sup>1</sup> *The adventures of Peregrine Pickle. In which are included, Memoirs of a Lady of Quality* 1751.

<sup>2</sup> *The adventures of Ferdinand Count Fathom. By the author of Roderick Random* 1753

<sup>3</sup> *The history and adventures of an atom* 1769.

<sup>4</sup> *The expedition of Humphrey Clinker. By the author of Roderick Random* 1771.

vigorous realities of life, Smollett represented, and more than represented, English brutality, English coarseness, and English want of feeling. He was certainly, in a moral sense, behind his age rather than with it. But this would not sufficiently define Smollett's place as a novelist. He was more than this, and he is still read with pleasure by boys,—or at least by lads just old enough to feel the charm of adventure and the love of danger. For success in the world, a certain amount of roughness is not undesirable in young men; and such young men like Smollett. But we can better place him by calling him the father of the writers of the sea novels. Smollett has inspired almost every writer of the kind even up to the living time of Clark Russell and Rudyard Kipling. And, speaking of the latter, I believe that a good deal of the roughness complained of in the tone of Kipling's poems and short stories, can be traced to the influence of Smollett. Among other names of authors who derived from Smollett as tellers of sea stories I may mention especially Captain Marryat. Captain Marryat brought the sea novel to the highest degree of perfection. We shall speak of him again in relation to 19th century romance.

Sterne,<sup>1</sup> the man who not unjustly satirized Smollett, is the fourth great novelist of the 18th century. At least he has always been classed as a novelist; and his influence upon English literature has been altogether upon novel writers and storytellers. Yet in the strict sense of the word, he did not write any novel. He wrote two extraordinary, eccentric, witty, indecent, nondescript books, impossible to class with any other production of English literature in any age. It is not even possible to compare Sterne's book with anything else in English. We must go to France to find the like of it, and then to the France of the 16th century. The only other writer in all European literature resembling Sterne is François Rabelais, and there is no doubt that Sterne plagiarized a great deal from Rabelais. Indeed he makes no secret of his thefts from the great author of *Pantagruel*. But you must not think of him only as a mere imitator,—not any more than you should think

<sup>1</sup> Laurence Sterne (1713-1768),


of Shakespeare as an imitator. Sterne had a wonderful genius of his own; and it enabled him to recreate and to embellish all that he appropriated.

A word about the man is necessary to a proper understanding of his literary history and relationships. Laurence Sterne was born in Ireland, the son of an English army officer, who was constantly being ordered from one place to another,—kept travelling around the world, in short, much as multitudes of English officers are kept travelling to-day. The family suffered a great deal from changes of climate, fatigue of journeys, and all the discomforts of military voyaging. Most of the children born to Roger Sterne died young. Opportunities for education were difficult in the case of the little survivors,—Laurence and a sister. The boy did not learn to write until he was nearly fourteen, but then he displayed extraordinary aptitude, and other relations helped towards his education. Presently Lieutenant Sterne, while at Gibraltar, got into a quarrel with another officer about a goose, and the result was a duel in which Sterne was run through the body. He never recovered from the wound, although his death took place much later in the West Indies. Young Sterne had lost his father; but his relations took good care of him, and put him through Cambridge University. After leaving the university he became a clergyman of the Church of England, and settled down in the country. Until he was nearly 50 years old, he never thought of writing a book. He passed his leisure time in ways the most extraordinary, considering that he was a clergyman. He hunted, and rode, and fished, and drank, and played cards, and made love to all the women within reach,—even after he had become a married man. He was what was called in old times “a roystering parson.” No man ever was less fitted to become a clergyman, and when he turned to authorship, it was to write the most indecent book in all English literature. I do not mean to condemn the books merely upon account of their immodesty,—for the immodesty is redeemed by great wit,—great tenderness, great beauty of style and sentiment. I only mean to say that it is very curious that the most audacious book of this sort

in all English literature — true literature — should have been written by a clergyman. But up to the age of Sterne the very same thing might be said concerning Sterne's great French prototype Rabelais. The indecency of Rabelais most astonishes us in view of the fact that it is the work of a monk. However, we must acknowledge that Sterne is at times a little more wicked than Rabelais ever becomes. Perhaps, in both cases the anomaly between the author's calling and the character of his book, was due to the same cause. Neither the French monk of the 16th century nor the fox-hunting English clergyman of the 18th century was fitted by nature for religious duty. Both men had taken up an unsuitable profession for reasons of necessity or interest; and neither of them could help expressing his true nature through the pages of his book.

A word about Rabelais — you cannot understand the existence of Sterne without some knowledge of Rabelais. Rabelais was a wonderful man, who, in the age of inquisitions and burning, dared to satirize not only the follies of his age in general, but the corruptions and the ignorance of his own Church, in particular, by means of an extraordinary romance. This romance was modelled in a way after the old French prose romances of previous times; but it resembled true romance much less than *Don Quixote* resembled the Spanish romances of chivalry. It is much more of a satire than the work of Cervantes. The narrative of Rabelais is put into language of the most extraordinary kind — terms of scholarship being everywhere mixed with common terms of filth and nastiness, so that the humour is of the most grotesque description. Then everything ridiculed by Rabelais is ridiculed in a mixture of terms partly learned, partly obscene or vulgarly dirty. And Rabelais had an extraordinary delight in the use of dirty words. To mention or to qualify everything by a *single dirty* word was not Rabelais's custom; on the contrary he would pick out all the dirty or ridiculous words in the French language (sometimes also borrowing from other languages) and put all these vulgar words before the name of the thing he wanted to ridicule. Sometimes he arranges all these terms in alphabetical

order. You will find hints of this system also in the books of Sterne.

Another of Rabelais' characteristics is a provoking habit of digression. By digression we mean leaving the subject under consideration to talk about something else—something having no real relation to it at all. Many great writers have been guilty of digression, even in our own time:—De Quincey, for example. But Sterne, following Rabelais, carried digression to a degree never seen before; he actually made it the rule rather than the exception,—actually treated it as a fine art. He has himself compared his method of telling a story to one who, instead of travelling a straight line, should travel something like this  In his own book the line describing it is more irregular. Great patience is required to read Sterne all through, but that patience will be rewarded.

This ends the comparison between Sterne and Rabelais. Rabelais was insolently dirty,—purposely dirty. But he wrote for a very rough age. Sterne was too fine a gentleman, too nervous, too delicate to be dirty; he never makes the reader smell unpleasant things; but, on the other hand, he is morally indecent to a much greater degree than Rabelais. He is this not only directly and boldly; but much more by suggestion: there are double meanings on almost every page, and these are often of a kind which no man could venture to put into print to-day. But in spite of this there is wit, beauty and fine pathos at times! This may surprise you. Nothing seems so far removed from pathos as the tendency to indecent joking. The man who writes the latter is not suspected of being capable of the former. There is no possibility of imagining tenderness in the case of Rabelais. But Sterne has the strange power of mingling the two tendencies together in a single artistic production. This is a very rare power. In the present century there was one great French writer who had the same ability,—and curiously enough, he was also a close student of Rabelais: I mean Balzac. There is a wonderful book by Balzac written in old French,—the French of the early 17th century, and called



the *Contes Drolatiques*. I believe you have in the library a very good English translation entitled *Droll Stories Collected from the Abbeys of Touraine*. Now in this book you will find an extraordinary admixture of tenderness and moral looseness,—beautiful feeling side by side with indecent jests. At one moment you laugh at a reckless jest; and next moment you find your heart touched and tears in your eyes. This is astonishing art. Perhaps it is especially the story in that book called *Le Péché Veniel* (The Venial Sin) which you will find to illustrate the extraordinary skill I have suggested. But there are several other stories in that book showing the very same thing. Sterne had this kind of art in the 18th century and we can forgive him for a great many naughty things because of possessing it.

All Sterne's work excepting some sermons, which I advise you not to read, can be had to-day in two volumes—even, for that matter, in one. It is represented by two distinct works, *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy*<sup>1</sup> and *A Sentimental Journey*. The first of these books was originally issued in a great number of volumes; and we wonder at the patience of the generation who liked the book so much as to make it an immediate success in spite of this peculiar way of publication. It is very hard to describe in brief the real nature of this composition. It is not a novel, yet it is full of stories and studies of real life. It is not an essay; yet it is more than half made with the real material of an essay,—philosophical and moral reflections. We are first introduced to the hero Tristram Shandy in his babyhood; the first chapter assuring us that the book is a kind of autobiography. But thereafter Tristram Shandy himself does not make his appearance more than twice or thrice. The rest of the book chiefly refers to the events of the house—conversations between Tristram's father and mother, between Tristram's uncle Toby and his servant the Corporal, and between various visitors to the house and members of the family. At the latter part of the book there is a love episode but of a

<sup>1</sup> *The life and opinions of Tristram Shandy* 1759-67 (Vols. I & II, 1760; III to VI, 1761-2; VII & VIII, 1765; IX, 1767).

most Rabelaisian kind—telling how a certain handsome widow Shadman determined to get Uncle Toby for a husband, and how with the help of her servant she appears to have brought about the desired result. The humour here is really of a dramatic kind; the two servants being pitched against each other in the battle of diplomacy; and the widow herself being able single-handed to defeat the united powers of Uncle Toby, the elder Mr. Shandy and all the family advisers. Then the book ends as suddenly as it began. There really is not any beginning, any true middle, or any end. The whole thing is an amazing medley. And yet after having read this you never can forget the scenes which it has opened to your eyes;—you feel that you have been looking as through a window, upon real warm human life,—the life not of to-day by its outward aspect, and yet the life of all times by its inner human aspect. What could be a more commonplace subject, for example, than the conversation of a father and a mother as to whether their child son should have a pair of trousers made for him or not? (I suppose you know that the first great day of an English or French boy's life is the day when he is first permitted to put on trousers). But the chapter in *Tristram Shandy* as to whether Tristram should or should not be “breeched”—so they called it in those times—is one of the masterpieces of literature. Sterne could make the most commonplace thing of intense interest—merely the conversation of two servants in the kitchen, or the accident of a visiting doctor falling off his horse, or the gossip of a midwife about events of her neighbourhood. Of course the greater number of the episodes are comical. But the few pathetic episodes are of startling power, and cannot be too highly praised. Such an incident as the death of Lefèvre has been justly admired by all critics; and I believe that it has found its way into the most of standard books upon elocution. Many schoolboys who could not be allowed by reason of age to read *Tristram Shandy* are nevertheless taught to recite the scene of Lefèvre's death—by way of an exercise in the art of oratory.

Much shorter as a composition is the *Sentimental Journey*.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *A sentimental journey through France and Italy by Mr Yorick* 1768.

The *Sentimental Journey* is the narrative of personal experiences of travel in France. It is certainly the best of the two—though not the best known,—in spite of the fact that a beautiful French edition was published some years ago with illustrations at a luxurious price. From the literary point of view this book can be fairly described as the best attempt ever made by any Englishman to write English with the grace and wit of a Frenchman writing French. Of course Sterne was a perfect master of both languages—a perfect mastery means much more than a literary knowledge of French. He spoke it like a mother tongue. But I have often told you that French is a finer language than English, it has a longer period of civilization behind it; it can convey delicacies of feeling and grace of fancy impossible for the English tongue to utter. Hence, it is next to impossible to produce French literary effect with English words. But this next to impossible, Sterne achieved. You almost forget that you are reading English. Besides it is not a mere question of language and style—the whole tone of the 18th century French life breathes from the pages. And yet another wonder; the book is not a mere reflection of any one class or kind of life. Sterne could make himself at home with French princes and princesses and certainly was well received by good French society; but he was quite as much at home with the flower girls of the shops, the servants of his hotel, the coachman who drove him from town to town, or the peasant maidens dancing the wine festival dance in the fields of Provence. Of all these and much more he has given us perfect little pictures full of joy, merriment, sunshine; with occasionally a jest or a tear by way of variety. There is not a single tiresome page in the *Sentimental Journey*. It ends as no other modern English book has ended and no future English book is ever likely to end. I can not tell you how it ends—that is the reason I say that no man is likely, in England at least, ever to attempt another such ending. For the Japanese student the *Sentimental Journey* will prove better reading than *Tristram Shandy*; but some knowledge of French and of French life is necessary to proper enjoyment of it.

Sterne died, quite suddenly, shortly after becoming famous, died away from home, in a little room above a London shop, which he had temporarily occupied. The people there did not know who he was; and somehow or other his dead body appears to have been sold for medical purpose, and to have been bought by a Professor of Anatomy in the University of Cambridge. That was Sterne's university; and it is not a little strange that his body should have found its way back in such a fashion to the dissecting room of the same institution.

Very important is his place in literature for one reason — the new tone of refinement and of toleration and of kindness which his books introduced. Even Fielding seems rough at times compared with Sterne. The century had been a very coarse one; and Sterne was the first to say, "Try to be a man of good taste and delicacy in all things. If you want to tell a nasty story, try to tell it at least in a refined way. If you want to ridicule the follies of humanity, let the ridicule be of a gentlemanly kind,—not of the brutal kind. Be free in the expression of your thoughts and emotions; but do not consider yourselves free to give pain, free to hurt the self-respect of weaker minds and weaker hearts." In this teaching he was really a good preacher—although his religious preaching seems not to have been good at all. But after Sterne there was an end of the old brutality of English literature. Who could have dared to write in the manner of Smollett after having read pages of Sterne?

These were the really great novelists of the 18th century. There may be mentioned a few other names; but they are far less important, with the exception of two. The two are works of Johnson and Goldsmith; and only one of them can properly claim to be a novel. Johnson's *Rasselas*<sup>1</sup> is usually classed with 18th century novels; but I think that this is wrong. *Rasselas* is not a novel any more than *Utopia* of More or Sidney's *Arcadia* are novels. It is not a reflection of real life at all, but a romance with a didactic and philosophical purpose. As a romance it is now old-fashioned; and you will find it a little tiresome. It is chiefly interesting as an example of Johnson's style. But

<sup>1</sup> *The prince of Abissinia* (*Rasselas*), a tale 1759.

Goldsmith's *Vicar of Wakefield*<sup>1</sup> is really a novel of the 18th century—though not so great as the novels of the Great Four. Indeed it would be better described as a novellette by reason of its brevity, its idealism and the small number of the characters that move across its pages. Also it is not a work which is quite in tone with the time; it is much more like some of the early French stories than like the work of Fielding's age. I suppose that you have all read it. As a picture of 18th century life it is not altogether cheerful, and the reader is glad that the conditions described have become impossible. Noblemen in England to-day cannot kidnap girls without considerable difficulty and the sponging houses no longer exist. No doubt there are English people of rank quite as bad and quite as good as those described in Goldsmith's story; but the manifestation of the goodness or the badness would now be of quite a different kind. There are faults in this book of a kind which no modern novel writer would commit. Yet it is an immortal book, because the real human nature figured in it has always been and will always be. The simple-minded and kindly-hearted clergyman; the aristocratic seducer; the weak and amiable victim; the clumsy well-meaning son; the sharpers at the fair—all these are still alive, and to be found almost anywhere, in almost any country. They do not now wear the same clothes and wigs. But their hearts and minds have changed very little in course of a hundred years. Only two more novels need be here mentioned. Johnstone's *Chrysal*,<sup>2</sup> and Miss Fielding's *David Simple*.<sup>3</sup> The first book is of a kind somewhat related to the picaresque novel. It is the story of a piece of gold money, which, continually passing from hand to hand, witnesses all kinds of adventures, perceives all kinds of secrets, discovers all kinds of villainies. Making an inanimate object the narrator of a romance was a successful literary device before Johnstone; but his satirical book is perhaps the best of its kind. Early in the 19th century his example was imitated by Douglas Jerrold,

<sup>1</sup> *The vicar of Wakefield* 1766.

<sup>2</sup> Charles Johnstone (1719?-1800?) *Chrysal: or the adventures of a guinea* (anon.) 1760.

<sup>3</sup> Sarah Fielding (1710-1768) *The adventures of David Simple in search of a faithful friend* 1744-52.

whose *Story of a Feather* relates the private history of a number of different women who successively purchased the same ostrich feather to wear in their hats. But Miss Fielding's book is a better example of the real novel. It was not comparable to the great novels of her brother; but it was in its way a very good venture in a new and difficult direction. The story is about a young man in love with two girls at the same time and long unable to decide which he should marry. But now we had better turn to a different department of 18th century prose.

### THE LAST ESSAYISTS OF THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

Among essay writers of the age of Johnson, essayists as distinguished from historians and didactic or theological writers, the greatest figure of the later period was certainly Edmund Burke.<sup>1</sup> Probably Burke was greater as a personality than as a writer—greater as an orator and statesman than as a mere man of letters; but he obtained and still holds immense distinction in both fields. As Johnson was in the literary world the king of his time, so Burke was in matters of political opinion another king,—indeed it may be doubted whether he did not at one time exert even more influence than the reigning monarch. Such was his influence upon public opinion that we must consider him especially as having at an early time decided the hostile attitude of England toward the French Revolution, and as the attitude of England changed the whole course of European history and politics, it is hard to over-estimate the power of Burke's personality.

Next to Johnson, Burke was the most consulted authority on literature of his time; and like Johnson he was a generous friend to literary strugglers, and like Johnson he was a strong and extreme conservative. Beginning life as a law student, and an occasional hack writer for publishers, he gradually worked his way up to the highest possible place, outside of

<sup>1</sup> Edmund Burke (1729-1797).

political preferment, that a private individual could hope to gain. And almost everybody liked him. Johnson not only liked him, but acknowledged his superiority in a curious way. At one time, when Johnson was sick, it was thought that a visit from his friend Mr. Burke might cheer him up; but when the suggestion was made, Johnson said: "No—that fellow taxes all my intellectual powers to the full extent. If I had to talk to him now, sick as I am, it would kill me." In other words Johnson acknowledged that it required a great deal of intellectual quickness and energy to sustain a conversation with his friend—that only a robust mind, in the best of health, was equal to the task. I believe that Johnson never paid such a compliment to any other mortal man; and as in most cases where he did pay compliments this was one well deserved. Burke's political enemies very quickly found that it required extraordinary powers of mind to cope with him. As Johnson at another time said, Burke was a man who appeared distinguished and extraordinary even to the poorest and most ignorant people. "If Mr. Burke," said Johnson, "were to go into a stable to look at a horse, the groom would immediately say, 'This is an extraordinary man.'" We have therefore, in Burke, to consider a character of the rarest kind—equally remarkable for its charm and for its force. Perhaps part of this charm was Irish. Burke was one of the great Irishmen, not an Englishman, of the 18th century, and in point of personal charm, there is only one other Irishman of the age to be compared with him—that was Bishop Berkeley. But Berkeley, with all his loveliness, did not possess the dominating power, this personal force of Burke. In his power to dominate, Burke rather resembled Swift; but he had none of Swift's cruelty.

It is by speeches chiefly, or short political essays, that Burke is best known; — though it is by his æsthetic essay, *On the Sublime and Beautiful*,<sup>1</sup> that he is most closely and most nobly related to literature. Altogether he was the author of about 60 different publications, mostly brief; and these were originally

<sup>1</sup> *A philosophical inquiry into the origin of our ideas of the sublime and beautiful* 1756.

republished in book form in 16 volumes. You will see from this fact that Burke's literary production was not small. We have now to consider what it represents in the evolution of English prose.

It represents really the beginning of a new prose style. It is very different to the other prose of the 18th century. It is quite as musical as the best prose of the classic writers, but in another way; and it cannot be called, in the true sense, classic. It is too rich in ornament—too crowded with imagery and metaphor,—too passionate and warm for classic taste. It has extraordinary faults as well as extraordinary beauties, and the faults are faults of good taste. Mr. Taine, who was an excellent critic of 18th century literature, has actually said that Burke had no good taste. Perhaps from the classic point of view, this criticism is undeniable. But there is a strange and splendid beauty,—a disordered beauty,—in this faulty style;—it is immensely powerful; it astonishes and delights by its rapid succession of discordant but most effective imagery; it has the charm and the colour of some tremendous panorama. The chief fault of taste is in the direction of violence. For Burke, in his anger, thought no comparison, no metaphor, no simile below the dignity of literature if it could help him to vividly express the indignation that burned within him. He would compare his antagonists or their measures to insects, to reptiles, to tapeworms, to whales, to mythological monsters or to tropical amphibians, when it suited him. And the pain and the anger that he felt goes into the mind and heart of his reader. No matter what people may say about the faults of the style, nobody can deny its prodigious power to move the emotions. Mr. Saintsbury, another critic, says that Burke failed in two great respects; that he had no command over tears and laughter; that he cannot make us laugh and that he never makes us weep. Mr. Saintsbury is a very great critic; and I suppose that what he says in this regard is true. But the purpose of Burke was not to make people smile or weep,—not to produce laughter or tears; it was to stir their moral sympathies, their sense of justice or their capacities of honest indignation. And this



object was always fulfilled. Acknowledging the correctness of the two criticisms to which I have referred, still the fact remains that Burke was one of the greatest masters of language who belonged to English literature.

The new style which Burke unconsciously invented, — a style simply the expression of his own supreme character—laid the foundation to what we call the “coloured prose.” All the richly florid prose of the 19th century is derived from it: I mean such prose as of De Quincey, of Ruskin, and in a less degree even of Carlyle with his German eccentricities. Probably Burke influenced Macaulay a great deal also—though without spoiling him. Burke is a dangerous, a very dangerous master. One is much more tempted to imitate his form than to go to the trouble of analysing his merits. He is not a good model for the Japanese student of style—quite the reverse. But he is a very good subject for the study of the orator, the parliamentarian,—for any public speaker who can be judicious enough to observe the general effect of such eloquence, without trying to imitate the detail and the individual peculiarity of the style.

This brings me to make a second necessary definition of Burke’s literary place. I have said that he is the father and founder of modern coloured prose; but this prose, for the most part, was not intended merely for reading. I doubt whether Burke seriously cared to figure as authority in matters of style. He wrote his addresses only thinking how they would sound as delivered with all the art of a well-trained voice. The style of Burke is not the style of the ordinary essayist, nor of the historian; it is the style of the orator. I may call this style, therefore, the best example of 18th century oratorical prose.

Now there are two kinds of oratory—political oratory and religious oratory. The oratory of Burke has this peculiarity,—that while its form is the oratory of the statesman, of the secularian, its feeling, its whole tone is much like that of religious oratory. Burke uses language which no preacher would use—at least no preacher of so dignified a church as the Church of England. But the way that he feels is the way of the preacher; the moral appeal is of the same kind; and you feel as

you read him that you are being preached to. About political, social and even literary matters, Burke thought only from the standpoint of ethics;—hence the passionate character of his language of denunciation. This man, who had such power that he could change the whole tide of English feeling on the subject of the French Revolution<sup>1</sup>—such power that to oppose his teaching was dangerous, and that the houses of men like Price and Priestley, who had dared to express sympathy with the French Revolution, were sacked by English mobs,—this man was utterly incapable of entertaining a thought of self-interest. All his policies, all his ethics, all his notions and opinions were solved for him by such simple moral questions as “Is this right?—Is this honest? Is this good for the country and for the people?” In this way he resembled Johnson—also a man of very simple character; but in his hatred of wrong, his furious indignation, he resembled Swift. Very often Burke was wrong. But he was never knowingly wrong. He never said or did anything which he did not believe to be honest and right. And for this his memory remains in honour.

I suppose that in these days of elaborate German psychology, and French psychology on the subject of æsthetics and æsthetic feeling, very few serious thinkers would care to quote from Burke’s essay *On the Sublime and Beautiful*. But perhaps that book shows Burke at his best in the calmer and gentler phases of his noble spirit; and it may be considered, from a purely literary point of view, as his least faulty production. Yet, at one time, this essay was the only important essay upon æsthetic problems written by any English subject; and it long remained a solitary authority. It is said to have influenced thought upon æsthetic subjects, both in France and in Germany; and it is supposed that Lessing obtained a great deal of inspiration from it. At all events, I think it is one of the books which every student of English literature should try to read. It marked an epoch. Burke was not only the founder of coloured prose;—he was among the first, if not the very first, who taught Englishmen to think seriously upon the problem of

<sup>1</sup> By his *Reflections on the revolution in France* 1790.

beauty and the intrinsic signification of art.

There is none among the later essayists of Johnson's time at all comparable to Burke, beyond those already mentioned. Many of the greatest thinkers and most valuable writers of the age, moreover, do not strictly belong to literature at all. For instance, the great father of English political economy, Adam Smith,<sup>1</sup> cannot be said to belong to literature by his *Wealth of Nations*;<sup>2</sup> — nor can Malthus<sup>3</sup> be said to belong to literature by his most famous treatise on population.<sup>4</sup> These men, like Bentham, like Godwin, like half a dozen others, will always be remembered in their relation to science or philosophy; but they were not stylists, and we need not dwell upon them. On the other hand the names of Lord Chesterfield, and Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, and Horace Walpole, and the mysterious Junius have literary claim. We turn to the last mentioned first, because he approaches more closely to Burke, than to any other figure of the time. No less than twelve different persons have at different times been accredited with the famous or infamous letters called *The Letters of Junius*<sup>5</sup> — and even now their real authorship remains unknown. There is some reason to believe them to have been written by Sir Philip Francis, a member of the Government service; but up to the present year nobody can say that the real writer is ever likely to become known. Fifty years ago *The Letters of Junius* were considered models of good English and were even compared with the speeches of Burke. But no critic of to-day would make such a comparison; nor would anybody offer these *Letters* to English students as models of style. This is not because the English is bad—for it is very good; it is because there are so many better things to choose from, and because the study of such pages is not apt to improve the moral feeling of the readers. These so-called letters, anonymously published in a newspaper, have the length, the polish, the rhetoric of essays; but they are in themselves nothing more than violent personal attacks upon the statesmen and

<sup>1</sup> Adam Smith (1723-1790).

<sup>2</sup> *An inquiry into the nature and causes of the wealth of nations* 1776.

<sup>3</sup> Thomas Robert Malthus (1766-1834).

<sup>4</sup> *An essay on the principle of population* etc. 1798, 1803.

<sup>5</sup> '*Junius*' *Letters* 1769-72.

the Government of the time. The invective is ferocious, the personalities often brutal; and we may justifiably wonder whether any man would have written in this way, if his name were known. Swift would have had the courage, perhaps; but I can think of nobody else. Burke had any amount of courage; but Burke has no personal cruelty in his composition, — and he would not have attacked anybody exactly after the fashion of Junius. Of course, the literature of invective has a certain value; and I suppose that *The Letters of Junius* still retain some value of that kind. But, if for the purpose of controversy or of political oratory any of you should wish to study the art of great invective—then it is not to Junius that I should recommend you to go, but to Swift and to Burke,—remembering the while, that while it is a grand thing to attack great abuses, general wrongs, it is never a grand thing to attack persons. This was not so well understood in the 18th century as it is understood to-day. Indeed, by confining one's attacks to persons, the almost invariable result is to create sympathy for the person attacked. There is no doubt that Burke's own impeachment of Warren Hastings,<sup>1</sup> although intended much more as an attack upon great political abuses of power than as an attack upon Hastings himself, actually created a good deal of false pity and unreasoning sympathy for the chief criminal.

The next figure to be considered is that of Philip Dormer Stanhope, Lord Chesterfield,<sup>2</sup>—the famous author of the famous *Letters*. Professor Saintsbury has said that it was a great misfortune for Chesterfield that the world should have to look at him “through the spectacles of a much greater man's indignation.” The greater man was of course Dr. Johnson. No doubt Lord Chesterfield had abilities; but I doubt whether any of his admirers could prove that Dr. Johnson was wrong in his judgment of the man—notwithstanding the fact that Johnson was angry when he pronounced it. Let us here make a little digression; — for it is necessary that you should know something about the history of the quarrel between these men. The quar-

<sup>1</sup> *Speeches on the impeachment of Warren Hastings* 1788.

<sup>2</sup> Philip Dormer Stanhope, 4th Earl of Chesterfield (1694-1773).

rel is not in itself at all important; but it draws our attention to an important thing—the 18th century relation of patron to author.

There are now no patrons. The custom of literary patronage is very ancient—we find it twenty-five hundred years ago among the Greeks and at a much later date among the Romans. It was revived principally after the Renaissance; and it continued in England up to the end of the 19th century. To explain the custom in the fewest words possible, I will only say that after the revival of learning it was considered a good custom for any rich man and capable man among the nobility to help some authors with gifts of money,—to assist them in finding publishers,—to smooth away for them the difficulties of life. Some patrons would take an author into their houses, and treat him somewhat as a poor student might be treated by a rich family in Tokyo—that is to say, something better than a servant, yet not quite so well as a member of the family. You will remember that the great Swift had Sir William Temple for a patron, and that Temple proved a very harsh master. A much happier case was that of the poet Crabbe: he had Edmund Burke for his patron; and Burke treated him like a son. Other examples might be mentioned. But there were strong-willed, independent men, who would not enter the house of a patron under any circumstances;—they would only ask for financial help in their undertaking. Men of this class would approach some noble man by letter, or by dedicating a book to him, or by offering to make the dedication—asking for certain help. Dr. Johnson was a man of the latter kind; he would ask a favour only as a prince or a king might ask it. He approached Chesterfield to ask for that nobleman's patronage, only because Lord Chesterfield had long been known as a good scholar and a patron of learning. Now Johnson wanted, and badly wanted, some help for the publication of his great *Dictionary*. Nothing is so difficult as to make a good dictionary; few things are more costly to publish; and it usually takes a long time to get back the money expended in such undertakings. But as this undertaking was really for the benefit of

the English language, and of scholarship generally, Johnson thought it only reasonable to ask Chesterfield for some assistance. Chesterfield promised a great deal, sent Johnson a very little money and then took great care not to see him for a number of years. Therefore Johnson was very angry—angry because Chesterfield had lied to him and caused him to expect money that never came. So when Johnson finished his *Dictionary* without anybody's help, he dedicated it to Lord Chesterfield as he had promised—but the dedication was really a terrible thing and it damned Lord Chesterfield in public opinion for a hundred years. It was a fine piece of writing—dignified, strong, containing not one unpleasant word; but it was the most terrible punishment that could have been imagined for falsehood. After that Dr. Johnson never had anything good to say about Chesterfield's work. But there is no doubt that Chesterfield acted very dishonourably.

Now a word about Chesterfield. He represented in himself everything artificial and detestable in the 18th century, as well as its refinements. Before Johnson's day even, it had been thought that an English gentleman ought to show no emotion, to feel no enthusiasm, to indulge no admiration, to appear as much like a wooden man or walking statue as possible. He was to have all his actions and thoughts and habits regulated by irrefragable laws. You can imagine one reasonable side of such a theory of conduct—the duty of high self-control. But you can also imagine a very unreasonable side to the practice of this theory by untruthful or hypocritical men. I think that Chesterfield represents the hypocritical class to a great extent. His entire life was one uninterrupted piece of acting. He had a rule for everything and he actually wrote down a defiance to the effect that no man could truthfully say that he had ever seen Lord Chesterfield laugh. Perhaps this is true. But imagine what an unpleasant character must be the man who could boast of never having laughed in his life. All his life was only acting. And Lord Chesterfield, who never laughed in his life, was not very particular about his morals. He had an illegitimate son whom he appears to have well provided

for, but to whom he always preserved the strange attitude of a patron, rather than of a father. That was the style of the 18th century—though not the style of men like Burke. Chesterfield's great anxiety was to make his son as much like himself in character as possible; and it was for his sake that the famous *Letters* were written. The attempt to educate his son in this way was not successful; and the young man died before reaching his intellectual maturity.

When Dr. Johnson got a copy of those *Letters* and had read them, and was asked for his opinion of the book, he said that it represented "the morals of a whore, and the manners of a dancing master."

Now this is really true. You cannot possibly get over certain disgusting immoralities which appear in Chesterfield's *Letters*—cynical instructions to his son on the subject of relation to women, showing a strange amount of cold cruelty, and a strange absence of what we should call a good conscience. And again there is no denying that the book contains a great deal of instruction how to bow, how to wipe one's nose, how to cough, how to wear a sword so that the scabbard does not get between your legs and cause you to fall down when you walk,—and all these things really are the things which dancing masters should know how to teach, and which might therefore be called "the manners of a dancing master." Another thing that Johnson said about the book is also probably not far from the truth,—namely, that a young man brought up according to the teachings of the *Letters* would make a good subject for a tragic novel. Several persons had suggested a novel of this kind,—that should show the results of such immoral teachings; and it was proposed to make the father, the teacher, a victim of his own teaching. Johnson approved this. But this is not the whole of the truth about the *Letters*. They are perfect models of cold, polished English, and they perfectly reflect the ideal style of the man-of-the-world of the 18th century. If only for this, they have literary importance. And in the second place, they are full of good advice and keen observation—notwithstanding the question of the character of certain pages.

Revised and expurgated, they would still make good reading for young men. Finally—and this is an important thing to remember—they were not intended to be published at all. Nor were they published by Chesterfield: they were published after the death of his son by that son's widow.<sup>1</sup> I should recommend you to look at these letters when you have time, and to judge for yourselves what real merit they possess. They will certainly amuse you in some parts; and you will not find any part dull.

More deservedly famous as an essayist was Lady Mary Wortley Montagu.<sup>2</sup> This extraordinary woman lived through a great part of the 18th century, and exercised much social as well as literary influence. As a child she was wonderfully beautiful, and was introduced by her father to a famous Club—the Kit-Cat Club—at which she was toasted as the beauty of the time. Growing up she had scarcely a rival among the handsome women of the day; and portraits of her may still be seen which justify the praise of her contemporaries. But her attractions were not merely physical; she was the most intellectual woman of her age. Educated privately by no less a teacher than Bishop Burnet, she early imbibed a great love for philosophy and the severer forms of literary scholarship. While still in her teens she translated difficult Greek authors with the greatest ease. And another thing by which she is remembered is that she first introduced into England, from Turkey, the practice of vaccination for small-pox. Marrying a gentleman who was appointed ambassador to Turkey, she passed several years in that country which she described in a series of most interesting letters. In Turkey, however, she herself got the small-pox, and lost her wonderful beauty: it was this misfortune, no doubt, which impelled her to interest herself so earnestly in the question of vaccination. After returning to England, strangely enough, she separated from her husband—although they never had a quarrel; then she went away again to Italy, and lived separated from England and her people for nearly twenty years. On the whole it must be confessed that

<sup>1</sup> *Letters to his son Philip Stanhope 1737-68* (Published by Mrs Eugenia Stanhope. 2 vols. 1774).

<sup>2</sup> Lady Mary Wortley Montagu (1689-1762).



this wonderful woman achieved much less than might have been expected from one so gifted in all respects. Her life was a long series of quarrels and troubles. You remember that she had a little quarrel with Pope and that Pope wrote very wicked things about her. She had also quarrels with most of the distinguished people of her kind. She knew Johnson, and the two did not get along very well together—though Johnson admired her great talents. No doubt she was a most imperious woman—and whoever refused to submit to her dictate was almost certain to have trouble with her. On the other hand she appears to have had scarcely any of the quality we call *tenderness*—a quality which means so much in literature. You will perceive the absence of this sympathetic element all through her letters. They are witty, brilliant, surprisingly clever, surprisingly picturesque; but they are strangely cold.

It is by her letters<sup>1</sup> alone that she belongs to the great prose literature of the 18th century. There are two sets of these letters—the letters written from Turkey, and the letters written from Italy or elsewhere. Some good critics prefer the letters treating of social matters and Italian experiences. I must say that I greatly prefer the Turkish letters. They were beautifully published with wonderful pictures of Constantinople; and I remember that it was from reading these letters and looking at the beautiful steel engravings which accompanied them that I first obtained some vivid ideas of Oriental life. Since that time, hundreds of books about Turkey have been written, but I do not think that the book of Lady Mary has even yet been surpassed.

Of course I must say something to you about James Boswell<sup>2</sup>—though I suppose you have learned a good deal about his wonderful book. Boswell was a young Scotch gentleman, of independent fortune, who came to London about 1761 and made the acquaintance of Dr. Johnson for whom he immediately expressed a sentiment of admiration but little removed from idolatry. Thereafter for twenty-one years, he constantly

<sup>1</sup> *Letters* (1763-67, 1790, 1820).

<sup>2</sup> James Boswell (1740-1795).

followed Johnson about, making himself as familiar as he dared, and writing down in a little note-book every thing that Johnson did or said. The extraordinary thing is that Johnson tolerated him, for the great Doctor professed a supreme dislike for all Scotchmen and this little Boswell was the most unpleasant kind of Scotchman. Moreover he was very inquisitive, very talkative, and somewhat impudent,—three things which Johnson detested. Perpetually Johnson snubbed him, frightened him, said rough things to him, put him to shame in company. But he bore all this quite patiently, always confessing himself wrong, and writing down the hard things that Johnson had said to him in his little note-book. It mattered not to him how much so great a man snubbed him; for he thought it was an honour and a privilege even to be permitted to enter the same room with Dr. Johnson. And after all he must have been a good-hearted fellow—otherwise the Doctor could never have endured him. After Johnson's death Boswell published all the contents of his note-books, which had been steadily kept for twenty-one years; and the result was the best biography ever written in any language of any human being. This is now universally acknowledged. There is really no other biography to be compared with Boswell's *Life of Johnson*.<sup>1</sup> It is the classic biography. We may of course use it as a standard by which to estimate such excellent biographies as Lockhart's *Life of Scott*, Moore's *Life of Byron*, Trevelyan's *Life of Macaulay*. But any of these failed to reach the standard—Boswell's biography of Johnson remains unique of its kind.

Horace Walpole<sup>2</sup> is a name which you should remember for other reasons than those which demand its insertion here. He is important as a writer of romance—as the first link in a chain of story-writers who dealt in the Gothic and the horrible—we might call him the founder of the Romance of Mystery. I am referring to his *Castle of Otranto*<sup>3</sup> which appeared early in Johnson's time. But we shall have to speak of all the Romances of Mystery and Horror at a later day, in another place. I am

<sup>1</sup> *The life of Samuel Johnson LL.D.* 1791.

<sup>2</sup> *Horatio or Horace Walpole*, 4th Earl of Orford (1717-1797).

<sup>3</sup> *The castle of Otranto; a Gothic story* (anon.) 1765.

mentioning Walpole here as a letter-writer. As a letter-writer he ranks with Lady Mary—perhaps even excels her; and his letters are famous pictures of 18th century life. Perhaps you may think it strange that I should speak of letter-writers under the head of essayists. But really the 18th century letter-writers wrote their letters like essays; and we may very properly class them with essay literature.

Even the department of natural history gives us some valuable additions to 18th century literature. The famous book called *White's Natural History of Selborne*<sup>1</sup> was written by a country clergyman<sup>2</sup> chiefly to amuse his personal friends, and without the faintest idea of creating a really standard work of natural observation. The whole merit of the volume may be said to lie in the author's remarkably patient, minute and always accurate observations of the habits of birds, animals, fishes,—and of the characteristics of the seasons in the country. Although now more than a hundred years old, and although written considerably before the really scientific period of natural history, this book still delights scientific men; and it has otherwise become a classic. Also let me remind you that it was almost the first book of its kind written by an Englishman. About one hundred years before there was indeed the great Izaak Walton,<sup>3</sup> the author of a book called *The Compleat Angler*,<sup>4</sup>—which has also become a classic. But this delightful book was, after all, little more than a treatise upon fishing. We may say that Gilbert White was really the first to make daily study of bird-life and animal-life a picturesque subject of literature.

<sup>1</sup> *The natural history and antiquities of Selborne* 1789.

<sup>2</sup> Gilbert White (1720-1793).

<sup>3</sup> Izaak Walton (1593-1683).

<sup>4</sup> *The compleat angler* (Part I) 1653; ed. 2, much enlarged 1655; ed. 3, much enlarged, 1661; ed. 4, much enlarged, 1668. *The universal angler* 1676 (Pt. I. Walton's Compleat angler, ed. 5; Pt. II. The compleat angler, being instructions how to angle for a trout or grayling in a clear stream, by C. Cotton; Pt. III. The experienced angler, by Col. R. Venables).

## EIGHTEENTH CENTURY DRAMA

## THE LAST DRAMA OF THE CENTURY

We may say that the history of English drama closes with the age of Johnson. During the time in question there were but two dramatists of any great power; and these have never been succeeded upon the English stage. Indeed, I may tell you that English drama died with the 18th century.

But here I must make a qualification. You must not suppose that no great English plays have been written since the 18th century; on the contrary multitudes of good plays and a few very great plays have been produced even during the Victorian era. Almost every great poet of the time has been a dramatist, Tennyson, Browning and Swinburne must all rank very high as dramatists,—from the literary point of view, but only from a literary point of view. The great English plays of the 19th century are not suited for the stage, with few exceptions; and those few exceptions have not been successful in the meaning of being popular. The general fact may be thus stated:—After the 18th century English plays of literary merit have not been suitable for the stage; and English plays that have been theatrically successful cannot be considered as really belonging to literature. Before the 19th century, it was considered that a play must be both good literature and good drama, in the sense of beingactable. But during nearly a hundred years these two essentials of good dramatic work have scarcely been found together in English production. Accordingly we may say that English drama died with the 18th century.

The two dramatists of whom I have spoken above were Goldsmith and Sheridan. Of Goldsmith's plays in the literature of the time we have already spoken and I need add nothing more regarding his dramatic work than the fact that his plays still "keep the stage"; that is to say, that such comedies as *She Stoops to Conquer*,<sup>1</sup> and *The Good-Natured Man*<sup>2</sup> are still

<sup>1</sup> *She stoops to conquer, or the mistakes of a night, a comedy* 1773.

<sup>2</sup> *The good-natured man, a comedy* 1768.

acted. The same may be said of most of the plays of Sheridan.

Richard Brinsley Sheridan,<sup>1</sup> the last of the great English writers of pure comedy, was like Goldsmith an Irishman; but his life and work were altogether in England, and neither offer us any remarkable Irish features. He was a man of considerable personal charm, obtained at an early age considerable social influence, eventually became a Member of Parliament, and temporarily distinguished himself as an orator. But his relation to English literature is almost entirely through his comedies, and several are still favourites with the English public. The best of these comedies is *The School for Scandal*;<sup>2</sup> but *The Rivals*<sup>3</sup> and *The Duenna*<sup>4</sup> are still acted, — and the second named has actually given several household phrases to the English language. Sheridan also wrote an amusing comedy called *The Critic*<sup>5</sup> and several minor pieces, we might say farces, such as *The Scheming Lieutenant*.<sup>6</sup> The bulk of his production is not large; but it is of almost unapproachable quality throughout. For wit and truth to life, we must go back to the best comedy of the Restoration in order to find a parallel; — and then we can find it only in Congreve, the prince of Restoration comedy. However, the plays of Sheridan contain nothing of the gross and cynical kind which offends us in nearly all the comedies of the Restoration. Both Goldsmith and Sheridan present us with comedy completely purified of all coarseness and yet even more interesting and more natural than any Restoration comedy. And their reward has been continued popularity. Not only are these plays still acted in England, they have become an imperishable power of English dramatic literature.

Before leaving the subject of 18th century drama, please to remember that tragedy figures scarcely at all among its productions. The tragedies of Addison and of Johnson cannot be called great works, though possessing merit. Comedy alone

<sup>1</sup> Richard Brinsley Sheridan (1751-1816).

<sup>2</sup> *The school for scandal* 1777.

<sup>3</sup> *The rivals* 1775.

<sup>4</sup> *The duenna* 1775 (1783).

<sup>5</sup> *The critic, or a tragedy rehearsed* 1779.

<sup>6</sup> *St Patrick's day, or the scheming lieutenant* 1775.

takes a permanent value in this expiring season. And of the comedies, I could recommend a Japanese student to read only *The Rivals* of Sheridan. The others, although good, represent features of English society that you would find it very difficult to understand and could not much sympathize with. But *The Rivals* gives us pictures of human nature, which have an interest altogether independent of particular social conditions; and the character of the famous person whose courage “oozes out of his finger’s ends” before the duel, will be appreciated in any part of the world where the English language can be read.

#### THE ROMANCE OF MYSTERY AND HORROR

Really the subject of this division of our lecture belongs both to the 19th and to the 18th centuries. The movement in literature which produced a taste for the pleasure of fear, maintained that form of taste well into the age of Byron and even a little beyond it. But as it began in Johnson’s time, about the year 1764, we must consider it in this place. It is important, because it leads up to the great work of Sir Walter Scott and his followers in romance of another and a higher kind.

You will remember that I told you about the love of the Gothic, the mediæval, created by the poems of *Ossian* and the ballads published by Bishop Percy—in short, by those books which represented the seed of a romantic movement in prose as well as in poetry. The first fruit of this kind of taste was that romance of Horace Walpole, of which I have already spoken—*The Castle of Otranto*. This is a mediæval story, of which the scenes are laid in southern Italy and vicinity; and it is full of what we call blood-curdling adventures, in which the supernatural element is strangely mixed with the natural. Even to-day boys find enjoyment in reading this book,—though it was not written for boys. Its success tempted other authors into the same field of imagination. Afterwards came Mrs.

Radcliffe<sup>1</sup> with her *Mysteries of Udolpho*,<sup>2</sup> a book of very much the same kind, but for one curious distinction. Mrs. Radcliffe had no faith in the supernatural; and she used no ghosts or goblins in her story. She made a compromise. She would describe something as having happened in such a way that the reader felt sure some ghost or goblin or devil must have done it; and then she would explain the whole thing by natural causes. As a boy this book greatly delighted me, but I do not know whether I could find any pleasure in it now. Enough to say that it is still read by the young. A third writer in the same direction was Miss Clara Reeve,<sup>3</sup> who instead of putting the scenes of her romance in Italy and some far-away country, made a good English mystery story *The Old English Baron*.<sup>4</sup> This too still lives as a “juvenile;”—and it is curious to notice how in literary history, the books which appealed to one generation of adults had a tendency to become “juveniles” in another generation. A fourth writer who belonged to the 19th century also, Matthew Gregory Lewis,<sup>5</sup> carried the love of horror and mystery to the extreme pitch in a succession of romances of which *The Monk*<sup>6</sup> is the most famous. *The Monk* is an extraordinarily unpleasant and monstrous story—recounting rape, incest, murder, all kinds of crimes, successfully perpetrated by a Catholic monk, whose profession of religion long enabled him to escape detection. I believe that this book still has readers, but to-day it appeals only to a rather vulgar class of imagination,—not because of the offensiveness of the subject, but because of the extremely low and brutal appeal to the physical impression of horror. However, Lewis, who wrote such detestable things, was personally one of the most amiable and gentle of men, a great friend of Sir Walter Scott, and a great influence in bringing the later success of the romantic movement. You ought to remember him for another book

<sup>1</sup> Ann Radcliffe (1764-1823).

<sup>2</sup> *The mysteries of Udolpho; a romance interspersed with some pieces of poetry*. 4 vols. 1794.

<sup>3</sup> Clara Reeve (1729-1807).

<sup>4</sup> *The champion of virtue, a Gothic story*, 1777. Title changed to *The old English baron* in 2nd (1778) and all later edns.

<sup>5</sup> Matthew Gregory Lewis (‘Monk’ Lewis) (1775-1818).

<sup>6</sup> *Ambrosio, or, the monk* 1795. Entitled in 2nd edn *The monk; a romance*, 1798.

which he edited and edited very well — the famous *Tales of Wonder*,<sup>1</sup> — a series of extraordinary ballads and poems upon horrible subjects, to which Sir Walter Scott made several splendid contributions. And we may mention a fifth writer, Charles Maturin,<sup>2</sup> who wrote up to about 1820, though he began in the latter part of the 18th century to startle people with his astounding nightmares of fancy. Maturin was quite as much of a horror-monger as Lewis; but he was a much better artist; and his *Melmoth the Wanderer*<sup>3</sup> is the best of the whole series of Gothic romances in regard to the terror-producing impression that it makes. It is still read—indeed, almost every man of letters has to become familiar with it. Maturin was not so successful in other directions. He tried drama; and one of his plays was so hideous, so impossibly horrible, that the public refused to listen to it. So far as horror and mystery can be separated in this regard we may say that merely horrible romance died with Maturin. But we can trace his influence much later — especially in the wonderful and terrible book of Mrs. Shelley, the famous *Frankenstein*.

In another way and a much greater way, the romance of mystery was assisted by the literary work of William Beckford,<sup>4</sup> who took an Oriental subject for his theme. Beckford was one of the most extraordinary Englishmen—indeed I should say the most extraordinary of human beings that ever lived. Perhaps you will remember that Byron in *Childe Harold* called him “England’s wealthiest son.” Perhaps no other Englishman had ever been so rich. We have now accounts of larger fortunes, both in America and England, but it is at least certain that no other Englishman either before or since, ever lived upon such a scale as Beckford. Even the living of the King of England was miserable poverty compared with the style in which Beckford lived. His vast wealth was derived from the labour of black slaves on plantations in the West Indies and he spent it as if it were utterly inexhaustible. He had been

<sup>1</sup> *Tales of wonder*. [In verse.] Written and collected by M. G. Lewis. 2 vols. 1801.

<sup>2</sup> Charles Robert Maturin (1782-1824).

<sup>3</sup> *Melmoth the wanderer, a tale* 1820.

<sup>4</sup> William Beckford (1760-1844).



very well educated; he was possessed of extraordinary intellectual powers; he had great artistic tastes;—and yet he was a typical misanthrope. From an early age he lived in super-isolation, in a more than princely domain surrounded with immense walls, lofty as the walls of a prison or a castle. These walls enclosed a landscape garden seven miles in circumference,—so contrived as to imitate almost every variety of scenery. Within the domain were also museums, filled with curiosities and antiquities of all kinds;—the finest library owned by any private individual in Europe;—and a palace in Gothic style, constructed at enormous expense, and dominated by a lofty tower from whose summit a vast amount of country could be seen. There are many strange stories about the building of this palace, which its owner desired to have completed as soon as possible,—obliging the masons to work all night by light of torches. The great tower several times fell, but was as often reconstructed. Employed by Beckford were various professors of arts and sciences,—the most learned that he could obtain; thus he had a professional musician of eminence for his teacher of music; a professor of archæology and pneumatics for his secretary; professors of Arabic and Persian to teach him the two principal languages of the Mohammedan East. Whenever Beckford travelled he was attended by all these;—also by a private physician, a librarian, many cooks and as many servants. The greater part of his youth he passed in luxurious travel during a part of every year,—during the rest of the year in equally luxurious seclusion. As other men devote their lives to some pursuit of a scientific or philosophical kind, Beckford devoted his life to personal pleasure, to the art of living as magnificently as possible without having any intercourse with his fellow men. Such a life is certainly not commendable; and Beckford's hardness and selfishness were almost as remarkable as his wealth and his eccentricity. But this selfish man was at times an artist—really interested in matters of literature and taste. This alone connects him in a way with the subject of our study.

Besides building palaces in England, he also built palaces

abroad. At Cintra in Portugal, the traveller is still shown the grand ruins of one of Beckford's residences. There also he wanted a great tower; and in a country subject to earthquakes this proved even more difficult to build than in England. After several failures he was obliged to abandon the tower; but the rest of his dwelling and its surroundings was the astonishment of the Portuguese.

In the later years of his life, finding his fortune somewhat diminished, he sold his immense estate at Fonthill and then built himself a third palace in the neighbourhood of the city of Bath. This estate may still be seen. As the richest Englishman he was several times Lord Mayor of London; but his acceptance of the office did not bring him much into contact with the rest of the world. Most of his life—a long one, as he was born in 1760 and died in 1844—was uneventful, except to himself. Two of his daughters he married to great noblemen. A third daughter, daring to refuse the titled husband whom her father wished to give her, was immediately dismissed from his presence, and was never forgiven. During the remainder of his life he would never speak of her, or see her, or assist her in any way; and at his death he left her not even a penny. This is a striking instance of his capacity for cold and cruel resentment. In some ways the man reminds us of certain great characters of the Italian Renaissance, who were great poets and artists, although voluptuous and cruel. Yet there was about those Italians an emotional strength, a vigour, an energy, a capacity for affection, which were utterly lacking in Beckford. He was the coldest of men,—cold in his pleasures, incapable of making anybody about him happy, but more than capable of inspiring fear. As his life, nevertheless, reads like a fairy tale,—and as it contains a great moral lesson for the intelligent and unselfish—I would advise you to make a study of it. It were well worth an essay, if any of you should care to attempt an essay upon the Vanity of Riches. And now about his famous book.

If Beckford had been poor, he might have been a great author, though in a different way. He wrote only to amuse

himself. What he did was chiefly done in his young days, when he produced *Memoirs of Extraordinary Painters*<sup>1</sup> and the classical romance of *Vathek*.<sup>2</sup> Then he wrote nothing more for forty years, after which he published two volumes of letters of travel reminiscences of sojourns in Italy, Spain, Portugal chiefly.<sup>1</sup> All these books have extraordinary literary merit; but only one of them need concern us,—the romance of *Vathek*. Curiously enough he wrote this book, published about 1782, in French,—the finest kind of classical French; and did not think of putting it into English until several years later. And the English of *Vathek* still has something French about it—nothing that detracts from its literary perfection, but something that reminds us of the perfect polish and elegance of Voltaire in his stories. Beckford went to the best French models for the study of classic style.

I suppose that you know the story of *Vathek*, and if you do not know, you should certainly read it. An edition can be obtained anywhere for a few cents—though there are luxurious editions worth a good deal of money. One value of the story is the faultless style—there is no better example of style in any short story of the 18th century. But it has a still greater value as a work of pure imagination, being at once unusually powerful, and yet original to a degree unlike anything produced before or since in English,—if we except the equally wonderful Oriental tale of George Meredith, *The Shaving of Shagpat*, written in our own time. Both of these books were the outcome of Oriental studies; but both are intensely original; and have borrowed from Oriental literature nothing but local colour. But there is an immense difference otherwise in the two as to literary and as to moral value. The work of Beckford is a model of classic style, and contains little or no moral or philosophical thought: it is only a splendid story of imagination. The work of Meredith is a model of modern romantic style, written under inspiration of *The Arabian Nights*; and its great value is the philosophical and moral teachings that un-

<sup>1</sup> *Memoirs of extraordinary painters* 1780.

<sup>2</sup> *Vathek* written 1781 or 1782; tr. 1786.

<sup>3</sup> *Letters from Italy, with sketches of Spain and Portugal* 1834.

derlie the wildest of narratives. To find any teaching in Beckford is almost impossible,—although we may consider the study of *Nouronihar* as a remarkable suggestion of how an innocent and beautiful girl might be seduced into all kinds of wickedness by the prospect of wealth and the flattery of greatness; presupposing, of course, some germs of natural evil in her character. But that was not Beckford's object. His object was to dazzle and terrify imagination; and he has done this grandly in the final chapter,—the great scene of the everlasting torment of hell. Excepting the hell of Dante (and it is scarcely fair to compare poetry with prose in this way) the hell of Beckford is almost unapproached in modern literature. Another fact about the book is that it bears a very interesting relation to the life and the thoughts of the writer. Most impersonally written, its details are nevertheless intensely personal in a way that will delight the reader who knows the strange romance of Beckford's private existence. For the palaces of the Caliph of Vathek really represent to us the palaces of Beckford at Font-hill and at Cintra;—the tower of fourteen hundred steps is the tower which Beckford so often built in vain in England or in Portugal; the infernal splendor of the hall of Eblis was painted from some one of the lordly interiors of this millionaire; and not a little of the personal character of Beckford—its coldness, its capacity for cruelty, its admiration for art and beauty—seems to be reflected in the character of the Caliph of Vathek. The girl *Nouronihar* would appear also something of a study from life; but we do not know anything of the original. If you want to have a good imaginative sensation, let me advise you first to read the life of Beckford, and only then to read *Vathek*, or at least to read it over again if you have not done so already. You will find that the effect is immediately enhanced by knowledge of the author's biography.

There was another strange person, of vast wealth, living contemporaneously with Beckford, who made an impression both upon art and literature, — but an impression much less magnificent and less durable. This was Thomas Hope.<sup>1</sup> Hope

<sup>1</sup> Thomas Hope (1770?-1831).

was originally a Dutch merchant, who settled in England, and astonished society by the splendour of his living. But Hope was a dweller in cities; he would not have cared for places in the country; he loved company, and was altogether a most sociable person. Having travelled a good deal in the East of Europe,—especially in Turkey, he there acquired a great taste for the luxurious arts of decoration and of comfort which made beautiful the palaces of the Turkish nobles. He then tried to introduce into England a corresponding taste in matters of house-furnishings and house-decoration; and in this he was partly successful. We may say that he was the first to awaken the English minds to a love of Oriental furniture, Oriental carpets, Oriental hangings,—divans, and things of that kind. He wrote one famous book called *The History of Anastasius*.<sup>1</sup>

Anastasius is a wicked Greek adventurer; and the whole of the book is simply an account of Oriental intrigues in which Anastasius successfully engaged. For this reason the book is much more closely related to the picaresque novel than to the new romance; but it has one relation to the later literature in the fact that it is Oriental, and that it had some effect in quickening public taste in a new direction. It was so successful that its author was not thereafter called by his real name of Thomas: he was everywhere known as Anastasius Hope. But he was not a good scholar like Beckford and the book did not possess sufficient literary merit to preserve it for a generation. It is now almost forgotten, and has been mentioned only because of its temporary relation to literature.

Here we need say no more about the Romance of Horror and Mystery. In the next century it will reappear; but Beckford was the last of the great representatives of this literature in the 18th century. Please, however, to notice one fact,—the place of men like Beckford and Hope in regard to the evolution of a new taste. Previous romantics had revived a liking for Gothic things, mediæval things; these created a new liking for exotic subjects, Eastern romance. Afterwards we shall find

<sup>1</sup> *Anastasius: or the memoirs of a Greek written at the close of the eighteenth century* 1819.

that Scott, Southey, Byron, Coleridge, and a number of others also indulged the public with Oriental themes. And since the 18th century—since Beckford's day—the two chief subjects of romanticism, both in poetry and in prose, have been the mediæval and the Oriental. Before the 18th century, the charm of the Orient had remained almost unknown,—in spite of the Crusades. A public taste had not yet been created for the exotic.

### A GROUP OF REVOLUTIONARIES

We cannot leave the subject of 18th century literature without calling attention to a few names among the many writers profoundly influenced by the French Revolution. You know that at one time there was really a likelihood that the English nation might follow the example of the French,—might proclaim a republic, and the principles of Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity. It was the great influence and eloquence of Burke that especially checked the English sympathy with France; but among Burke's opponents there were persons of great ability who figured in the literature of the time. Three of these only need be mentioned; Thomas Paine, William Godwin, and Mary Wollstonecraft. The last two will especially interest us,—as their history reaches into the 19th century, where it connects itself in a tragical and most fantastic way with the life of the great poet Shelley. If there had been no Godwin, there would still have been a Shelley—but not the Shelley whom we know.

But first a word about Thomas Paine.<sup>1</sup> Paine had a certain relation to literature through the fine strong clear English prose of his *Common Sense*,<sup>2</sup> and of his *Vindication of the Rights of Man*.<sup>3</sup> The first of these books was a strong argument in support of the American Revolution: it was highly successful and made many friends for Paine in America, where he went

<sup>1</sup> Thomas Paine (1737-1809).

<sup>2</sup> *Common sense* 1776.

<sup>3</sup> *The rights of man* 1791-92.

and remained for a considerable time. The second of his books was an argument in support of the French Revolution; and it was written in answer to the terrible speech of Burke. If it was not warmly received in England, it at least aroused enthusiasm in France; and Paine was honoured by a gift of French citizenship and various titles. He was later one of the very few Englishmen to whom Napoleon was kind. You see that he must have been a person of considerable ability and social charm. But all that Paine really did and really was, has been almost forgotten because of the tremendous abuse and calumny excited by his third book *The Age of Reason*.<sup>1</sup> Paine was a deist; and, with the example of Voltaire before him, he wrote a book attacking the Bible—pointing out the contradictions in its records, in its laws, in its history. It would be very difficult to pick out from *The Age of Reason* those passages which are original;—Voltaire had almost exhausted the subject in his attack upon the Bible, both as a history and as a work of religion. But Paine wrote very differently from Voltaire—in a rough, angry, mocking way, that greatly enraged Christian believers. So great was the storm which he raised that even to-day it requires some courage to speak justly about him in print; and a new life of him published some years ago by Moncure D. Conway, a Unitarian clergyman, was tremendously abused by the whole English press. It has been so much the custom to call Paine an atheist, a drunkard, a vulgarian—all of which is untrue—that people are apt to forget the relation of the man to English literature, and the remarkably fine English of his earlier books. From Paine may be said to have descended the whole great school of journalistic writers, among whom the most distinguished perhaps was Cobbett. If only for this reason Paine must be mentioned.

But a greater literary figure than Paine was William Godwin.<sup>2</sup> Beginning life as a dissenting minister, of almost Puritan austerity, he later threw off the ecclesiastical frock altogether, and became a professor of something very like atheism. He

<sup>1</sup> *The age of reason* 1794-5. Pt III. 1811.

<sup>2</sup> William Godwin (1756-1836).

was no doubt a sincere man ; and in freely expressing opinions contrary to those of his time, he had no advantage to hope for. How far his opinions were contrary to the opinions of the time you may judge from the fact that he desired the abolition of all government, the abolition of marriage laws, the abolition of property laws. He held that all government is necessarily bad,—that men would be much better without any government at all. He thought that marriage was bad,—that a man and a woman ought to be able to live together when they pleased, to separate when they pleased. He was much more of a revolutionary than the people who made the French Revolution. These ideas he boldly published in a book called *Political Justice*<sup>1</sup>—afterwards considerably modified. Some people thought him crazy ;—most people thought him a scoundrel. He was neither crazy nor a scoundrel. He was simply a man bewildered by the new ideas of his time, and unable to properly co-ordinate and balance the mass of new facts presented to his mind. As he had to live somehow and could not continue to be a minister, he took to literature and journalism, producing a number of curious books. I need only mention two—*Caleb Williams*<sup>2</sup> and *St. Leon*<sup>3</sup>—both of which are novels. *Caleb Williams* is still read ; it is a physiological romance of a strange kind. The other book is still more strange—its subject being the Elixir of Life, but it has not the literary power of *Caleb Williams*. Very probably Godwin inspired Bulwer-Lytton with the idea of writing his *Strange Story*—but there is no comparison between the merits of the two books. The *Strange Story* is the greatest romance of magic in the English language—perhaps in any language. The work of Godwin is very pale indeed beside it. Godwin at last got a government pension. He was recognized as a sincere man, in spite of his eccentricities, and he did a good deal of political writing for the government interest. But from that time his literary production amounted to nothing. He belonged to literature chiefly through

<sup>1</sup> *Enquiry concerning political justice and its influence on general virtue and happiness* 1793.

<sup>2</sup> *Things as they are, or the adventures of Caleb Williams*. 3 vols. 1794.

<sup>3</sup> *St Leon. A tale of the sixteenth century*. 4 vols. 1799.



*Caleb Williams*, and by reason of his relation to Shelley and to Mary Wollstonecraft.

Now about Mary Wollstonecraft.<sup>1</sup> She was a beautiful Irish girl, who had been at one time employed as a secretary by Dr. Johnson. She had, however, a lazy family to support; and her salary as secretary was not sufficient for this. Then she became a governess; still later she went to France as a teacher of English. In Paris she met a handsome but wicked man—an American soldier named Gilbert Imlay. His name lives only through the memory of the wrong which he did her. He seduced her under promise of marriage, and deserted her in Paris. She was in a most desperate condition when Godwin happened to meet her in Paris. Godwin was a kind-hearted man; and although he had written a book against marriage, he was neither afraid nor ashamed to marry Mary Wollstonecraft and to take care of her child. And this marriage seems stranger for the reason that Mary Wollstonecraft herself had written a book against marriage. Because of her sufferings, she had become the first English advocate of what we now call Women's Rights—though she took some ground which a modern advocate of the same cause would not take. By this book she belongs to English literature. It is called *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*.<sup>2</sup> Poor Mary was happy with Godwin; but she died after the birth of her first child. And that child was Mary Godwin,—who afterwards became the second wife of the poet Shelley. That story is very strange as we shall see later on.

## SUMMARY OF THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY LITERATURE

The chief facts in the history of 18th century literature may now be briefly summarized.

The 18th century opens with the Augustan or classic period, and closes with the beginning of the romantic period.

<sup>1</sup> Mrs Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin (1759-1797)

<sup>2</sup> *A vindication of the rights of woman*. Vol. I. [No more appeared,] 1792.

Really the classic period begins some forty years before the opening of the century; but it reached its full development only in the time of Pope.

The classic period may be defined as the time during which all English literature was subjected to the laws of what is called classic composition—that is to say, the rules of rhetoric and prosody derived from the study of the ancient *classics*, or Greek and Roman authors, especially the rules of Aristotle. But, as these rules were not directly taken by the English from the ancient authors, but from the French masters who began the same kind of literary reform at an earlier time, the movement has sometimes been called Gallo-classic,—which in plain English means only French-classic.

The classic spirit was opposed to individual liberty of expression in literature; it insisted that everything should be done according to rules, and that no expression should be made use of for which a good classic author should not be found. Accordingly, it was intensely conservative; it substituted everywhere convention for originality; and it could not but produce a decline in the true spirit of literature. It always upheld the artificial in opposition to the natural.

But, on the other hand, it accomplished a vast amount of good in relation to form and exactness. It corrected the extravagances of poetry and the inaccuracies of prose. By insisting upon exact measure in verse, it compelled a great improvement in poetical execution. By insisting upon method in prose, it perfected English prose to such a degree that no improvement has really since been made. The last prose of the 18th century remains the best prose of the English language.

But, having accomplished this good, it had nothing further to do. Had its tyranny continued, there could have been no poetical advance; and originality of every kind would have proportionately suffered. By those who knew that more liberty was compatible with new rules, new unities, a romantic movement was begun.

The object of this new movement was the breaking down of convention,—the securing to the individual of freedom to

express his sense of the beautiful in any way that could be made to accord with the laws of beauty in language and form. So much for the general fact of the great contest. The contest itself is the largest fact in the literary history of the time.

Now try to memorize as well as you can the history of the period in poetry,—beginning with Pope and ending with Wordsworth and Coleridge. You need not remember all the names; that would be of little use. But you should remember that poetry, a little before the middle of the century, divided itself into two streams,—a classical stream continually becoming narrower and shallower; and a romantic stream continually widening and deepening, which was to be broadened at last into the grand current of Victorian poetry. Remember that the last great representative of classical verse in the 18th century was Erasmus Darwin, and that the greatest representatives of the new romanticism at the end of the same period were Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Walter Scott—who had just begun to sing.

The novel was the special creation of the 18th century in prose. Try to remember clearly the difference between a novel and a romance—the novel being essentially a narrative which reflects real and contemporary life; while the romance is a work of imagination, in which truthful life is not essentially necessary, and which may be pictured conditions having no reality in contemporary time or place. Remember too the four great novelists—Richardson, Fielding, Smollett and Sterne. But do not forget the connection between their work and the fiction which preceded it,—the work of Swift, Defoe, and the makers of romances of adventure,—picaresque books. Also two classical works—difficult to put in either category—the *Rasselas* of Johnson, *The Vicar of Wakefield* of Goldsmith—should serve to remind you of the struggle maintained even in prose fiction between the old spirit and the new.

Johnson fought for conservatism; Goldsmith attempted a compromise. And while we are mentioning names, remember that you should be able to answer the question who were the two greatest men of letters of the 18th century—the literary

kings. They were Swift and Johnson. Swift was the great literary power of the first half of the age; Johnson of the second; and Johnson was the last of the literary kings.

It is also of importance to recollect the particular part played by Johnson as the champion of conservatism in literature. More than anybody else he was able to delay the triumphs of the romantics. If he had been unopposed by genius, as well as by fate, we should have had none of the Victorian poetry which now delights us—no Tennyson, no Browning, no Rossetti, no Swinburne.

What were these forces that broke down the classical reserve? Remember the publication of (1) the popular ballads by Bishop Percy, (2) the *Ossian* of Macpherson, (3) the imitations of Elizabethan poetry by Chatterton, and (4) Warton's *History*. Such works, though not in themselves of the greatest importance, pleased the popular mind, and prepared the way for better things. Remember the work of Thomson and of those who abandoned the heroic couplet for freer forms of verse.

History also first came to perfection in the 18th century. Consider the minor historians lightly; but remember Hume, Robertson, and the prince of historians, Edward Gibbon. You should be able to state in very few words, what distinguished Gibbon from every preceding English historian.

Another branch of literature which reached perfection in this period was the art of letter-writing. In remembering this it were also well to remember the relation between this art of letter-writing and the early English novel. I told you that the first great novelist, Samuel Richardson, began as a letter-writer; and that his novels were written in the form of letters. No doubt this method may have been suggested to him by the methods of the picaresque writers, who wrote everything in the shape of memoirs and in the first person. Nevertheless Richardson's method was original in a special way, and shows the connection between the art of correspondence and the art of fiction. Also do not forget that the essay eventually often assumed the same form. The letters of Chesterfield and of the other letter-writers really take the polished form of literary essays.

Ethics and ethical writings should not be forgotten. The beginning of the Augustan age was a time of cruel satire and coarse realism—the spirit of the Restoration still lived in letters. Remember that Addison and Steele were most instrumental in bringing about a better state of literary morals by their little newspapers, which actually made morality fashionable. And this good work was afterwards continued by Johnson in his *Rambler* and other publications. By the end of the 18th century brutal satire had almost ceased to exist; and a gentler tone of criticism made itself visible in all critical estimates. It is true that the great reviews—*The Edinburgh* and *The Quarterly* especially founded and maintained in opposition to certain political tendencies—did furiously attack some of the best works of the time, and this even after the 18th century. But these attacks were of a dignified kind; they were not written merely to give pain; there was an absence in them of everything which disgusts us in the satirical criticism of an earlier time. The 18th century was really the great period of English social and moral reform.

Remember too the effects of the French Revolution on English literature—the eloquence of Burke upon one side, the productions of Godwin, Paine and Mary Wollstonecraft upon the other. You must not forget that there was a natural sympathy between the romantic literature and revolutionary doctrines of any kind. So much did the romantics naturally hate classical invention, that they were inclined to sympathize with any opposition to any kind of convention. Godwin's literary work ought to be considered in this light. The sympathy of such men with the doctrines of the revolution was really a sympathy born of the literary struggle. Later on we shall find that even Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Southey, in their young days, were zealous for the revolution. Afterwards they became conservative in their politics. But during the 18th century, it was difficult for a romantic to put himself upon the conservative side even in regard to national topics.

These are the principal facts of 18th century literature compressed into the smallest possible space, with one excep-

tion. You should remember the failure of the drama. There was, in the classic period, no good tragedy; and after the 18th century, there was no good comedy. And only the names of writers of comedy are worth remembering. The death of drama in the 18th century is partly illustrative of the injury done to letters by classical tyranny. On one side this tyranny accomplished immense good; but in another direction it worked for evil. Drama, above all things, requires great imagination, the highest faculty of imagination; and the whole spirit of classicism was opposed to imagination. Drama requires strong personality, intense individuality. But individuality, personality — these were just what classical convention was fighting against. The rule was that every one should suppress his personal tendencies, and should write only according to set models. Under such rules no human being could produce a good English play of the serious kind. Comedy was possible, not great tragedy.

There is one little thing which I forgot to remind you about — the madness of some of the gifted men of the time. Swift, Collins, Cowper and Smart died mad; and the gifted mystic Blake may be said to have lived mad. Such little biographical details have a particular value in assisting the memory of events. You should be able to mention at any time the names of the five great writers who became insane.

To conclude:—The 18th century is the most important of all centuries in the history of English literature—though less splendid in its productions than the age of Elizabeth. After all has been said and done, our study of English literature must be essentially a study of living literature, contemporary literature—the English written and spoken in our own time. We read Shakespeare, we read Milton; but in order to do so we have to translate their English into the English of to-day. Now the English of to-day really begins with the 18th century. Upon the work of the 18th century masters rests the whole foundation of 19th century and existing English literature. Our next studies will be studies of the early literature of the 19th century; but in every case, or nearly every case we shall

be obliged to explain facts by looking back to the century of Swift and Johnson. Even the most beautiful flowers of Victorian poetry are nourished by streams that flow to us through the classic age and beyond its boundary.