

## PRE-VICTORIAN PROSE—FICTION

### THE GREAT NOVELISTS

IF there had been any great—any really great 19th century drama before the Victorian period, we should consider drama before considering fiction because it represents a higher form of literature. But there was no drama of consequence—nothing better than the plays of Sir Henry Taylor,<sup>1</sup> which cannot be put into the front rank by any means. On the other hand the really great prose event of the 19th century was the sudden development of fiction in almost every advanced form. During the 18th century the novel had, indeed, been invented, but perfectly; and English literature has never surpassed the best work of Fielding. But you will remember that there were very few novels of the first rank produced during the 18th century—perhaps fifteen titles would cover everything worth remembering. On the other hand the 19th century was the great century of novel writers; and between 1800 and 1900 there have probably been on an average about 100,000 novels produced. Of this vast number, not 100 have been really great; but the fact is striking. As the greatest prose movement of the century was in the direction of fiction we are quite right in taking up that subject next to poetry. If you attempt to get from the many different literary histories a clear account of this period in fiction, you will be probably disappointed. Every authority makes a different classification. Some arrange the history of production chronologically only; others arrange it evolutionally only; others again make periods varying from 15 years to 25 years, according to the colours and tones of literary change, literary fashion. The best of the grouping is certainly that of

<sup>1</sup> Sir Henry Taylor (1800-1886).

Professor Saintsbury; but I do not think that it is the best form for the lecturer.

It requires a strain upon the memory of students which ought to be avoided as much as possible. According to this system—evolutional system, I ought to begin the history of the 19th century fiction with an account of several female novelists who preceded Scott, and one of whom, Miss Jane Austen was among the very greatest of English novelists. But I think a better way to arrange the matter for lecturing purposes will be to consider the female novelists in a group by themselves, and to begin the history of the pre-Victorian novel with the group of the very greatest only,—the first peerless four or five who followed in the steps of Fielding.

Therefore I will say in the simplest way, that the history of 19th century fiction begins with Scott and that Scott was followed by Bulwer-Lytton, Dickens, and Thackeray. If you can remember the names and something of the work of these four you will be able to establish a good foundation for clearly remembering all the other groupings related to this principal one. The first four great novelists, then, were Scott, Bulwer-Lytton, Dickens, Thackeray—and each one of four represents an entirely different order of literary art.

## SCOTT

First of all, we must speak of Scott, whose first great novel *Waverly*<sup>1</sup> appeared in the year 1814. We have already spoken of Scott's life when considering him as a poet: our duty now is to consider his relation to fiction. This is very easy to state in a few words. Scott made modern *historical* romance; and what he did in this direction was never surpassed. It would not be correct to think of him as a novelist in the strict sense of the word, although some of his books come very near to what we call novels. A novel, as I told you before, is essen-

<sup>1</sup> *Waverly, or 'tis sixty years since.* 3 vols. Edinburgh, 1814.

tially a story of human society,—a story of life as it is, contemporary life; and it is customary that such a story has its principal motive, the emotion of love. But a romance is not confined to any particular period or place, nor to any particular form of social existence; and it is not necessary that it should contain any story about love, nor even so much as the figure of a woman. That is the great difference. Now the most popular of modern story-tellers, Stevenson, was, strictly speaking, not a novelist. The best of his books, although true stories of human nature, do not reflect the life of society and in a number of them there are no female characters at all. Scott was, like Stevenson, a romance writer; and as a romance writer, the greatest creator of the century, not only in Great Britain but in Europe.

You know that he became immediately famous by reviving in his early books the ancient life of Scotland—a theme which he had previously been dealing with in poetry. One reason why there had not been any great historical romance before Scott is that there had not been any great knowledge of history. Such history as existed of Scotland or of England before the 19th century had been of the very driest kind—it was the kind of history that told men the dates of accessions, of battles, the nature of new laws passed, the change of political party. But it was not the history of human habits, manners and customs. It could not help a man to imagine how his forefathers ate and drank, and slept, loved and fought, and diverted themselves, dressed and visited and worshipped. Scott knew this; and he did not go to printed histories for his material, but directly to old documents, archives, museums, collections of weapons, dresses, old-fashioned furniture. To know exactly how people lived in feudal castles, he studied the castles themselves, as carefully as any architect; and to understand the emotions produced by famous tragedies or victories, he thought out and read all the old family records that he could find. This was a very great innovation. And it was so successful that it tempted him into other fields where he again succeeded by the same means. With almost equal charm he

wrote of old Scotch highland life, Border warfare, the times of the Puritans, the times of the Crusades, the times of the greatness of Constantinople, and curiously enough of modern life as well. It would be quite wrong to suppose that these novels are especially Scotch;—they are simply European and Oriental subjects from the early Middle Ages up to Scott's own time. Scott's influence could not have been what it was if he had written only about Scotland. But he wrote about matters which interested all Europe, and all Europe read him and still read him.

You can imagine what an influence he exerted from the simple fact that his novels alone brought him in commission no less a sum than £ 15,000 every year. Multiply that by ten and you will see the value represented in modern Japanese money. And this did not represent at all his foreign readers, who paid him nothing for the privilege of reading him in translations in German and in many other languages. Comparison can be justly made only when two writers happen to treat of the same subject from the same point of view; and of the four great novelists whom we are now considering, no one can justly be compared with any other. It would be absurd to say that Scott is better than his successors, or that any one of the successors exceeds him in general excellence. The excellence of each is a thing quite apart. For the student it should be sufficient to understand the position of Scott as that of the greatest European writer of historical romance—the man who influenced, and still influences, all Europe by his stories, just as Byron influenced all Europe by his poetry. Another thing to remember is that Scott is still read in all countries;—new editions of his works are announced almost every year; and it will soon be a hundred years from the time that he began his wonderful narration. When novels or romances give such proof of vitality as this there must be something in them far beyond mere merit of style or ingenuity of plot. What characterizes them is life—the dramatic power of animating imaginary figures with real human character. To say more about Scott than this will not be necessary—no greater thing could be said of any



literary creator. As for reading him, I think that every student ought to read three or four of Scott's romances. If you should ask me to make a selection I would suggest *Ivanhoe*,<sup>1</sup> as a picture of mediæval life; *The Talisman*,<sup>2</sup> which is a tale of the Crusades; *Rob Roy*,<sup>3</sup> as a picture of old Scotch life. If you read any of these three, and like it, you will feel impelled to read more. If you don't like the stories—then you had better leave Scott alone for the time being and try again at a later date when the result may be different.

### LYTTON

The next great figure is that of Lord Lytton<sup>4</sup> or Bulwer-Lytton as he is more generally known. Except Macaulay, no more extraordinary man of letters achieved a more extraordinary success during the first part of the century. Whatever he did he did very well—except, perhaps, poetry. He was a good statesman, a great man in society, a fine dramatist, and a prince among story-tellers. The date of his birth is disputed—some say 1800, others 1803:—at all events his life begins or almost begins with the century; and he lived to be quite old, never ceasing to produce literature of some kind, up to the time of his death. His existence ran always smoothly with the exception of some domestic quarrels, an attempted quarrel with Tennyson, who crushed him at once, as a wheel might crush a fly. He had no power in poetry. But as a story-teller I do not think that he has ever been equalled in certain directions, and he greatly influenced literature by the creation of a new style,—a florid style full of ornament and colour and force: a little extravagant, no doubt, but, on the whole, very attractive and very beneficial to the development of a new kind of prose.

Bulwer-Lytton must also be classed rather as a romance

<sup>1</sup> *Ivanhoe. A romance. By the author of Waverley.* 3 vols. Edinburgh, 1820.

<sup>2</sup> *Tales of the Crusades.* [Vols. I and II, *The betrothed*; vols. III and IV, *The talisman*], Edinburgh, 1825.

<sup>3</sup> *Rob Roy. By the author of Waverley.* Edinburgh, 1818.

<sup>4</sup> Edward George Earle Lytton Bulwer-Lytton, 1st Baron Lytton (1803-1873).

writer than as a novelist in the true sense. His novels proper such as *The Caxtons*,<sup>1</sup> *Pelham*,<sup>2</sup> *My Novel*,<sup>3</sup> etc., have a certain unreality which deprives them of the right to be called great. They are the works of a dreamer and of a dreamer who did not have the power to make his dreams talk and move like real people. But his attempts at the novel represent but a small part of his works; and in other departments of story-telling, his very defects become merits. In his historical romances we do not mind the unreality, especially when we are carried back to ancient Roman days or early Saxon times, or to the Italic of the Middle Ages. For instance, such books as *Rienzi*,<sup>4</sup> a historical romance, requiring extensive scholarship to write; *Harold*,<sup>5</sup> the tale of the last Saxon king; *The Last Days of Pompeii*,<sup>6</sup> with its wonderful description of the eruption of Vesuvius—are among the most brilliant historical romances ever produced. A great deal of their excellence is, however, due to the nature of the subjects, which allowed of great display of colour in words. As to actuality these books are not better than the romances of Scott: they are the reverse. But there is a charm about them, a charm of strange beauty, not to be found in Scott. Yet the third class of books written by Bulwer-Lytton seem to me to give him a place that nothing can ever take away—a supreme place in the world of imagination,—I mean his stories of magic, of the supernatural, and of fancy, future possibility,—such as *Zanoni*,<sup>7</sup> *A Strange Story*,<sup>8</sup> *The Haunted and the Haunters*,<sup>9</sup> and *The Coming Race*.<sup>10</sup> The first of the four is the weakest. But any one of the other three would be enough to make any man famous in literature for all time. Almost everything which had been written on the subject of mesmerism, of magic, of the elixir of life, of wraith, of haunting, appeared to be mere child's play, mere dullness, compared

<sup>1</sup> *The Caxtons, a family picture.* 3 vols. 1849.

<sup>2</sup> *Pelham; or the adventures of a gentleman.* 3 vols. 1828.

<sup>3</sup> *My novel.* 4 vols. 1853.

<sup>4</sup> *Rienzi, the last of the tribunes* 1835.

<sup>5</sup> *Harold, the last of the Saxon kings.* 3 vols. 1848.

<sup>6</sup> *The last days of Pompeii.* 3 vols 1834.

<sup>7</sup> *Zanoni* 1842.

<sup>8</sup> *A strange story* 1862.

<sup>9</sup> *The haunted and the haunters: or the house and the brain* 1859.

<sup>10</sup> *The coming race* 1871.

with the astonishing power of *A Strange Story*. The characters, I acknowledge, are not always the best possible; but the book is the weirdest thing in European literature—nothing else gives so extraordinary a thrill. It does not matter whether you believe in the supernatural or not;—belief has nothing to do with the effect of the narrative, to read it. You have here the belief of the Rosicrucians; the belief of the ancient North; the belief of the individual as to witchcraft and magic, all combined together into one astonishing fiction, having every appearance of a scientific truth. The art is worthy of the scholarship. This is the story of a man—a very wicked man who has discovered secret means of prolonging his youth and strength and preserving his life through a period of hundreds of years. In order to do these things, however, he occasionally needs human help. His knowledge, the acquisition of centuries, gives him power to obtain all that wealth or society is capable of giving him, but the wonderful elixir by which he can live beyond the mortal term, that he cannot make without assistance. The tragedy of the book is the story of his failure to accomplish this—a failure caused by selfishness and cruelty. But the book is worth reading for much more than the mere romance of it: it is a masterpiece of romantic style often rising to the highest possible grade of poetical prose. *The Haunted and the Haunters* is simply the best ghost story ever written in any language or in any country. It is very short and ought to be read more than once. When I say the best ghost story, I do not mean that the narrative is more beautiful or more strange than any other ghost stories. Some of the old Greek ghost stories,—such as that about the girl whom her parents obliged to become a Christian, coming back after death to take away her lover, and to declare allegiance to the ancient Gods—are more beautiful and more strange. The merit of Bulwer-Lytton's story is in the quality of the thrill produced. It gives you, in a way, the same kind of fear as a bad dream; and it does this whether you happen to believe in ghosts or not. As for *The Coming Race* I think you know all about that book, and that you must have remarked how wonderfully well it

predicted the inventions and discoveries of things unknown in the author's day;—for example, there was no electric lighting when *The Coming Race* was published. There is yet one more thing to notice about the book;—namely that it is written in a very different style from any of the rest. Here Bulwer-Lytton adopts the plain clear prose of the 18th century, and drops his florid manner altogether.

You will see that it is rather difficult to decide the exact position of a man who writes so many different kinds of books, and changes his style in the most magical way to suit his subject. But as his best work is certainly the ghostly, I think we may say of him that he is the greatest writer of supernatural romance. Moreover he influenced literature very considerably in weird directions. Edgar Poe, on whom I lectured to you last year, is one of the very greatest creators of supernatural romance; and Edgar Poe was undoubtedly a pupil of Bulwer-Lytton. Those who attempt to study Bulwer-Lytton's work do not seem to have noticed this. Lately a whole series of strange stories by Poe have been clearly shown to owe their inspiration to Bulwer-Lytton's short story, *Monos and Daimonos*. In this story the style is so much like that of Poe that it is almost impossible to detect a difference.

## DICKENS

As Scott was the great writer of historical romance, and Bulwer-Lytton the great creator of supernatural romance, so Charles Dickens<sup>1</sup> was the cultivator of what we may call the fantastic novel. You know that the fantastic means fanciful or whimsical, — and yet something more, something illusive, reality distorted. Fantastic art is an art in which a reality is depicted not as it is, not by those features which everybody knows, but by the exaggeration or application of some feature that especially strikes the artist. For example, a statue of a

<sup>1</sup> Charles Dickens (1812-1870).

lion that exactly represents the real form of a lion would be simply a work of art ; but a statue of a lion in which the head and front feet would be made disproportionately and startlingly large for the purpose of exciting fear or wonder—that would be a fantastic work of art. Now when I say that Dickens wrote fantastic novels, I mean that he wrote stories of real life, in which the truth is always presented in a strange, exaggerated, whimsical way. All that he wrote is true, is real—and yet it is real only in the way that shadows in a concave mirror are reflections of real objects. Look at your face in such a curved mirror and you will find that it will become long or broad, accordingly as you turn the mirror, in the strangest goblin way. Yet it is you: you can recognize your face even though your nose appears three inches longer than it really is.

So much for the definition. Dickens, unlike the other great story-tellers mentioned, was not an educated man. He had but very little schooling, — he could read judiciously, and write charmingly ; but there was nothing of the scholar in him. He began life as a newspaper reporter—a short-hand writer,—and he remained a journalist throughout a great part of his life. As to the upper circles of society he never really knew anything. He had friends even so aristocratic as Lord Lytton; but the friendship was only literary and Dickens never understood and never could have understood the existence of the leisure class, — the really refined class. But he understood exactly, marvelously, the life of his own class—the great middle class of London; and he understood what was below that—the life of workers, the artisans, the clerks, the poor,—lastly even the criminal classes. This was the life which he painted in his books, and he painted it as no one else had done before him. He looked at it as a caricaturist looks at things—most often, though not always, a gentle caricaturist who laughs without malice.

Please remember that I do not mean to depreciate Dickens in the least, when I tell you that he did not know the aristocratic in the literal sense. I only want to impress you with the fact that he was especially a painter of middle class life. That

is his especial position among novelists. And in referring to his methods as that of a caricaturist, I do not mean to speak disparagingly in any way; that was his particular genius,—the genius of the caricaturist: no other man in English literature ever possessed the same kind of genius in the same degree. And finally it is well to say that no more healthy, joyous, good moral books, were ever contributed to the literature of fiction than the novels of Dickens. Nevertheless I must tell you that they are not to be recommended in a general way to Japanese students. On the contrary I should advise you to read very little of Dickens for the present. Dickens can only be properly understood by a person who has lived a long time in England, and lived there from childhood. To understand the scenes and the characters one should have been especially in London. Having read Dickens in London I could feel the charm of him in a very vivid way; but I doubt extremely whether you could find any charm in his whimsical English middle class life. It was for some time a custom to read *The Cricket on the Hearth*<sup>1</sup> in Japanese schools; but I doubt whether a worse choice could have been made for the sake of Japanese students. Simple as the story appears to an English mind, it is utterly impossible for a Japanese student to understand it. No matter how much it may be explained, every paragraph in that little story treats of matters which do not exist in this country; even the picture of an English kitchen cannot be understood unless you have seen the real thing. Infinitely better would have been such stories as the wonderful railroad stories, collected under the title of *Mugby Junction*.<sup>2</sup> Those could be tolerably well understood by any one familiar with railroad life. I shall mention those of Dickens' novels which I think the best for general readers; but there is only one of them which I would strongly recommend, and that is a story of the French Revolution. I think that *Oliver Twist*<sup>3</sup> might be found enjoyable in part; if you can get it illustrated, so much the better. *Nicholas Nick-*

<sup>1</sup> *The cricket on the hearth. A fairy tale of home* 1846.

<sup>2</sup> *Mugby junction* 1866.

<sup>3</sup> *Oliver Twist or, the parish boy's progress. By Boz.* 3 vols. 1838. 2nd edn. 1838. Also 1839 and 1841.

*leby*<sup>1</sup> the famous satire on a certain class of English schools, deserves notice for reasons altogether independent of the subject. Finally *A Tale of Two Cities*<sup>2</sup> appears to me the only one of all the novels that could really fill us with a sudden passionate admiration for something noble and good. The story is very beautiful as well as very horrible—the story of a man who gives up his own life in order to save that of a friend condemned to the guillotine. But should any of you go to England, then it would be almost a duty for you to read Dickens right through with the life of London all about you. You would find Dickens better than a guide book; he would prove for you the great psychological interpreter.

### THACKERAY

Each of the three writers spoken of, as we have seen, represents something entirely unique in literature. The next, and the greatest, is not unique in the same sense. He was rather the direct descendant of Henry Fielding; and he was the greatest novelist of the 19th century exactly as Fielding was the greatest novelist of the 18th century. It is hard to say that he was greater than Fielding—perhaps there is no greater novelist than Fielding. But of course the society of the 18th century and the society of the 19th century were vastly different, and the work of Thackeray probably excels the work of Fielding only in so far as it depicts different and superior conditions.

William Makepeace Thackeray<sup>3</sup> was not born in England, but in India, about the year 1811. He was of good family and his father who had long been in government service was able to give him an excellent education. He passed through public school, and attended the university, but did not take a degree.

<sup>1</sup> *The life and adventures of Nicholas Nickleby containing a faithful account of the fortunes, misfortunes, uprisings, downfallings, and complete career of the Nickleby family.* Edited by Boz. With illustrations by Phiz 1838. Also 1839.

<sup>2</sup> *A tale of two cities.* With illustrations by H. K. Browne 1859.

<sup>3</sup> William Makepeace Thackeray (1811-1863).

He had a very small fortune—just enough to keep him from want; and he turned to literature in order to increase his income without any idea of his own astonishing talents. These were first discovered when he was writing for the famous comic newspaper *Punch*; but he was much more than a comic writer. Later on, when he began to produce his wonderful work, literary men knew that the greatest of all English novelists since Fielding had appeared. The public did not know; that talent was too far above them. An ordinary genius quickly becomes known;—the extraordinary requires a long time to obtain general appreciation. Of course Thackeray as a novelist had a respectable sale and brought in some money; but Charles Dickens had fifty copies where Thackeray could sell only one. Probably Thackeray made more money by his comic writing which he never entirely gave up. He was not only the greatest novelist of the time, but in the highest sense the greatest humorist of his time. And this amazing faculty was also duplicated in his verse. At one time he would write poems that drew tears from all English eyes; the next moment he would write a comic song that would make people shout and scream with laughter. And there was nothing slipshod about any of his work. It was always perfect in form. I hope to read a few of Thackeray's poems one of these days; and you will see what a very excellent poet he was. But whenever we find a talent of this sort we may be sure that it cannot prove very fertile—I mean that a man with such abilities must exhaust his nervous system very quickly through the exercise of his prodigious faculty; the higher the class of work, the more nervous cost of it; and the more likely it is to take away or shorten the life of its possessor. As a matter of course Thackeray died young. He produced about half a dozen novels, better than anything of the century: and he left behind him volumes of many other different kinds of work which will always be found delightful reading. But compared with the productions of Scott and Bulwer-Lytton or Dickens, Thackeray's work is small. It cost too much—probably shortened his life by at least 20 years. There is a strange and terrible law in artistic creation—a law



that even Shakespeare could not escape from. You may give life to your conceptions, to your dreams;—you can make them walk about the room and utter voices. But the life that you put into them must come out of your own life; and the operation of creating is dangerous.

As I said, the place of Thackeray is not unique, in the sense of establishing a new school or a new method. But he is the greatest literary artist of 19th century prose; the prince of 19th century fiction. He is this for exactly the same reason that Shakespeare is the greatest dramatist, because every figure which he creates has real life and force. But we may say that he was particularly the novelist of the upper class—the gentility and the aristocracy. Although a poor man, comparatively speaking, he was admitted to the highest and best society; and he knew society perfectly. For this reason it is astonishing that he should be so well able to write about the life and character of servants. Here again is the proof of astonishing versatility. Another astonishing thing about the work of this man is that,—no matter how varying the subject, whether comedy or satire, or history, or fiction,—the style is always the same; the finish is always exquisite. Of no other English novelist of the century can this be said: perhaps it cannot be said of any novelist of any century. At the age of 26 years he began to write; and he wrote for exactly 26 years—dying at the same age as Shakespeare: 52. Now during the whole of those 26 years his style never changed. It was just as good when he produced his first story about *The Great Hoggarty Diamond*,<sup>1</sup> as when he stopped in the middle of the last uncompleted book, just after writing the words “And his heart was filled with the most exquisite bliss.”

Of the twenty-seven volumes into which Thackeray's work has been collected we need only mention a few titles, for a large part of his work consists of journalism,—charming funny things contributed to *Punch*, comic verse and delightful parodies—for Thackeray was the best parodist in all English liter-

<sup>1</sup> *The History of Samuel Titmarsh and the Great Hoggarty Diamond*. Ptd in *Fraser* (4 nos.) Sept. — Dec. 1841. As *The Great Hoggarty Diamond* New York, 1848. Under original title 1849. Rptd in *Miscellanies* vol iv, 1857.

ature. (He would write a little story imitating the style of Scott, Bulwer-Lytton, Disraeli, and others, so perfectly that from these parodies a student can learn more about the peculiarities of the original authors than from any amount of learned criticism.) However, excepting the parodies, the fun of Thackeray could scarcely interest you without an intimate knowledge of English life. For example, *The Book of Snobs*<sup>1</sup> or *The Yellowplush Papers*,<sup>2</sup> — you could scarcely hope to understand without a long acquaintance with mental vices of English society on the one hand, and of the eccentricities of English servants on the other. But the more serious work—the great novels and the great essays—these you should read and try to understand; for they represent the highest possibilities of plain prose, and the highest art of the dramatic presentation of life in the form of narrative and comment. I do not mean that it is necessary to read them all: read any of them which can most interest you. The great novels are *Vanity Fair*,<sup>3</sup> *Esmond*,<sup>4</sup> *Pendennis*,<sup>5</sup> *The Newcomes*,<sup>6</sup> and *The Virginians*;<sup>7</sup> — there are others, much lighter, of somewhat comical kind, which we need not dwell upon. But the five named are the greatest novels of the century. Two of them are historical — not historical *romances* in the style of Scott, but historical novels in the sense that they picture the social life of the past as vividly as if it were the present, and that they deal with the passions and emotions of the people, not with heroic events. Of these—*Esmond*, *The Virginians*—I think you would like *The Virginians* the best. The scenes are laid partly in England, partly in America,

<sup>1</sup> *The snobs of England, by one of themselves.* Ptd in *Punch*, 28 Feb. 1846-27 Feb. 1847. *The book of snobs*, with seven chapters, viz. XVII-XXIII, omitted 1848. New York, 1852.

<sup>2</sup> *The Yellowplush correspondence.* Ptd. in *Fraser's Magazine*, Nov. 1837—Aug. 1838. Philadelphia, 1838.

<sup>3</sup> *Vanity fair, pen and pencil sketches of English society.* Ptd in 20 serial nos., Jan. 1847—July 1848. *Vanity fair, a novel without a hero*, 1848. Also 2 pt. New York, 1848. Revised edn. 1853. 2nd revised edn. 1863.

<sup>4</sup> *The history of Henry Esmond, Esq.* 3 vols. 1852. New York, 1852. Revised edn. 1858.

<sup>5</sup> *The history of Pendennis, his fortunes and misfortunes, his friends and his greatest enemy.* Ptd in 24 serial nos. Nov. 1848—Dec. 1850. 2 vols: vol. I, 1849; vol. II, 1850. Also 2 vols. New York, 1850. Revised edn. 1863.

<sup>6</sup> *The Newcomes, memoirs of a most respectable family, ed. by Arthur Pendennis, Esq.* Ptd in 24 serial nos. Oct. 1853—Aug. 1855. 2 vols: vol. I, 1854; vol. II. 1855. 2 vols. New York, 1855. 1860. Last revised edn. 1863

<sup>7</sup> *The Virginians, a tale of the last century.* Ptd in 24 serial nos. Nov. 1857—Sept. 1859. 2 vols: vol. I, 1858; vol. II, 1859. New York, 1859.

in the time of George Washington, who figures in the story, not as an ideal hero, but as a very real human being. If you only study the way in which Thackeray treats the character of Washington, you will be able to perceive how very much more vivid and sincere his art is than that of other novelists. The other three books deal with English society, English life as Thackeray saw it in his own time; and he saw it as clearly as a philosopher, and as impartially as it is possible for the thoroughly good man to see what is bad, or weak or foolish in human nature—sometimes pitying, sometimes laughing, but always just and true. I am not sure whether you would care as much for *The Newcomes* as I do; it refers so much to particular conditions of English life. I think that you would like better *Vanity Fair*; and that is the greatest book. It is Thackeray's masterpiece, so far as any distinction can be made among so splendid a mass of work. Try to read that. You will find it curiously illustrated with little pictures. Thackeray used to illustrate his own novels; and though he was not a perfect artist in the matter of using the pencil, he was a very great artist indeed by the method in which he could present comical ideas, or satirize a foible in the expression of a face.

There is yet another division of Thackeray's work which you cannot afford to ignore,—the great essays. Any one who reads the historical novels of Thackeray must see that he had the same extraordinary kind of natural ability for historical work as Macaulay. And indeed it would be difficult to say which of the two men wrote the most brilliant historical essays. Thackeray's are less well known; but that is all the more reason why you should read them. I need only to give the title of one matchless book,—the history of *The Four Georges*.<sup>1</sup>

### MINOR NOVELISTS

The above four authors represent the great group of the

<sup>1</sup> *The four Georges: sketches of manners, morals, court and town life.* Ptd in *The Cornhill* (4 nos.), July—Oct. 1860. New York, 1860. 1861.

pre-Victorian era—one of them being the greatest of the century. As for the other three we shall find equals for them in the next period. Here I am not speaking of Scott who properly belongs to both centuries. As about four suns might circle a host of planets, so about the great group revolve to their mood a host of lesser lights. For the novel once developed, the blossoming was multitudinous, amazing,—the great century of the novel was beginning. It would be waste of time and study even to memorize the names of all. But a few secondary names are scarcely less important to the history of this period of literature than are the names of the first class. As Scott and Thackeray and Bulwer-Lytton and Dickens each represented a kind of fiction, so do certain secondary names; and the fiction is not the same. There remains to be noticed the romance of horror, the military novel, the naval novel, the philosophical novel and various works of fiction difficult to class under any one.

Last year I traced for you the history of the early development of the romance of horror; but we have some reason to dwell further upon the subject in treating of this period—which witnessed the close of this particular movement. The highest expression of the terrible in a supernatural way was given by Bulwer-Lytton in those astounding romances of which I spoke the other day. After that the literature of terror temporarily ended. It was impossible to do anything further. But before Bulwer-Lytton wrote *A Strange Story*, two very dreadful books had been published, which will always be remembered. One of them has become a classic, I mean the *Frankenstein*,<sup>1</sup> of Mrs. Shelley,<sup>2</sup> — the second wife of the poet, and the daughter of William Godwin. During their sojourn in Italy, Byron, Matthew Lewis, Shelley, and Mrs. Shelley, meeting together, agreed that each member of the party should write one dreadful story. But only two of them kept their words; Lewis and Mrs. Shelley. Her story is the story of a young student called “Frankenstein,” who has discovered how to make a man by chemistry: he tries

<sup>1</sup> *Frankenstein, or the modern Prometheus* 1818.

<sup>2</sup> Mrs. Percy Shelley *nee* Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin (1797-1851).

to make a very beautiful man, but he only succeeds in making a very frightful monster. The story has been especially successful as a moral tale; and by its moral it can never die. The other story by Charles Robert Maturin,<sup>1</sup> is chiefly important as an influence; it furnished inspiration to a host of writers, and is said to have affected even the work of the poet Rossetti. At all events the best critics judge it to possess literary merit of a strange kind. This book is called *Melmoth, the Wanderer*—it was originally published in 1820 in four volumes. It is the story of a man who has sold his soul to the devil in return for the gift of long life in this world; that is to say, he agrees to be burned forever in hell, provided that he is enabled to live for some centuries in this world, young, and strong, and rich. Very probably Bulwer-Lytton got several of his ideas from this book. But the devil and the man make their bargain this way:—if the man, Melmoth, can find within the time of 150 years any human being willing to exchange places with him, then he can escape his doom. Naturally he endeavours to save himself by finding such a person, and he wanders all over the world looking for very unhappy people and offering them relief, wealth, whatever they want on condition of going to hell in his place. But the friendship and gratitude of men, the love and devotion of women, are not sufficient to produce the willingness to make such a sacrifice. For example, a mother sees her child about to be strangled and is told that she can save it by taking Melmoth's bargain off his hands: she prefers that the child should die. There are many faults of construction in the story—extraordinary faults. But there are very strongly and finely written pages of descriptions; and the chapters devoted to the subjects of the inquisition and of convent life are strangely powerful. The book is an instance of what mere false imagination cannot accomplish without any real knowledge of the art of telling a story. Maturin wrote many other books, but none of them need be noticed. He was an Irish clergyman; and he wrote stories only to make a little money, because his salary as a preacher was not sufficient to support him.

<sup>1</sup> Charles Robert Maturin (1782-1824).

The military novel and the naval novel were represented in this period by two men of considerable fame, respectively Charles Lever and Captain Marryat.

Lever,<sup>1</sup> a very well-educated man, a graduate of Trinity College, Dublin, and welcomed in the best society, became a doctor by profession, much as Fielding became a lawyer. There was much resemblance in the vigorous, life-loving, joyous disposition of both; and both turned away from the profession which they had studied for the love of literature. Lever had a great many college friends in the army;—he knew the life of regiments—at least the life of their aristocratic officers; and he set to work to write about it much in the style of Fielding—though with less genius. Three of his books may be mentioned: *Charles O'Malley*,<sup>2</sup> *Harry Lorrequer*<sup>3</sup> and *Tom Burke of 'Ours'*.<sup>4</sup> The first and the third are the more remarkable; and though all are good, *Charles O'Malley* is by common consent the public favourite. I fear that you would be disappointed, however, in trying to read these—especially if you imagine that they would tell you much about active military life. It is not the active side of military life which Lever relates, but the social side,—the relation of the army to Dublin and London fashionable society. I could not recommend Lever's books for literary study; but they must be mentioned as they prepared the way for thousands of military novels. Lever was the founder of a school; and the military stories of to-day continue to show his influence. It is otherwise with the naval novels of Captain Marryat. Captain Marryat<sup>5</sup> was really a captain—a commander in the English Navy; and he was engaged in the wars with Napoleon;—afterwards he was in China and in the Malay campaigns of the first part of the century. Promotion, however, is very slow in the English Navy; and Marryat preferred to write books. He left the service when already a middle-aged man, and produced a great number of sea-novels

<sup>1</sup> Charles James Lever (1806-1872).

<sup>2</sup> *Charles O'Malley, the Irish dragoon* 1841.

<sup>3</sup> *The confessions of Harry Lorrequer*. Ptd in *Dublin University Magazine*, Feb. 1837.

<sup>4</sup> *Tom Burke of 'Ours'* 1844.

<sup>5</sup> Frederick Marryat (1792-1848).

which have always been popular and are still extensively read by the young. The English boy who does not read Marryat may be said to miss an opportunity of education. Although written for grown-up people, the novel became so popular with the young that the publishers persuaded the writer to write some adventures particularly for boys. And these sell as well as they ever did. The subjects of the novels are, as might be expected, of very great variety—dealing with sea-adventure in almost every part of the world. Of the very numerous works of Frederick Marryat the most famous perhaps is *Peter Simple*;<sup>1</sup> and it is perhaps the best to begin with—as a test for the question whether you like him. If you like him—and he is a splendid story-teller,—then I should advise you to read also *Jacob Faithful*,<sup>2</sup> *Japhet in Search of a Father*,<sup>3</sup> and *Mr Midshipman Easy*.<sup>4</sup> To a great extent the four books above mentioned represent personal experience. This is not the case with *The Privateersman*;<sup>5</sup> but that powerful narrative might interest you in quite another way; it is a thrilling book. As for the juvenile work, the best of Marryat's books beyond question is *Masterman Ready*,<sup>6</sup>—I don't hesitate to say that I think it is a better book than *Robinson Crusoe* which it partly resembles in plan. If you can get this book in the Bohn edition, which is interestingly illustrated, I think you ought to read it; the fact that it was originally written for boys, makes no difference—the English is an excellent example of narrative style. Moreover the book is now interesting for other reasons than those which once made it famous; the conditions which it describes are impossible to-day, and it so represents almost historically the possibilities of 60 or 70 years ago. There is but one other thing to say about Captain Marryat,—that he perfected what Smollett had begun. Smollett, you know, was the first who wrote sea-stories from personal knowledge of the sea, and Marryat, writing from much larger and longer experience and with a more than equal gift of narration, far surpassed Smollett in this direction. He is the greatest novelist of the sea to this very day—notwithstanding all that has since been done by writers

<sup>1</sup> 1834.<sup>2</sup> 1834.<sup>3</sup> 1836.<sup>4</sup> 3 vols. 1836.<sup>5</sup> 1844.<sup>6</sup> 1841.

like W. Clarke Russell. Indeed there is only one person with whom I should like to compare him; and that is Mr. Frank Bullen<sup>1</sup> who is writing sea stories at this very moment. Bullen has a strange history. He went to sea as a little rugged boy, who saved himself from starving, gradually worked his way up to the position of first mate;—then left the sea in order to marry, and successfully attempted to make a living for his family by writing of his experiences as a sailor. He now writes for the London *Spectator* a good deal—proof positive that he is a master of style; and his books are published by Macmillan. But there is this difference between Bullen and Marryat, that Bullen is not a novelist, but only a story-teller, and that he has not yet given any sign of his ability to write a novel. If he ever manages to do so, he may become a rival of Marryat: but otherwise I should say that Marryat still remains without an equal in his particular field of fiction.

Two other kinds of novels remain to be noticed. The philosophical novel is one of them—perhaps I had better say the satiric philosophical novel; in any case the kind is hard to class. The man who fairly introduced it was Thomas Love Peacock. Before Peacock there was Lawrence Sterne about whom we talked last year; and Sterne came very near to writing a philosophical novel. But nevertheless he did not actually give his work that shape;—Peacock was the first to do it well. There is no other writer in the whole world of English fiction exactly like Peacock. He was a man of great gifts, large scholarship and a strong tendency to consider all things human as more or less contemptible at times. He had the satirical temperament—not of the gloomy, but of the joyous kind; and all his novels are satires of social conditions of some sort. They are rarely ill-natured, though always very sharp. They seldom touch on persons in particular, and treat of things in general. But once at least he caricatured a friend in one of his novels and that friend happened to be the poet Shelley. Shelley does not seem to have been much hurt, nevertheless—perhaps because he was too sweet-tempered to show it; anyhow he always

<sup>1</sup> Frank Thomas Bullen (1857-1915).



remained a good friend of Peacock. The favourite plan of Peacock was this: he assembles together a great number of different characters, at the beginning of the story—characters of the most various kind, representing the most opposite opinions;—then he makes them argue together through the book, and the end of the whole thing proves very clearly, for the reader, the vanity of human knowledge and the stupidity of human opinion. In *Headlong Hall*,<sup>1</sup> for example, we have a story of a wealthy Welsh squire who wants to be a patron of literature and learning, and therefore assembles in his house men of many different professions and scholars of different schools. There are Christian clergymen, and there are atheists. There are positive philosophers of the Hobbes kind and there are sentimentalists. And every day when these meet at dinner, they argue furiously together. At the end of the story you more than laugh; for the book forces you to think in a new way about the relative worth of doctrines and of philosophical systems. Everything has been proved ridiculous—the right as well as the wrong. Not because the right in itself is not always right and the wrong in itself not always wrong, but because the men who argue for either side are very apt to argue without knowing the subject. Another book of the same kind is *Gryll Grange*.<sup>2</sup> Here it is quite astonishing to observe how English prejudice and English cant are ridiculed. But I am not mentioning these books as being necessarily the best. You ought to read everything that Peacock wrote if you can. He wrote nothing bad and he is always a master of 18th century style. There is his peculiarity. He detested the romantics—had no sympathy whatever with the new movement in literature; but he invented a new kind of novel, and he wrote with the grace of Gray and the force of Swift. He lived to be a very old man, dying only in 1866. I can remember when a boy buying one of his freshly issued publications.—The principal of his works, excluding mention of short stories and occasional poems—are *Headlong Hall*, *Nightmare Abbey*<sup>3</sup> (this is the work in which Shelley was caricatured), *Gryll Grange*, *The Misfor-*

<sup>1</sup> 1816.<sup>2</sup> 1816.<sup>3</sup> 1818.

*tunes of Elphin*<sup>1</sup> and *Maid Marian*.<sup>2</sup> All of his work can now be obtained in half a dozen neat volumes; he was not a prolific writer;—he was much too careful to produce much. Another kind of novel was invented, never to be imitated, by George Borrow.<sup>3</sup> Borrow to-day is again in favour, new editions of his are constantly coming out; and his life in two large volumes has lately been published. But I think that the interest attaching to Borrow himself is the chief cause of interest now felt in his books. It is exactly opposite in the case of Peacock. The work of Peacock so much interests us that we can enjoy it very well without knowing anything about his personality, but you will care for Borrow's work only, I imagine, when you have heard the extraordinary history of the man, one of the most eccentric Englishmen in the whole history of literature.

George Borrow was the son of an English army officer, and, although fairly educated, does not appear to have enjoyed the highest advantage of university training. But he has an astounding natural faculty for languages; and from an early period he took up subjects of linguistic study which were at that time strange to most Englishmen,—languages of Eastern Europe, of the Turkish province, of Persia, and he also studied and mastered the Celtic languages. His natural tastes were thus in the direction of philology; but his character was the very reverse of that which seems to be necessary for success in scholarship. He was by nature a wanderer, a man who hated to remain long in one place, and who would not submit to control of any sort. Moreover he detested society and all its conventions,—preferring to associate with common people, and to associate especially with gypsies. Perhaps you know that this strange people of gypsies, who first appeared in Europe in the early middle ages, and who may have originally come from India, constitute a very singular society of their own, in the midst of civilized society. They have no religion, no class conventions, and no fixed places of residence. They refuse to live in town; and even when they own houses they prefer to rent

<sup>1</sup> 1829.

<sup>2</sup> 1822.

<sup>3</sup> George Borrow (1803-1881).

them, and seldom or never stay in them. Like the birds they go south in winter, and north in summer. You see them often camping by roadsides in England, America, Australia, and in almost any country of Europe; and they seem to you, unless you have an experienced eye, just like ordinary poor people—vagrants, or travelling artisans. Artisans many of them are; travelling blacksmiths and tinsmiths; but they are better known as horse dealers. Their women tell fortunes, and often appear as dancers or female gymnasts in travelling shows. But, really, these people are of a very distinct race; they can speak the language of the country in which they happen to be; but they have also a language of their own called the Romany. Among this class there have always been a great number of famous athletes—especially boxers, wrestlers, professional acrobats. In short this wandering race has almost always lived “by its wits.”

These are the people who particularly fascinated Borrow, as indeed they fascinated many men just as clever as Borrow himself. As far back as the 17th century we have a story about an Oxford scholar, who ran away from his university to become a gipsy: Matthew Arnold made this story the subject of a very celebrated poem: *The Scholar-Gipsy*. In quite recent times we had the “scandal,” as it was called, of an English nobleman marrying a gipsy—a match which ended unhappily for both parties. I mention these things out of hundreds merely to show that it was not strange that Borrow should have been attracted by this people—by their freedom of life, their outdoor existence, their strange customs, strange language and strange arts. He learned their language and their occupations—sometimes working as a blacksmith, sometimes bargaining as a horse dealer, sometimes appearing as a thinker. Perhaps it is curious that he never married among them, and that he always found himself able to return to city life when he pleased. Even while playing gipsy, he was writing essays and looking for publishers. His work was good; but he had no university influence, no scholarly friends to help him with publishers; and he almost despaired of getting into print, when he was offered some work by the Bible Society. This work was simply to

distribute Bibles in Spain, and to act as agent there for the Society. That was just what Borrow wanted. Of all countries in Europe, Spain was then, as it still is, especially the country of the gipsies. Borrow went to Spain, distributed plenty of Bibles, satisfied the Society; but he lived most of the time with the Spanish gipsies, studying matters that had nothing to do with the Bible at all. When he came back he had no difficulty in finding a publisher for his new book, *The Bible in Spain*<sup>1</sup> — one of the most romantic books of travel ever published. You must not be deceived by the title; it is merely a book about the gipsy. Borrow had discovered the affinity of their language with languages of India; and he had prepared a dictionary of gipsy. After this he wrote many curious books about his wanderings, the most personal of which is perhaps *Lavengro*;<sup>2</sup> another of his books *The Romany Rye*<sup>3</sup> has been dramatized. It would not be quite correct to call any one of these books a novel; but two of them very closely approach the form of the novel; and we have to class Borrow with the novelist, because we cannot class him with anybody else. Of course as a philologist, he might have a particular place, but only a very small part of his philological work, which was enormous, has ever been published. Late in life he returned to civilization, married, and, as the English call it, “settled down”; but he always remained a somewhat solitary person, and was considered a dangerous man to talk with. His gipsy manners always clung to him and, if anybody offended him in conversation, he would immediately knock the man down without explaining why. Eccentric as he was, he is now fairly acknowledged to be a genius in many directions—only one of which concerns us here. He had a great art of simple and vigorous narrative—romantic narrative couched in the purest and strongest English. Any one of the books which I have mentioned would be good to read; to-day *Lavengro* is the most highly praised.

And now must be said a word about Benjamin Disraeli,<sup>4</sup>—the Jew who afterwards became Prime Minister of England,

<sup>1</sup> 1843.

<sup>2</sup> 1851.

<sup>3</sup> 1857.

<sup>4</sup> Benjamin Disraeli, Earl of Beaconsfield (1804-1881).

and one of the greatest Tory Ministers that England ever had. This many-sided man was clever at literature in a particular way; his family was a literary one. The best known of his work in fiction belongs to a later time; but his first novels appeared before the Victorian era, and we may as well speak of them here. They are wonderfully clever books; but none of them could be recommended to you in point of form.

Really Disraeli cared much more for what he had to say than about the way in which he should say it. He was careless and extravagant about his style and even about the structure of his novel; but he could write novels of a kind unlike anything else. His later novels, of which *Lothair*<sup>1</sup> is perhaps the best, are interesting politically and socially. His early novels take almost the character of romances, but are founded always upon some knowledge of facts. One of his mighty novels is *Venetia*,<sup>2</sup> and the reason that it interests you, is that it is really the life of Byron.

### THE FEMALE NOVELISTS

In the case of the masculine novelists, we could make easily three divisions or ranks instead of two. But in the case of the female novelists of this time we need only to dwell upon names of the first class. And the reason is this. Women had not been sufficiently educated in former centuries to figure much in the class of persons who wrote for a living; and after education had given them the necessary capacity, still it was considered somewhat unbecoming for a lady to write novels. The poorer class of women were very slightly educated. Still precedents in the 17th century had not been in favour of the female novelist. There were women in the time of the Restoration, for example, who had written shameless things; and we can well imagine a parent in the second half of the 18th or the first half of the 19th century, asking a literary daughter in alarm,

<sup>1</sup> 3 vols. 1870.

<sup>2</sup> 1837.

“Do you want to become like Mrs. Aphra Behn?” [Mrs. Behn who wrote plays and novels was a very licentious writer (1640—1690)]. Even in the early part of the 19th century there lingered a good deal of prejudice of the same kind. In short the taking up of this branch of literature successfully by women properly belongs to the pre-Victorian era. Female novelists then appeared as a new phenomenon of social development. During the Victorian era, they were in number not hundreds, but thousands. However, before that period, there were not a dozen names of note; and of these we need not mention half a dozen. First, however, let me say that we must go back to the 18th century for the root of the new growth. It began with Miss Frances Burney;<sup>1</sup> and we should have no right to count her but for the fact that she actually published a novel in 1778. She lived to be very old and she is known generally in literature by her married name of Madame D’Arblay. The name you perceive is French; and her husband was a French refugee. She was the daughter of a great friend of Dr. Johnson,—namely Dr. Burney, who wrote a history of music. At an early age she brought out a comical novel—the first good comical novel written by an English woman—*Evelina*.<sup>2</sup> This book which immediately made her famous is still read; it is a very good novel describing the first entrance of a young girl into society, and gently ridiculing the follies of the time. It was a time, however, in which success had its dangers. Queen Charlotte took notice of Miss Burney, and offered her a situation as waiting-maid in the palace; and her father forced her to accept it. She kept the position for nearly five years; and it nearly caused her death, as well as ruined her talent. Place a person of imaginative genius in a position of such awful constraint as the conventions of a palace require, and the faculty is certain to be destroyed. But, in the court of Queen Charlotte, the conditions were exceptionally neat and even cruel. After she left her place as attendant upon the Queen, she really did nothing more of any importance for literature proper. But she left be-

<sup>1</sup> Frances Burney, afterwards Madame D’Arblay (1752-1840).

<sup>2</sup> *Evelina, or the history of a young lady’s entrance into the world* 1778.

hind her some volumes of memoirs,—a kind of diary, which had great interest at the time, and was the subject of a celebrated essay by Lord Macaulay. If you want to know more about the story of her life you will do well to read that essay; but it is only necessary now to remember that Miss Burney was the first of the great line of female novelists which continued all through the 18th century down to the present time.

Miss Burney married; but her great successors remain all maids. There were three and you will easily remember their names,—Miss Edgeworth, Miss Ferrier, Miss Austen. The last named was the greatest. When I say the greatest I must also tell you that you must not think of her as a minor novelist. There is no English novelist greater than Miss Austen. She had a talent which has been compared to that of Shakespeare. She was certainly the equal of Fielding—although the nature of her life, and the range of her experience was much smaller. But we must take these three female writers in their natural order.

I shall first speak of Miss Edgeworth,<sup>1</sup> — because her relation to literature, through Scott, precedes, in respect of influence, that of the others. She might be called the first female Irish novelist;—all her books of this class relating more or less to Irish life. She was the daughter of a strange gentleman, tolerably rich, and very eccentric, who married no less than four times; in other words, Miss Edgeworth had three step-mothers, one after the other, and she must have had extraordinary tact and sweetness of temper to pass her whole life under such conditions without serious trouble of any kind. In spite of all the step-mothers she remained ever her father's best-beloved confident and friend; and he really sympathized with her literary tastes and cultivated them as much as he could. Miss Edgeworth made her first success with a book called *Castle Rackrent*,<sup>2</sup> a novel describing the troubles and follies of an Irish family, reduced by their own fault from wealth to beggary. The book might still be taken for a faithful paint-

<sup>1</sup> Maria Edgeworth (1767-1849).

<sup>2</sup> *Castle Rackrent: an Hibernian tale*, 1800.

ing of certain conditions in Ireland of to-day. Another very successful book was *Ormond*,<sup>1</sup> — also dealing with Irish life. *Belinda*,<sup>2</sup> on the other hand, treats of London society: but the Irish characters in it are sufficient to justify its classification as the work of an Irish novelist. These three novels are her best; she wrote about eleven in all, not to speak of volumes of short stories, some of which you probably know. And besides all this fiction, Miss Edgeworth wrote a great many books for young people—juvenile books, as we call them. These were all composed with a didactic purpose; they do not rise to the first rank—perhaps for that very reason; but they became a part of English standard moral literature. All children were at one time obliged to read Miss Edgeworth's story about "Good Boys and Good Girls."

But the only fact about Miss Edgeworth which is more important in English literature than all her own productions put together, is that she first inspired Sir Walter Scott to write his wonderful Waverley novels. It was after reading her stories of Irish life that Scott first obtained the idea of writing novels of Scotch life. And the authority for this statement is Sir Walter Scott himself. He printed the statement very nobly and generously, that it was she who had inspired and taught him. We must always remember Miss Edgeworth in relation to Sir Walter Scott.

The next of the female novelists to be mentioned is Miss Suzan Ferrier (1782—1854). Miss Ferrier did for Scotland very much what Miss Edgeworth did for Ireland—but in a different way. She was also a great friend of Sir Walter Scott—indeed she took care of him in his last years. She was the daughter of an Edinburgh lawyer, an old friend of Scott's family. She wrote only three novels, — long novels, — respectively called *Marriage*,<sup>3</sup> *The Inheritance*,<sup>4</sup> and *Destiny*.<sup>5</sup> These novels are very good of their kind — though their kind is restricted to the particular society with which Miss Ferrier was perfectly

<sup>1</sup> *Ormond, a tale* 1817.

<sup>2</sup> 1801.

<sup>3</sup> *Marriage, a novel* 1818.

<sup>4</sup> 1824.

<sup>5</sup> *Destiny; or the chief's daughter*, 1831.



familiar. Good judges think her work is better than the novels of Miss Edgeworth; but I doubt whether such a comparison can justly be made. Miss Ferrier does not write at all in the tone of Miss Edgeworth—she is much more ironical; she satirizes with great skill and nevertheless without being ill-natured. Perhaps the novel *Marriage* is the best book to test your liking for her—if you like that, you will read the rest. But, for Japanese students, her work is less suited than that of Miss Edgeworth: it is very Scotch; and I doubt if you could understand the manners described in certain chapters—manners of old-fashioned Scotch country people, who must be known to be really understood. Miss Ferrier died unmarried. She is not much read to-day except by men of letters.

The last of the female novelists whom I am now mentioning, as belonging to the early part of the century, Miss Jane Austen (1775—1817) was as markedly English as Miss Edgeworth was Irish and Miss Ferrier was Scotch. She was the daughter of a country clergyman; and she lived all her life in the country, knowing only and seeing only a very small part of the world. She herself compared her work to a fine engraving made upon a little piece of ivory only two inches square;—and the comparison is really true. The ivory surface was small enough; but the artist was one of the greatest that ever made drawings of human life. Indeed as I said before, Miss Austen is only inferior to Fielding or Thackeray by the mere fact that her life was narrow. The daughter of an English clergyman was of course very strictly brought up, and she was obliged all her life to obey a whole round of conventions—religious conventions, aristocratic conventions, and purely local conventions of a multitudinous kind. She could only write about what she saw; and she was not allowed to see many things. Moreover there was a prejudice, even in her own family, on the subject of the writing of novels by a lady. Some people say that it was chiefly for this reason that her first novels were not published for more than 20 years after they had been written; and that the last three of her novels were not published until after she was dead. There may be some truth in this. But it is equally

true that publishers to whom the novels were offered, would not publish them; they were too fine. Indeed, even to-day, it requires good literary training to appreciate the extraordinary merits of her books. No common vulgar person could understand at all, that is, at all below the surface. She wrote altogether six novels: *Northanger Abbey*,<sup>1</sup> *Sense and Sensibility*,<sup>2</sup> *Pride and Prejudice*,<sup>3</sup> *Mansfield Park*,<sup>4</sup> *Emma*,<sup>5</sup> and *Persuasion*.<sup>6</sup> To say which is the best of these were just as hard as to say which is the best of Thackeray's novels; all are good; but *Pride and Prejudice* is thought by various critics to be the best. It is the story of a young girl who rejects an offer of marriage simply because the noble person who makes it has been rude to her family. That is all—and certainly the statement suggests a very thin plot. But the plot is really no thinner than that of some of Shakespeare's plays, and the dramatic truth and vividness of the characters is really Shakespearian. I imagine that you would better like *Sense and Sensibility*—a story of two sisters: one is sensible, that is to say, hard and practical, with the shrewd knowledge of the world; the other is emotional, full of sensibility (sensitiveness), and of course has a great deal more to bear. *Persuasion* is also a novel that might interest you: it shows the character of a girl who has the virtue of patience even to the degree of fault,—who allows herself to be perpetually imposed upon by her family, by her friends, by almost anybody who is allowed to obtain access to her. Still I am not sure whether you could like Austen or not. You ought to try to read at least one of them. But the kind of life described, the kind of people described, the suffering and the follies described, would probably seem very strange to most of you. Really, unless we can feel some sympathy with the people of the fiction that we read, we can get only small benefit from the reading. If you can like Miss Austen, I think it will be chiefly because you are able to find in certain phases studies of really sweet characters who may remind you of Japanese girls. Above all things remember that Miss Austen is especially the novelist of the young girl—not that she ever wrote

<sup>1</sup> 1797-1803-16.<sup>2</sup> 1797-1811.<sup>3</sup> 1796-1812.<sup>4</sup> 1811-13.<sup>5</sup> 1814-15.<sup>6</sup> 1815-16.

for young girls, but that she understood them astonishingly well, and knew how to paint their characters, and to show exactly how they would act under almost any conceivable circumstance. Now she does not paint a girl merely by saying that the young person had such an appearance and such a disposition—never! She paints her by making her act and talk; and from what the girl says and does, you are obliged to know the character. Now the really good girl, the sweet girl, is, in all countries, very much the same in the best respects; and in spite of the fact that Miss Austen's girls are very English, I think that you would find out that they are also at times very fine Japanese. Now the best way to remember this group of three—here we need not count Miss Burney—is by the nationality of their work. We can tabulate them:—

Miss Maria Edgeworth	. .	Irish.
Miss Suzan Ferrier	. . .	Scotch.
Miss Jane Austen	. . . .	English.

### THE GRAVER PROSE AND ITS GREAT MASTERS

So far we have been dealing with the prose of fiction only; and it is now time to speak of the forms of prose which better express the literary movement of the century. The romantic triumph, as it is called, was no less marked before the Victorian period in prose than in poetry. Stated in the simplest possible way, the important fact for the student to remember is that 19th century prose attempted to do what had formerly been done in verse only—or almost only.

For, be it observed, there is truly no such thing as a sudden invention, a sudden change in literary production. All things are growths, which develop gradually and which can be traced back to their earliest simple beginnings. It would not be quite correct to say that the 19th century gave us any kind of prose which had never been written before. There was poetical prose in the time of Elizabeth. There was magnificent romantic

prose in the 17th century—of which the finest example is the work of Sir Thomas Browne. In the 18th century it is true that the tendency of prose was to severity. And this tendency lasted well into the 19th century. But it would not be right to say that romantic prose begins with the 19th century. It does not;—and yet we can boldly state that the 19th century is the English age of romantic prose—because the tendency to this form first dominated in that century.

A word now about romantic prose. Romantic prose differs from other prose not only in the fact that it breaks the classic rules of severe composition, but also in the fact that it attempts to do almost everything that verse can do. It appeals at once to the ear as well as to the eye;—it produces very nearly, if not quite, the same effects of colour that poetry gives, and also much of the effect of sound. Also, like poetry, it expresses individual feeling, *personal* emotion. You know that the tendency of all classic composition is to the *impersonal*—to the suppression of all peculiarities, eccentricities, individualisms, by which the work of one man can be readily distinguished from the work of another. If the classic idea could be perfectly carried out (which is impossible owing to the imperfection of the language itself) every person who wrote classic prose would write like every other person who wrote classic prose. But in romantic prose, on the other hand, the individual expresses himself—his peculiar emotion, his particular sense of beauty, whether in form, sound or sense. In other words he has even more liberty than the poet—since he is not confined by laws of meter.

So much for introductory observations. One thing more only remains to tell you; the classic prose continued into the century, in modified form; and we are not going to treat only of romantic prose writers, but of both kinds. Of the greatest prose masters of the century three belong to the period before Victorian; and each of the three represents something different. These three were Macaulay, Carlyle, and De Quincey. If we should take them in the order of their birth, we should not take them in the order of their influence, nor in the order of

their literary relation. The literary relation is the most important one; and for that reason we shall take Macaulay first, though he was five years younger than Carlyle. He best represents the link between 18th century and 19th century prose.

### MACAULAY

Thomas Babington Macaulay<sup>1</sup> was born exactly in 1800—so that it is very easy to place him; and as he died in 1859, you know from the date of his birth at once that he had not yet reached his 60th year at the time of his death. You know a great deal already,—must know a great deal about Macaulay as a writer. I presume that you also know how very fortunate and brilliant his life was. Privately educated, he entered Cambridge University at the early age of 18, and there distinguished himself in the very same direction in which he afterwards became famous. So matured were his powers in early youth that even some of his poems and other compositions contributed to a college magazine are still worth reading. We can trace even in his university work of that time all those characteristics which afterwards marked his prose. Immediately upon leaving the University he found that his father was ruined; and he at once announced his resolve to restore the fortunes of the family. Then he began writing; and in those days writing was well paid under particular circumstances. Politics helped a little, of course. The editor of *The Edinburgh Review*, Jeffrey, wanted a young man of liberal tendencies—“Whig”—to help him; and Macaulay was recommended. His essay on *Milton* first made him famous; and he was famous at 25 years of age. The Government looked for clever men of good character to further its own interest; and Macaulay was soon called to a good position. Next we hear of him in Parliament—the most brilliant speaker of his time; next he was sent to India, to occupy the important post of President of the Council, to frame

<sup>1</sup> Thomas Babington Macaulay, 1st Baron Macaulay (1800-1859).

a new code of laws for India, and to direct the system of Indian education. It was in India that he obtained himself the material for those wonderful essays upon *Clive* and *Hastings* which you have all read. He returned from India with enough money to restore his family to wealth and position and live independently for the rest of his life. But the Government and the public would not let him rest—nor did his own nature incline to a life of ease. He continued to write for the great review; he published his *Lays of Ancient Rome*;<sup>1</sup> he laid the plan for his wonderful *History of England*.<sup>2</sup> Again he was member of Parliament; he was Post-master General. Eventually he became a peer,—Lord Macaulay, perhaps the most highly respected person of his time; and his *History* alone would have made him rich. The *History* has been translated into eleven European languages; and in German alone there are no less than six different translations of it. Facts of the kind are too large not to demand attention. Unfortunately he died before the last volume was completed.

Now for some brief consideration of his literary influence. It was enormous, educational, far-reaching, enduring, to a degree difficult to express in a few words. It is still very great; but there has been in this period of literary degradation, some reaction against it. Shallow minds have tried to decry it, and also, I am sorry to say, some brilliant, but narrow minds. Perhaps the greatest name among those who have spoken ill of Macaulay, as a poet, was Matthew Arnold; but Matthew Arnold was very often mistaken in his judgment and Matthew Arnold also at one time declared that Tennyson was not much of a poet. One must not be deceived by criticism of this kind. The judgement of the whole English race for half a hundred years still is that Macaulay is their greatest writer; and the judgement of a whole race, thus tested by time, is not likely to be altogether wrong. I am glad to read, in so cautious and so conservative a critic as Professor Saintsbury, the plain statement that only a vulgar and uncultivated person can belittle

<sup>1</sup> *Lays of ancient Rome* 1842 and many later edns.

<sup>2</sup> *The history of England from the accession of James II.* 5 vols. 1848-1860. (Vol. V, ed. by Trevelyan, Lady.) Many later edns. 8 vols. 1858-62.

or try to belittle Macaulay's merit from the literary point of view. You will find that all the highest English critics are on the same side. The reaction against Macaulay merely implies want of culture on the part of those who read it. Still his *Essays*<sup>1</sup> remain the best of their kind ever written. Still his *Lays* remain unapproached in the vigour and strength and brilliancy of their clear verse—remember that they were offered only as ballads,—and, no matter what historic criticism may choose to say about the defects of Macaulay's *History* as history, it has taught a whole generation of historians how to write history; and it is the most brilliant monument of vivid history, from a literary point of view, ever produced in the language. Partisan? Yes. But remember that every attractive history is partisan—if you find a history that is not, you will also find a history that is not literary. The only other European historian whom we can fairly compare with Macaulay from a purely literary point of view is Taine. And Taine is not less valuable because he happened to be conservative. Another brilliant historian Michelet was very partisan on a liberal side; but everybody must read him. You might as well say that a statesman is a partisan as to say that a historian is a partisan;—both necessarily represent party to the same degree that they represent active force. But we are here concerned with the history as literature; and as literature it ranks very high indeed—perhaps there is nothing higher in the whole historic production which can be qualified as romantic in method. I do not mean to say that Macaulay is superior to Gibbon. But the two cannot be compared at all. You can only compare Macaulay with men who have written history in the romantic way; and there, he has not, in England at least, any equal.

But, although I call Macaulay a literary romantic by his methods, I do not mean to call him romantic by his style. He is romantic only because he believed that his history should be as interesting as any romance without imagining anything improbable, and because he taught people how this could be

<sup>1</sup> *Critical and historical Essays contributed to The Edinburgh Review*, 3 vols. 1843, and later edns.

done. That he was right, the judgment of all Europe justifies. But in style, Macaulay departed only a very little from the classical tradition. He was a most excellent classical scholar ; and he wrote on classical lines with a profusion of classical forms—chiefly modelling them upon Gibbon. What he really did was to modify Gibbon’s style to lighter usage : he took the solemnity out of it, made it less impersonal—warmed it with a certain quality of personal feeling—rendered it more flexible and more modern. Also he used a little, a very little, romantic leaven at times—when he could do so without breaking rules. His main purpose was clarity ; and there is not even any French writer who is more clear. But we must place Macaulay among the classical writers—a very classic of classics. He loved everything in the classic form—the rolling peal, the antithesis, the perfect balance, the law of contrast, the law of unity. A great classic master, wielding a perfectly beautiful classic style, but altogether romantic by his method of appealing to imagination — that is Macaulay. Of his particular excellencies, none is more striking than his clearness. More scholarly English was never used — only a great scholar could write such English. But who ever found Macaulay obscure? Even to the Japanese student of an ordinary middle school, Macaulay is comparatively easy reading—easier than many a badly constructed text in some popular reader. But it would be a most unhappy mistake to think that he is not worth study because he is easy to understand. On the contrary it is just for that reason that he is supremely worthy of study ; for his astonishing clearness is entirely the result of purity of English and perfect knowledge of expression. But never try to imitate. No man has been able to do that successfully—though it has been tried for fifty years in England. To write like Macaulay one must have a mind like Macaulay ; and minds of that kind are likely to appear less than half a dozen times in the course of a thousand years.

I suppose that I need not cite to you what to read in Macaulay ;—you know his books : if you did not, the best advice in any case would be simply this,—“Read anything—ex-



cept his purely political essays.” But in the case of the next great writer, it would not be possible to advise in the same generous way. Carlyle can be read to advantage by you only under direction, and it would be very unfortunate to imagine that all his work is of excellence.

### CARLYLE

Thomas Carlyle<sup>1</sup> was born in 1794 or 1795, in the little Scotch village of Ecclefechan—the son of a peasant, as Burns was, but of a well-to-do peasant, as Burns was not. His father at one time was a stone-mason, and afterwards did a good deal of house-building work on contract. But there was not enough money to educate the boy as the family could have wished. In certain cases, however, the church gives help in the case of clever boys — assists them towards university training in the hope of their becoming clergymen of talent. After having been educated at a common school, Carlyle was sent to Edinburgh in the idea that he would become a preacher. At the University he studied very well; but his studies did not result in strengthening the hope of his parents. He did not even think of becoming a clergyman after his mind had sufficiently matured. On leaving the University he took to teaching instead, and he combined literary work with this teaching. But it is very doubtful whether he could ever have obtained distinction by literary work performed during the time of being burdened with the duties of a country schoolmaster. Fortunately for him, he married a wife who had property of her own, and who encouraged him to live with her, and at her expense, on the little farm, so that he might devote himself altogether to literary work. He did this for seven years. I must tell you that it is contrary to all custom to do such a thing in England or Scotland among respectable people. The fixed idea is that no man should accept help from any woman, least of all from

<sup>1</sup> Thomas Carlyle (1795-1881).

his wife; and that no wife, with any spirit, should allow her husband to live at her expense, except in case that the man should be incapacitated by sickness or injury. I say that such is a social idea; and both Mr. and Mrs. Carlyle ran social risks by breaking it. But in this case, the wisdom of Mrs. Carlyle was fully justified by results. At the end of those seven years, Carlyle had not only made a literary reputation,—had not only written *Sartor Resartus*,—but had greatly developed all his mental powers, and completed his literary training. After that, the two could easily go to London without fear, and enter upon the literary struggle there. Carlyle succeeded in London. He never became rich—he always remained respectably poor; for he was a most independent, outspoken person, who would never flatter any human being, and who would not do those things in journalism and literature by which other men easily make money. It was thereafter almost entirely to history—philosophical history that he devoted himself—producing in succession his wonderful *History of the French Revolution* (the first manuscript of it was burned by John Stuart Mill's servant girl and had to be written all over again), his *Letters and Speeches of Oliver Cromwell*, various volumes of essays, nearly all historical, and last, his *History of Frederick the Great*, which occupied fourteen years. He died a very old man, in the '80s. Before his death he had become known throughout Europe and America as a great man, a great thinker, a great teacher, and a great literary artist. We are chiefly concerned here with his relation to literature; but we cannot possibly understand without some reference to the character and ancestry of the man.

I told you before that university training had not strengthened Carlyle's disposition towards the church. To be still plainer, I might say that it made him something of a free-thinker—this higher education. But in a certain way, the same training developed prodigiously within him a kind of religious emotionalism inherited from his stern and homely ancestors. I suppose you know that the Scotch peasantry are the very sternest and most earnest—perhaps I may say the most bigoted and fanatical of Protestants, non-conformist Protes-

tants. Carlyle inherited all the severity, all the ascetic inclination, all the supernatural awe, which his class were distinguished for throughout centuries. University teaching might make him different to small dogmas and doctrines; but it only strengthened his more profound religious feeling. All his faith might be summed up as belief in the moral order of the universe, and in the great general laws of right and wrong, as established by the consensus of human experience, and so embodied in all great religions. With this most simple doctrine, and a knowledge of all modern philosophy, he was able to treat historical problems in quite a new way. He wrote to prove what he believed; and what he believed was that Conduct is everything, even in history. All great historical facts were susceptible, he believed, of ethical explanation. And his conception of Law and Duty was very noble, very grand;—and it was immense, tolerant, profound, in many respects at harmony with the highest teaching of science. But at the same time, in opposing what he believed to be wrong, Carlyle could show and did show all the bigotry and roughness and asperity of his harsh ancestors. When he struck, he struck very hard and sometimes cruelly or needlessly. This does not detract from his greatness. I mention it only because I want you to observe the fact that Carlyle's faults were all faults of inheritance, while his astonishing merits were altogether his own. No man presents such an antithesis to Macaulay. Macaulay always cool, tolerant in the consideration of evidence, always obedient to law, always preaching order and arrangement,—always telling people why they should be perfectly content with the condition of things as they are. Macaulay—hating metaphysics,—altogether practical, detesting mere theories almost as Napoleon did. And Carlyle on the other hand seeing everything in the light of metaphysics and morals—telling people that it was their duty not to be content with things as they are,—telling people that what the world called respectable and satisfactory was immoral and wrong—telling people in fine that all history proves it the duty of man not to seek for pleasure in this world, but to seek for soul strength, intellectual power, moral force.

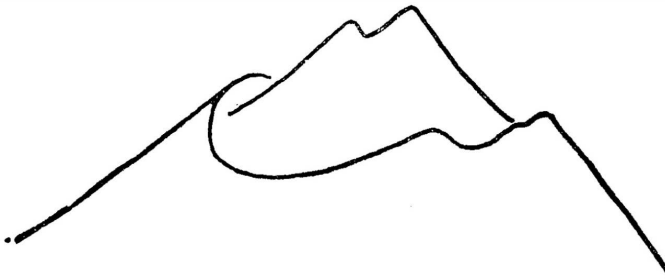
More extraordinary contrast never existed, for you must remember that the two men were writing at the same time living under the same modern influences.

Macaulay, as I told you, might be called the last of the great—the really great master of classic style. Carlyle may not have been the first master of romantic style, but he was certainly the first great romantic in prose of the 19th century—the first great master of a new, strange, stout and purely personal style. The style shocked and repelled all preceding notions of literary law and custom. Jeffrey who loved Macaulay for his style, and wanted to befriend Carlyle for other reasons, was obliged to refuse him employment—or, more correctly, to discharge him—because of his style. *Sartor Resartus* found a home at first between the covers of a magazine; and it was the historian Mr. Froude who had the courage to print it. But many persons said the book was not the English at all. It was abused, it was ridiculed, it was parodied. And nevertheless it proved to be one of the greatest literary masterpieces ever produced—one of the strongest books ever written. What was ridiculed at the beginning of the century was prized extravagantly before the end. This is a good instance of the truth that a literary man must not be afraid of offending against literary fashion. Literary fashion must change like all other fashions; and a strong thinker may have the honour of changing it by even one powerful book.

It was not so surprising, however, that some critics should say that Carlyle's English was not English, or that it read like a translation from German, which indeed it pretended to be in the case of *Sartor Resartus*. When Carlyle first wrote for *The Edinburgh Review* he wrote plain English like everybody else. It was not until after his studies of German philosophy and German literature that he developed his very curious and forceful style. Undoubtedly he was influenced by German writers. But by whom? I think I can read to you some sentences from a German author, translated into English, which will make you think immediately of Carlyle. Take the following, for example, --a little account of the neighbourhood of Vesuvius:--

As in a burnt-up, smoking city, I went along by hollows, around hollows, mountains around mountains, and over the trembling floor of an everlastingly active powder-mill up to the powder-house. At last I found the throat of this land of fire,—a great glowing, smoke-valley, containing another mountain within it,—a landscape of craters, a workshop of the last day, full of fragments of worlds, of frozen, burst hell floods,—an enormous potsherd of time, but inexhaustible, immortal as an evil spirit, and under the cold, pure heaven bringing forth to itself twelve thunder-moths.

FORMER ASPECT OF VESUVIUS



(See Huxley's *Physiography*)

This little bit from Jean Paul Friedrich Richter's *Titan* is so much like Carlyle, that it might easily be mistaken for one of his paragraphs. Notice the studied effect of compounded words, the forceful metaphors, the extraordinary picturesqueness of the whole thing, and the strange mixture of the sublime with the grotesque in the phrase which compares the volcanic crater to a monstrous potsherd. All this is altogether contrary to classic rules: that is the German romantic method at its best. Take another little extract:—

Now hast thou ended thy course here below, stern, steadfast spirit! and into the last evening-tempest on thy bosom there still streamed a soft, playing sun, and filled it with roses and gold. The earth-ball, and all the earthly stuff out of which the fleeting worlds are formed, was indeed far too small and light for thee. For thou soughtest behind, beneath, and beyond life, something higher than life; not thy *self*, thy *I*,—no mortal, not an immortal, but the Eternal, the Original One, God!

Anybody could mistake this for Carlyle—it contains almost every trick of Carlyle. It represents prose so cultivated as to produce the highest effects of poetry. There can be no doubt that Carlyle was enormously influenced by Richter. Richter taught him how to make a new style. But you would be wrong, nevertheless, in supposing that Carlyle merely imitated Richter. No: what he did was only to adopt the German romantic method into English because it suited his purpose better than any other method; and he remained original in spite of this adoption. Another feature of his style he may have got from Sir Thomas Browne,—the splendid use of capitals. You know that in German, capital letters are used in far greater profusion than in English; and it was supposed that Carlyle got the idea from the Germans of capitalizing every word that could appear more forcible with a capital. But this does not follow; because English writers of the 15th, 16th, and 17th centuries used capitals almost like the Germans still do in prose; and even many books of the 18th century capitalize nouns in the most seemingly unnecessary way; still you will find in these old books that some words look very much more startling and strong with a capital letter;—the old meaningless habit of capitalizing whole classes of words really contains an artistic suggestion of no small value. Carlyle followed the suggestion with extraordinary results;—and so, for that matter, did Fitzgerald at a later date in his wonderful translation of *Omar Khayyám*. Generally speaking, we may say that in spite of its German affinities, the style of Carlyle is the most original and forceful prose style of the English romantic movement. I must also observe that it owes not a little of its extraordinary strength to the use of Biblical language, in which Carlyle was a mighty master.

A word now about his books. *Sartor Resartus* (a Latin title which signifies “the tailor repatched,” and which professes to treat of the philosophy of clothes) is really a psychological autobiography, disguised under German names: Carlyle him-

<sup>1</sup> *Sartor resartus; the life and opinions of Herr Teufelsdröckh*. In three books. With Preface by R. W. Emerson. Boston, 1836. First English edn. 1838. 2nd edn. n.d. 3rd edn. 1849. (It originally appeared in *Fraser's Magazine*, 1833-4).

self, his birthplace, the events of his childhood, and the trials of his struggle with the world, are here introduced to us. We are told about how the mystery of life weighed upon him from the first—how he learned to work and think—how he learned to view society—how he fell in love for the first time, and was bitterly disappointed—how the world after that became dark for him—so dark that he doubted the existence of a divine power—how, after the loss of early faith, he found a larger faith, and learned to regard even the follies of the world in their relation to eternal things. If there be in this book any one particularly original conception, it is that of the Necessity of Illusions. There is a Buddhist proverb to the effect that even from that which is not true, truth may be learned. And that is the whole spirit of *Sartor Resartus*.

*Sartor Resartus* is not, I think, a book for the young—although one of my students some years ago actually had the courage to attempt a translation of it. It is extremely difficult reading even for English students—difficult, not merely because of the tremendous style, full of unfamiliar suggestion, but because of the peculiar thinking, full of unfamiliar philosophical suggestion. A certain knowledge of Western religious feeling (I don't mean sect feeling) seems to me partly necessary to an appreciation of the book; and a large acquaintance with the poetry of Biblical expression is also to be desired. Furthermore, this is one of those strange books which seem quite different every time that they are re-read. Read it at the age of 25; and if you can fully understand it, you will be partly pleased and partly surprised by the result—you will then think that you have “read it.” “Have read” in the ordinary use of the term, really means not read at all; but I am speaking of the right sort of reading. Read it again at the age of 30; and you will find that means much more than you supposed the first time you read it. Read again at 40, at 45, at 50—always the strength and beauty seems to grow. Of course that is partly because the reader's mind has been growing and strengthening through the years; but it is also proof positive that an ordinary young man cannot fully comprehend the force

of the book. I would say this: Do not read *Sartor Resartus* unless you have a strong natural taste for that kind of philosophy which deals with the problems of life in itself. If you delight in that kind of intellectual exercise, then you can read the book with profit; but you will not be fully able to enjoy it until you become an old man.

For all literary purposes I think it would be better to read *The French Revolution*<sup>1</sup> — which you can easily obtain in one neat volume. There you have all of Carlyle's beauty and wonder of style, and all his power of thinking and painting. It is a little hard reading; but it is worth the trouble. Or, if you cannot spare the time necessary for this task (and it is not a small one), and want to have only some examples of the best parts, let me suggest to you to read just one chapter of it—the first chapter of the book entitled *Terror*. This chapter is entitled “Charlotte Corday,”—tells the story of the grave, beautiful, and heroic girl, who mistakenly or otherwise made her way to Paris alone to kill Marat, and killed him. If you can feel the terrible beauty of that chapter—with all its irony, with all its tenderness—then you will know Carlyle.

I could not recommend anybody to read the whole of Carlyle's *Cromwell*<sup>2</sup> for merely literary reasons, but there are famous pages in it which you can easily pick out and study and admire. Remember that this book is little more than a collection of letters — state letters — with comments between the letters, and it is in the little comments that the preciousness of the book is felt. As for the vast life of *Frederick the Great*,<sup>3</sup> you need to think about reading that only when you have a great deal of time as well as a great deal of inclination. The essays are better for purposes of literary study. Some of them, no doubt, you have already read. All the earlier ones have some value.

<sup>1</sup> *The French Revolution. A history.* 3 vols. 1837. 2nd edn. 1839. 3rd edn. 1848. Also 1857 and 1871.

<sup>2</sup> *Oliver Cromwell's letters and speeches. With elucidations.* 2 vols. 1845. Also, New York, 1845. 2nd edn., enlarged. 3 vols. 1846. Also 1866.

<sup>3</sup> *The history of Friedrich II of Prussia, called Frederick the Great.* 6 vols. 1858-65. Tauchnitz Collection of British Authors. 13 vols. Leipzig, 1858-65. 7 vols. 1869. 10 vols. 1872-3.



## DE QUINCEY

The romantic prose was exemplified in another way—very, very different from the way of Carlyle by the writing of Thomas De Quincey. De Quincey was born in 1785 and died in 1859. He was the son of a wealthy merchant in Manchester—the great, dull, gloomy, manufacturing town. It is not surprising, that even as a boy, De Quincey hated Manchester. Indeed, he hated it so much that he ran away from it at last, and hid himself in London, where he had many strange and some touching adventures. He was well educated and studied long at Oxford, but never took his degree—though regarded as an exceptionally fine scholar. After leaving the University he did not think of returning to Manchester, but settled in the Lake country at Grasmere where Wordsworth lived, and remained there for 20 years. After that he went to Edinburgh where he died—a very old man.

Although the son of a wealthy man, De Quincey wasted his own fortune so quickly that he had to write for a living. However, he wasted a good deal of his money in giving help to literary friends and to needy persons—if that can be called waste. Generosity was one of his characteristics. He was not capable of leading a very active existence, being extraordinarily small, weak and delicate, and, what was still worse for him, he contracted at an early age, the same bad habit of Coleridge—that of eating opium. Nevertheless, in spite of all these disadvantages, he produced a great deal of work—representing at least 16 volumes of between four and five hundred pages each. This does not mean that he “wrote books.” He only made one or two books—very small books. The great mass of his work consists altogether of essays, which he wrote for the leading magazines. It is a most extraordinary fact that he supported himself and his family entirely by writing for the magazines, and that he never had time to write books even if he had the inclination, after he had reached middle age. You must think of him as a magazine writer by profession, but he carried

English prose to a point of luxurious perfection, never heard of or imagined before his time. As an essayist his importance has been immense as a literary force and is still very great. It is not the influence of Macaulay—not a power directed towards hard clarity and vivid strength of expression. It is quite otherwise. But the style of De Quincey has much in common with the style of Macaulay,—that both were the result of extraordinary scholarship. Macaulay represented a classic form; and De Quincey represented a classic form—yet the two are worlds apart from each other. Though inspired by Greek and Latin study, the style of De Quincey is romantic prose rising to the highest heights of poetical expression.

Perhaps you will think the above statement paradoxical. How can a man be a classic and a romantic at the same time? Unless you understand how this is possible, you cannot understand the place of De Quincey's style in English literature. I think I can best explain the matter this way. There were two great kinds of classic prose—not merely one. There was the severely correct written style—the style of narration used by the best Greek and Roman writers. There was also the oratorical style,—the style used for direct speech, for addresses, for political harangues. This oratorical style allowed larger liberties than the other: it was especially intended to excite emotions; and the Greeks excelled in it. Now De Quincey founded his most splendid effects upon a study of the oratorical style, especially the Greek—and thus without leaving his classical models at any time, he was able to produce purely romantic effects,—emotional and imaginative effects,—of the most startling kind. We must rank him the very highest place in romantic prose, but we must never forget that this prose is never romantic in the meaning of any breaking rhetorical rules. De Quincey's first book, the *Confessions of an English Opium Eater*,<sup>1</sup> immediately gave him a wonderful reputation as a master of style. But, curiously enough, it was also popular; for De Quincey's scholarship, like that of Macaulay, never suf-

<sup>1</sup> *Confessions of an English opium eater* 1822. 2nd edn. 1823. New and greatly enlarged edn. Edinburgh, 1856.

ferred him to become obscure. People who could not understand the beauty of his work at all, could nevertheless understand and delight in the story part of what he wrote. The vice of eating opium was but little known in those days; and De Quincey's revelation of his own addiction to that habit created a morbid curiosity. The book had, and still has, a great circulation. It is an account of the strange influence of opium upon the author's mind especially in dreams. Opium affects the ideas of space and time, less than some other drugs, such as hashish, but very markedly; and De Quincey tells us in the most wonderful way how, in one night, he seemed to live through a period of hundreds of years. His dreams were sublime, terrific, monstrous by turns, but always characterized by extraordinary suggestion of length and depth. Thousands of people who read that book bought opium and ate in order to enjoy dreams of this kind. But of course they were very disappointed; and most of them had no dreams at all. What made De Quincey dream so wonderful was the vast scholarship of the mind upon which the opium acted. If you have a perfect knowledge of Greek literature, Greek and Roman antiquities, ancient and modern history, German and English philosophy, and perhaps a hundred other subjects—then if you eat opium and dream you may have extraordinary dreams. But the man who is ignorant and dull will not be able to have anything but stupid dreams under the influence of opium. The rest of De Quincey's work almost entirely consists of essays—there is one novel *Klosterheim*, but it is not worth reading. There is also a single volume of connected essays upon Roman history, forming a real history of one period;—this book *The Cæsars* may also be counted an exception. But nearly all the work is built up of detached essays—essays afterwards collected under different heads, grouped so to say, as historical, literary, narrative, philosophical, historical, etc. It is necessary for the student to be on his guard, and know beforehand what to read of De Quincey. There is a good deal of poor stuff, of dull stuff, tiresome stuff, in all these volumes; and if you should happen to read a dull essay first, you would not learn to love

De Quincey as he deserves to be loved. So I will attempt to suggest certain subject to you. The most extraordinary of De Quincey's papers, and I think the best, are the two astonishing narratives respectively entitled *Flight of a Tartar Tribe*<sup>1</sup> and *The Spanish Nun*.<sup>2</sup> Although historians have tried to pick holes with the first of the above, it will always remain famous as a piece of literary magic—marvellous and terrible. I think you know the historical fact—how in the 16th century (?) a whole tribe of Tartars, numbering many hundred thousand souls, fled from Russian rule, right across Asia into Chinese territory, seeking the protection of the Emperor of China. The paper of De Quincey is an account of the horrors accompanying the enormous emigration. The other essay is founded upon a Spanish record—the true story of a young girl who escaped from a convent to become a Spanish soldier, and to make such a reputation as no European woman ever had made before in feats of arms. Here there is a wonderful mixture of the pathetic with the strange. I should also advise you to read *The Cæsars*,<sup>3</sup> from beginning to end. You will find it a delight, even if you are not familiar with Roman history; while if you *are* familiar with Roman history, you will discover an entirely new conception of it through reading De Quincey's extraordinary essays upon that period. After having read those things, you will be better able to pick out for yourselves the beauties of De Quincey. But some of them are scattered through dull pages—like bags of gold dropped in a desert; and it is some work to find them. There is one, for example, at the end of the long essay entitled *The System of the Heavens*<sup>4</sup>—an old-fashioned dissertation upon the wonders of astronomy. Since that essay was written we have learned infinitely more about astronomy than De Quincey could have dreamed. We know now even what metals exist in the farthest visible stars. So the essay has no astronomical value now. But it contains some astonishing beauties of style, and some sublime thoughts

<sup>1</sup> *Revolt of the Tartars; or, flight of the Kalmuck Khan and his people from the Russian territories to the frontiers of China* 1837.

<sup>2</sup> *The Spanish military nun* 1847.

<sup>3</sup> 1832-34.

<sup>4</sup> *System of the heavens as revealed by Lord Rosse's telescopes* 1846.

about the enormity of space and the mystery of the suns. And it ends with a most astonishing dream. Now De Quincey was one of the greatest dreamers that ever lived—I mean of those who dream upon their feet; and this is the very best of his dreams. I want to dictate it to you: it is scarcely a page long; and it contains the best possible example of De Quincey's splendour.

God called up from dreams a man into the vestibule of heaven, saying, 'Come thou hither, and see the glory of my house.' And to the servants that stood around his throne he said, 'Take him, and undress him from his robes of flesh; cleanse his vision, and put a new breath into his nostrils: arm him with sail-broad wings for flight. Only touch not with any change his human heart—the heart that weeps and trembles.' It was done; and, with a mighty angel for his guide, the man stood ready for his infinite voyage; and from the terraces of heaven, without sound or farewell, at once they wheeled away into endless space. . . . Then, from a distance that is counted only in heaven, light dawned for a time through a sleepy film: by unutterable pace the light swept to *them*, they by unutterable pace to the light: in a moment the rushing of planets was upon them: in a moment the blazing of suns was around them. Then came eternities of twilight, that revealed, but were not revealed. To the right hand and to the left towered mighty constellations, that by self-repetitions and answers from afar, that by counter-positions, that by mysterious combinations, built up triumphal gates, whose architraves, whose archways,—horizontal, upright,—rested, rose,—at altitudes, by spans,—that seemed ghostly from infinitude. Without measure were the architraves, past number were the archways, beyond memory the gates. Within were stairs that scaled the eternities above, that descended to the eternities below: above was below, below was above, to the man stripped of gravitating body: depth was swallowed up in height insurmountable, height was swallowed up in depth unfathomable. Suddenly as thus they rode from infinite to infinite, suddenly as thus they tilted over abysmal worlds, a mighty cry arose—that systems more mysterious, worlds more billowy—other heights, and other depths—were dawning, were nearing, were at hand. Then the man sighed, stopped, shuddered, and wept. His overladen heart

uttered itself in tears; and he said, 'Angel, I will go no farther. For the spirit of man aches under this infinity. Insufferable is the glory of God's house. Let me lie down in the grave, that I may find rest from the persecutions of the Infinite; for end, I see, there is none.' And from all the listening stars that shone around issued a choral voice, 'The man speaks truly; end there is none, that ever yet we heard of.' 'End is there none?' the angel solemnly demanded. 'Is there, indeed, no end? and is this the sorrow that kills you?' But no voice answered, that he might answer himself. Then the angel threw up his glorious hands to the heaven of heavens, saying, 'End is there none to the universe of God? Lo! also, there is no beginning.'

No person could for a moment question the immense romanticism of this splendid passage,—said to have been inspired by listening to a lecture by Richter, the same great German who inspired Carlyle. Nearly every phrase is a classical phrase, nevertheless: and Greek and Latin words predominate: indeed, it is the Greek words especially and the Latin words which give to those sentences their extraordinary sonority. So I think that this passage will clearly explain to you how De Quincey was at once the greatest of romantics in feeling among the English prose writers, and yet also, perhaps the very first of classics in his management of style. Oratorical the style certainly is; but the subject amply justifies the form. As for the fancy,—the dream,—we have to go to Oriental literature to find anything comparable to it—anything which impresses the mind with a right idea of vastitude. There is an ancient Indian story that once the two Gods, Brahma and Vishnu, disputed together, which was the mightiest — Brahma as Creator, or Vishnu as Preserver. But while they were disputing in heaven, suddenly Siva, the Destroyer, came between them in the form of a pillar of fire. Immediately Brahma flew up to find the top of the pillar; and Vishnu flew down to find its base. Each of them flew for myriads of years; but they could find neither the beginning of the pillar nor the end,—and a great fear came upon them. Perhaps this is the only literary story that can be compared with De Quincey's dream in the sense that I referred

to; yet, though rendered into verse — into English verse by Southey, it does not really leave the same feeling of sublime awe in the mind. Now it is no exaggeration to say that there are many pages of De Quincey as splendid as this—though the subject may be less tremendous.

These were the princes of prose; and it is noteworthy that the tendency of all was in the direction of history. Macaulay was, even in his criticism, primarily a historian. So was Carlyle. A large part of De Quincey's work is history; and what is not history is chiefly biography, or autobiography, both of which are closely related to history. But history is not necessarily literature—nor is science, nor is philosophy. There were many other great writers — historians, philosophers, men of science; but I shall not dwell upon them because they did not influence literature in the literary sense. For example there were such historians as Milman, Grote, Alison, Freeman, Mitford, Lingard, and of no one of these could it be said that he was a literary force in the same sense that we can say this of Gibbon or of Macaulay. Yet in the case of Kinglake,<sup>1</sup> another historian and a very fine writer, we have something to notice which connects him with the best literature of the age in a small way. Kinglake wrote a little book of travel in Egypt and Palestine, called *Eothen*,<sup>2</sup> which promises to become a classic by reason of its extraordinary beauty of thought and style. I could quote a page from it—the close of a chapter recounting the impressions of a visit to the great Sphinx—which could be compared with the fine work of De Quincey. This little book has passed through a great number of editions; and it has had a very great influence upon the future writing of books of travel.

Again there were essayists, of a purely literary kind, whose names will always be remembered in English literature because of the relation of their bearers to the greater literary celebrities of the epoch. Such were Charles Lamb,<sup>3</sup> a good critic and a

<sup>1</sup> Alexander William Kinglake (1809-1891).

<sup>2</sup> *Eothen, or traces of travel brought home from the east* (anon.) 1844.

<sup>3</sup> Charles Lamb (1775-1834).

charming essayist in a light vein; and Leigh Hunt,<sup>1</sup> somewhat larger as a critic, and also somewhat a poet. I suppose that all of you have read Lamb's essay *On Roast Pig* and Leigh Hunt's *About Ben Adhem*;<sup>2</sup> — they live in literature by little things like these, neither great nor strong, but pleasing and delicate. Much more do they live by the part which they took as journalists in the romantic movement;—Leigh Hunt, for example, went to Italy to edit a paper in partnership with Byron and Shelley and after these writers were both dead he long remained the friend of many men of letters,—especially of Carlyle. On one occasion when he brought some good news to Carlyle's house, Mrs. Carlyle whose name was Jane (familiarily Jenny) jumped up and kissed him out of sheer joy. It was then that he wrote one charming little song which you will now find in most of the good anthologies:—

Jenny kiss'd me when we met,  
 Jumping from the chair she sat in;  
 Time, you thief, who love to get  
 Sweets into your list, put that in!  
 Say I'm weary, say I'm sad,  
 Say that health and wealth have miss'd me,  
 Say I'm growing old, but add,  
 Jenny kiss'd me.

Even if Hunt has written only this pretty little thing, he would probably be always remembered for it—just as we all remember one quaint English poet Oldys simply because he wrote a pretty poem about a fly. But both Lamb and Hunt were only good small influences. A larger influence was that of Hazlitt,<sup>3</sup> whose name almost everybody knows, through its connection with Shakespearian criticism.<sup>4</sup> Hazlitt was a fine writer, and one of the first to do justice to Shakespeare; but his influence is almost gone;—we have got very far beyond Hazlitt to-day; and the great German critics, especially, have made his essays useless. Even the astonishing literary labour

<sup>1</sup> James Henry Leigh Hunt (1784-1859).

<sup>2</sup> First appeared in S. C. Hall's *Book of Gems* 1838.

<sup>3</sup> William Hazlitt (1778-1830).

<sup>4</sup> *Characters of Shakespear's plays* 1817, 1818. 3rd edn. 1838.



of Hallam<sup>1</sup> has also become old-fashioned now; and we need not give him any space in this connection, further than to say that he pointed out the way for a new comparative study of European literature. This is the plan that is now being carried out very successfully, under the supervision of Professor Saintsbury. When the new series of books entitled *Periods of European Literature* will have been completed, nobody will be likely to consult Hallam for an opinion about any modern author.

And here we may turn to the next division of our subject—the Victorian Era.

<sup>1</sup> Henry Hallam (1777-1859).