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REPRESENTATIVE  
ENGLISH PROSE

AND

PROSE WRITERS

BY

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## PREFACE.

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The present volume is offered as a contribution to the study of English Prose in its representative *Historical Periods*, in its representative *Literary Forms* and in some of its *Representative Authors*. That portion of our prose is especially discussed that dates its beginning from the reign of Elizabeth in the writings of Bacon and Hooker and extends to the present decade in the pages of Carlyle. This is English Prose Proper. As we advance, careful attention will be given to the discussion of English Prose Style as visibly expressed in a few of our prominent prose writers. The work will be *literary*, throughout, in its method, subject matter, and purpose, as distinct from that order of treatment that might be termed technical or speculative. A detailed account of the life and times of the separate authors examined will thus be aside from our main design, such allusions being made only in so far as they serve to cast light on the particular author's work as an author.

We have aimed to make the discussion both philosophic and practical, in a department of our literature as yet but approximately covered.

We trust that the treatise is so presented in thought and external form, that, while serving a special educational purpose in our college class-rooms, it may also prove stimulating and helpful to every ingenuous student of English Letters.

T. W. H.

COLLEGE OF NEW JERSEY.

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ENGLISH



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# INTRODUCTION.

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## CHAPTER I.

### ENGLISH PROSE FROM BEDE TO THE CHRONICLE.

THE exact historical period covered by this division of our earlier prose as distinct from poetry may be said to extend from 673 A.D.—the year of the birth of Bede—to 1154 A. D.—the year of the close of The Chronicle. Within these limits, the four prominent centres of prose writing were Yarrow, York, Winchester and Abingdon. The four prominent prose writers were Bede, Alfred and the Aelfrics, representing, respectively, the geographical centres mentioned. The earliest specimens of First-English Prose were, undoubtedly, the collections of the Laws in the seventh century, by Ethelbert, Hlothere' and Eadric, Kings of Kent; by Ine, King of Wessex, in the same century; by later writers, also, such as Ecgbert of York, and so on to Alfred the Great who in his carefully compiled codes laid the basis of a wise Christian legislation at the very opening of our literature. Connecting his code with that of Moses and with the broader one of Christ and the apostles he adds—“Those which I met either of Ine's day my kinsman, or Aethelbert's who first received baptism among the English race, that seemed to me rightest, I have here gathered and rejected the others.” Then follows,

The Chronicle, compiled, partly, by Alfred, and partly, by Plegimund and other less known annalists. This collection, unimportant as it is in itself or in its literary character, is invaluable in its historical and civil bearings. Beginning long before the Conquest, it runs nearly a century beyond it and thus serves to cherish the First-English spirit and language. As the earliest history of any Teutonic people in a Teutonic language, and with the Laws the earliest form of English Prose, it has an interest and value quite aside from its contents. Alfred did for it what Chaucer did for English Poetry. He made it national, so that from his time to the death of Stephen it was the people's authority. Above all, it was English clear and clean and lies back of all later English as a basis and guide. As far, therefore, as mere time is concerned, there are nearly five centuries included in this earliest prose era, a period fully as long as that from The Chronicle to Bacon's Essays, and longer by far than that from Bacon to Carlyle. In noting more specifically the English Prose of this period, there is, first, the unfinished translation of St. John's Gospel by Bede. There is, also, Alfred's translation of Orosius, a kind of manual of general history. Alfred's translation of Boethius' *De Consolatione Philosophiae* is especially memorable. In this, the classical and the English spirit, the speculative and the practical, are happily combined, while Christian sentiments are always enforced as superior to those of a pagan philosophy. It is by way of eminence that one of Alfred's productions in which his great and generous English heart reveals itself most fully. We know of no work of Pre-Reformation times in which there is found a purer ethical teach-



ing, a more conciliatory spirit or a cleaner prose style. Then follows his translation of Bede's Ecclesiastical History of England, a work which Alfred selected, partly, to give to the people the benefit of its contents and, partly, because of its intensely English character behind and below its foreign dress. He, also, translated Gregory's Pastoral Care—a kind of Homiletical hand-book for Churchmen. Most of it reads as an affectionate pastoral letter. It is full of interest from the fact that Gregory, its author, was the one who sent the first missionaries from Rome to Kent; also, because Augustine, who headed this movement, brought the original work with him to England, and because in it he speaks sorrowfully of that olden time when piety and English learning flourished together, and yet hopefully, in that better days seemed to be dawning. Such was the noble work of Alfred as our first great prose writer. If it be said that his work was mainly that of the compiler, translator and paraphrast rather than that of a creative author, it is to be answered, that the original additions that he made, especially, to Orosius and Boethius, were so numerous and valuable that he may be said to have combined the work of an independent author with that of a commentator. As to his style, it has all the best qualities that mark the First-English character,—plainness, directness, spirit, ethical gravity and manliness. In these particulars he may be compared with English writers of any subsequent epoch. Nor must it be forgotten that no modern translator of Latin into English has had anything like the difficulties of structure and style before him that Alfred had when he aimed to render a compact classical tongue into the more flexible En-

glish of his time. From the pen of Aelfric the Grammarian we have, The Homilies, The Colloquy, Lives of Saints, a partial translation of Old Testament Scriptures, with a number of manuals and less important works. Equally clear in his prose with Alfred and even more poetic and finished, he had to a less degree that masculine vigor that marked the king. Most of his prose is so alliterative as to mar its character and, yet, what he lacks in solidity he supplies in a more modern, lucid and facile expression. A later and less renowned Aelfric—Aelfric Bata—enlarged The Colloquy of his superior.

As far, therefore, as the prose authors themselves are concerned, they are seen to be but few in number, not exceeding a half dozen at the most. It might lead to serious error, however, should it be supposed that the smallness of the number marked the real character and results of the work accomplished in this province. Nor must the principle be too strongly pressed that in this first era, if matters be reduced to their last analysis, we have but little of native, genuine English. \* It is perfectly true that Bede wrote nearly all that he wrote in Latin; that Alcuin the pupil of Bede and the teacher of Charlemagne, re-edited the old classic authors, and in his Commentaries, Capitularies and ethical treatises, used the language of the Church of Rome. It is also true that each of the Aelfrics was in a sense an Anglo-Latin author and that Alfred was the only writer of First-English Prose who can with full truthfulness be said to have given us an example of prose in "English Undeified." This is all correct, and yet we are to bear in mind that beneath the letter is the spirit and behind the text is the man; so that of such an author as

Bede, Morley may justly say—"He leads the line of English Prose Writers,"—and Mr. Brooke may state of Aelfric the Grammarian, "that he wrote a simple, literary English." The indebtedness of Modern-English Prose to the English Prose of this first era, in so far as actual subject-matter is concerned, is not large, nor could it naturally be expected to be. It is, nevertheless, a real indebtedness, and to overlook it as some ultra modern writers have done, is as untrue to literary history as it is to the genius of the English people. Such an epoch is not to be measured simply by what it has left in the form of visible prose product, but also by what it made possible for succeeding ages to accomplish and to accomplish more easily. The study of our first prose is, indeed, now a matter of etymological rather than of purely literary benefit. Still, in and through such philological work the modern English student is continually noting traces and glimpses of literary value, and is all the better prepared by such study for the full appreciation of those later prose eras which have thus been heralded and hastened. Among the four or five prose authors already mentioned as illustrating in their writings more or less of the English element, King Alfred, as has been stated, is the only one whose prose is out-and-out English. He is thus, not only the founder of English Prose historically viewed, but the one First-English Prose Writer with whom above all others the modern English student should be thoroughly conversant.

Intensely English in spirit and mission, all that he said and wrote was in his birth-tongue, and he lived mainly to found and foster a home literature. Zealous as he was in the line of literary service and

political reform, his chief love was in the sphere of the home speech. "There are only a few," he says, "on this side of the Humber who can understand the divine service or even translate a Latin letter into English; and I believe not many on the other side of the Humber. There are so few, indeed, that I cannot remember one south of the Thames when I began to reign." This was his constant lament, and it was the ruling passion of his life to redeem the land from such disgrace. To this end, he encouraged English scholars, founded English schools, wrote educational treatises, traveled from place to place, and organized the literary work of the country. It is to be emphasized, here, that what he wrote, he wrote in the form of prose as best adapted to the needs of the hour, and his prose was always mature, thoughtful and substantial. As Milton after him, he had no liking for frivolities. He wrote as he lived—for the weal of the people. It may safely be questioned whether from the ninth century to the present time there has been any prose writer of English who has better understood his age than Alfred did his, or one who has done more for his age in the line of literary advance than did Alfred for his. Hence in any historical and literary study of Modern-English Prose we are compelled to go back to the writings and spirit of Alfred as a necessary introduction. The meaning of his name—one skilled in council—will express the character of his mission.

If we inquire as to the *Characteristics* of First-English Prose, they may be stated as—Brevity, Sincerity, Directness, Vigor and Ethical Earnestness. What they said and penned they expressed in sentences short, frank, pointed, forceful and serious.

They called things by their right names; said just what they meant, nothing less, nothing more, nothing different; spoke "right on" as "plain, blunt men," in terse, pithy and homely English, with no other purpose than to be understood and felt. Just here is seen the great difference between our first prose and first poetry. The verse abounds in abrupt inversion, in paraphrase, excessive apposition, restatement and circuitous forms. In fact, these are its main marks and make it at times so difficult as to defy a clear rendering. There is, perhaps, no language in which there is such a wide difference as to structure and consequent difficulty between the prose and the verse, as in First-English. This difference, fortunately, is all in favor of the prose. It is probable that there is no period of Modern-English Prose in which there is so little waste of words in the expression of thought as in this earliest one. Little is to be said, however, as to grace or finish of structure in the prose. It was as devoid of that quality, as it was of moral looseness. With the exception, however, of grace and descriptive ease, we find in the prose all the higher elements of a good literary product. In an age so wide-mouthed as the present, when fluency and ideas are so often in the inverse ratio, something is still to be learned, perchance, of this olden time, when men spoke and wrote for a purpose and were sparing of their words.

As to the *moral quality* of the prose, it should not be forgotten that in addition to the homilies, Christian biographies, commentaries and religious treatises of the time, each of the prominent prose writers—Bede, Alfred and Aelfric—translated larger or smaller portions of the Scriptures into the common speech of

the people. Morley, in his "Illustrations of English Religion," has very naturally dwelt upon such striking facts as these, and despite the cynical allusions of Mr. Taine and the liberal school, they can scarcely be ignored.

Before leaving this opening era, it is of interest to inquire as to the AGENCIES which were at work *for* and *against* the development of a native English Prose.

As to those which were *adverse*, there were two of special prominence. One is found in the prevalence and bitterness of *civil strife* somewhat deepened by foreign wars. It is a matter of no small surprise that any degree of literary life could have been maintained in such an era and that Alfred could have done much of his best work in prose with the sword in one hand and the pen in the other. As the Jews in the days of Nehemiah, they must perforce, build and battle at the same time. Such a condition of things is a practical explanation of the moral sobriety of the prose, and a full explanation of its fragmentary character, its comparatively small amount, and the narrow range of subjects it includes. Literary art needed a more congenial soil in which to take root and produce the best fruitage. The temple of letters as that of Jehovah at Jerusalem must be built in times of peace. A further adverse agency is visible in the prevalence of the *Latin* as the vernacular of the island after the establishment of Rome's civil and ecclesiastical power. It is not the purpose, here, to arraign the Latin at the English bar to answer for this, or to diminish in one iota that large measure of benefit which has accrued to England and the English tongue from this kindred speech.

It is in point, however, to state that by reason of this Roman and Romish supremacy it was a much more difficult matter for the native language to make any headway or the native authors to found a native literature. The very word which meant, Latin—*leden*—also meant language, as if the two things were identical. So potent was this influence that as has been seen, Bede and others yielded to it. Aelfric and others compromised on the interlinear method, and Alfred alone resisted and overcame it. Even this was somewhat due to the fact that he lived in the ninth century, when the Roman influence had diminished or was superseded by Danish and other less potent and pervasive agents. Anglo-Latin was the prevailing language; and had it not been for the unconquerable English spirit of these writers, their translations of Scripture into the folk-speech, the work of Alfred and of the compilers of *The Chronicle*,—the name of First-English as applied to this period would indeed be a misnomer. In asking for a statement of those agencies which were *friendly* to the formation of a home prose, attention must first be called to this innate and indomitable English spirit which demanded the preference of the native language to all foreign rivals; to the wise and loyal policy of Alfred as a king, an author and a man; to the early opposition of the native Church to the order and doctrine of the Romish; to the preparation of the Biblical and secular manuals in the vernacular; and, most of all, to those marked providential agencies at work separating this western home more and more distinctly from the traditions and teachings of eastern and continental Europe. Even so cautious and critical an author as Ten Brinck, in closing his

survey of this period writes—"The English Language had by that time reached a high degree of culture and aptitude for the purposes of prose writing."

The spirit and drift of the age was after all Teutonic rather than South European. Hence the remark of Morley relative to the Anglo-Latin element—"They are English studies, English aspirations that we follow through the Latin Literature. The accident that use is made of a continental language leaves the native character unchanged." Even the Danish hordes that infested the land were pure Teutons, and it was not till the incoming of the Norman-French that this Teutonic impulse received any substantial check. First-English Prose, fragmentary and composite as it is, is after all, more English than it is anything else. In its spirit altogether English and so, to a good degree, in its letter and texture, it forms the opening chapter in that grand historic series which takes a new departure in the days of Elizabeth, and is even now in manifest expression before us. Bacon and Addison, Johnson and De Quincey would not have been what they are in English literary prose had it not been for these men of vigor who centuries before them did their pioneer and preparatory work. "Thus even before the Norman Conquest there appeared phenomena in England," writes one, "presaging the Middle Age of English,"—presaging, we may add, the Modern Age of English Speech and Letters. Such is the law of historical sequence as applied in the domain of language and literature.



## CHAPTER II.

### ENGLISH PROSE FROM THE CHRONICLE TO BACON.

THE chronological limits of this period extend from the close of The Chronicle (1154), on through the death of Chaucer (1400) to the full opening of the Modern English Period, in 1561—the birth of Bacon. This period, it will be seen, is not as long by a century as that which preceded; and, yet, it represents, especially at the close of it, a list of authors and an amount of English prose product altogether superior to anything that had preceded it and quite indispensable in its preparative relation to what was to follow. The general literary character of this period, both as to prose and poetry, is a matter of history. Discouraging as it is in some of its epochs and phases, it is interesting to note that more attention is now given to this intervening period than at any previous epoch. German, English, and American scholars alike, represented by such men as Maetzner, Ten Brinck and Brother Azarias are vying with each other in seeking the full explanation of that long literary decline which then prevailed, and also, in bringing into prominence any elements of promise that then lay concealed or but partially revealed. There is a true sense in which the difficulty of as-

certaining the real character of such eras marks the measure of their importance to the historical and literary student. The Norman Conquest of 1066, preceded by repeated Danish invasions, had done its transforming work, introducing a new system of civilization, a new language, in part, and a new spirit. To the older life of the times of Bede and Alfred these must altogether yield, or on the basis of compromise be adapted and adjusted. In the nature of things and by the providential course of events, there was a kind of union of systems, each retaining cardinal characteristics of its own. The result was, The Middle-English Prose. In speaking of the *agencies* at work in the First-English Period against the development of a native English Prose, we mentioned Foreign Influence and Civil Strife. It is suggestive to note that these, in somewhat different form and measure, are the obstacles at work in the Middle Period. In the early portion of the era—from its opening to Chaucer—the great opposing influence was the Norman-French. Beginning early in the eleventh century and culminating in the year 1066, its influence is distinctly marked as far on as to the middle of the fourteenth century. The chief result as far as structure is concerned, was the change of English from an inflected to an uninflected language, and as to vocabulary, the introduction of a large number of foreign words. However true the theory may be, that this phonetic decay of English would have taken place in obedience to an inevitable tendency of language to simplify, it must, still, be conceded that such decay was greatly hastened by Norman influence. The result was that First-English gave place somewhat violently to another form of English, call

it what we may. From this time on, it was all the more difficult for native writers to express their thoughts in native forms, or when so expressed, to have them accepted. As in the earlier era, Anglo-Latin was the prevailing tongue, as used by Bede, so now, Anglo-Norman, as it is called, was the literary language with the old Latin influence largely remaining. In fact, Norman-French and Latin now combined to make the cultivation of the home literature almost impossible. Hence it is that modern literary historians in commenting on this period, correctly speak of English writers in Latin and French. They wrote either in Latin or in French or in both combined—in anything but pure English. Such prose writers were those who wrote immediately at the opening of the Middle Period, when the foreign influences were the strongest, and who disappear as we near the days of Caxton. Such were William of Malmesbury, Ralph Higden, Geoffrey of Monmouth, Richard De Bury and Roger Bacon. They were in no honest sense writers of English, and cannot claim from the student of English Prose more than a passing notice. In chronicles, historical romance, and philosophy, they undoubtedly quickened the intellectual and literary life of the time, but did little or nothing directly for the English as a language. So dominant was this foreign influence for a century and a half after the Conquest, that these Latin and French authors on English soil had the field to themselves. There was no such thing just then as a substantial body of vernacular prose. It is to this very period that Ten Brinck refers as he says,—“The English Language could not maintain itself in the foreground of literature against the two-fold competition of the

Latin, which more than ever held the ear of scholars, and of the Anglo-Norman, which was the idiom of power and of fashion. It withdrew more and more into obscurity, as if to gather strength for better times." Such a work as, *The Anceren Riwle*, by Bishop Poor, written first in Middle-English and then in Latin, was based on a kind of compromise between the two languages. Never in the history of the English people has there been a period when the home speech was so completely in abeyance, and foreign forms so potent. It was not till the second half of the fourteenth century that this was changed and English began to assert itself with some prospect of success. Though this was signally true in poetry, it was true to some extent, also, in prose. In the latter part of this era, or from the death of Chaucer on, we meet a new obstacle in English Prose, in the Civil Wars of The Roses, more deadly, if possible, than the bitter feuds of the Octarchy. No sooner had the literature taken on a national as opposed to a provincial form, than these prolonged conflicts made it tend back again to dialects and local usage. As we stand at the tomb of Chaucer and cast the eye along the following century, we are prepared to appreciate the comparison which Warton makes between those times of promise and the beauty of a premature spring. The latter is no more surely followed by a short return of wintry winds than was the former by a period of literary coldness and death. This is especially true of the fifteenth century, of which it is truthfully remarked by Morley, "that it has not bred for us a single writer of the foremost rank." This is true, though it is possible to number no less than half a hundred versifiers and not a few prose writers as properly belonging to

this period. Of the last fifty years, beginning at the time of Henry VIII, better things can be said. As far back as Caxton, a new movement was partly visible as hastened and matured by the introduction of printing into England and by the liberal policy of the king toward men of letters. Not only is there now a new intellectual life abroad, and English Poetry under Italian influence is rising to newness of life, but in the special department of English Prose there is a deep and wide revival of interest. A good number of names may be cited here as working decidedly in this domain, while it has been suggestively remarked by not a few critics that the prose of these years will very favorably compare with that which followed in the age of Hooker.

This upward movement calls attention to what may be termed the *friendly agencies* at work on behalf of a native prose. Mention might be made here of the loss of Normandy in 1204, by which the Dukes of Normandy were no longer Kings of England, and the political separations of the two countries was substantially completed. The English *victories* in the Civil Wars tended, also, to the same beneficent result. Macaulay's prophecy, that if France had gained in these struggles, England would have become her dependency, was not a wild prophecy and was nullified by England's success. If we add to these, the friendly offices of the government toward native English writers, we have a partial explanation, at least, of the new awakening in prose letters.

The two agencies of special note, however, remain to be stated.

The first was, *The Introduction of Printing into England by Caxton and his colleagues*. In Cologne,

in 1471, Caxton published the first book ever printed in the English Language, and in 1474, the first English book ever printed in England. Each of these was translated from the French, and it was in the province of translation and revision that he put forth most of his energy. As most great workers, he little understood the meaning of the instrument he had in hand and its best uses. Instead of publishing the accepted authors of former times, and thereby giving examples of the best styles, most of the issues of his press were in the department of romance. We rejoice in what Caxton did. We deplore what he failed to do in the line of the more stable adjustment of a classic English Prose. The second specially helpful agency was the immediate result of printing itself—*The Publication of the Christian Scriptures in the VERNACULAR*. In addition to some partial versions of the First-English time by Aldhelm, Egbert, Bede, Alfred and Aelfric, and in addition to the later versions of Shoreham, Hampole, and Wyclif, it is interesting to note that between Caxton and King James we find no less than four or five Bible versions—Tyndale's, Coverdale's, Roger's, Cranmer's. This work of Bible translation was a literary as well as a religious work. It was invaluable at the time in giving widespread currency to the English tongue, in establishing secular literature on a moral basis, and in opening the way for the English Reformation. Both as to the matter of printing and that of Scriptural versions, it is not to be forgotten that while they belong alike to prose and poetry, it was in the sphere of prose, especially, that they found their best expression and uses.

If we inquire as to the writers of English Prose, in

this Middle Period, there are *three distinct lists* of names that engage us.

(a) The first is found in that part of the period that embraces the latter half of the fourteenth century (1350–1400), and includes four names of greater or lesser prominence—Chaucer, Mandeville, Wyclif, and Trevisa. From Chaucer we have in English Prose—The Parson's Tale and the Tale of Meliboens in the Canterbury Tales; his Translation of Boethius; The Testament of Love; and the Astrolabe, in which last he says what will apply to all his writings—"By this treatise I will show thee naked words in English." In the first of these writings we find what might pass for a sermon on Jer. vi. 16, wherein the Pilgrim's Progress of Bunyan is anticipated in the poet's most serious vein. In the second, the same strain of serious allegory is continued in dialogue between Meliboens and his wife, Prudence, wherein it is taught that life should be under the control of the moral law. In the Boethius, the same work which Alfred did nearly five centuries before, is taken up again and the union of the First and the Middle Period happily effected in the sphere of ethical prose. It is thus reserved for Chaucer not only to preserve the moral continuity of English Letters, but to substitute for the Consolation of Philosophy the higher consolations of religion. It is not a little peculiar here, as Morley suggests, that although the original Boethius has poetry as well as prose, and although Alfred has handed down to us his Metres,—the later English translator is so intent upon the prose of this didactic treatise, that he studiously omits the rendering of the verse.

In the Testament of Love, supposed by some not

to be genuine, there is a most interesting passage of The Prologue insisting on the wider use of the native language—"Lette than clerkes enditen in Latin and lette Frenchmen in their Frenche also enditen their queinte termes, for it is kyndely (natural) to their mouthes, and let us show our fantasies in soche wordes as we lerneden of our dame's tonge." This has the true ring about it, and marks the man who spoke it as loyal above all to the speech of his fathers. The writer pleads in this work for the presence and solace of the Love of God in the time of trial—the trial in his own case being supposed to refer to his imprisonment in 1388. Of the *Astrolabe* suffice it to say, that it is written for the benefit of his son Lewis, and a few years before the author's death. In it he takes frequent occasion to praise the use of the native English, and while encouraging his son in the study of Astronomy makes ever and anon suggestive hints on education and morals.

From the pen of Mandeville we have "The Travels,"—an account of his more than thirty years' sojourn in the East, making a sort of guide-book for those who might be inclined to journey over the same ground. Dedicated to Edward III., the date of its publication was 1356. Translated from Latin into the French and then into English, it became as an English treatise widely popular. It had just enough of facts in it to please the historian, and just enough of miracle and Eastern legend to frame a romance for the curious reader. It served to continue in English romantic prose what Geoffrey of Monmouth and his Anglo-Norman colleagues had begun earlier in the era, and to prepare the way for that special kind of prose in later periods which is marked by the



adventurous spirit. Of *Wyclif* and his work, it is scarcely necessary to speak.

His English version of the Scriptures was completed in 1380—the first complete Bible translation into English. Though not printed until centuries later, it was for a century and a half the Bible of England, and, what concerns us here especially, was the standard English Prose of the time. It is simply impossible to estimate the immediate and continuous effect of this version upon the English mind and the English speech. With over ninety per cent of native words in it, and being distinctively the people's book, it entered into the secular life and common speech of the time as an essential element. It did for that age what Tyndale's version did for his; and though a treatise purely Biblical, takes its place in the history of English Prose as an example of secular literature. The Bible was inspired, but its diction was *Wyclif's* and it was English to the core.

There remains a single name in this first list,—that of *Trevisa*, who did good work in converting Latin books into English, and his best work in giving an English rendering of Higden's *Polychronicon* (1387),—a kind of universal history bearing especially on that of England. If we compare *Trevisa*, the English Translator, with Higden, the Anglo-Latin original, we can get a very just idea of the difference between an Englishman writing in Latin and an Englishman writing in his mother tongue. *Trevisa* as contrasted with Higden reveals to us the progress that was slowly under way from the foreign to the native language.

(b) The second list of writers of Middle-English Prose, also, numbers four, and brings us into the six-

teenth century (1400-1500). They are Pecoock, Fortescue, Caxton, and Malory. Of the first of these authors, it is known that he was a man of high degree in the Church, able in theological controversy, arguing in English Treatises against the Lollards, and producing at length, his most famous work,—The Repressor of Over Much Blaming of The Clergy. As to its purpose, it is enough to state, that it was a vindication of the clergy against those charges made by the "Bible Men," and others, in justification of pilgrimages and similar practices. We have to do with it simply as a specimen of Middle-English Prose, and in that particular it deserves an emphatic mention as we pass along. Mixed as his English was, it was English, and much purer than his doctrine which trimmed too closely between reason and faith.

*Fortescue* introduces us into an entirely new department of prose—that of political and constitutional law. A man of high descent, of large legal learning, of official rank as a jurist and strongly inclined to democratic views in government, his main English treatise is—The Difference between Absolute and Limited Monarchy. The object is the same that he had in view in his Latin work on, The Praises of the Laws of England; namely, to show the superiority of a modified form of liberal government to that which is extremely restrictive or absolute. The spirit is the spirit of Alfred of old, and he writes as a man who was looking forward more than two centuries when English liberties were to be fully established at the revolution of 1688, under William. Of *William Caxton* enough has already been said to show how in the line of translating foreign books into English, and as an original writer and printer, he furthered the

good work already begun and probably did more than any secular author of his time on behalf of English Prose, secular and Scriptural. Of the last of this list, *Malory*, little is known; but that little is valuable. Enough is known to state that in speech and writings he separated himself from all those who still dallied with the courtly French, and entered heartily into the English movement. His book—The Byrth, Life, and Actes of King Arthur—is full of Christian spirit, and though dealing with the times of the great British hero, is marked by a true English zest and phrase. The extreme eulogiums pronounced upon it by critics serve to show that it has a rightful place among the best examples of Middle-English Prose and serves as another link to connect that history with all that follows.

Among the literary prose productions of this century, "The Paston *Letters*," deserve honorable mention not only by reason of their intrinsic merit, but of their peculiar relation at the time, to the history of our prose, and of the important light which they throw on many matters otherwise obscure. These letters appear to have been written in the reigns of Henry VI. and Edward IV., even on to the time of Henry VII. Composed by the members of a highly respectable though not an aristocratic family, they interpret as nothing else could have done the English life of the times. There is in such letters an informal and ingenuous expression of opinion quite foreign to the more critical and elaborate treatise. The private correspondence of Racine and Boileau, of Goethe and Schiller, and of Addison and his contemporaries, reveals to us far more of the character of the respective men and their eras than any of their more formal

productions could possibly do. Such a form of epistolary prose is especially valuable in an age when good literature is struggling for existence against grievous obstacles, and when the natural expression of thought is most difficult and most desirable. When, therefore, in *The Paston Letters* we discern a good degree of grammatical accuracy, a comparatively large vocabulary, and a fluency of diction indicating "the pen of a ready writer," we at once, accept the correspondence as a good specimen of the current prose of the time.

(c) A third and somewhat fuller list of Modern-English Prose in this middle era awaits us as we pass into the sixteenth century, almost within sight of the *Essays of Bacon*, and the era called Modern. The call of the roll is substantially as follows,—*More*, *Latimer*, *Lord Berners*, *Elyot*, *Hall*, *Fabyan*, *Leland*, *Tyndale* and *Ascham*. "Though these writers," as *Minto* suggests, "are very far from being of use as models of style," we may add, that they serve a most important use in our study of the historic development of English Prose from its beginning to its present forms. With *More* as the author of "*Utopia*" and other Latin treatises, we have nothing to do; but with *More* as a literary leader of his time and the author of English works such as, *Edward V.* and *Richard III.* we have much to do. Young, brilliant and scholarly; versed in all classical and modern lore, he was even in his Latin writings a quickener of the English mind, while in so far as he wrote in the native tongue, the weight of his personal influence gave to his words unwonted power.

*Latimer* was the John Knox of his time, and is connected with the history of English Theological Prose

as a writer of bold, impassioned, pungent sermons. He preached straight at the "conscience of the king" and of all who heard him, and on such wise that moral reformation speedily followed. The fact is, that the pulpit prose of that day might well become the model of modern sermonizers, when men wrote with the Bible before them and for the salvation of men. One of the English yeomanry by birth, his homely prose took right hold of the honest English heart and moulded the character of the common people. Of *Berners* it is sufficient to state, that in his translation of Froissart's "Chronicle" he gives more than an average specimen of the prose writing of his time; and of *Elyot*, that his "Governor" presents not only a valuable educational treatise for that early period, but a helpful one in the line of native prose. His other works—on philology, sanitary and social science—prove him to have been as versatile as he was practical. *Hall*, *Fabyan*, and *Leland* were the chroniclers of their time in the line of work begun by Froissart, in Latin, and continued by Berners in English,—one writing, The Union of the Family of Lancaster and Yorke; another, The Chronicles of England and France, partly in prose and, partly, in verse; and the third, The Itinerary, doing for travelers in England what Mandeville had done for tourists to Jerusalem and the East. It is pleasing to note that though, as the King's Antiquary, he wrote much in Latin, his best prose work is in his own tongue. We are now brought to the name of *Tyndale* and his great work of Bible translation. In the face of threats from every quarter, he determined to "open the King of England's eyes," as to Protestant teachings, and to give the Bible to

the people in their own tongue, so that boys of the anvil and the plow would know more of God's Word than Papal priests did. But we are studying the subject of English Prose, and with this in view it may be stated, that Tyndale's version of the Scriptures—the first *printed* version extant—occupies on its secular side as important a relation to the history of our prose literature as any other one book. Superior to Wyclif's, in that it was from the original and was printed, it had the advantage, also, of all later versions, in that it appeared just when it was most needed. It determined, then and there, for all subsequent history, the fortunes of the English tongue and formed a basis for subsequent versions. It did for English what Luther's version, a few years earlier, did for German; and no arithmetic can compute the indebtedness of the respective languages to the respective translations. Thousands who fail to form their lives on Scriptural teachings, form their speech upon them; and to these, and the daily journals, and a few printed books of household use, look for all that they learn of style and diction. Nor is it to be forgotten here, that this close of the Middle-English era was an era of translations of Scripture. Coverdale's version in 1535, Matthew's or Roger's, in 1537, and Cranmer's (The Great Bible) in 1539, appeared as the direct result of Tyndale's work. "It was wonderful to see," says the quaint historian Strype, "with what joy this Book of God was received not only among the learned sort, but all England over." It was for all England over that it was meant, and in this fact lay its power as a specimen of English Prose. The last name of the list before us is the name of *Ascham*, who stands on the border line

between the old and the new, acting alike as an historian and a herald. "His chief service to English Prose," as Minto, referring to Drake, declares, "is the example he sets of writing in the *vernacular*." In his "Toxophilus," he gives the principles of good writing, as well as of archery, and in his "School-master," touches on various topics of interest in education. "I write," he says, "English matter, in the English Language, for Englishmen." He resolves "to think as wise men, and to speak as the common people." He is eager to write something for the yeomen of England and in his classical studies not to forget his own birth-tongue. Mr. Disraeli is right when he says, "that the volumes of Ascham are indispensable to any English library whose possessor in any way wishes to connect the progress of taste and opinion in the history of our country." Similar in spirit to Fuller and Walton, he did in his day an invaluable work in English Prose, and connects himself historically with all that is best in our letters. Living and writing in four different reigns, he may well be regarded as the last of the Middle-English list, or the first of the Modern in the realm of Prose Literature.

In surveying this roll of Prose Writers from Mandeville to Ascham, it is to be noted—

That outside of the Bible, we have not yet found any *standard* prose writers of native English, writers upon whose style a modern student may be safely urged to base his practice and progress. While this is true, we have found not a few of these names well worthy to rank as forerunners of those mightier men whose number begins with Hooker and Bacon. They wrote in times of great civil and literary confusion;

in a language that may well be termed, Broken English, and in periods of marked moral decline. Still, they were staunch enough in spirit and English purpose to bring some degree of order out of the chaos; to maintain the thread of English speech clearly through all deviations and to open the way for the speedier incoming of a stable, Christian, English prose. No such example of stern and successful resistance to foreign influence can be found in history as that of these Middle Englishmen in their relation to Latin and Norman-French. In the face of all such opposition, the body of the language remained what it had ever been, while the native writers struggled on midway between an inflected and an uninflected system, to express their thought in native forms, and they succeeded. It is not to be forgotten, indeed, that to the Norman-French they were deeply indebted for a large increase of vocabulary and for a much larger variety of literary form than was possible in the preceding period. Still they insisted, especially in prose, that the freshness of the old folk-speech must remain inviolate so that after all the disorder of the intervening centuries English should emerge in the time of Ascham more forceful than ever and better prepared for that great literary future awaiting it. We note that in 1258, Henry II. issued "to all his faithful, learned and laymen," a proclamation in the English tongue; that in 1349, Latin became subordinate to the home language; that in 1362, English took the place of foreign tongues as the language of the courts; that in this year, also, Parliament was opened for the first time in English; that even in the fifteenth century, French became an accomplishment rather than a necessity, and that at



the invention of Printing, in 1442, the change from Middle to Modern-English Prose was philologically and morally assured. From these historical facts we may get some glimpse of that great work that had been done by these writers, no one of whom would now rank as standard. In a much truer sense than of the First-English Prose it may be said that in our estimate of authors and authorship the line and plummet are not to be applied too closely lest we undervalue what is of real importance. We do not desire with the scholarly Erasmus to magnify these primitive efforts into something unprecedented, nor do we desire to commit the graver error of some later critics and count them out as of little moment. It is far too easy to confine attention to brilliant eras and refer epochs of preparation to the hands of the antiquary. English Prose is said to begin with Hooker, and so it does as a national and stable prose in its modern type, and yet a noble initial work had been done by other hands from Alfred to Ascham. In Italy, the way for the golden age was prepared by an early Arabian influence at work in Southern Europe. In France and Germany, similar preparative processes opened the way. Such influences though silent, isolated, and irregular, are, after all, determinative and constructive. If fewer and less excellent prose writings are found in early England than are found later, it was because nothing was fixed in literature or society, in politics or culture, and partial results were the best possible. But had it not been for these old chroniclers, translators, reformers and preachers, the golden periods of English Prose might have been deferred for centuries, if, indeed, they had ever become a part of our literary history. We re-

gard it as one of the urgent literary needs of the time that due attention be given by English critics and readers to these first and middle eras. It is certainly an omen of good that increasing interest is now developing in these directions. Writers are calling attention to the necessity of the study of our first authors, not simply as a matter of etymological profit, but as the means by which an insight is to be obtained into our later literary life and history. Until the modern English student is thus furnished he is but half educated, and is using a language of which he is ignorant as to its origin and progress. Ever and anon as he advances from age to age, he will discern all along the line of the history of our prose, points of junction between the new and the old, influences and effects dating in their causes back to Wyclif and his forerunners. In the life of literature as in that of philosophy and science, the law of continuity, of logical sequence is fundamental; and as we prosecute the study of modern eras it may be well to keep before us the text of Chaucer in *The Parson's Tale*,—"Stand ye in the old ways, and see and ask for the old paths."

## PART FIRST.

### REPRESENTATIVE HISTORICAL PERIODS.

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#### CLASSIFICATION.

THE wide variety of view which has been taken by literary historians as to the number, limits and general characteristics of our Modern Prose Periods, sufficiently serves to indicate the difficulty involved in reaching satisfactory conclusions, and also the great importance of reaching them. Such periods are far more than chronological or historical in their import. They have as well, a philosophical and logical relation to each other and to that entire period of which they are the separate parts. This diversity of view has arisen, partly, from the particular standpoint at which each critic has stood at the time of discussion; partly, from the fact that opinions once held are modified as a literature advances; and, partly, because the historic development of English Prose and Poetry, however different, has been sufficiently similar to lead at times to a kind of classification that exactly expresses neither the one nor the other. As far as poetry is concerned, the great historical divisions are substantially the same among leading scholars. In Prose, these divisions take a wider range and may be said to be included in three quite distinct methods, repre-

sented by such critics, respectively, as Mackintosh, Minto and Bascom. From the standpoint of the first we have the following—

- (1) From Sir Thomas More (1500) to Clarendon (1650). This is termed the Latin age of English Prose.
- (2) From the Restoration (1660) to 1750. This is called the Classic Age of natural, idiomatic English Prose.
- (3) From Samuel Johnson (1750) to the present era. The Rhetorical or Literary Period.

This division, it will be noted, is based on a somewhat sharp distinction between the progressive development of our prose and our poetry. The authors of it mean it to be confined to prose, and on this basis exclusively it has some merit, in so far as the dates are concerned. The names assigned to the respective periods—Latin, Classical, and Rhetorical, are open to just criticism.

They are scarcely in accordance with literary facts. The plan, moreover, is narrow and partial.

Mr. Minto, in his admirable *Manual of Prose*, goes directly to the other extreme of undue minuteness, dividing the history of English Prose into no less than eight or ten distinct periods, beginning at 1580 and closing about 1850. This gives to the different eras but an average length of a little over a quarter of a century—far too limited, in most cases to mark the full development of the period. In such a period as 1640–1670 it might do, but by no means in such periods—1700–1730, or 1790–1820. The classification as a whole, is so full as to break the historical continuity by excessive subdivision of epochs; and again, in its separate parts, so narrow as to forbid a free expression of the literary prose of the time.

A third class of critics, represented by such men as Morley, Masson, Moir, and Bascom, has wisely avoided each of these extremes, and adopted a method by which the logical as well as the chronological view of English Prose may be manifested. President Bascom, in his *Philosophy of English Literature*, applies this method both to Modern Prose and Poetry in the following order of periods—

FIRST CREATIVE,	1550-1650.
FIRST TRANSITION,	1650-1700.
FIRST CRITICAL,	1700-1750.
SECOND TRANSITION,	1750-1800.
SECOND CREATIVE,	1800-1850.
PERIOD OF DIFFUSION,	1850- .

In each of these six periods, ample room is given for the full expression of the individual life of the period and yet each is sufficiently compact to mark the period as distinct, while the excellence of the plan lies in the fact that behind the dates as given lies the philosophy of literary progress and decline. In the plan that we present, this last order of division will be the preferable one as a guide—though as to number of epochs, their names and relations, we shall widely depart from the order presented, and offer a classification of our own as follows—

I.—PERIOD OF FORMATION,	1560-1660.
Bacon—Milton.	
II.—PERIOD OF TRANSITION,	1660-1700.
Milton—Addison.	
III.—PERIOD OF FINAL SETTLEMENT,	1700-1760.
Addison—Johnson.	
IV.—PERIOD OF EXPANSION,	1760-1860.
Johnson—Carlyle.	

The first of these eras includes the reigns of Elizabeth, James I., and Charles I., and the Protectorate. It is Elizabethan, and Early Stuart, and Cromwellian. The second era includes the reigns of Charles II., James II., William and Mary. It is the Later Stuart, or Restoration Era, and that of The Revolution, or Great Rebellion.

The third era includes the reigns of Queen Anne, of George I., and George II. It is Augustan, and Early Georgian. The fourth era includes the reigns of George III., George IV., William IV., and Victoria. It is later Georgian and Victorian.

We have thus clearly before us the historical limits of each of these four eras, the leading prose authors that mark the beginning and close of each, respectively, and the English kings, queens, and other rulers who, in each respectively, held the reins of government and favored or retarded the growth of letters. We shall arrive at the best results by discussing each of these periods separately and, at the close, noting those general inferences which suggest themselves from a comprehensive survey of the four eras as one historical period of English Prose.

## CHAPTER I.

### FORMATIVE PERIOD—1560-1660.

THIS embraces, as we have seen, precisely a century, the reign of three sovereigns, including the Protectorate, and presents some of the leading names of English Prose. The widely current name assigned to this epoch—The Reformation Period—is somewhat misleading and is not the best. In all departments save the ecclesiastical and theological, it is formative or shaping rather than re-formative. Even in the sphere of the church itself, formation was, after all, the main work of Protestants. As English Protestantism may be said to take *form* for the first time in the era before us, it was the English Formation rather than Re-formation. Precisely so, in English Prose, as, indeed, in English Letters. As English Prose may be regarded as having taken literary *form* for the first time in the days of Elizabeth, as contrasted with the Middle and First-English Periods the phrase, formative, is the proper one to designate its character. It was in no true sense, re-formative. In this respect the word, creative, so often assigned to the poetry of the age before us, is not out of place as to prose in so far as it involves the idea of fashioning or shaping, although the term, formative, best expresses that special process which was then going

on,—the molding or adjusting of all those literary elements which were at hand into a well ordered system of prose discourse. As yet, there was no English Prose existing as a body of literary product which could be re-formed. The work was more experimental and tentative, than it was a revision of that already in being. We no sooner open the best prose literature of the age, such as Bacon's Essays, Hooker's Polity, or Johnson's Discoveries, than we see this formative process in action before us. As we shall see later in the discussion, the real re-formatory process in English Prose finds ample scope in the third period,—that of Settlement. There was then something to recast into better shape as an essential work preparative to the final establishment of our Prose Literature either as a model for the student or a study for the critic. The epoch before us is not without a fitting parallel in the progressive history of creation. The first chapter in the history of English Prose as it reads in the sixteenth century, runs very much in a literary point of view, as the first chapter of Genesis reads as an account of God's creative work. It is a record of formations. The First-English word for creator, *Scyppend*, the Shaper, is in place here and describes that partly original and partly mechanical or plastic work which was done by the best prose writers in this first period. Bacon may be truly said to have re-formed philosophy. He cannot be said to have re-formed English Prose. He did much, however, toward forming it and putting it in shape for those who were to follow and perfect it. In developing more fully this particular period, we shall examine in order, its *causes* and *character-*



*istics*, pursuing a line of discussion somewhat similar to that adopted by Hazlitt in his *Literature of the Age of Elizabeth* and ever keeping in mind that our theme is, *Prose Literature*.

(A.) Causes or Agencies of Formative English Prose.

FRIENDLY AGENCIES.

(1) We notice, first, that Antecedent and Preparative Work to which attention has been called, as it occurred in First, and, more especially, in Middle-English Prose. Sufficient has been said in the historical survey of these introductory periods to make emphatic what is here asserted. We have seen that even before printing was introduced by Caxton into England, and before published books were known, English Prose had a place in manuscript form, and bore an important relation to all that followed. We have traced the crude beginnings of prose in the writings of King Alfred, Aelfric, and the compilers of the *Chronicle*. We have followed the course of it on through the days of Mandeville, and Wyclif, and Ascham, down to Modern-English time. The history is one. The people, the language, the spirit, the purpose, are substantially one. So connected are the epochs, that in discussing the opening era of Modern Prose, we are driven perforce to those still earlier years, which were what they were and where they were, more for the ages that followed than for themselves, and which enter as an essential factor into the literary productions before us. As a man's antecedents do not determine, but largely modify his character and possibilities, so here, Formative En-

glish Prose was somewhat the thing that it was, because of the prose that preceded it.

(2) A second causative agency is found in what may well be called, The Great Awakening of English Literary History in the sixteenth century. It was in England what the Renaissance was in France and in Southern Europe, and was in literature what that was in art. The epithet, Great, may be applied to it in that it affected all departments of thought and action and pervaded every class of society. It was a time of new ideas and enterprises; of discovery and adventure; of mental, political, and religious revival—the golden age of national life. In the light of the discussion before us, there were two special features of this awakening that demand emphatic notice.

(a) It was distinctly *modern*,—a time of evoking new forces into action rather than of the re-awakening of forces long existent but slumbering. It was more like a regeneration than a revival or renewal. It marks the genesis of modern thought as distinct from ancient and draws once for all that broad boundary line which we discern between the old and the new. As far as it was an awakening at all, it was a modern awakening and in English Prose as in all things else that are English, manifests its modern impress and character.

(b) Nor was it modern only. It was modern English. It is historically true, as Mr. Hallam urges, that this awakening was European or Continental, affecting more or less deeply every important nation of modern Europe; still, on English soil, as nowhere else, did these new qualities appear, and in England,

as nowhere else, did they bear abundant fruit. Not only did all that transpired in Germany and on the Continent indirectly affect England for good, but it was in the England of that time that these new impulses and principles centred and developed, so that it became for all modern historians the one best standpoint from which to study what Mr. Hallam calls—"The revival of literature in Europe in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries." These facts bear directly on English literature and on the prose portion of it. Not only was it the time of first things in English poetry as in the epic of Spenser and the dramas of Shakespeare and his contemporaries, but it marks the formation of English Prose—so that in history, theology, philosophy, romance, and general literature the first productions of our language are here found. Even in the line of English Prose Manuals for educational purposes, this fact is quite significant. In 1551, we note the first scientific treatise in England on the Art of Discourse, by Wilson. In 1558, by the same writer, the first treatise in English on Logic. In 1586, Bullock gives the first English Grammar, and in 1589, the work of Aelfric in the First Period is taken up in better form by Rider, who prepares a Latin-English Dictionary. Thus it appears that in technical work as in a wider field of literary prose, the era was conspicuously modern and English, and, thus, a mighty agent in the furthering of that formative work which is now manifestly in progress. The eminently English character of this era and prose will be further noted in the sequel.

(3) We notice another helpful agency in, The Attitude of Royalty toward the Rising English.

Between the early dissensions caused by the bigotry of Mary and the later troubles arising from Civil War, there was now a protracted period of comparative peace nearly up to the time of the Protectorate. It is well known how Spanish Letters suffered by the policy of the Philips; how the literary progress of Italy was retarded by civil oppression and how similar results followed in Germany while Adolphus and Wallenstein were at war. English Letters now suffered but little from such disturbances. More than this, there was positive and practical aid to the aspiring writers of the time. Elizabeth, James I., and Charles I., did much, directly and indirectly, to favor this formative work. No modern literature has less to complain of in this regard than the English; while in certain instances, as in the case of Elizabeth, the reigning sovereign has not been content to give political protection to authorship, but has personally entered into the lists, and added to the literary product of the time.

(4) A further friendly agency to the prose is seen in the number and importance of the English Versions of Scripture in this era. Attention has been called to the fact that this was also a marked characteristic of the Middle-Prose Period, as seen, especially, in the versions of Wyclif and Tyndale. Equally striking is the fact that this first period of Modern English Prose may be said to be opened, as it is throughout characterized, by the translation of the Bible into English. The Geneva Bible (1557—60), prepared by Protestant refugees, in Geneva, who had fled from the persecutions of Bloody Mary, was the popular English Bible for half a century; and stands

at the very opening of this era, as if to give it character and historic renown as the first prose production. As the first example of an English Version in which the old black letter gives place to modern English script and type, it fitly marks the passing away of the old, and the formal introduction of the new English Era of sacred and secular prose. In 1568, there follow, "The Bishops' Bible," based on Cranmer's, re-issued by Parker in 1572; and, as most noteworthy of all, King James' Version of 1611, the Bible of England and America down to the date of the recent revisions. This is the Bible of which ninety-five per cent and over is First-English; and which, as far as the vernacular itself is concerned, still remains unequaled. It is more than a specimen of the King's English. It is the people's English. Too much emphasis cannot be laid upon the fact, as bearing on our present purpose, that the Bible is an example, on its secular side, of English Prose, and enters as an essential element into this formative work.

Viewed as a version, or translation, purely in its human aspect, as an example of English speech, it undoubtedly stands all through English literary history, and, more especially, in this era, as the leading agency of all others. It did then for English Prose what no other production could possibly have done. It gave that true direction and character to English Prose style which is now an elemental part of it. English Prose is Biblical.

These were the main friendly agencies at work in this first epoch of English Prose, applying more or less fully to all forms of literary activity, and, yet,

having a pertinent bearing on the formation of prose. This is especially true, as seen, of the Scripture versions as rendered into prose; and largely true also of that great awakening of modern English life which marked the era throughout. Let us note some Adverse Agencies.

#### ADVERSE AGENCIES.

1. *The Peculiar Grammatical Structure* of the English of this period which, as bad as it was in poetry, was more harmful in prose.

We allude here to the fact that English syntactical and verbal structure was greatly unsettled, and necessarily so. This arose, mainly, from the results that attended the breaking up of the old inflectional system. That system prevailed in First-English, partially existed in Middle-English, and was still in process of change. Mr. Abbott, in his Elizabethan Grammar, has given the full history and explanation of the English of this period. Varieties of grammatical form not tolerated now were then admissible. Gross violations of modern grammar were then in order on every page. Inflections were retained or rejected at pleasure. Words in double senses outside of figurative usage were freely employed. Literal and metaphorical uses were quite the reverse of what they are now. In a word, the writer took his own way, despite all existing rules. There was no law nor standard. Hence, it was with no little difficulty that the prose authors of that time at all succeeded in forming an English Prose and serves to show conclusively that those critics are in error who insist that we have in this first era a fully developed and

settled English Prose. This was in the nature of things impossible. The shifting grammar of the language made it impossible. The authors did the best they could; and the marvel is, that with such materials in hand they formed so goodly a structure. The prose was in formation, just as the language itself was, and because it was. The one could not advance toward fixed establishment more rapidly than the other. In poetry it was somewhat different in that a larger freedom in the choice and use of grammatical forms was and is permissible. The quaint phrase was often the preferable one.

2. *The rise of Euphuism, and, The Metaphysical School of Prose.* In a word, the rise of a conceited style.

This was not germane to England or English writers, but came from without. English Prose is at fault in that it so readily received and applied it. While it flourished, it did no little harm in the formative work going on. We shall have occasion in the sequel to trace the presence and influence of this school of conceit, whose disciples wrote profoundly of the simplest thing, or atoned for absence of ideas by a wild profusion of quaint and overdrawn phrases. In no more unfortunate time could such a style have entered English Letters. It was untimely, just because our prose was taking shape and was keenly sensitive to every surrounding influence. At such a crisis, it was even more inclined to take on the evil than the good. Euphuism no sooner came from the Continent to England, than Sydney, and other prose writers, became a prey to it; and from that day to this it has had more or less sway among us. The

Metaphysical School of Donne, and Cowley, in the reign of Charles I., was the first to perpetuate it, even in grosser form, to later eras. They had all the faults of Lyly as a writer, without his redeeming features.

### 3. *The Revival of the Classical Languages and Literature.*

This was, in all respects, the most prominent, constant and formidable obstacle in the formation of a native English Prose. We are now speaking of this classical awakening simply in the light of its unfriendly relation to the English; it being well known to every student of history that the blessings of that general revival of the old learning were invaluable. There were three distinct forms of foreign influence which at the time worked against our English Prose—as English,—the Latin, Greek, and Italian. We have noted how, in the First-English Period, most of the English writers of prose wrote in Latin. We have seen that in the Middle Period, up to the time of Caxton, Latin still had a large place in the prose of Englishmen. In the sixteenth century, also, new forces were at work in Europe, in the interests of old Roman Letters. The revival was general and pervasive, and once again made itself felt in special power on English soil. It is now that the classical professorships at Oxford and Cambridge were established on a sure foundation, while it was regarded as in place for all those who were counted among the scholars of the land, to make themselves conversant with the old learning now made new.

Precisely so as to Greek. After the capture of Con-



stantinople in 1453, this language became the free property of scholars all over Europe, and of course, moved steadily northward and westward across the English Channel. The enthusiasm over the Greek at the great educational centres of England, was even greater than over the Latin. It spread far and wide. It permeated all quarters, so that under such instructors as Erasmus and Cheke, thousands of ambitious students were introduced into the mysteries of Attic lore. It was a kind of Athenian contagion, a "new thing." So, as to Italian. This was the special period of Italian influence on English; the age of Ariosto and Tasso, and the prose writers beginning in the time of Henry VIII., and pervading the reign of Elizabeth. From this brief survey it may readily be seen that if, in one respect, the drift of the age was modern and English, in another, it was backward and classical. Books in Latin, and, more especially, translations in Latin and Greek, now abounded. Fox and Jewel, Parker and North, and hosts of others, resorted in preference to the older tongues. The Queen, herself, made the Italian and Greek a part of her daily task-work under the guidance of Ascham and others. English Reformers wrote and preached and wrangled in Latin. More and Browne, Milton and Bacon wrote in Latin. Nothing will more clearly reveal the powerful sway which the Latin then had than the language which Bacon himself uses. Of his *Essays* he says: "I do conceive that the Latin volume of them, being in the *universal* language, may last as long as books last." Again he says: "My labors are now most set to have those works which I have formerly published (in English) well translated into Latin.

For these *modern* languages will, at one time or another, play the bankrupt with books; and since I have lost much time with this age, I would be glad to recover it with posterity." Such language was somewhat natural, perhaps, in a man whose main work was philosophical and who wrote with one eye always on Aristotle and the Latin Schoolmen; but it was not confined to Bacon. It was in the air and temper of the time as the result of the classical renaissance, and is still another proof that whatever the English Prose of the time was, it could be formative only, and not final. The foreign influences from all quarters of Europe were too many and potent to allow it to become stable, or to do anything more than successfully to offer resistance, or make judicious compromise. In fine, there was a strong reactionary tendency to other forms than English. Just as in the Civil Wars of Middle-English, the language continually reverted to old dialectic usage, so now, under a pressure from abroad, native forms and forces reverted of necessity to the older life of mediæval and ancient Europe. The era was more than critical for English Prose and Poetry and for the English Speech itself.

If we ask how and why the influence was checked and caused to recede, we come in contact, at once, with the *providential* element in human history—especially manifest in English History. It was thus that the Roman armies strangely left Britain when they did, in 425 A. D. It was thus that Romish Missionaries in the sixth and seventh centuries in England were thwarted in reducing the country to Romish doctrine and rule. It was thus that in the

French and English Wars, England somehow triumphed; and so it was, that just as the old heathen influence from Latium, Greece and Italy, poured in upon England as a flood, there was another flood of deeper depth and mightier momentum, in the form of the Protestant awakening; so that the English Church and the English Tongue were saved together as English.

### (B.) Characteristics of Formative English Prose.

#### 1. *Increasing Grammatical Regularity.*

Allusion has been made to the variable, unsettled structure of the grammar of this period, due to the surviving struggle between inflected and uninflected English. Hence, the diction and rhetorical character of the authorship were ever changing, but also, ever tending to permanence. The conflict now, it is to be noted, was not between foreign forms and native, but in the bosom of the home-speech itself between one form of English and another. There was danger in all this, and, yet it was the sign of life and progress; the same inward principle of life that was at work in First-English Prose at the hands of Alfred, and in Middle-English under Wyclif and Ascham. Here it is once again manifest, that English Prose was not yet fully settled, but in process of settlement. Even such cautious writers as Tyler, and Morley, speak of "formed" English Prose even before this era. It was formative only, but as such, more and more inclined to take an abiding cast and character. Unsettled, in a sense, as the best examples of it are, there was still a molding work done at that time which could have

been done neither before nor after, and which was absolutely essential to the existence of this form of literature.

### 2. *An Increasing Vocabulary.*

From what has been said relative to the great mental and moral awakening of this period, it can readily be inferred that words were pouring into English from all quarters. This was not confined, however, to the incoming of foreign terms. The native speech was broadening under the influence of the new impulses. Mixed English was becoming more and more a pure English, while even foreign words themselves were received and compacted into the body of the home language. Those prose authors who felt obliged, for prudential reasons, to continue the use of the classical Latin, did so with ever renewed distrust; until at length, they yielded with the poets to the resistless pressure of native influences. Even at this early period there were forty-five thousand words in our vocabulary, nearly one half of the present number—while the manner in which the Bible Versions controlled common speech made it more and more native in character.

### 3. *Its English Spirit.*

Foreign Influence had now reached its height and was declining, while the home influences were coming into ever wider scope. Especially true in poetry, this characteristic marks, also, the prose. Though Bacon wrote his philosophy in Latin, still, that part of his prose which was designed to be practical, “to come

home to men's business and bosoms," was wisely written in the mother tongue. Though the reign of James I. was somewhat under the influence of Spanish Letters and though canons of French taste revived toward the time of Cromwell, still, this English spirit was dominant over all and ever on the increase. The foolish conceits of Lyly and his followers affected the surface more than the centre of authorship. Deep down in the inner life of the best literature the servitude either to ancient or modern Europe was solemnly forsworn and a new departure at once taken into the liberty of the home-speech. The age was eminently English, because it was free from all the trammels which had hitherto bound it. Men were doing their own thinking in their own way, and this newly acquired intellectual liberty meant an ever wider removal from classical terms, and an ever firmer committal to the modern and the advancing. Modern progress meant English progress more than anything else and the prose authors of the time embodied and transmitted it. If the queen could boast of her proficiency in the Greek and Italian, she could also boast that she employed a preceptor, in the person of Ascham, to compose his *Toxophilus* in the special interests of his native speech. Whatever the prose period was or was not, it was one of mental freedom in the interests of the home-tongue.

#### 4. *Its Versatility.*

This arose largely from the rich infusion of new ideas that then took place and from the consequent stimulus of the English mind. Not only in poetry, but, in prose,—theological, philosophical, to historical

and general—this variety is manifest. It reminds one, as he enters it, of a rich tropical clime where nature displays herself in a profusion almost bewildering. So rich and versatile was the literary product that the so-called second rate authors might with justice be cited as examples of good literary work, while the names of first excellence were so supreme as still to hold in English Letters the place that was then assigned them.

### 5. *Human or Catholic.*

Never were what Whipple would call "Literature and Life," so closely related as now. The man was in the author and his book. Men discussed what we term living issues, and in a living manner. It is this characteristic of the prose of this age that Mr. Hallam must have had in mind when he says: "There was never a generation in England which for worldly prudence and wise observation of mankind stood higher than the Elizabethan." It was an age in which the principles of human nature in general, as well as the English human nature in particular, were deeply studied and fully expressed.

Never have writers understood each other and the world better. They seem to have had an instinctive as well as a studied knowledge of their fellows, and could portray them to themselves. In this particular, Shakespeare stood first; but he had many able disciples in poetry and prose. It was natural that the great authors of this period, especially in the days of Elizabeth, should thus become the skillful interpreters of men to men. The literature could not but be catholic and spacious, in an age when church and

state were alive with good impulses and when the special mark of the period was that the ancient was giving way to the modern, monasteries to universities, priestly bigotry to Protestantism, and narrowness to breadth of idea and spirit.

English Prose has many excellences now which it had not then; but it has never had a larger degree of general robustness and vigor than then it had. It was heroic, chivalric, and wide embracing,—the age of man and of truth.

#### 6. *Protestant and Ethical.*

The Literature of the time was under the influence of the English Reformation and that of the English Bible and Christian Reformers. As grand and general as the intellectual progress of the time was, there was a moral movement deeper and wider. The sceptical Buckle, in his account of European Civilization, is scarcely competent, as a rationalist, to give a true history of this era, on its religious side. It is a spectacle as pitiable as it is fruitless, to note the attempt on the part of this adroit historian to give us the explanation of this era apart from this ethical feature as most prominent. Gibbon, in his record of reasons for the early establishment of Christianity in the Roman Empire, is far more political and judicious in that, with natural and social causes, he is free to admit the presence of others. There is no part of the racy criticism of our literature by Mr. Taine more suggestive than where he is brought face to face with this special aspect of British life. Admitting that the Reformation entered England "by a side door," he grants that it *entered* and speedily induced among

all the people that "crisis of conscience which is natural to the race." He calls the Bible "England's book," and marvels at that persistency which in spite of protestation caused it to be read and heard. "Never," he adds, "has a people been so deeply imbued by a *foreign* book, or let it penetrate so far into its manners and writings, its imagination and its language." Such are the concessions that must be made even by French and prejudiced critics. The period was Protestant and moral as compared with the preceding, or as compared with contemporary periods across the Channel. The age was golden in this respect as much as in any other. It did more for our literary future in this regard than in any other, and served to mark, for all time, the prose of England as elevated and Christian.

At the close of this era in the days of Cromwell, an era especially of prose, a peculiar phase of this ethical literary life comes into prominence. We call it Puritan, oftener Puritanic, and in some respects, we admit it marked a decline from the stalwart morality of earlier times. Still, it was a distinctively *moral* influence, somewhat narrower and less attractive than that of Sydney's day, and, yet, an earnest protest against the low and base. Certainly, no sounder form of English Prose exists in any period than we find in the writings of Walton, of Fuller, and Jeremy Taylor.

If Protestantism overreached itself in some of these Puritan Prose-writers, and degenerated, often, into bigotry, the balance was more than struck by their living earnestness on the side of truth and on behalf of English morals. The Puritans have had their



share of sneer and satire at the hands of Macaulay and others. They had, however, a mission and fulfilled it. Open to criticism at many points, suffice it to say that they could be ill spared from English History or English Letters and in the time of which we speak did no inferior work in the line of a solid, serious, ethical, English Prose. As we close the survey of this first period, it is quite noticeable that, although at the opening of it, in the reign of Elizabeth, English Prose was inferior in quality and measure to poetry,—at the close of the era, as we near the Protectorate, these relations were reversed, so that prose has marked an advance and we find ourselves somewhat further on in its historic development. Still, from beginning to end, the prose was substantially one. Hooker at the opening, and Milton, at the close, had much in common both as to merit and demerit. However different the varied features of the period are, they are alike in this—that they were formative and Elizabethan. As Mr. Brooke correctly remarks in speaking of the prose authors of the Cromwellian era itself, “The style of nearly all these writers links them to the age of Elizabeth. The prose of men like Brown and Burton and Fuller, is not as poetic as that of the Elizabethan writers, but it is just as fanciful.” He speaks of the prose of Taylor and Milton having all the faults common to the days of Hooker and Bacon. In fine, the century was one of prose in process of settlement, and all minor differences are lost in the great fact that we find in 1650, as the period closes, English Prose was mainly what it was as the era opened in 1560—a prose still in formation, with a somewhat stronger principle of

adjustment and unity present in it, and an ever clearer prospect of final fixedness. That era, however, is suddenly delayed for a half century of political and social events, and ere we come to settled prose, we must note an epoch of transition.

## CHAPTER II.

### THE TRANSITION PERIOD—1650—1700.

THIS period embraces nearly a half century—the reigns of Charles II., James II., William and Mary; and as compared with the period preceding, is one of decline, as it is, also, far inferior to the era immediately following.

It will be necessary, at the outset, to note the nature of these Transitions, and the application of the term to the period now before us.

#### Transitions.

These are historical and literary and appear in the development of every nation's mental life. It is these changes to which Mr. Hallam refers in speaking of the general history of the European mind—its best and worst epochs. He says, "There is, in fact, no security, as far as the past history of mankind assures us, that any nation will be uniformly progressive in science, art, and letters, nor do I perceive, whatever may be the current language, that we can expect this with much greater confidence of the whole civilized world." Such a remark is made from no pessimistic view of the defeat of truth in the earth, or the relation of Providence to

human progress, but rather from the undeniable lesson of the world's experience that all that is human is subject to change. It is precisely what Disraeli would call the principle of "crises and reactions," as founded in nature and ratified in history. In no department of mental inquiry and study is this principle more patent and influential than in literature. No important literature of ancient or modern times, has failed to exhibit it. If Italy had her golden age of Tasso and Ariosto, she had, as well, the reactionary age of Marini, in the seventeenth century. The age of Cervantes, in Spain, was closely followed by that of Gongora; while the classical eras, both of France and Germany, were alike preceded and followed by epochs of mental weakness or literary indifference. In the history of English Letters, both in prose and poetry, this law of action and reaction is manifest. In the First-English Period, it is seen in connection with Danish and Norman invasions; in the Middle-Period, at the time of the English and French Wars; and in the Modern era, at successive epochs, such as the Civil Wars and Revolution in the age now before us.

In fact the history of a literature, as of English, might be divided into the two periods of permanence and of transition, acting upon each other and interacting. The former are so fixed and their character so revealed that but little difficulty is found in correctly interpreting them. The latter are more perplexing to the literary student and, yet, full of interest and most important in relation to what precedes and follows. These transitional epochs would seem to have a life and history of their own, and give origin to

many questions of peculiar interest. Why in English Letters they occur just when they do; why they are long or short in duration; why they appear at somewhat regular intervals along the development of the literature, and why they should be now from the better to the worse and, now, the opposite—are queries which belong to the philosophy of literary history, and are at this moment the subject of careful study on the part of the best English Critics. President Bascom, in his discussion of English Literature, speaks of two of these transition periods—the one being that era now in question and the other, the second half of the eighteenth century. What he calls “The Retrogressive Period,” from the opening of the fifteenth century to the middle of the sixteenth, might also be called by this name. Mr. Taine, in his English Literature, less formally, but with equal certainty, marks the appearance and disappearance of these eras in our prose and poetry.

#### Appropriateness of the Term to this Era.

This is seen from its Unsettled Character. The Revolution of 1640 had closed with the execution of Charles I. The stormy days of Cromwell then followed. After that, in the era now before us, there came the civil disorders under the second Charles, and James II., ending, in the Revolution of 1688, in the reign of William. For more than half a century, the nation was distracted. The period was purely revolutionary, either by the presence of home or foreign strife. Even when, for a time, there seemed to be peace and settled order, the quiet was purely external and there was constant danger of

outbreak. It was an age of violent extremes in thought and life. In the church, the struggle was between Puritan and Prelate, Protestant and Papist, Presbyterian and Independent. In the state, the Royalists and Roundheads opposed each other. In society, morality was confronted with open profligacy; while, in literature, ability and character struggled to hold their own against mediocrity and the lower æsthetic tastes of the time. At no era in English history can such clashing interests be found. Levelers and Seekers, Rationalists and Free Thinkers, Fifth Monarchy Men and Fanatics, were all active for precedence.

It is not strange that Dryden, the central literary figure of the time, especially in poetry, exclaims with feeling:

“ Must England still the scene of changes be,  
Tost and tempestuous, like an ambient sea ? ”

There was no moderation in the age. The golden mean was never reached by any sect in church or state. Monarchy need not be despotic, but the Stuarts became so. Prelacy may exist without interfering with the subjects' freedom and Puritanism can be held without offending the world by its moroseness, but it was not thus. Bad men were especially bad and good men were good to a fault, in the mode of the expression of their goodness. There was no unity. All was divergent and one-sided, unnatural and transitional. What the age was in church and state, and society, it was in literature—and it was in Prose Literature—an age of *extremes*. If we find keen and telling satire against the vice of the age, we also find,

and even from the same pen, the most abject adulation of the great. High moral teachings strangely mingle with debasing maxims, while throughout the era, the shocking absence of any high order of English Prose as continuing the formative prose of the earlier period makes it manifest that such literature had for some reason come to a sudden cessation. The literary as well as the social continuity was broken and, for a time, the best minds of the age must either look back to the days of Milton, or onward to those of Addison, to be cheered in their work as prose authors.

#### (A.) Characteristics of the Prose of this Period.

##### 1. *Franco-English, or Anglo-Gallic.*

The satirical Butler, who was especially sensitive as to this feature of English in his time, speaks of England as "going to school to France." The expression may be taken as literally true. There were special reasons why Gallic influence was peculiarly strong at this epoch. It was the golden age of French Literature and an inferior age of English Literature. It was but comparatively a short time before the restoration of Charles II. that the French Academy was established (1636) under the sagacious policy of Richelieu, as the centre of French Culture, and in the middle year of this era it was in its glory. It was but natural that the influence of the French School at such a time was far-reaching and pervaded England. To this it must be added, that the exiled king going to France, attracted numbers with him, and he and they veritably "went to school to France." On their return to England, there began a kind of

Franco-English dynasty and English Literature received then and there a Gallic impress from which it will never be entirely free. Some benefit resulted, indeed, but the issue was mainly evil, as to our prose and poetry. The special misfortune lay in the fact that, whatever may have been the apparent relation of the two countries and literatures, they were at heart utterly at variance. There are no two national characters more unlike than the English and the Gallic. They are not necessarily hostile, as the German and the Gallic are, but they are uncongenial. 'Twas so in the eleventh century (1066), when a kind of coalition was effected at the point of the bayonet. Even Dryden, with all his classic and continental tendencies, saw this and deplored it. He entreats his fellow authors to be natural, as Englishmen.

“Let us our native character maintain.

’Tis of our growth to be sincerely plain.”

The advice was ingenuous but of no avail, while Dryden himself sinned against his own theory. Nothing could have been more untimely and harmful as to its effect on English Prose than such an influence in such an era. Our prose was in process of formation. From the time of Ascham to that of Milton and Bunyan, this formative work had not been materially checked. It was continuous and promising and just about to take shape permanently not only as prose, but as English Prose. Foreign French influence now enters, not only to delay, but to direct and modify the plastic work—to turn the course of prose development into a new channel—to make it a mixed English Prose. Elizabethan prose had many



defects incident to its character as formative, but with all its faults it was superior to that which followed. Instead of the natural, fresh expression of the earlier English, there appears the formal, courtly style of the foreign school, and all is changed for the worse. Rarely, if ever, has our literature been so sadly affected by outside agency. Under other social and historical conditions, the influence might have been overruled and salutary. As it was, it was baneful.

In Chaucer's time, French influence was strong. In the time of Henry VIII., Italian influence was strong as was that of Germany later in our history. All these influences, however, were under the control of the home literature at the time and were helpful, more than harmful. In the days of the later Stuarts, it was partly the shame and mainly the misfortune of England, that it was a dependency of France and its authors were the vassals of Gallic leaders. This explains another feature of the prose patent to every careful reader.

## 2. *The Inferiority of the Diction.*

It was what Swift aptly terms "a jargon." Double and doubtful senses were purposely given to words; partly, as an exercise in frivolous wit, and partly, as the natural result of the inferior ability behind the language. Brevity of statement was carried to such extreme as to defeat its own end and became the veriest buffoonery and burlesque. In fine, it was a form of that old Euphuism which flourished in the first period, but which, coming to England through France, had taken on new phases even more revolting

to good taste and in which Lyly and Donne were entirely outdone. The diction was mainly in the line of verbal device or display—the result both of mental and moral perverseness—and well adapted to thwart, for the time being, any advance in native prose. Just to the degree in which it was bombastic and pedantic, it was un-English, and marked an ever wider departure from earlier models. It cannot be denied that the vocabulary of our prose was largely increased in this half century of transition; but there are some things better for a literature than mere increment of words. The verbal gain was not all the gain, since it involved the addition of elements which have worked only harm in the province of English Prose.

All this, in diction, was fully in keeping with the trivial temper of the time. The age was not serious. Why should the authors be? The violent reaction from Puritan precision had set in, intensified and prolonged by influences from the Continent; king and courtiers were alike corrupt, and Satan was abroad, in poetry. Cowley and Waller were absorbed in writing effeminate verses for characterless ladies. In the drama especially, Wycherley is preferred to neglected plays of Shakespeare, while in the sphere of solid prose anything is admissible, so it reminds not of duty and moral responsibility. The phraseology of the time expressed the superficial character of the time. Most of those who wrote did what they did as the exponents of the hour; and it is not strange that it was in such times as these that John Milton ended his days in disappointment and neglect, while third and fourth rate versifiers and

provers were in honor at court and among the people. He had fallen on "evil days and evil times." So had English Letters.

### (B.) Helpful Agencies at this Era.

It is not to be supposed, that even in this period of transition and general decline, there were no forces at work on behalf of good literature and the development of a clear and substantial prose. One or two of these are conspicuous in their influence.

#### 2. *Popular Agitation of Thought and Life.*

This has been noted in speaking of the revolutionary character of the time and on the side of its danger and disadvantages. It has another side, equally important. Agitation in itself is healthful and stimulative. When exercised with regard to proper objects and confined within reasonable limits, and thus, under control, it has always tended to strengthen, rather than to weaken. Even when but partially fulfilling these conditions, it is productive of good in so far as it does fulfill them and serves to increase the evil resulting from lawless insurrections.

It is quite noticeable here, that just as the Formative Period of our Prose closed with political and popular agitation in the persons of Cromwell and the Puritans, so this period of Transition, beginning with the general excitement attendant upon the return of Charles II. and continuing in bitter feuds of the time of James II. ended in the reign of William and Mary, with the Great Revolution of 1688. Whatever the Commonwealth agitation did for the first era in the

line of a stalwart *and trenchant* prose, this final and pervasive English Revolution did far more. It settled two questions among others which, in their religious, political and social bearings cannot be overestimated, and which in the realm of the literature, then transitional, did a potent and enduring good. It settled the relation of the Romish Church to the Protestant, (in England) as one of subjection rather than supremacy, and it settled the basis of Constitutional Government in England as opposed to despotism, or absolute monarchy. It introduced and guaranteed the doctrine of popular rights in such wise that it has not been permanently disturbed since that era.

The effect of this agitation on the native prose was extremely happy and healthful. It gave it just what it needed at the time—literary spirit, flexibility, force, manliness, positiveness and freedom of expression. It recovered that Protestant and evangelical tone under William of Orange which it had formerly possessed under Elizabeth and Cromwell and had lost under Charles II. and James II. It regained that native English temper and vigor which, in the interval of Stuart rule, had been impaired by excessive foreign influence. More than all, it recovered something of that ethical purity which had so marked it in former days as distinct from the gross literature of the Continent.

Not only was the Revolution of 1688 the most important one in English history, but equally so in English Prose. The sum total effect of it was liberative and exalting. It broke away the barriers which a despotic church and civil polity had raised, and

bade the English people go out into a wide area and on to a better history. The nation began to breathe a purer air and live a freer life. Men thought independently of others and spoke and wrote as they thought. Just as soon as the outward agitation ceased and matters settled into civic and social order, the authors of the time, who had been repressed and hampered, at once awoke to the splendid issues before them, and the future of English Letters was assured. It is noticeable just here, as in the days of the Protectorate, that such healthful agitation expressed itself mainly in prose, rather than in poetry. In each of these periods—Formative and Transitional—poetry was prevalent at the opening, but prose at the close; and in each, this order was in keeping with the agitated character of the time and the special demand for honest, earnest words. In such times, authors must for a while forego the pleasure of poetic invention and the indulgence of imaginative power and resort to that straightforward method of expression which obtains in prose discourse. Locke and Temple, South and Sydney, Bentley and Collins could have written at that time in no other form than in prose. The gravest questions of church and state, of society and letters were before them and there was but one medium for their expression.

## 2. *The Personal Character and Work of Leading Minds.*

This traditional era, bad as it was, was not given entirely over to evil men and agencies. Now, as ever in English history, strong opposition was manifested and so strong as, at times, to prevail. Special meed

is due to those men who, in such a time, sternly contended for sound morals and good letters and wrought patiently in the sphere of native authorship. One of the special features of the period is seen in the defensive attitude assumed by some of the prose authors of the time against the prevailing degeneracy. Their effort was to conserve what was already theirs.

Inferior as the era in some respects was, it is safe to assert that there is scarcely an able writer of that time in English didactic prose who was not upon the side of mental and moral reform. It was because they were so outnumbered by the hosts of *second-rate* authors and men that the results are not more apparent. Even Dryden, whose main work was in poetry, and who in that sphere too often transgressed the limits of propriety, was in his prose more discreet and classic. As far as he went in this direction he was able and helpful and had he continued his prose work beyond mere Prefaces, Dedications, Translations and Epistles, might have gained a conspicuous place among his countrymen. If Thomas Hobbes was writing in the interests of a false philosophy, Cudworth, Locke and Newton opposed him. If some were slavishly addicted to the French, most of the best were loyal to their English ancestry and speech. A brilliant order of English Prose is not to be expected in such a period. The conditions did not exist. It is creditable to find even a second order of prose writers who, amid all discouragements, maintained their ground and preserved, to some extent, at least, the historical continuity of English Letters. If the era was transitional, it had reference to what was to

follow it as well as to what had preceded it. The best that can be said of it is, that as we go steadily on from the opening to the close of it through its forty-two years, English Prose at the end of it, in 1702, is seen to be on a better basis, after all, than ever before; and we can discern more easily than ever the character of the future that awaited it.

## CHAPTER III.

### PERIOD OF SETTLEMENT—1700-1760.

THIS period includes a little over half a century; the reigns of Queen Anne, George I. and George II., and may fitly be termed in this respect the Queen Anne and Early Georgian period of our prose.

#### The Term Augustan applied to this Period.

Leaving the transitional period between the Formative era and the present, it is now in place to note this special epoch before us in the days of Swift and Addison. This age has been known heretofore both in poetry and in prose, by no other name than Augustan and until recently, has been accepted by critics without debate, as deserving the title it bears. It has, also, had the sanction of general acceptance, though, it must be added, mainly through ignorance, or indifference as to the exact appropriateness of the phrase. The people of that era were quite willing, on grounds of national and intellectual pride, to have the age thus designated in history. Modern literary and historical criticism has objected, and rightly, to this appellation; so that the question is an open one. If inquiry is made into the precise origin of it, it will appear that the very reaction



which took place in church and state, in life and literature, led to its adoption. To those who had experienced the troublous times of the Stuarts and the more objectionable extremes of the Great Rebellion, the period was indeed Augustan. It was so relatively, however, rather than really. Still further, we note from the pen of Carruthers, an English biographer, that the age "was Augustan only in the patronage it extended to authors, which for extent and liberality was unexampled."

In confirmation of this, he goes on to cite examples of English authors who enjoyed the protection and favor of the government. This high eulogium is in a sense true, but needs modification. If we look carefully into the personal character of the kings and rulers of the time and their respective political policies, a particular of interest will be noted. It is, that their type of personal character was not such as to lend to literature or to anything else a strong, positive support. The order of royal mind was negative and inferior. They cannot be said to have discouraged letters. They did not heartily favor them. The attitude was one of indifference. It was scarcely possible for the narrow-minded time-serving Queen Anne to enter with zest into that new literary movement which had arisen by the sheer force of events. As to George I. his notable lack of culture was a disgrace to the nation he ruled. Little encouragement, surely, could be expected from him who was as ignorant of the correct and elegant use of English, as he was brutishly indifferent to its cultivation. Though at times assuming the air of a *litterateur*, he did so from mercenary motives and was playing a

part for which he was in no sense fitted. He was certainly in no wise a representative of the great Roman Augustus, from whom the age, in Rome and Britain, took its name. George III. in morals, followed his fathers, and as to genius, was a soldier, only.

The royal attitude, therefore, in so far as it was favorable, was patronizing. Addison, Swift, Steele and other prose writers, as well as the poets, were the subjects of such favor; but it was for purposes of policy and selfish interest. Partisan politics absorbed too much of the attention of the powers to allow of any disinterested kindness to authors. It has been aptly remarked by Ward in this connection, "that the Whigs will crown Addison the Laureate of their party, but not till he has sung the glories of their acknowledged hero." Courtiers of varied rank and title feasted and flattered the authors, if so be the authors returned the favor in the form of excessive laudation. Failing to offer such return, the face of official support was coldly diverted from them. Sir Robert Walpole, so utterly unscrupulous in matters of state, was equally loose in his relations to literary men whose services he wished to secure. He so extensively favored the authors of the time for private ends that he brought political patronage into deserved odium and transmitted his name to history as the most reckless "pen-hirer" of his day. He was strikingly different in this particular from Sir Wm. Temple, the famous diplomat at the court of William and Mary. In view of such facts, it is not surprising, to find the writers of the time lamenting the want of a more healthful and ardent support at the hands of official power.

One of the tenderest expressions in English Letters is found in a poem written by poor Savage, called "The Poet's Dependence on a Statesman," in which, bastard that he was, he looks to the final judgment as his only consolation.

"A scene will show, all righteous vision haste!  
The meek exalted and the proud debased.  
Oh! to be there! to tread that friendly shore  
Where falsehood, pride, and statesmen are no more!"

The age was Augustan in the freeness of its royal patronage, but not in the motive and quality of such patronage. In noting still further the origin and propriety of the name Augustan, reference must be made to Latin Letters at the time of Augustus. Professor Covington, in speaking of the poetry of this age, remarks: "It is a curious circumstance that the advice given by Walsh to Pope—to be correct in his writing—was precisely the advice which Horace gave to his countrymen." The remark will apply fully as well to the prose of this era. The point is, that the Horatian idea of written expression was different from that which had preceded. Horace took exception, as Boileau did in France, and the Essayists did in England, to the manifest indifference of most preceding writers to the *external form* of discourse. He cautions them against what might be called, a loose extravagance of ideas and words, at the expense of concise finish of style. He insists that writers must express themselves with more precision and elegance. He rebukes the pride of Lucilius when he boasts of having produced two hundred verses in an hour and much prefers the

painstaking care of Vergil who, after eleven years of revision, called his *Æneid* unfinished. In fine, he aimed to adjust, in their true proportions, quality and quantity in the literary product. In this particular, the term Augustan is in place, especially as to the first half of this Period of Settlement, between which time and that of Horace there is striking analogy. In each epoch, alike, the external structure of literature was specially expressed. Not only so, but the epochs preceding and following these respective periods, in England and Rome, were strikingly similar as to the relation of form and subject-matter. The Pre-Horatian Period of Cicero, though not strictly a golden age as was that of Elizabeth, was, still, an age of profuse production, as distinct from that which is precise. The Post-Horatian Period also corresponded to the Post-Augustan Age in England as to the subjection of the critical element of Juvenal and Tacitus to wider forms of literary expression. Hence, in the use of the word, Augustan, as here applied, it is not to be employed as a synonym of Golden, thus relating it to the age of Bacon, but as referring to the times of Latin Letters, when perfection of literary *form* took precedence of the creation of literary ideas. If we divide the schools of literary expression into Creative, Impassioned and Critical, it is to the last of these that special reference is made. It was an age of didactic and formal prose, rather than one of original and emotional power. There was little of the "sensuous or passionate," of which Milton speaks. The statement which Mr. Hallam makes of the literature of the reign of William will apply here far more correctly, as he says: "It marks the *nadir* in

works of imagination." So strong was this didactic bent and tendency, that even in poetry it controlled all else. Where one expression of genuine poetic fervor is given, of the style of Thomson's "Seasons" or Collins, scores are given us after the formal manner of Pope and Young and Prior. Mark Akenside writes a poem on "The Pleasures of the Imagination," of which the two main features are, that there is no *imagination* evinced in the production of it and no *pleasure* experienced in the perusal of it. It should have been written in prose. The era was one of verbal precision and in this respect sharply in contrast with the ages preceding. It will be seen in the subsequent parts of this discussion that there are benefits as well as evils connected with this critical tendency in letters and that in this very feature of the era there are to be found those elements that make the Augustan and Early Georgian age one of prose rather than poetry. In this connection there remains a further feature of the age to be noted—POLITICAL PARTISANSHIP. It was a time of petty feuds and party rivalries—a war of words and pens, more bitter, at times, than that of the sword. It seems to have been the general impression of the time that after the Revolution of 1688 had closed affairs of state would adjust themselves into unity and political order. As already stated, in all substantial senses this was true. English Liberties and English Constitutional Government were for the first time guaranteed, as the result of that revolution. As in all such events, however, the immediate and external results were of a different character, and a certain amount of friction was occasioned just because affairs

were settling into proper relations and law was becoming triumphant. This friction expressed itself in the sharp discussions of Whigs and Tories. There were factions for and against the government, for and against the policy which Temple had introduced into statecraft, divers opinions as to foreign policies and the mutual relations of subject and sovereign. Friends of the old Stuart dynasty were still in the realm and as the double-minded Anne ascended the throne the Tories were in power. Political clubs of all descriptions, from the "Kit Cat" to the "October," arose, and defended their respective tenets. Addison was issuing "The Freeholder" on behalf of religious principles, while Swift was issuing his "Conduct of The Allies," and "Public Spirit of the Whigs," in defence of Toryism. The queen was worse than a figure-head. She was the puppet of the politicians. All were wondering as to the future, and as the death of Anne was announced in 1714, all was reversed. Dukes and Duchesses fled to France to escape the Tower. The top went to the bottom and the Whigs triumphed. "Curse on the word, party," said Pope. The strange thing is that literature lived at such a time. It finds its partial explanation in the fact that the clubs then formed were literary as well as civil. Comparing the Whig and Tory circles in this respect, it is suggestive that in the one, literature was dominant over politics, while in the other, this relation was reversed. When Swift wrote his trenchant prose invectives as a Tory leader, he was more of a partisan politician than an author. When Addison wrote his prose essays as a Whig exponent, the author was prominent over the interested member of

a faction, and it was the influence of this Addisonian spirit that gave to letters a permanent precedence in England over politics. As far as this party strife had sway, it tended to evil, and degenerated, often, into personal scandal and abuse. The inquisitive Disraeli might have constructed a volume upon, *The Quarrels of Authors*, without going beyond the limits of this age. Had this strife been central rather than superficial and general rather than restricted in area, the age of Anne and the first George would have been the most unstable period of our history and literature.

As it was, it is all the more interesting to note that English government and English Prose were alike established for the first time in this Augustan and Georgian Age to an extent hitherto unknown, and in a form from which they have not materially departed.

#### Appropriateness of the Term, Settled, here Applied.

This is seen in the fact that the great substantial *forms* of modern prose and the leading *qualities* of prose style as we shall study them are now so fully illustrated that they may be taken as a standard, or point of departure, in all critical study of our literature. By this, it is not meant that there is exhibited in this period as high a style of English Prose as is found in succeeding years, but that it was in advance of anything preceding it both as to quantity and character, and is more *modern* in form and effect than the best that had been produced hitherto. To our mind, critics have overreached themselves in their excessive praise of this era. We are aiming simply

to emphasize the fact that, apart from its quality as better or worse, it marks a prose for the first time *settled*, as distinct from one in process of *formation* or *transition*, as well as distinct from that which later on is more fully *developed* and applied. As settled, it was a better order of prose than that of the days of Bacon and Dryden, though inferior to that which followed in the succeeding era.

### A Period of Prose.

The most important feature of this period, as compared with the two preceding it, is its distinctively *prose character*. In our study of the historical development of English Prose, this fact is invaluable and full of promise. It reveals to us the truth that from the days of Ascham on to Addison, progress had been in the main, unbroken. Despite the transitional character of Stuart times, the continuity was not altogether unbroken, and when in the days of Queen Anne our prose took settled shape and character, it must be confessed that forces had been at work of which no full account had been taken and that more advance had been made than the most sanguine critics had allowed. All the tendencies of the age were *prosaic* in the best sense. The character of the age as it has been described demanded such a form of literary art as distinct from verse, so that even when verse was attempted it was of that order that bordered the most closely upon the un-metrical.

Just as in the poetical age of Elizabeth, Sir Philip Sydney wrote the *Arcadia* in a prose that might be called poetical, so now, Pope and his colleagues in the sphere of poetry wrote a poetry that might be called,



technical and didactic. Most of what they wrote was virtual prose and they did wisely in yielding thus far to the spirit of the age. Never were the *historical tendencies* of a period and the *literary work* of authors more in harmony. Prose writers entered with fullest zest into the meaning of the hour, and poets if they must versify did so in terms of prose discourse and were poets simply in the sense that the accents of their poetry occurred at regular intervals. It is also suggestive to note here that the *critical* character of the age, as distinct from the creative, was inclined to express itself in prose. Essays on criticism, such as Pope's, were written in metre but are really prose productions. That temper of mind and order of mental power that finds its best expression in reflective and minute comment naturally uses the un-metrical form. Critical writing as critical, prefers the prose form, and when assuming any other, departs somewhat from its natural sphere. Hence it is seen that all the main literary tendencies of the age united in fostering that particular form of literary art for which the nation was ready.

It has been already stated that the close of each of the preceding periods was distinctively prose as compared with the opening. Here, the period from opening to close is a prose period; emphatically so and increasingly so as it goes on. Standing midway between the first two periods and the fourth, it expressed the best of what had been secured already and laid the groundwork for all that was to follow. What Saintsbury says of Dryden may more justly be spoken here of Addison: "At the time when he

first began to write there was no accepted prose style of English. Great masters may be quoted from the seventeenth century, but their excellences were almost wholly individual and provided in no way a model whereby the average writer might form himself for average purposes. Prose is now the instrument of the *average* purpose."

English Prose, as systematic, now takes its place once for all in our literary history—as distinct from those isolated and exceptional specimens of it that had marked the earlier eras. "For the first time," says Saintsbury, "the style of English Prose becomes simple and clear." If we compare the essays of Addison with those of Bacon and Cowley, we shall understand what is meant by *settled* or *formed* prose as distinct from that which is formative and transitive. Some of the characteristics of the English Prose of this era may now be noted.

#### (A.) Characteristics.

1. *Periodical, as opposed to those more extended forms in which the prose of preceding and later periods found expression.* The most cursory reader of the prose of the age will mark this feature first of all, and the more carefully the student examines it, the more he will see that, as certainly as the age demanded prose rather than poetry, it demanded the periodical form in preference to any other. This particular tendency began early in the era in the person of De Foe, who may be said to open that splendid series of periodical prose literature which has marked the history of English thought since his day. Dying in 1731, he belongs in part, to

the Augustan era. That the age should have demanded such a form is eminently natural after what has been said as to its political partisanship and club life. It was the golden era of party pamphlets—short, crisp and racy. The lines of Young were in place.—

“Our senate meets; at parties parties bawl,  
And pamphlets storm the streets and load the stalls.  
Truce, truce, ye Vandals! our tormented ear  
Less dreads a pillory, than a pamphleteer.”

The official leaders and middle classes are just well informed enough to produce and read such documents and for the time being they monopolized the English mind. The transition from the political to the distinctively literary pamphlet or essay, might have been difficult at some epochs, but was not in this. As already stated, the clubs were of both characters. Their members mingled in civic and scholarly debate. Addison and others wrote political essays in a literary manner; and the transition from the partisan pamphlet to the finished essay was short and natural. When the strife of factions subsided, the literary element came into prominence and English periodical prose took its permanent form. It was the age of a prose that was sketchy and readable, the people's era in the realm of letters. That type of prose productions which is now termed “miscellaneous” began at this point. For this reason, if for no other, we are not to look to the Augustan age as some do, for our highest prose. For this reason, however, we are to look there for a settled type of *general* prose. The Essayists were in power.

2. *Popular.* It is important to emphasize the fact often contested, that the prose of this age was popular prose to a greater degree than any before it. It was so just because it was periodical or racy, rather than technical. It was not theological to the extent in which Hooker's was, nor was it philosophical in the sense that Bacon's was, or formal and scholarly even to the degree in which Dryden's was, but miscellaneous and catholic, the language of the club and the social company, a kind of *conversational* writing for the great body of the people. Nor can it be said that the prose of this age was thereby devoid of literary character and representative of the lower rather than of the higher order of style.

It is one of the remarkable features of the era that while the English aimed to write a popular prose and succeeded in it, they still presented a prose which had all the essential marks of a high order of composition. As before stated, they did not present the highest form as compared with what followed, but they did improve upon all that had preceded and handed down to the future a body of English Prose which, even yet, is warmly recommended by critics to the student of English style. It was, in fact, the best work of this age that, avoiding the scholasticism of Baconian days, the extreme classicism of Dryden, and, also, that loose order of style which aims to win applause at the expense of good taste and literary law, it stood on the safe middle-ground between these dangerous extremes, and produced a prose, literary and popular, and thus, readable by all.

This was the very form which the succeeding age was wise enough to adopt, perfect and transmit to the present era. Technical prose belongs to the schools. Prose produced in violation of all rhetorical principles and merely for the hour dies with the hour that marks its birth. The prose that is produced to live and which the educated public may not "willingly let die," is that which was established in the age before us and still abides.

It is important to note, in this connection, that British Prose Fiction finds its historical origin, as the periodical essay does, in this Augustan Age and in the persons of the same authors, De Foe and Swift. This fact is notable as marking the prose character of the period and, also, the fact that its prose was narrative, descriptive and popular rather than philosophic.

Masson, in his "British Novelists" shows conclusively, that whatever may have been the earlier traces of the Novel in England and Britain, it began essentially in this age as a systematic prose form: and that whatever the superior excellence of later fiction, this was sufficiently good in the persons of Richardson, Fielding, and Sterne to mark it as worthy of criticism and historical place. Prose Fiction was then settled as all other prose was settled, and on the basis thus laid arose to that wide expansion which marked it in the days of the great British Novelists of the time of Thackeray.

Before leaving this period, attention should be called to any *special agencies* at work for or against the native prose. We shall allude to one example of each.

## (B.) Adverse Agencies.

*The Rise and Prevalence of French Criticism.*

The French Academy aimed to rule in England as well as at home. The ultra critical school of Boileau was in the ascendant and enforcing its technical precepts on every occasion. It was the reign of the Precieuses—a school so extreme in its canons and methods that the French dramatists themselves were obliged to satirize it.

French influence had somewhat manifested itself before, in the days of Charles I., and more especially, at the return of Charles II. That, however, was largely social in its form and affected literature mainly on the ethical side.

Now, this Gallic influence was purely literary, working in English Prose somewhat as Euphuism from Italy affected the prose in the days of Sydney. Nor did the influence consist merely or mainly in the introduction of foreign terms into the vocabulary, but rather in the imposition of French *laws of literary criticism*. Nothing could be allowed to pass current until it had squared itself to the line laid down by Boileau and the Academy. The danger was in the form of undue precision and nicety of expression and when it is noted that all the tendencies of the time were critical, it was especially to be feared that criticism would control all else and present a body of prose without life or force. Such would have been the result had the French School with its English adherents prevailed. The drift of the age, however, towards its close changed from the critical to

the popular and natural and the doom of the formalists was sealed.

The revival of classicism which began with Dryden and was furthered by his successors had well nigh spent its force when George II. came to the throne, and, henceforth, English Prose was to be less foreign and more native than ever. The English Academy had already taken the place of the French.

### (C.) Friendly Agencies.

There was at work at this time a friendly agency that is not to be overlooked in its relation to English Prose. We refer to the Philological study of English. The subsequent history of our prose will reveal the pervasive influence of this agency. The student of our literature, especially on its prose side, will find from this time on that the development of the literature and the language go together. Such development took its scientific origin in the age before us and its importance can scarcely be overestimated.

In the Formative and Transitional Periods, it is in no sense a systematic study, but occasional and irregular; Bacon, Johnson, the Translators of the Bible, Milton, Locke, Temple and Pope had called attention to such study, but rather indirectly than otherwise. No school or science had been formed and no special study devoted to the subject till agitated by Dryden, De Foe and Dean Swift. Dryden had already lamented the looseness of English diction even as it obtained in Elizabethan days and had taken actual measures for its correction. Had not Dryden been so devoted to the old classical lore, in

theory and practice, his influence would have been more marked. Swift, in his "Proposal for Correcting, Improving and Ascertaining (fixing) the English Tongue" (1712), did the first and best work in the scientific study of English for its expression in prose forms. Tickell, in his "Prospect of Peace," speaks hopefully of a time when the language shall be released from its present bondage. So Prior, in his "Carmen Secularo," makes mention of:

"Some that with care true eloquence shall teach  
And to just idioms fix our doubtful speech."

Poets and prose writers alike were now alive, as never before, to the study of the native speech, not for its own sake, but on the behalf of literary expression. When, in 1755, Dr. Johnson issued his "English Dictionary," a work was done for English speech and English Prose which cannot now be appreciated. Though it was a failure as an etymological lexicon for the scholar, it was a valuable dictionary for the age in which it was prepared,—the people's word-book, excellent for the time in its definitions, rich in illustration, and serving to unify and adjust all that had been done by Swift and others. Non-scientific as it was, it marked the beginning of the higher study of English Philology, and every later lexicographer must look into it. It introduced a kind of study which has done more for our literature than any other. Authors have understood that before they write they must know the nature of that language which they are using,—its forms, capacity and powers. Other things being equal, he will use the language with clearness, vigor, facility and grace, who subjects



it, as a language, to careful study on a systematic method.

At the point of view where we now stand, it may be clearly seen that English Prose has made decided advances since the days of Bacon and Dryden. Mr. Saintsbury, in his "Life of Dryden," assigns the advance to four distinct causes: "The pulpit, political discussion, miscellaneous writing, and literary criticism." Whatever the causes may have been, they were numerous enough, and sufficiently potent to give us a prose *finally fixed*, rather than one in *formation* or *transition*. This was a decided advance and marks the age as one of prose. The age did more than this; it settled the prose as English, rather than foreign; as *popular*, rather than technical; as *correct*, rather than loose and irregular; as *simple*, rather than involved; and as *healthful*, rather than harmful.

Whatever may be said of the morality of the poetry of the time, or of the prose of such writers as Swift and Smollett, it is safe to state that the prose of the Augustan and Early Georgian Age was, in the main a marked advance over the preceding period, and fully in keeping with that of the age of Elizabeth. In the Restoration, immorality was the law. Now, it is the exception. The general influence of the period was good.

The time is now rife for a still wider and higher development of English Prose. Premonitions of its approach are distinctly seen as early as the opening of the Georgian era, and more distinctly still, as we enter the reign of George II. It was in the days of Queen Anne and of Addison (1709), that he was born

whose name fitly stands at the head of the new development. Samuel Johnson, with his dictionary in one hand and his *Rasselas* and *Rambler* in the other, introduces us, in person, to the fourth and final period of English Prose.

## CHAPTER IV.

### PERIOD OF EXPANSION AND EXPRES- SION—1760-18—.

As far as the royal power is concerned, this may be styled the Later Georgian and Victorian Era.

It includes the reigns of George III., George IV., William IV., and runs on, a quarter of a century or so, into the present English queenship. It covers, in exact limits, the course of a century, while its forces are still at work before us.

#### The Modern Period Proper.

After noting in brief survey the First and Middle-English Periods as introductory, Modern English Prose was divided into four eras. Each of these falls within the province of Modern as distinct from our Earlier Prose. The period now before us is, however, peculiarly so. Nor is it simply meant by this that it is most modern, because the last of the series of each period is more modern than the one preceding it, but that in *character* and *measure* of production it is so. It might properly be termed Present-English Prose, inasmuch as the larger portion of the period is in the present century. Even that portion of it found

in the eighteenth century is the very prose in its quality that is found in the nineteenth. It is modern emphatically in that English Prose has not materially changed in character since the opening of the era in 1760. It has now the same cast of tone and may so be studied. Just as Modern-English Prose dates from Shakespeare, and yet the English of to-day in England and America is more modern than his and thus different, so as to the literature, and especially the prose literature. It is nineteenth century prose. Built on the basis of Augustan Prose, it widely differs in the form and measure of its development. It has an individuality of its own. It is essentially new.

#### Prevalence of Prose in this Age.

We have seen that in the first period poetry prevailed, though prose had a history throughout, and was especially prominent at the close. In the second era, these were more evenly adjusted, poetry being more prevalent at the opening, and prose at the end of the era. In the third, prose takes precedence throughout. In this final period, there is a more healthful relation of these two forms of literary expression than ever before. On a cursory glance over the period, it is puzzling to state the prevailing form. We state it correctly by saying that each is prominent throughout, and that while at the beginning the main development is poetic, the prose form tends more and more to precedence as the era goes on and finally secures it. If we extend this modern era to the England of to-day, the statement is more and more confirmed. It is certainly safe to style this period a distinctively prose period, whether we refer

to quality, or amount of product. The era strikingly confirms the central point of our whole discussion—the gradual, historical progress of English Prose from Bacon to Carlyle; interrupted at times, but again reviving with renewed power, until we come to its highest expression in the present era. The Georgian Age has been termed by Masson, Minto, and most critics, the Prose Age. This is all true by way of quantitative estimate, and relation to poetry. The proportion of Prose over Poetry was greater than it was before, or has been since; but in other senses, this more modern era is fully as much entitled to the distinction. It may be expressed as follows: That in measure and character of prose writing it has no parallel in English Letters. It is an Age in which more standard English prose has been written, and by more standard English writers than is true of any other—the Golden Age of our Prose, as that of Shakespeare is of our poetry.

#### **The Words Expansive, Expressive, as here Applied.**

These are selected as best setting forth the peculiar nature of the era.

All modern critics of English Letters have united in referring to this period as one specially signalized by its rich development of prose. This is partly the cause and partly the effect of that general enlargement which marks the period. This rapid growth of all that is English had its beginning as far back as the opening of the eighteenth century, greatly increased immediately after the close of the French Revolution, and it has scarcely yet reached its climax. It was not, in fact, until all earlier work had been

done in the way of formation, transition and final settlement, that this expansive process could begin and increase so that, when it did begin, it advanced with such vigor and rapidity. No sooner had the basis been well laid, in Addison's time, than the superstructure rapidly arose. Everything was ready in state and social life, in public enterprise and general intelligence, to foster and further the expansion. It is simply in keeping with the spirit of the age that literature should have taken on a new life, and equally natural that this life should express itself mainly in prose. All was astir. The old ways were too strait for the new movements, and growth is the law. "We are here in the middle of a tide of prose," writes Masson, "unexampled in any former time. What wealth, what variety, what versatility! It is clearly an age in which the most important and effective work of the British mind devolved on Prose." Expression was the one business before the minds of the educated. Men must give currency and play to the thought that agitated them.

This expansive character of the era in its prose is seen in nothing more than in the English Vocabulary. Words increased in rapid ratio in all departments. The area covered by our prose vocabulary in Bacon's time, and even in Addison's, was by no means equal to the needs of the writers in this new era. The demand arose and the supply came with it; and at the opening of the present century our language must have numbered seventy thousand words, as distinct from the fifty thousand of Elizabeth's time, and the one hundred thousand of to-day. Nor was this verbal expansion purely verbal. It was the actual result

of the rapid enlargement of the English mind and character.

This expression also manifests itself in the growth of Periodical or Miscellaneous Prose, as well as in the rapid development of historical and impassioned writing. These last forms took such shape in English literature and became so prominent, that they may be said almost to have arisen in this fourth period, as the Novel began in the days of De Foe.

English historical and oratorical prose is fairly identified with this era, while the periodical itself grows to still larger proportions. Here we find the great schools of English Historians, Forensic Writers and general Essayists. Each school covers a spacious period, while Prose Fiction itself finds here its fullest expansion and expression in the writings of Dickens and his successors. The period, at its opening, was fertile and ever enlarging, and the enlargement still continues.

### (A.) Special Characteristics of this Prose Era.

#### 1. *English in Form and Spirit.*

In no previous period was the prose more distinctively native and idiomatic. Better English and more of it has never been written than in the Prose of this age. What has been said as to the specially modern character of the age would confirm this statement. It was so modern because so English, drifting farther and farther away from foreign models. It is true that through the influence of Dr. Johnson and his school, the Latin language had considerable sway in the literary speech, but it was too strongly resisted

by the vast majority of writers to find general currency as in former periods. It is, also, true that in the style of such writers as Gibbon the old Anglo-French mania threatened once again to overcome and impair the native style. Still, this was limited in its scope, as was the Latin. The inevitable trend of the age was English, and the great body of the best writers were in sympathy with the tendency. Moreover, that special scientific study of the native tongue which began in the previous era in the persons of Swift and Johnson, now took much larger form, in obedience to the expansive spirit of the time. Johnson's Dictionary was re-edited in better shape, while English scholars all around, were looking as never before, into the meaning of the words they were daily using. It was this very revival of interest in the study of English that led to that wonderful work now doing, in this department, which finds its best expression in the publications of the Early English Text Society; in the New Philological English Dictionary; and in the widening of English courses in all leading modern institutions.

## 2. *Literary Prose.*

We are discussing literary prose, and that only, and there is a special sense in which the prose of some eras deserves this title. It was so in the Formative Period, and less so in the Transitional; it was so in the Settled Period, and is still more so in this of Expansion. If we close the period strictly at 1860, it is beyond question the most distinctively literary of the four. There is more substantial and permanent prose written in this century (1760-1860) on a



purely literary basis, as distinct from that which is scientific, technical, or professional, than in any other era. The authors were men who understood literary art, its methods and laws; who wrote in the love of their work and for beneficent ends; and who, whatever their personal gains might have been, sought above all else to express their best powers and elevate their fellows.

This however, is to be confessed. At the end of this century, (1860) the uprising of a different spirit is noticeable; the subjection of the literary spirit to what may be termed, the commercial, or unduly practical. English Literature in all its forms is following the modern drift and is becoming *secularized*. Business-like prose is fast becoming the popular form. This means the degradation of prose from a purely literary basis to a mercenary one. No careful observer can fail to note this; it has almost smothered our higher poetry out of being: it has materially impaired our prose. Here, as elsewhere, literature and philosophy affect each other. If we speak, however, of a definite century (1760–1860), of that, it may be stated, that the prose was literary and elevating. While entering fully into the onward movements of the time, and making itself a medium for the expression of modern thought, it still kept itself isolated as a literary art, and high above the commercial level of the time.

### 3. *Natural Prose.*

This marks as nothing else the spirit of the prose before us, and is so prominent a characteristic as to make it questionable whether in any of the preceding

periods such naturalness had at all existed. It certainly did not specially mark any of them. Despite occasional exceptions, as Bunyan and Swift, a simple spontaneous style of English Prose did not exist till late in the eighteenth century. It is not to be found in Hooker, Bacon, Milton or Dryden, and not in a marked manner, even in the writers of Queen Anne. They had other qualities, but not this. When we enter this period of expansion, the expansiveness is itself the first mark of its naturalness. All is free, informal and growthy, and cannot brook restrictions of any kind. The forms of prose now prevalent, the subjects chosen, and the spirit pervading them, all reveal a literary art founded on nature, and developed after a natural manner.

Euphuism is now a thing quite unknown, and this is the only period of which this can be said. There was no room for the false, conceited and forced. This naturalness, however, as all else that is praiseworthy, has its limit, and we soon notice a slight departure from it in the line of the formal and mechanical. Just as the purely literary type of this period is seen to give way more and more to the mercenary and commercial; so here, the natural gradually retires before the approach of the conventional. This change is affected through the rise of modern criticism, tending to the formal and precise at the expense of the creative. If we pass the limits of this period (1860) and enter the era now in progress, it is clearly manifest that English Prose is becoming less spontaneous and more artificial. It is the era of *literary criticism*.

## (B.) Helpful Agencies in this Era.

1. *Influence of Germany.*

Allusion has often been made to the rare advantages involved in the geographical position of England relative to the Continent. It is a double advantage in the way of isolation and of contact; just far enough removed to escape incessant friction, and yet near enough to share in all desirable benefits. It is impossible but that in thought and general culture there should be constant interchange of ideas, helpful or harmful, between Britain and the Continent. We have noticed this as to Italian influence under Chaucer and Henry VIII, and as to French influence, also, at Chaucer's time in the shape of Norman-French; and, later, in the time of Transitional and Settled English; while not altogether absent from the period before us. We now speak of Germany in its relation to England. The influence was, to a degree, mutual. It is well known in what high regard Goldsmith was held by Goethe, and it is also known that from the time of Goethe's entrance upon literary life in the last quarter of the eighteenth century no name has been more prominently before the German mind than Shakespeare's. It has occasioned more criticism than any other and modified the German drama more than any other. Despite the earnest attempts of Benedix and others to arrest this movement, it still continues, and the author of *Hamlet* is contending even now with the author of *Faust* for the Literary supremacy of the Fatherland. But we speak rather of German influence upon English Literature and English Prose, an

influence dating from the era now before us, and ever widening in its area.

With the first classical period in German Letters (1190–1300) we have little, if anything, to do, inasmuch as it occurred in our Middle-English Period, previous to the Modern Era.

The second classical epoch, however, (1760–1830) is almost coterminous with the epoch now under discussion. Hence, its influence would be marked. In this era are found the most illustrious names in German Prose and Poetry; it being quite noticeable that the first authors, Goethe, Schiller and Lessing, were alike famous in each sphere. Taking into account the social and historic relations of the two nations, their interaction is vital and extensive. English authors were aware of the vast resources over the Channel, and went thither in numbers, to return with precious spoil. Coleridge, in 1798, is a member of the University at Göttingen, and deeply absorbed in German studies as related to modern thought and English Letters. On his return to England, he devotes himself to the translation of portions of Schiller, and calls the special attention of British scholars to the prevailing philosophy of Germany. So as to Sir Walter Scott, poet and prose writer. He became thoroughly aroused by reason of the newly awakened interest in German literature prevalent at Edinburgh, and, following the example of others, translated into English some of the best productions of Goethe. Shelley, the poet, translated from Faust; while such authors as Southey, and Wordsworth, acknowledge and express something of the new impulse from over the sea.

If it be asked, how this influence was helpful to English thought and prose, it may be noted:

(a) That the helpfulness lay in the mere *union* of these two types of mind, so accordant and yet so different. The bias of the one was toward the serious and practical; that of the other was as strong toward the liberal and speculative. Literature and philosophy, alike, needed the combination. It was the quickening influence of that intellectual nation that England needed, and it was happily at hand just when this expansive era could receive it and use it. Whatever may be said as to the critical character of the German mind and authorship, it must be conceded that in its very criticism it is original and not imitative, stimulating and not repressive. More than at any period since, it was natural, suggestive and awakening. It was in Germany just what the native literature was at home.

(b) The *emotive* or *impassioned* character of this influence on English Prose was an advantage. A casual reference to history will reveal this element. One of the most conspicuous conflicts in German Letters was that represented by the names of *Gottsched* and *Bodmer*.

Before the Thirty Years' War, Opitz and his followers had made a kind of beginning in the direction of a truly natural literature. Nearly a century after the close of the war, this work was reopened, through the special medium of literary unions. Here we meet the two historical schools of Leipsic and of Zurich, and we note that the one contended for the literature of form; the other, for the literature of spirit and of power. The one, was in the interests of imitation

and of culture based on Gallic models; the other, on behalf of passion and inspiration based on natural feeling and English models. It was the old struggle of letter and spirit, and alike in Germany and in England the victory was on the behalf of the natural.

In speaking of the reciprocal influence of these two literatures, it is noteworthy that the German is always kept *subordinate*. In this respect there is a marked difference between this foreign influence and that of France in earlier days, in that the English was then subordinate. Whatever the effect of German Letters in England, our literature remained English in speech, personality and product. The process was assimilative, and not imitative. The question may justly be raised whether such German influence was altogether foreign, in that there is a common Teutonic lineage, and the forefathers of each people dwelt together upon the Elbe and Weser. The fond dream of Goethe as to a universal literature may not be within the possibility of realization. The prophecy of Milton, that the time is coming when the literatures of Germany, England and America will be one, is not altogether improbable. However this may be, the influence of Germany on English Prose in this period of prose expansion was a large and healthful one, and cannot be overlooked by any one who aims to give a true account of the agencies at work upon it.

## 2. *Political Agitation.*

Long before these agitations expressed themselves in the definite form of civil revolution in England, they were at work in the heart of Europe. The erratic Rousseau did not have reference to his own

country, simply, when he wrote "We are drawing near to a state of crisis, an age of revolution." Such a period of unrest was far too apparent in the gathering of its forces to be concealed; all Europe was practically concerned. As far back as the Roman Empire it began, and its course can be traced more or less clearly all along the line of Continental and of English History. It is the earnest struggle between the old and the new, between royal prerogative and popular privilege. It is seen in the early struggle between Saxon and Norman; at the time, also, of the Great Charter wrested from the King at Runnymede; in the Reformation at the time of Elizabeth; in the Great Rebellion of 1640, the age of Cromwell; and in the Revolution of 1688, when for the first time general and satisfactory results were reached in the line of civil and religious liberty. So was it in France, and so, across the Atlantic in our own country; and the question of that hour is still the question of Monarchical tyranny or Popular Rights. However important the first English Reformation may have been in its moral aspects, it may justly be said of this second one, that the issues it involved were more varied, practical and popular. It established the modern era of the *rights of man*. The point of special interest in our discussion, therefore, is that this agitation had an immediate and lasting influence on English Prose, and most especially at this period of its enlargement. Hence, we find the leading authors of the time acknowledging its power. Wordsworth was a traveler in France at the very time of the Revolution, and comes fully into sympathy with the general movement. Coleridge is

at Bristol, lecturing on politics; Southey, radical and conservative in turn, wrote and spoke on the questions of the hour; while the further we go on in the history of this period through the times of De Quincey, Macaulay, and the British Orators, the more distinctive is this influence of civil matters in literary methods. There are some special forms of helpfulness in which this period of public agitation expressed itself, as related to the growth of English Prose.

(a) In that England's attitude toward France was a formal protest against the further entrance and reign of Gallic *influence*. It was the home feeling opposed to foreign intrusion, not because it was foreign but because it was Gallic rather than Teutonic. England regarded France, at this time, as the most dangerous enemy to her peace and the peace of Europe. From the declaration of the war against Prussia in 1790, to the battle of Waterloo in 1815, the revolution was in progress. In 1793, war was declared against England, and the strife was maintained up to the Peace of Amiens in 1802. There could be no sympathy between the two peoples, politically or intellectually. The persistency with which England sought to humble France was the measure of that deep revulsion of feeling on the part of English authors against the future imitation of French models in literature. English Prose Writers above all, spoke and wrote against the principle, and the tide of Gallic influence was stayed.

(b) English Prose was now greatly benefited in that the issues at stake were *urgent* and *practical*, just such issues as belonged to the department of prose, rather than poetry. In all this struggle, there



was a deep emotive element finding its best expression in that large volume of impassioned prose that appeared at the time.

Authors wrote in practical ways for practical ends, and had but little time for paraphrase or indirect address. The Augustan Age of Settled English Prose has been called Popular. So it was, but in a far narrower sense from a literary point of view than is true of this period. That was the people's era, up to the limits of possibility in such an age, when the old restrictions in church and state were still to a degree influential. Now, all is widened, and healthfully free. The very word, people, has taken on a new meaning, and the literature responds to the enlarging process.

(c) Benefit is found in the very *changes* themselves. The spirit of inquiry was astir in all the departments of human thought. In Natural Science, the work of the Royal Society, founded in the days of Newton and of Boyle, was prosecuted with new zeal. In Theology, there were special discussions by Clarke, Warburton and Butler. In Adam Smith's "Wealth of Nations" Social Science may be said to have taken its origin. It was followed by the "Fragments" of Bentham and, later, by the works of Malthus and Ricardo. In Political Science, Ferguson wrote a "History of Civil Society;" while Burke in various pamphlets gave his views on matters of State policy. In Jurisprudence, Blackstone was writing his famous Commentary; Burke and Blair, Alison and Jeffreys were educating the people in the principles of aesthetic art; while Hume and Smollett, Robertson and Gibbon were penning their celebrated historical treatises.

In the sphere of mental and moral philosophy, this spirit of inquiry and expression was especially manifest.

Hume wrote his "Inquiry concerning Human Understanding." Fifteen years later, Reid followed with his "Inquiry into the Human Mind," his labors being ably supplemented by Stewart and the Scottish School. From France, Locke's philosophy was returning with some foreign perversions to which were added the dangerous theories of Bolingbroke and Rousseau. Early in the century, Berkeley had given to the world his "Ideal Philosophy." Toward the middle of the century Hartley appeared with his "Philosophy of Association"; while near the close of the era were seen together the skeptical system of Gibbon, the rationalism of Paine, and the gross materialism of Priestly. In the line of foreign philosophy, as bearing on British thought, there were two sets of influence. The one was started and maintained by the critical discussions of Kant; the other, by the Encyclopedists of France who began with doubt and ended with the bold denial of all moral truth. Catching its spirit from the teachings of Voltaire, it desired to construct a system fully in keeping with the reorganizing spirit of the time. All departments of thoughts were included. Born out of the bosom of the eighteenth century, it was to be its worthy representative as opposed to all that was past; while in and through it all, was the manifest preference of the sensual to the spiritual. In short, the discovery and diffusion of knowledge was the governing idea of the time; and just here we note the accordance of the era with the character of

the prose. Nothing could have been more opportune. The prose received just what it needed,—expansion of idea and form; and was enabled, while receiving this enlargement from the age, to give to it in time fitting literary expression.

Literature and life were in fullest harmony; and, if in reading the stirring prose of this period we note the grounds of this characteristic, they are seen in that awakened spirit of free investigation prominent in all lands and ever diffusing itself into wider areas.

### 3. *In the Revival of First and Middle-English.*

This movement is not confined to the century before us. In Wyclif's time, authors were looking back to Alfred, as in the reign of James I., they were reverting to Wyclif. Even Milton went so far as to write a history of Early England for the benefit of his time. Dryden, critical and classical as he was, ever referred his English readers to the pages of the old authors. Ever since the Baconian period, such a return to earlier eras is noteworthy. Neither the French influence of the Restoration, nor the classical influence of the Augustan Age could altogether annul it; until in the age before us, it revived in fuller power than ever before. Especially manifest in the sphere of poetry as induced by the labors of Ritson, Percy and Warton, it was also seen in our prose. The age preceding had been one of formal prose and literary tendencies somewhat imitative. The demand was for a change in the line of naturalness; and the people hailed with delight the return to what they regarded a more healthful time. Authors were now anxious as never before to reveal

the inherent independence of English Letters and thereby to lessen foreign influence. The age was to be English, out and out. The Declaration of Independence was not to be confined to civil matters and American life. English Prose Authors felt most deeply that just to the degree in which the era was expansive, impassioned and modern, just to that degree was there needed a style of prose that was English in spirit and purpose.

### General Inferences as to Periods.

#### 1. *Comparative Limits of the Periods.*

If we compare the four representative eras of Modern-English Prose now mentioned with the First and Middle-English eras preceding, as to *the time* included in each, we note a suggestive descending series,—five centuries (673–1164), four centuries (1154–1561), and three centuries (1560–1860+). It is a good illustration of the inverse ratio of periods to product. As worthy as was the prose work of Alfred and Wyclif and others of their times, it was as nothing in comparison with that unexampled display of literary power manifested in the Modern Era.

As far as the respective limits of the four modern eras themselves are concerned, it is suggestive that, as the first and fourth are included each in a century, the second and third alike are included in a half century. The longer periods are both in position and character by far the most important.

#### 2. *Comparative Amount of Prose and Poetry.*

As far as the introductory eras are concerned, there is, in First-English, more extant poetry than

prose. In Middle-English, the adjustment is more nearly equal, with the difference in favor of prose.

If we compare the four modern periods, they may be classified, as before, in pairs. The first and second, are in the main, periods of poetry; although in each, prose becomes more and more dominant, until at the close it prevails.

The third and fourth periods are distinctively prose, the third being so to a very marked degree, while in the fourth there is a more equal adjustment of quantity; the period opening with a striking poetic revival, but ever developing, as it goes on, more and more prose tendency and product, till prose prevails.

Taking the entire contents of the literature into account, there is a remarkable similarity as to the frequency of these two forms of literary expression. If a decision must be given, the superiority is undoubtedly on the side of prose.

### 3. *Unity of Periods.*

The more we subject these periods to close examination, the more evident will their historical continuity appear. Amid great variety of epoch and characteristic, there will always appear the presence of a definite literary law; so that while the individuality of each epoch is preserved, their unity is just as manifest. It is this principle that confirms the view of most literary critics, that in English Prose, as in poetry, there is such a thing as *sequence*; a graduated historical progress throughout; on such wise that the line of it may be easily followed from its beginning in the sixteenth century to the present. No true interpretation of English Prose can be given

if such a principle is overlooked. It is for this reason mainly, that all periods are found more or less to overlap each other and defy any absolutely fixed distinction of dates and writings. We have presented these periods as Formative, Transitional, Settled and Expansive; representing respectively, the Elizabethan, Stuart, Augustan and Georgian eras. These classifications, however, can be approximate and relative only. Were this law of historical method and unity absent, the decisions would be formal and mechanical. No one can be dogmatic as to the precise limits of Elizabethan Prose, or tell us just when the Restoration influences end. "In the literature of any people," says Morley, "we perceive under all contrasts of form produced by variable social influences, the one natural character from first to last." In no literature is this more apparent than in English. If the question be raised as to what this principle is that unifies our prose periods, it might be answered in Baconian phrase,—“to secure the glory of God and the relief of man's estate.” It evinces the ever deepening purpose to express the content of the English mind for ethical and humane ends, to gather an amount of literary product together in which the moral and the practical shall be together embodied and expressed.

He who sees most clearly this unifying element of English Prose will be its best expositor to others.

#### 4. *Progressive Development.*

Mr. Saintsbury, in his "Life of Dryden," insists upon calling attention to the comparative immaturity of Elizabethan Prose—what we have termed, Forma-

tive. After stating that "Prose is the necessary vehicle of thought," he adds: "Up to Dryden's time no such generally available vehicle had been attempted or achieved by any one." He goes on to confirm this by a reference to the unnatural constructions and phraseology of those Baconian days. Other critics speak in a similar strain. Though often stated in extreme form, there is historical truth in this view, and it is just what is to be expected. The very term—Formative—as applied to this first period implies this; and the more critically that style of prose is studied, the more manifest it is, that it marks a beginning of development rather than a completion.

As soon as we pass to the second or Transitional period, despite all deviations, there is a progress visible. "A new prose," writes Brooke, "of greater force of thought and of a simpler style than the Elizabethan, arose." Whatever it was or was not, it was more varied and flexible than any previous form. When we pass to the Settled and Expansive periods, this gradual growth of our prose is so apparent as to need no exposition. It is, in fact, the special mark of the two eras, and seems more and more to exhibit that central law of unity already noted. It was because there was unity that the progress was consecutive and unbroken, while this in turn intensified the unity itself.

##### 5. *The Period and the Writer.*

As a rule, the respective writers of English Prose at all eminent as models, were in vital sympathy with the age in which they lived and wrote. Whatever the general bearing of their authorship might

be, they had a special meaning at and for the time. It was on this principle that Bacon wrote his *Essays*; Hooker, his *Polity*; Milton, his political, ecclesiastical and social treatises; Swift, his partisan pamphlets; Addison, his *Spectator*; and the later British Essayists, their various works. They not only "held the mirror up to nature," but, as the men of Issachar, "they had understanding of their times." They gave to the "body of the time its form and pressure." They and their respective periods exercised mutual influence upon each other, not to the extent, indeed, which Mr. Taine would hold in defense of his special theory, but still to an important extent, so as to mark them as in one age and not in another. They were sufficiently in sympathy with their time to represent it and meet its needs; and yet, not so fully subjected to it as to make their prose local and narrow in its range. It is not a little remarkable that such works as Bacon's "Advancement of Learning," and Addison's "Spectator" are still so largely read, despite their local occasion and purport. They wrote for their age, mainly, and, yet, for other times, also.

So vital is this relation of writer to epoch, that it is difficult to conceive how Hooker could have written in any other age than the Formative one; or Dryden in any other than the Transitional; or Johnson in any other than the Settled; or Macaulay in any other than the Expansive. There is an historical and a logical fitness in all this, and the classification of eras is a virtual classification of writers. It would scarcely be too much to add that the principle of gradual progress is apparent even here, so that Macaulay may be said to have been the exponent



of English Prose in his age, more fully than is true of any previous author in any particular age that he represented. Moreover, in the proportion in which a writer is leading and eminent, in that proportion, precisely, may he be said to be the true exponent of the literary character of his time.



PART SECOND.



## PART SECOND.

### REPRESENTATIVE LITERARY FORMS.

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#### Literary Forms.

As indicated in the Preface, the term, *literary*, is emphatic throughout the present treatise as distinct from any other terms with which it may be confounded. By Forms, in this connection, is meant therefore, exclusively, Literary Forms as distinct from any other kinds of English Prose possible to an author,—scientific, speculative, technical. Prose treatises on science or metaphysics, or any of the professional departments, would thus be excluded from the strictly literary sphere, and find their place more fittingly in the narrower area of the technical and special. What has been generally termed, the department of Belles Lettres in the widest and highest sense of the term covers the main scope of what is here intended, and distinguishes these forms from those which belong to other provinces.

#### The Word. Forms.

In the province of rhetorical and literary discussion, this word is used as synonymous with, modes, and may be so interpreted in the discussion before us.

They are the *modes* or *ways* in which literary art expresses itself and, as to our purpose, in the department of prose. Nor is the word, *mode*, to be so emphasized here as to make it sharply distinct from subject matter, and thus reduce literary expression to a mere mechanism. It is the expression of the inner mind of the writer, and, though external, takes its character from that which is beneath and behind it. This part of our subject will therefore be nothing more nor less than a presentation in classified order of those different divisions of English Prose which we find illustrated in English as in all literatures. It may here be stated, that in the subsequent discussion of English Prose Style, as illustrated in our prose authors, this study of Prose Forms will be seen to have been essential.

### Methods of Classification of Forms.

If we classify by *periods* only, then we note such historical forms as,—The Elizabethan, Stuart, Augustan, and Georgian; or using the divisions adopted, Formative, Transitional, Settled, and Expansive Forms.

If we classify by Authors only, there would be,—Baconian, Addisonian, Johnsonian Forms, and so on, throughout the list of leading writers.

If by *quality* of writing, or *style proper*, there follow such forms as,—the Clear, the Forcible, the Elegant, the Suggestive.

If by *process* and the *object* merely, we have,—The Didactic, Logical, Emotional, and Persuasive Forms. These are not only possible classifications, but have in turn been adopted and applied by literary critics;

and there is in each of them some element of worth as indicating a method of study. The difficulty is that any one of them by itself is too restrictive and mechanical—not wide enough to embrace those great divisions of prose expression in which the author can freely move. We shall submit a classification essentially including all the principles thus far mentioned, and, as we believe, quite including all *representative* forms thus far illustrated in our literary history.

The one exclusive principle of the classification we need not state, inasmuch as there is none sufficiently broad. In the divisions given, however, special reference will be made to *process*, *quality*, and *object*, as giving the main basis for a full statement of the Forms of Literary Prose.

The true classification is as follows:

- I.—HISTORICAL OR NARRATIVE PROSE.
- II.—POETIC (OR DESCRIPTIVE) PROSE.
- III.—PHILOSOPHICAL OR DIDACTIC PROSE.
- IV.—ORATORICAL OR IMPASSIONED PROSE.
- V.—MISCELLANEOUS OR PERIODICAL PROSE.

It will be our purpose to discuss each of these in the order stated, making the discussion brief and yet sufficiently full to give an intelligent understanding of the forms themselves and as they are related to the subjects that precede and follow.

## CHAPTER I.

### HISTORICAL OR NARRATIVE PROSE.

#### Contents.

This important division of English Prose may be said to include, strictly, History Proper and Biography.

What are termed—Annals or Chronicles, are the essential basis or material of this department, but in the literary sense of the term,—Historical Prose,—do not fall legitimately under it. As mere collections of dates, facts and incidents, they have no rhetorical character whatever, and are simply means to the production of prose proper. They sustain the same relation to History that boards and bricks do to a building. They must be put into symmetrical form and position. Even when such Annals take so extensive a form as in “The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle” or in the “Outlines of Universal History,” they are not entitled to the name and rank of History Proper, in that the material is not presented in consecutive or narrative form, but simply as an accumulation of facts without comment or enlargement.

So, as to Memoirs: At times, they assume a somewhat lengthened form, and combine the national with the personal element, as in “The Memoirs of the Times



of George IV.," by Queen Caroline; or "The Historical Memoirs of the Church of France," by Butler. Still, they are Memoirs, and not connected History with a rhetorical order and development of thought.

Memoirs are related to Biography as Annals are to History, constituting its material. They are necessarily fragmentary and brief, and serve their purpose as ministrant to the forms of prose proper. Hence, they have no strictly literary character, and do not fall within the limits of our discussion. They are personal annals, and as biography is inferior to History Proper, Memoirs are inferior, even as material, to Annals proper.

There is a popular and vague use of the words, Annals and Memoirs; as in MacDonal'd's "Annals of a Quiet Neighborhood"; and Pope's "Memoirs of Martin Scriblerus." With this use of the terms, however, we have nothing, at present, to do. In the department of Fiction and Satire and Humorous Discourse, it is in their wider and accommodating sense that such technical terms are generally used.

Historical Prose, as literary, may be said to include, therefore, the two classes specified, Biography and History Proper.

### BIOGRAPHY.

This is *personal* history,—the record or account of human life as expressed in the individual rather than in the nation or race. It is in the strictest sense a distinctive form of historical prose, in that it is continuous, logically progressive, and unlike the memoirs, a complete presentation of the subject in hand. As to its further relation to History Proper, it differs

mainly as to its comparative brevity. This limitation arises naturally from its personal character. In the limits assigned it, however, it is unique and symmetrical as a form.

From these two features, personality and brevity, are derived the two main matters noteworthy regarding Biography, its Interest and Clearness. It has to the reader all the attraction of life-like reality as to its subject matter, and of literary simplicity as to its expression. Being the history of a person, it adds to the historical something of present vividness; and being brief, it seldom wearies or perplexes. So long as Pope's statement holds good that "The proper study of mankind is man," so long will Biography fill a large place in the general reading of the educated public. It is almost needless to state that Autobiography is a life written by the author himself.

#### Remarks.

(a) There are many works which are biographical in character, and yet are not strictly Biographies. They have the personal element in them as distinctive, and yet so in connection with other elements, historical and general, that the special form is somewhat obscured. Such books as Field's "Yesterday with Authors," or Knight's "Half Hours with Authors," are of this character. They embrace a series of authors, and present a kind of combination of literary history and biography.

We are becoming familiar, in our day, with the phrase, "Life and Times," of which Masson, in his "Biography of Milton," has given us the finest ex-

ample in English Prose. In such volumes, the author is not careful to restrict himself to the poet or prose writer whom he is discussing, but introduces us to the history of his age, the peculiar surroundings in which his youth and later years were passed, and shows us the close relations of the man to his circumstances.

(b) This biographical method of composition is applied, at times, to subjects *other than persons*,—to states and nations in their individual character as political bodies marked, respectively, by well defined features. They are viewed as personalities, and so presented. The origin, progress, and varied expressions of their civic life are given, as in the case of the individual life. Such a series as "The American Commonwealths" is a good example of this peculiar phase of historical writing. Such forms may be said to mark the line of union between biography proper and history proper, and to have the main element of each.

(c) *Prominence in Modern Times.*

No careful observer of the growth and variations of literary prose product will fail to note the rapid increase of biographies and biographical writing. In no particular is this more apparent than in the large number of serial or collective biographies found in our libraries. Such as the following will illustrate:

Johnson's "Lives of the Poets," Strickland's "Queens of England," Thackeray's "Four Georges," Thackeray's "English Humorists," Higginson's "English Statesmen," Morris' "American Statesmen," Morley's "English Men of Letters Series," Warner's "American Men of Letters Series."

These examples will suffice to show the increasing number, interest and value of these serials, and their tendency to assume the form of lives written by various authors under the control of a general editor.

If in addition to these collected biographies, the references be to separate treatises, the number is simply beyond recital, having representative expression in such works as:

Boswell's "Johnson," Lockhart's "Scott," Masson's "Milton," Stanley's "Arnold," Forster's "Dickens," Trevelyan's "Macaulay," Froude's "Carlyle."

(d) *Life and Authorship.*

So vital is the relation of an author's personal character and history to his literary character as a writer, that in the great majority of cases, certainly, the one must be known before the other can fully be. Masson, in his "British Novelists," refers to Wordsworth as objecting to the mingling of the biography of an author with the reading and study of his work. In this opinion he opposes the Lake poet, and justly. Wordsworth himself, is a conspicuous example in point.

Some authors indeed, as some men in all spheres, seem to be one thing, and express themselves as another; but these are few.

No student of our literature can afford to open the pages of an English author of note, until he has made himself thoroughly conversant with the life and times of the author. This is especially important in prose discourse, in that poetry lies more outside of ordinary thought and life, and may be to a great extent quite independent of periods and persons.

## HISTORY PROPER—HISTORICAL PROSE.

## MEANING.

The most specific idea which this term indicates is expressed in such words as,—civil, political, constitutional. Hume's "History of England," Hallam's "Constitutional History," Bancroft's "History of the United States," are examples of this application. When not otherwise defined, the word means, a record of the founding and growth of nations; a narration or relation of the political life of states and empires. "An account of facts, particularly of facts respecting nations and states" is the definition given by Webster, and is the commonly received meaning.

There is, however, a wider meaning which has to do more with the etymological idea of the word as a narrative of events, or statement of facts, than with the subject matter involved, as civil or otherwise. In this sense, the term may be applied to any department of knowledge embodied in the form of narrative or recital, rather than in any one of the other possible forms that might be used. Hence, we have the following:

HISTORY OF LITERATURE, such as, Hallam's.

HISTORY OF POETRY, such as, Warton's.

HISTORY OF PHILOSOPHY, such as, Lewes'.

HISTORY OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE, such as, Marsh's.

ECCLESIASTICAL HISTORY, such as, Mosheim's.

HISTORY OF DOCTRINE, such as, Shedd's, etc.

In the use of this wider meaning, we are introduced to a spacious area of historical prose, and the re-

lations between the narrative form of discourse and all other forms, become apparent.

It is, however, in the narrower sense, as synonymous with the phrase, Civil or Political History, that the term is mainly employed. Even as thus defined and limited, the province it covers is a broad and inviting one, and full of special interest to the student of Letters and of English Prose.

### (A.) Characteristics of Historical Prose.

#### 1. *Accuracy of Statement.*

There must be evident throughout, a conscientious loyalty to the truth; a strict fidelity in the record of facts. However much personal opinion may vary, testimony is to be impartial. The deductions which the historian may draw from facts submitted to him are one thing and open to difference of view;—the facts themselves are not his, but belong to the common stock of truth, and must be given as they are, and not otherwise. History, as its very etymology implies, is a recital of past events, and not the origination of new facts.

#### 2. *Clearness of Statement.*

This is a strictly literary characteristic and, as such, has to do with the form of expression as plain or obscure, rather than with its inherent quality as true or false.

As clearness may be said to be the first quality of writing, so there is no province of prose in which it is more needful than in narration. To the extent in

which history is doubtful as to meaning, it is unreadable, and fails of its prime end.

It is for this reason that most of our leading historians have paid special attention to the subject of expression and method in their narratives; and, in order to be understood, have introduced a great degree of incident, figure, and poetic phrase. This is noteworthy in all readable historians, such as, Macaulay and Motley.

### 3. *Unity and Order of Statement.*

History has often been said to assume the same rank in prose discourse that the epic does in poetry. Each is essentially narrative, and in each, the law of unity may be said to be fundamental. This implies and demands that in every separate narrative of events there shall be a central, dominant event, and that around this as central, all else shall be grouped in the order of relative worth. This is a logical as well as rhetorical feature, and lifts the whole department of narrative prose out of the plane of the mere recital of events to the higher plane of the causal connection of events.

It is simply the general law of method in discourse applied to history.

The application of this principle is especially difficult in complex narrative, as in the history of a nation in all its periods and variations of life. Hence, the small number of histories of such a country as England, in which the narrator has attempted to cover the entire ground; and the increasingly large number of those which confine themselves to a separ-

ate epoch or period, as Froude, Macaulay, Stanhope, Leckey and Clarendon.

Even when the fuller method is applied, as by Knight and Greene, the result is rather a collection of the histories of the several epochs in one aggregate than a separate history by itself. The application of this principle of unity in any sphere is as difficult as it is important. To know precisely what is the central event or class of events, to adjust them in right relations to each other, and to know the definite border line between minute detail and generalization, is no small matter, and marks the master.

#### 4. *Delineation.*

This has to do with both characters and events. It reveals the presence of the biographical element in history and, also, its relation as a literary form to other forms, as, the descriptive. As the word implies it draws *the lines* around the event or person. It is graphic, picturesque and pictorial, and seems to lend to the didactic element of historical prose something of that interest which belongs to the less serious forms of prose expression. Dr. Lord in his discussion of the great Historical Characters from Charlemagne down, presents a fine example of this delineative feature. So in Prescott, Motley, Headley, Freeman and Macaulay. The historian who is able to hold it within due limits, and to make it subservient to the great end of history as instructive, proves thereby his genius for narrative discourse in its best forms. There is such a faculty as the Historic Imagination.



### 5. *Simplicity of Statement.*

It is safe to say that narration is the simplest as it is about the earliest form of expression in prose. It is common to all ages, classes and peoples. It is the natural form of human utterance—a telling of the story or fact with unconscious art. This simplicity is to be preserved in all relations. When history becomes so complex or prosaic as to conceal or impair it, in so far it departs from its normal type. It is in its primary conception “a plain unvarnished tale,” a speaking “right on,” and must be devoid of artifice and studied attempt at display.

### 6. *Gravity—Moral and Literary.*

History is essentially a dignified form of discourse. Its object is instruction rather than entertainment. Its subject matter is fact, and its general procedure orderly and serious. Anything in the line of the burlesque, flippant and common is excluded. The historian owes it to himself and his theme, to keep aloof from all that is belittling, and to regard himself as an appointed teacher of men. Judgment should be apparent everywhere, as superior to fancy or frivolity. Even in a literary point of view as to diction, figure and general manner, the author must rise above all temptations to exceptional methods, and keep in line with the higher order of minds. Facts are mighty and important as facts, and need a careful handling. History, as a body of prose, is well preserving its character in this particular. One of its main benefits to the student and reader is in this direction. Its effect is elevating and ethical. For this

reason, among others, it might well be substituted by young men for promiscuous fiction as the staple of their early reading.

## (B.) Methods of Historical Prose

### 1. *The Chronological.*

This is essentially historical in that the element of time is prominent. It presents events in temporal succession. More than this, it is purely and only historical. It includes no other feature, as the descriptive, reflective or logical. It is a mere recitation of facts, without enlargement or inference.

It is the first and simplest method of historical prose. As stated, its extreme form is found in the works of Annalists and Chroniclers, in Outlines and Schemes. Apart from this, however, it is expressed as veritable literary history in those authors who present facts in a connected form, and yet not sufficiently so to mark their inner bond of relation or to furnish an historical manner. Such writers always follow the centuries in regular order, and regard any deviation therefrom as contrary to law. Such an historian as Hume follows, in the main, this chronological order, and is, so far, inferior to most of those who succeed him as English Historians.

### 2. *The Logical or Causal*

This is a more recent and a higher order of narrative prose, and is adopted by all the leading historians of modern times.

There is such a thing as,—The Philosophy of History. Facts, are followed by principles reached

through them. Generalization, succeeds the mere recital of events. Causes and effects, are discussed in their relations; and in and through the historical records are seen the laws that control them.

This is a method in no sense contradictory or opposed to the other. It is simply higher and broader. It is based on the other and is logically dependent on it. Froude differs from Hume not in decrying facts, but in subjecting them to ideas and principles. It will be clear at once that this is the most difficult method, and yet the more recompensing, It indicates and develops the ability of the historian while, also, affording to the student of historical prose a more satisfactory body of literature for reference and reading.

### . Suggestions.

#### (a) *The Relations of History.*

From what has already been stated, some of these relationships are apparent, as, to Description, Biography, and in the higher forms of historical writing, to Philosophy and Logic.

We have alluded to the epic as based on the narrative. This is true to a large extent in the Drama as involving plot and story. There is a very distinct dramatic element in history as there is the historical element in the drama. The Historical Plays of Shakespeare are examples in point.

Narrative poetry is so called because of this special element in it.

The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle has poetry as well as prose in it. The Metrical Chronicle is not without frequent example.

Many of the older writers, such as, Lydgate, Drayton and others, wrote their histories in poetic form.

This narrative element is, also, found very largely in Fiction. This is so marked as to give us a distinct order of novel called, The Historical, as in Scott, and Mühlbach. It is difficult, if not impossible, in much of our fiction to separate the narrative from the romantic element.

The relation of History to Geography is close, especially in that form of Geography called Political. The historian, to be successful, must not only be conversant with geographical data, but must know the close connection of places and events and how the course of history is materially determined by the courses of mountains and rivers; by race, climate and locality. In fine, the scope of historical discourse is so broad that it may be said to touch nearly every main department of human interest, government and society, morals and industries, life and thought. This again, adds to its moral dignity and worth.

(b) *Effect of Historical Reading on Style.*

If, as has been stated, simplicity and naturalness, unity and clearness, are characteristics of this species of writing when properly exhibited, then it follows, that every student of English Style must be conversant with it. It is not only a safe model and profitable to consult, but is not optional with the ambitious composer to neglect it. His own interests make it necessary. To recount a narrative, or state connected facts in a plain and pleasing manner, is a high literary art; and, when expressed, as it is, in our best historical prose, should be ever consulted by the

writer. It is for this reason that literary biography reveals the fact that some of the most mature and eminent English writers were in the habit, late in life, of refreshing and simplifying their style by frequent resort to such models.

It is well known how Thucydides, in his country and time, served as a model in this respect. Nothing will more effectually save a writer from the natural tendency to conceited and extravagant forms of expression, than a continual contact with our best narrative discourse.

(c) *Elements of Interest.*

The main feature of interest here is the same as in Biography, the *personal* one. Although not so prominent or exclusive as there, it is still sufficiently so to give this life-like character to the narrative, which makes it impressive and pleasing. History is more than a connected record of facts and events, dates and incidents. It is a record of *human life* as manifested in the aggregate,—in society and nation,—an account of the way in which the world acts under all possible variety of circumstances. It is, in a real sense, an enlarged biography, and gains in breadth what it loses in specific reference.

It may be said to be one of the proofs of this, and one of the marks of modern historical treatment, that this element of individuality is made increasingly distinct. Hence, we have such works as,—Green's History of the English *People* as distinct from England, and McMaster's History of the *People* of the United States, rather than of the States themselves. It is now noticeable that historians are passing more and more from the abstract to the

concrete; from the impersonal to the personal; from the historical, pure and simple, to the biographical also. These narratives are becoming more and more practical and helpful in their instruction. Detailed accounts of wars and civil politics give place to the record of the common life of the people, their habits and industries, their domestic, social and moral economy; in fact, their personal character as expressed in every day forms. This, moreover, is all in the line of the very ideal of history as a record of the past life of nations for the guidance of present peoples.

In addition to this personal element as conducive to interest, there may be noticed others such as, the pleasure of noting the *progressive* life of nations; the *triumph* of right over wrong; the *dramatic cast* of narrative discourse as it goes on from scene to scene towards its consummation; and above all, the spacious and imposing scale on which history moves as a successive and accurate record of the world's career. It thus resembles the epic, not only in its narrative feature, but also in its moral sublimity and scope.

## CHAPTER II.

### DESCRIPTIVE OR POETIC PROSE.

#### The Word—Descriptive.

THIS term is here used as distinct from the term, narrative, and as applicable to that kind of prose which sets forth objects, located in space, rather than events occurring in time. It conceives of its object as fixed in definite position, and not as changing its form through successive eras.

It may, also, be termed descriptive in the sense of graphic, poetic, or pictorial. It is that order of English Prose which is imaginative, rather than historical. It is representative rather than presentative, and has to do with symbols and figurative forms, as well as with facts. In the higher themes and forms of descriptive writing, such as, "The Character of Milton," or of English Poetry, the presence of the imagination is especially seen in its constructive power. In such cases, the idea to be set forth must have place and body given it as if it were a visible, tangible thing. The writer must *see* it, and so present it through pictorial emblems that the reader may see it with equal distinctness. The readers must be made spectators of the scene presented as in many of the descriptions of Bulwer and Dickens. In narrative

writing, it is the historic imagination that is at work. Here, it is the *poetic* imagination in its normal and healthful action as the imaging faculty. Hence it is, that in poetry, as distinct from prose, this element largely enters, as in dramatic and pastoral forms, and in that special form of poetry which, by way of distinction, is termed—descriptive.

### Benefit of Descriptive Prose to Style.

As in narrative prose, the main benefits to the reader and student are naturalness and simplicity; here they are vividness and vigor. It is because these qualities of style are so rare, even among those possessed of all the others, that such an order of prose discourse is invaluable. No student of expression can devote himself either to the frequent production or consulting of such writing and not become thereby the master of a lucid, fluent and animated style. All is life-like. The idea is made to stand forth on the page as the picture on the canvas. Its outlines are so clear that from them one can easily discern the entire content of the scene or object. It is one of the most healthful indications of modern times in the department of literary art that the rigid and somewhat lifeless methods of the older schools are giving gradual place to a more flexible and vivacious style. Nothing is more marked in the progressive history of English Prose than in the steady advance it makes in this direction, whereby the comparatively unbending forms of Hooker and Dryden give way at length to the more pliant prose of Addison, and this, in turn, to the still more natural prose of the Georgian Age. This is all in the line of a real return to the true in



prose composition in that description, as narration, is a normal mode of mental expression, and must find scope and use just to the degree in which freedom takes the place of constraint, and artifice yields to art.

### The Mental Element in Descriptive Prose.

There is a philosophical law that applies here,—that we can expect to find no more in the effect than the cause; that what we do find in the effect is due to the power resident in the cause. Clear expression reveals clear thinking. A high order of descriptive prose argues a high order of intellectual insight. The mental ability of the one determines that of the other. Vivid description, as given us in the best historians and novelists of England, means vivid conception. This mental power is especially manifest in the imagination as a faculty of forecasting and combining.

Descriptive power is not, indeed, the highest order of power, since the imaging faculty cannot be said to rank above the others. Some of our prose writers excel in this only, thus revealing the fact that imaginative power may exist in special excellence when other powers are feebly expressed. The ratio at times seems to be inverse. In its proper place and function, however, it is a mental faculty of high order, and when ably expressed in literary product marks a good degree of personal ability.

In this respect, those writers succeed the best who cultivate and apply their descriptive powers, not as an isolated form of mental activity, but as vitally related to all the other essential powers of the mind. This is the sufficient explanation of the fact, that de-

scriptive writing is so often more healthful and successful in prose than in poetry, while in the region of prose itself, historical descriptions are often the best, in that the historic imagination controls the poetic.

### Province of Descriptive Prose.

The area covered by descriptive prose is similar to that covered by the narrative form. These two divisions of prose so happily combine, and are as a matter of fact so frequently connected, that the phrases,—historical description, or descriptive narration,—have become current. In history, travels and biography, the descriptive element is always more or less present; while in the special department of experimental teaching it is the controlling form. "Description," says Bain, "is involved in all the other kinds of composition."

There are, however, two special forms of prose discourse in which this order of writing is clearly prominent.—Poetical Prose and Prose Fiction.

### POETICAL PROSE.

As the phrase indicates, this is an order of prose that seems to lie on the border line between prose proper and poetry—a form which, though not metrical, has a larger amount than usual of rhythm and accentual regularity in it.

It means, imaginative or symbolical prose—what we are here discussing as descriptive. The terms descriptive, and poetical, are here quite interchangeable in that the term poetical is used as synonymous with the term pictorial. An important suggestion at

this point is, that the term prose when used without definition or explanation, means an unimaginative, unpoetical order of writing. It means just what the word prose (*prosus*) etymologically means,—a straightforward, direct method as distinct from one more or less indirect. The original idea of prose has reference to its various forms other than the imaginative form.

In so far, therefore, as prose expression tends to the poetic, it departs from its primal law. Historically viewed, we shall note that of the four or five forms of prose that are to come before us, the one we are now discussing is the only one that has swerved from the old idea; just as in didactic poetry or prose poetry we mark the one exception in that sphere among all the existing forms of verse. Exceptional as it is, however, this species of prose is natural, well established, widely current, and, in common with all descriptive writing, manifestly on the increase. It marks a reaction from that strong didactic tendency prominent in prose as such, and urges the cultivation of a style somewhat freer and bolder. Such prose writers as Sir Philip Sydney in his "Arcadia," or Jeremy Taylor in his "Holy Living and Dying," or Ruskin in his "Stones of Venice," or Irving in his "Sketch Book," are pertinent examples of this peculiar order of prose. It is scarcely correct to call such specimens, as most critics do, examples of a mediate or third form of writing, one between prose and poetry. It is distinctively a prose form in that it is unmetrical, although not so fully such a form in that the poetical element is unusually present. In the Old Testament Scriptures, among what are termed The

Poetical Books, there is ample illustration of this kind of descriptive writing, so germane to the Oriental mind.

### PROSE FICTION.

In this species of prose is found one of the most distinctive provinces of descriptive writing, whether we view it in its specific character as descriptive, or in its relations to other forms. It demands, therefore, a somewhat full discussion.

#### The Phrase—Prose Fiction.

Critics and authors have quarreled not a little over the propriety of this phraseology; the point at issue being whether Fiction belongs, in truth, to the sphere of prose or poetry.

As far as the phrase which has been accepted goes, the concession is made to those who claim that it finds its place in prose. If we define the term fiction etymologically, as something feigned, imaged or depicted in symbol, or if we define it, as generally done, as that form of discourse in which truth is set forth through incidents and media invented at the time, the result is the same, and we have nothing more nor less than a kind of poetic-prose, prose set forth in unreal forms, supposed for the time to be real. Despite this concession, however, the war still wages. Minto, in his "Manual," writes: "In excluding Romance or Fiction from a Manual of Prose Literature, I follow a division suggested by the late Professor Moir. Romance has a closer affinity with Poetry than with

Prose: it is cousin to Prose, but sister to Poetry. It has the Prose features, but the Poetical spirit." Minto has done unwisely here in following Moir. The error lies in the strange confusion of adjective and noun—poetic and Poetry. The error is so vital as to detract sensibly from the merits of the "Manual." If the reader will turn to Minto's discussion of Daniel De Foe, the first strictly English Novelist, he will note how the author unconsciously departs from the suggestion of Moir and assumes safer ground.

Robinson Crusoe is essentially poetic. It is not a poem, or poetry.

Mr. Masson, on the other hand, in his "British Novelists" thus writes: "If we adopt the common division of literature, into History, Philosophical Literature and Poetry, or the Literature of the Imagination, then the Novel or the Prose Fiction, as the name itself indicates, belongs to the department of Poetry (as that of the imagination). It is Poetry, inasmuch as it consists of matter of imagination, but it *differs* from what is ordinarily called poetry, inasmuch as the vehicle is not verse but prose."

The "common division" of literature here stated we cannot adopt, nor the principle that everything is necessarily *Poetry* that "consists of matter of imagination." It is still true, as Masson intimates, that Fiction belongs to "The Prose literature of the Imagination," or, as he states later, in showing the relation of Fiction to Poetry, that "The Novel, at its highest, is a Prose Epic." The detailed coincidences, however, on which Mr. Masson insists, between the Prose Fiction and the Epic, are pushed too far in

that it would narrow the province of the Novel to the narrative or historical.

Fiction, is thus, *poetic* more or less, but not, as a matter of course, Poetry. Here is just the point on which the question turns. The main feature in poetry, after all, is one of *form*, and not of essence. It is its *metrical* structure. Even bad poetry in *metre* is poetry nevertheless, and Fiction belongs to the sphere of Prose because imaginative as it is, its form is unmetrical. Its accents are arranged on no definite system of regular succession.

Quite apart from this question of form, as we shall see, there are some kinds of Prose Fiction which in their *content* are so decidedly prose as to make it impossible to classify them under any form of verse production.

Prose Fiction, therefore, is a form of Descriptive Prose, in which the pictorial and romantic element enters even more largely than into ordinary description. Prose, as it is, it serves but to manifest still more clearly the close connection of metrical and unmetrical literature, and to show that they are but different forms (external) of expressing the same mental idea.

It is in point, here, to note, that it is in the historical study of English Prose and not of English Poetry, that we come to the origin and earliest forms of the English Novel.

It were well could we have done with this anomalous phrase—Prose Fiction—and term it Fiction, pure and simple. If the terms must each exist, reason requires their reversal so as to read: Fictitious Prose (or Imaginative Prose).

## KINDS OR CLASSES OF PROSE FICTION.

The old division into Novels Proper, and Romances, need not be emphasized, in that particular forms of the Novel may be termed—The Romantic.

As to these divisions, various ones have been given, especially on the side of excessive minuteness. They range from the thirteen different orders as given by Masson, to the three given by Bulwer—The Familiar, Picturesque, and Intellectual.

We shall present a four-fold division of what Mr. Dunlop has happily termed—The Prose Works of Fiction, viz:

THE HISTORICAL OR LOCAL NOVEL.

THE DESCRIPTIVE OR SOCIAL NOVEL.

THE ETHICAL OR DIDACTIC NOVEL.

THE ROMANTIC OR SENTIMENTAL NOVEL.

### (1.) The Historical Novel.

If any form of the Novel could be placed under Narrative rather than Descriptive Prose it would be this. It marks the union of fact and fiction; the point of importance being that the fact is for the sake of the fiction, and not the reverse, as in history itself; so that the novelist is expected somewhat to shape and adjust his facts to his plot and plan. For this reason, the narrative novel must be placed under Pictorial rather than Historical Prose as a specific form. It is historical subordinately.

Of this species of Prose Fiction, Sir Walter Scott may be said to be the father, in England. Historical Novels had existed as far back as the days of De Foe, but under Scott they took a definite and leading

place in our literature. In America, Fenimore Cooper holds a similar place.

Separate examples illustrating this order may be selected as follows:

Bulwer's	{	"Harold, the Last of the Saxon Kings."
		"England and the English."
		"Last Days of Pompeii."
		"Last of the Barons."
		"Rienzi."
Kingsley's	{	"Hypatia."
		"Westward, Ho!"
James'	{	"Richelieu."
		"Mary of Burgundy."
		"Henry of Guise."
		"Atilla."
		"Charlemagne, History of."
Miss Mühlbach's	{	"Frederic the Great and his Court."
		"Henry the Eighth and his Court."
		"Joseph the Second and his Court."
		"Napoleon and Queen Louisa."

Many isolated specimens, as Thackeray's "Henry Esmond" and "Four Georges," or Dickens' "Martin Chuzzlewit" and "Barnaby Rudge," might be cited, while in such a novelist as Disraeli there is seen a good example of what might be termed Politico-Historical Fiction.

## (2.) The Descriptive Novel.

This is descriptive by way of distinction, and may be safely viewed as the typical form of Prose Fiction. It may further be regarded as the most frequent of



of the higher forms. It is often called—The Novel of Life and Manners,—whatever the sphere or nationality may be in which that life is exhibited. Its object is to give a graphic and truthful picture of men and things in a given age or community; “to hold the mirror up to nature,” (human nature) and reveal the world to itself. Its purpose and method are delineative in the sphere of character and customs. It has been called—The Domestic Novel, in the fullest sense of that term.

In this, the historical element is present but somewhat concealed, while the imagination in its present active and portraying work is especially active. All the features that mark fiction as a separate form of prose and ally it, also, closely to poetry, are present in this kind of novel more than in any other.

It is not surprising to find, therefore, that the leading names in Modern English Fiction are found just here,—Dickens, Reade, Bulwer, Thackeray, Miss Mulock, Miss Austen, Mr. Trolloppe, George Mac Donald, Collins, Charlotte Brontë and others, as Hawthorne, in America. If we extend this list so as to include other novelists, who though out of England have written in English, their name is legion.

### (3.) The Ethical Novel.

It might be called the Didactic or Philosophical. As a matter of history it has been known by some as, The Novel of Culture, and by others as, The Novel of Purpose. Outside of England, we are pointed to Goethe’s “*Wilhelm Meister*” as an example where

the reflective element in character is made the chief one, and where such a character is represented as seeking for light in darkness and coming through doubt to certainty.

In this type of Novel we reach a class where the distinctive elements of Prose Fiction are least manifest, and we border most closely on ordinary, unimaginative prose. Such fiction is so formal in method and aim, and so introspective in character, that it lacks much of the spontaneity and scope of fiction proper. The fictional feature is not prominent, nor is the main object of the novel—to please—always clear. Motives are dissected and principles laid bare. Fiction as it is, the ethical, logical and philosophical cast is so prominent that one is often in doubt as to just what he is reading. Mentally, it is the most difficult kind of Fiction to produce or enjoy, while its moral coloring is evident on every hand. As might be supposed, this is a species of the Novel which has but few illustrations as compared with the others. Its leading exponent, in England, is George Eliot, whom Sidney Lanier has seen fit to regard as the *representative* English Novelist of Modern times.

By reason of her present wide influence as an author and a thinker, the ethical novel may be said to be now at its height and enjoying a popularity somewhat apart from its intrinsic worth as a form of fiction.

If it be asked, why this didactic type of novel should not find place under ordinary didactic prose rather than under Prose-Fiction or Descriptive Prose, it may be answered—that philosophical as it is, it is

fictitious and imaginative in its groundwork and method. In its use of symbolic characters it has all the descriptive element of dramatic writing. It is didactic simply as to its aim. Its character is delineative and pictorial.

#### (4.) The Romantic Novel.

This is what is often termed—The Sentimental or Sensational Novel. Mr. Masson speaks of it in his classification as, The Fashionable Novel, its main purpose being to set forth the higher phases of city life. Bulwer would call it, The Familiar Novel, having to do with the more common events and affairs of men.

In this type of Novel we have the best examples of The Romance as distinct from the Novel Proper—that order of fiction in which the fanciful and extravagant rather than the normally imaginative is supreme. Of the four classes mentioned, this is by far the most abundant in English Prose, especially so in modern times, and is by far the least valuable in character, method and design. It is necessary to state that there are two forms of the Romantic Novel.

The less objectionable form deals, though in a somewhat superficial way, indeed, with the current phases of fashionable life, and yet keeps comparatively clear of moral excess or defect. It succeeds in taking an indifferent attitude relative to the right or wrong of any given question, and aims simply to interest the reader by skipping pleasantly over the surface of social life. It mingles just enough art, politics, and sober allusion, to cast a coloring of propriety over all, and yet not enough to detract from the chief aim of fiction—to entertain and amuse.

Sir Philip Sydney, in his "Arcadia," and Richardson and Fielding in their better productions, illustrate this form. Mr. Disraeli exemplifies it in his politico-social sketches, as also, Bulwer, himself, in some of his lighter works.

With that large class of readers who care but little for the Historical or Ethical Novel, and, yet, are not quite prepared to endorse that order of production which is positively immoral, this better form of Romance may be said to be the most acceptable of all.

As to the lower form of the Romantic Novel, the words of Masson are in place—"that no harm will attend its total and immediate extinction." We may add, that great mental and moral good would attend such an extinction.

This is the Sentimental Novel—pure and simple. Transient and unhealthful sensation is its only aim. Produced as it is more fully in England and America than any other form, and read more than any other form, it is yet the one form which should find no place in any library or community. It is the novel of low life and tendency—the romance of the street, brothel, dance house and third-rate theater. As a form of Prose Fiction it corresponds precisely to the immoral drama of the time of Dryden, as produced by Dryden himself, and such authors as Wycherly, Aphra Behn and Vanburgh. In the latter part of the Augustan Era of English Prose, the immoral drama gave way, in part, to an equally immoral order of novel as seen in the works of Smollett and Sterne. The key-note of it all is illicit love. The most pronounced indecencies and personal vices are portrayed

in brilliant light, and glossed over with an adroit literary art so as to allure and corrupt. This is the popular romance of Modern Europe and America. Recent English critics are inclined to take a hopeful view of the novel of the future. They think they discern in what they call the increasing realism of the novel, a decided tendency toward the intellectual and moral, and away from the fantastic and unsound. This tendency to realism is, indeed, apparent, but not in the form that is desired. It is not to the end that our Prose Fiction may be made more real in the sense of historical as in Scott, or more real in the sense of truthful social sketches as in Thackeray, but more revoltingly real in the form of a material and sensuous view of life. We must have life depicted as it is say these authors, and hence the rise of—The *Experimental* Novel of Emile Zola and his English co-workers—the last outcome of realism, and the lowest bottom that fiction has yet reached.

These tendencies are all downward. The only hope of English Fiction is to return to that form which, take it together, is the best—The Descriptive Novel—the safe middle-ground between the didactic and the fanciful—the portraiture of healthful English Life.

Little need be said as to the descriptive element in this last species of fiction. In each of its forms it is conspicuous. Often in the lowest form it reaches the extreme of wild and loose portraiture whereby the baser passions of the reader may be excited. In these four species of Fiction, therefore, description is present, though the measure of its presence is different in each.

### Rank and Value of Prose Fiction.

Were we to judge of this value by the *amount* produced and read, this species of Prose must take rank over all other existing forms. The proportion is certainly six-tenths and over. Modern Critics,—Lanier, Besant and others, intimate that a true estimate would take us up to eight-tenths. Certain it is, that the Novel and the Newspaper are the greatest popular educators of modern times. We say nothing as to the quality of the education. When it is remembered, however, that this vast amount is mainly made up both as to production and perusal, by the prominence of the lowest order of Novel, it is seen that some other principle than mere amount must be accepted as the basis of estimate. If we have reference, therefore, to the best forms of fiction only, and inquire as to its rank, it is safe to say that in the sphere of prose it covers a most important area between History Proper on the one hand, and Philosophy Proper on the other. As has been seen, there are historical and philosophical elements in Fiction, but not enough to impair its character as fiction, just enough, indeed, to strengthen it. It furnishes to the English reader and student just that kind of mental food that he needs, when not engaged in the weighing of facts or the adjustment of speculative problems. It is in the line of relief, refreshment, mental quickening and æsthetic culture, and when properly used ministers to the best development of the man.

Lanier, in his masterly work on "The English Novel" defines it as, "The distinctive form in which man's new personal relation to his fellow man has

expressed itself." The Novel, in his view, is the expression of personality. This he calls "the principle of its development." As far as this goes, he would rank Prose Fiction as the highest form. This view is suggestive and full of interest and, yet, pressed too far.

There are other forms of Prose more important. It is indispensable, however, as a form. It supplies a place covered by no other form, and is the natural mode of the expression of thought. There is no kind of prose so easily and frequently abused, and none as to which criticism has been more bigoted.

The lowest form of Fiction should never be read. Promiscuous novel reading is a mental and moral enervation, and, yet, no student of English should fail to make himself intelligently conversant with the *best* works of our *best* novelists. Nothing is more unfortunate in a literary and moral point of view, than that young men should begin with the novel only, and for a long time continue with the novel only, as the subject matter of their reading. Still, it cannot be safely discarded. Its moderate and gradual combination with other forms of English Prose all along the line of one's literary life is the most desirable method.

### General Characteristics of Descriptive Prose.

#### 1. *The Imaginative Element.*

As already suggested, this is its main feature as seen in its two leading forms—Poetical Prose and Prose Fiction. It has to do with scenes and object conceived as existing in space, and not with actual data given

to hand. It is an order of prose in which sketching takes the place of statement and imagery, that of logical process.

## 2. *Pictorial Diction.*

Descriptive Prose has its own diction. It is called by the critics—Word Painting. In Poetry, naturally, this is the controlling order of diction, as in Tennyson. In this order of prose it is present in so far as the prose is poetic. Hence, in Fiction and other kinds of descriptive writing the phraseology is peculiar. It is graphic and picturesque. It is delineative. It is in literature what painting is in the fine arts, or drawing in the practical arts. Hawthorne is a notable example. Dickens, in his “Sketches of Boz,” illustrates it, and Victor Hugo, in his “’93,” and “Les Miserables.” Outside of Fiction, in the general province of description, it is seen in Ruskin, Lamb, and Irving. In Historical Description, as in Prescott, Motley, and Macaulay, this pictorial use of language is noteworthy. Even Gibbon has some striking paragraphs of this order. A good use of figurative terms is, thus, an element of success.

## 3. *Comprehensiveness and Minuteness.*

There is no form of prose, even the historical, in which this adjustment of fullness and detail is so important and so difficult. Of the object or scene *all* the facts must be described and, yet, the extreme of wearisomeness as to minor points must be avoided. Success in this marks the master. The description may be complete, and much, yet, must be verbally omitted



The reader has his part, and desires to have it. What this is the writer must know. If either, it is better to be too general than too minute. A repulsive minuteness is the vice of the lowest fiction. It is purposely so. Standard novelists, as Dickens and Cooper err here, while George Eliot fails at the other extreme. As a rule, the Ethical Novel tends to undue comprehensiveness while the others tend to undue detail. The best fiction could be condensed one-half and be improved.

How to adjust generals and particulars in the presentation of any scene, object, event or character, is the problem of descriptive prose as it is its characteristic.

## CHAPTER III.

### ORATORICAL OR IMPASSIONED PROSE.

#### The Words Oratorical and Oral.

THESE are to be here sharply discriminated; the first referring only to written discourse; the latter, to spoken or delivered discourse. Oratorical Prose refers to that form of prose in which those elements are prominent that would make it adapted to oral delivery. It is thus more nearly related to spoken discourse than any other form of written prose. It may be said to be a kind of middle form between the written and the oral and that through which the one passes over easily into the other. As such, its importance is marked and it is so prominent a species of Modern English Prose that its careful discussion is essential. The old writers called it—Persuasive Prose, having to do with the will and the outward action of the man.

#### (A.) Characteristics of Oratorical Prose.

##### 1. *Emotional.*

It is the impassioned form, as distinct from the historical and the descriptive. It has to do mainly with the feelings as sources and agents of power, its

main object being to express, awaken and control feeling. It is a form of writing marked by true inspiration and impulse rather than by the more cautious processes of reason and logical analysis. It seeks to impress more than it does to explain; to incite to immediate purpose and action rather than to show why such action might be desirable or practicable. Whatever other qualities of a good style it may be said to possess, it possesses the quality of *force* more than any other. Hence, the themes that it discusses are cogent, animated themes—the vital issues of the age or people, calculated to beget true passion in the soul of the writer and reader.

The diction chosen is thus forcible rather than merely clear or graceful; the sentence structure is so built up and related that the leading ideas of the paragraph shall stand forth prominently and so that the best effect of the rhetorical climax shall be produced. For the same reason, the strongest forms of figurative language are used, as Metaphor, Personification, Epigram and Interrogation so that the final effect of the writing may be intensified and potent. All that is insipid, puerile or irrelevant is conscientiously discarded if so be the thought expressed may have its fullest force and move the soul of the reader. This feeling may be subdued or demonstrative, still, it is in the soul and in the thought and cannot be concealed. If it be genuine, little care need be taken as to the precise manner of its expression.

## 2. *Objective in Aim and Result.*

It is a form of prose whose purpose is altogether outside of itself. It is not so much for the writer's

sake or even for the sake of the subject matter, as for the reader's sake, to move and mold his nature. It is for this reason free from many of those literary errors that arise from restriction and the prominence of the subjective. It is for this reason that they succeed the best in this kind of prose who have the fullest knowledge of men and things outside of themselves. They understand their fellows and the times in which they live. They know how to reach men and impress them, so that when they take pen in hand to discuss a living theme for definite external ends they cannot but be forceful. They are so, sometimes, at the expense of the graces of literary art. Their vigor and masculine power are, at times, manifest to the detriment of the niceties and proprieties, so called. Such writers are willing to sacrifice the lesser to the greater, and gain force when they lose refinement. Devoid of finish as such prose often is, it would be safe to say, that no species would be more missed to-day from the body of our prose literature. It is as much needed as it is rare.

This external force of impassioned prose lies partly in the theme or the time, but mainly in the author himself. [The personality of the writer, after all, is the motive power. It is that which leads to potent expression and impression. English writers may be classified on this principle—their ability to project themselves upon the mind and heart of their readers, so that the reader, perforce, acknowledges the power and yields himself implicitly to its sway. These are the masters. They are but few, but they rule the world.

### 3. *Freedom of Thought and Expression.*

True feeling cannot be confined within prescribed limits. In its very nature it is spontaneous. Emotion is motion. The royal law of liberty holds here most especially. As soon as any formal statute is applied which the writer must, at all hazards, follow, the natural flow of passion ceases and all is constrained and sluggish. All genuine emotion must be under the control of mind and judgment, but this conceded, its range is to be unrestricted. There is a drift, a momentum about it that cannot brook obstruction, and if obstructed, will leave its normal channel and break away into dangerous courses. Specific limitation here is fraught with far more harm than the largest possible liberty of scope.

### 4. *Interesting and Stimulating.*

“Passion,” I see, “is catching,” said the dramatist. There is no form of prose in which the attention of the reader becomes more engrossed. This arises from its very nature as impassioned, and from the character of the subject discussed. Earnestness begets corresponding earnestness even to the removal of hostility, indifference and prejudice. The reciprocal influence of author and reader is constant and potent and as the tide of feeling rises in one it rises in the other until full community of interest is established. Discourse now appears as a sympathetic interchange of ideas for mutual good and the happiest results follow. In oral speech, where the orator and the auditor come into the personal presence of each other, the results are at times, indescribable. Even in written prose,

however, the principle of sympathy holds good, so that there is identity of feeling and object. The reader is more than entertained as in pictorial description or pleasing narrative. He is absorbed and engaged and becomes, for the time, personally committed to the subject in hand. The understandings of men may be enlightened and their judgments convinced and their taste gratified in other ways and by other forms of prose, but little is done, after all, until the soul, as the seat of the affections, is reached and roused. Men must be *moved*.

#### Notes.

(a) This form admits of the presence of the *imagination*, in its office of bringing the unreal into real nearness, and thus making it more effective in awakening feeling. In dramatic literature and in sacred discourse this emotive office of the imagination is especially cogent. The abstract must be made visible, concrete and real, in order to evoke emotion.

(b) *The Ethical Element is here indicated.*

Genuine passion has a distinctively ethical feature. It comes from the soul, the moral nature of man and is best illustrated in the moral realm. Impassioned prose, as such, awakens the deepest sentiments of the heart and appeals to the higher and deeper nature. In Scripture, in sacred prose and in secular prose of the ethical order, its best illustration is seen.

Moral feeling is the highest form of feeling.

(c) *Its Abuse.*

This is as common as it is easy. Just because this order of prose appeals to the emotions rather than to the critical faculty, it is delicate and tender in its

nature. It is as sensitive as sympathy itself. Spontaneous in its outflow, it may easily degenerate into fanaticism or unlicensed passion. In Prose Fiction, as already discussed, there are striking examples of such abuse—in those lower forms of the novel where feeling is excited either for its own sake or for some transient and base end.

## (B.) DIVISIONS OR KINDS OF ORATORICAL PROSE.

### 1. Forensic Prose.

This would be called in England, Parliamentary Prose, and in America, Senatorial or Congressional. The written productions of that class of men known as the British and American Orators would best exemplify this order of prose—Pitt, Fox, Burke, Adams, Otis, Clay and others. This is the civil or political prose of English Letters—the literature of statesmen. Its themes are practical and broad. It has to do with the discussion of great national issues, on which the policies of States depend. It seeks to enforce as well as expound great constitutional principles as embodied in the various forms of civil government. Cicero in the Forum, Mirabeau in the Assembly, and Sumner in the Senate, present a form of prose which as written and unspoken is oratorical and impassioned. In the days of Aristotle and the Greeks, it was termed, Deliberative Prose in that it had to do with the weighing or considering of vital civic questions. It is legislative in its order and object and is handed down to later ages in the shape of State documents for reference and as elaborate orations for study and instruction.

If the *requisites* to its successful production be asked, they may be said to consist in *political knowledge* and an unselfish *devotion* to public interests.

The forensic writer must be thoroughly versed in the Science of Government—its sources, powers, forms and aims. He must be grounded in constitutional law as a special branch of law, must know the relations of rulers to the governed, and what is called, the genius of government. A state paper from such a man as Gladstone is valuable in its literary and official character as coming from one who is a student of statecraft as he is a student of Homer and English Poetry.

Early American Forensic Prose is thus, far in advance of the later, and may favorably be compared at that time with that of the mother country.

## 2. Judicial and Argumentative Prose.

This is closely allied to the former kind in that the jurist and the statesman, as in the cases of Hamilton and Webster, have so often been combined. Still it has a separate place and history. It is the prose of written debate and jurisprudence and largely illustrated in every period of marked mental activity when sides must be taken and proofs examined. Its object is to secure, defend and enlarge the rights of man, national, local and individual; to see that justice is done on every hand. Nor does its end close with the mere exposition of the law, but as a form of impassioned prose it has more especially to do with its enforcement and application. It has a persuasive element in it, especially as applied in criminal jurisprudence where feeling sometimes rises to its highest levels.



Conviction is reached through emotion, as guarded by reason. In published Debates and printed Judicial Cases and Proceedings this style of prose is seen.

Here as before, knowledge and personal interest are the main essentials to success. The judicial writer must be versed in the principles and details of law as a separate science, must be imbued with its spirit as the embodiment of justice and be devoted to its great end, the maintenance of human rights. Irrespective of any particular case in hand, he must as a man, be identified with the triumph of law if so be he is to write with cogency and success. Erskine of England and Choate of America finely fulfilled these conditions.

Just to the degree in which a juristic writer is conversant with his theme and loyal to the interests of law and order wherever infringed, will he be fervent in his style and produce a type of prose so animated as to find its best and fittest expression in oral discourse.

### 3. Sacred Prose.

This is best seen in Homilies, Sermons, and Ethical papers. It has all the emotional elements of ordinary secular prose as oratorical, with that additional element which comes from its moral character.

This form, in its very nature, is persuasive, sympathetic and arousing. It aims at an immediate result upon the will, conscience and life. Sacred Prose, in so far as written, should be imbued with genuine feeling in that it has to do with the highest interests of man and must reach those interests largely

through the affections. The sermon, as distinct from the technical theological system or treatise, should be impassioned. In the extant sermons of the great French preachers—Massillon, Bourdaloue and Bossuet; in Chrysostom of Greece; in Hall, South, Tillotson and Taylor of England; in Chalmers of Scotland and in Edwards of America, this order of prose is seen to be fervid and forceful to the highest degree.

In each of these forms of oratorical prose mentioned, it is to be emphasized, that there is present an impassioned vigor and boldness of style. Whatever their didactic basis in knowledge may be, or whatever their purpose to explain, political, legal or moral science, their main feature is the emotional one and their main aim, to stimulate and persuade. No literature is richer than the English in this form of prose. Just because it is mediate between written and spoken discourse it is interesting and serves to mark the close relations of the two departments. It is needless to add that as strong as these principles are in written prose they are immeasurably stronger, when they assume oral character in the person of the orator. Modern English and American Prose needs nothing more than this impassioned element. In the rise and prevalence of technical criticism and in the dominance of a false æstheticism in art and literature, there is danger lest masculine vigor may give way to the effeminate and the Saxon turn once again to the Norman.

There is no danger whatever, as some insist, that high and clean literary art will suffer when passion enters. We are told that the dispassionate temper is proper here and no other. This dogma is plausible,

but has overreached itself until the formal has too often taken the place of the natural and until correctness has triumphed over creative genius. Dryden had his day and did his work and need not be recalled. The period of expansion in our prose is the best, among other reasons, for this, that it is the most spontaneous and informal and yet according to law. English Poetry is fast succumbing to this unimpassioned ideal and is thereby losing its hold on the modern mind. It lies in the line of the best interests of our prose to conserve this intrinsic element, and give it all healthful scope as guided and guarded by rational principle.

## CHAPTER IV.

### PHILOSOPHICAL OR DIDACTIC PROSE.

THE term—philosophical—is not used here in its technical sense as applied to the speculative or metaphysical, but in its more general sense of scholarly, intellectual or dignified prose. The term, didactic or reflective will express it. It is not mainly historical, descriptive or impassioned, nor does it include these elements to any marked degree. As contemplative and instructive, it differs from them as it also does from that spacious province of prose included under the name—Miscellaneous. It has an individuality of its own.

The most restricted use of the word Philosophy would mean—Mental Philosophy (Psychology, Metaphysics). In this sense, philosophical prose would mean the actual prose of philosophy as a separate department as seen in Locke, Berkeley, James Mill, Stewart, Hamilton and others. This is, of course, excluded. A wider use is indicated in the terms—Philosophy, Science, Art and Literature. Here the word includes—Mental and Moral Philosophy, Logic and so on. In such a usage, the prose would be represented in the works of those respective branches of learning. The university use of this word as seen

in the Doctorate of Philosophy is this wider one and includes even Language and Literature. A further peculiar and confusing use of this word is seen in the sense of Science as in the Phrases—Mental Science, Moral Science, Natural Science and so on, where the words Science and Philosophy are strangely mixed.

No one of these uses is in place in the discussion before us.

Philosophical Prose means here, *unimpassioned* prose. It is marked by the absence of graphic, figurative and oratorical elements. It is temperate, even, academic and intellectual. It has a high degree of literary gravity and is the golden mean between the lighter and the heavier forms. It is not superficial on the one hand nor is it, on the other, heavy and repulsive. It is an order of prose we may add, germane to the calm and reflective character of the highest minds. It is a style of writing in which *principles* are discussed more than facts; laws and causes, more than special applications. Its method is wide and broad. It reaches the frontiers and foundations of things. Nothing short of thoroughness will satisfy it as a method. A few examples of it outside of the region of Philosophy Proper will illustrate its meaning and its power. It is seen in Hooker, Adam Smith, Alison, Chillingworth, Barrow, Butler, Warburton, Charnock, Whewill and others. These men were not writers on Mental Science distinctively; they wrote on theology, social economy, history, and literature and kindred subjects. In fine, they wrote not on philosophy as a specific subject, but on all subjects *philosophically*.

Froude and Bancroft have written philosophically

on history as Devey has on English Poetry and Guizot on European Civilization. These names will mark it as an order of prose by itself. Mr. Emerson of our own country, is in the main, a philosophical writer on general topics, though his too frequent obscurity detracts much from the merit of his style. The philosophical style is as clear as it is profound.

### (A.) Characteristics.

#### 1. *Unimpassioned.*

This allies it somewhat to the Historical order of writing and marks it as distinct from the Oratorical. It has little to do with the emotions as a separate part of the nature of man. Its object is fully gained when in the clear, white light of reason, the subject is made plain to the rational understanding of the reader. The older writers would have called it, the Expository or Explanatory Form by which the topic is made plain through an unadorned presentation of it to the mind. It aims to establish the exact *meaning* of the idea rather than its *truth* or *falsity*—to enlighten rather than convince. In sacred discourse this is often seen in what is called—the expository method. There is, even in the popular use of this word, this idea of dispassionateness. Men are said to take life philosophically, when they accept its events and issues without any special feeling.

#### 2. *Thorough in Method and Aim.*

There is a virtual antithesis between the terms—philosophical and superficial. This general use of the term is undoubtedly derived from its special use

as denoting Mental Philosophy. This department of thought, having to do above all others, with the most profound questions of human interest, the very word, philosophical, even in its popular sense has retained the generic idea of profundity and thoroughness. The very nature of it excludes the hasty, imperfect or desultory treatment of a theme. In this respect, philosophical prose means a solid, substantial order of prose, one that carries its own force with it and whose fitting illustration demands, on the part of the writer, a profound and substantial mind. This is a species of prose to which Bacon had reference when he said: "Studies serve for *ability*. Read to *weigh* and *consider*. Some books are to be chewed and digested, to be read wholly and with diligence." It is safe to say, that for this reason, if for no other, a literature cannot be said to be complete or excellent without a good degree of such prose. It acts as a conservative element among others less stable. It steadies and balances a literature as ballast does a vessel. Periods may be classified as safe or excessive by the presence or absence of it. It marks the Formative, Settled and Expansive eras of our prose. In the Transitive era it was much less conspicuous, but had it not been for its partial presence, the results would have been far more disastrous. It may be added here that what is called, a thoughtful or *suggestive* style, is germane to this order of prose. From the fact that it deals with great principles in a weighty way, the expression would be but the outward form of the ideas behind it, and far more would be intimated than could be stated. The ideas as germinal and potential

would beget other related ideas in continuous succession, so as to make the style full of intellectual stimulus. In this regard, it is a type of prose whose excellence increases with the mental maturity of the writer. It is alike a cause and a result of such maturity.

### 3. *Sedate and Dignified.*

This amounts almost to a moral quality in this type of prose—the natural expression of the soul when in its contemplative moods and the natural expression of the English mind as distinct from the South European. It is for this reason that we find it in every period of our literature and most marked in those eras when ethical influences are the most active. Gravity is said to be a mark of the higher order of historical prose, as of other forms. It is so when they are the most philosophical, while in philosophic prose itself it is a vital element. Its unimpassioned and profound character would demand this and no excuse would be accepted for its omission. It corresponds in prose to the principle of moral sublimity in poetry and its effect is similarly great. It demands that the theme, method of discussion and the special aim of the writing be lofty rather than low, on a spacious and not a narrow scale and that the result be morally elevating. When Herbert Spencer writes on—*The Philosophy of Style*, or Campbell on—*The Philosophy of Rhetoric*, or Schlegel on—*The Philosophy of Life and Language* they write philosophically in that the discourse is marked by a literary and moral dignity throughout. This form of prose never descends to the trivial or



puerile or even to justifiable pleasantry and humor. Its high mission is never forgotten, and the fulfillment of that demands a rational sobriety. For this reason, it is well that it is not the most frequent form of prose. For this reason, also, it is well that it is a distinctive form having place and function in our prose literature to control more wayward tendencies.

#### 4. *Adaptive.*

This form mingles freely with all the others, save the Impassioned, while even there it is not altogether absent in that feeling itself must ever be under the control of the judgment. In History it is prominent in what is termed, the Philosophy of History or the philosophical method of treating it. Even in Prose Fiction, there is the Philosophical Novel in which character is profoundly studied and where the ethical features are made prominent.

In oratorical prose other elements are more marked and yet, in judicial and sacred discourse most especially, the meditative and the moral are present and potential and lend a philosophic cast. Judicial prose is in its very nature dispassionate and dignified.

In Miscellaneous Prose, where all the forms find place this, of course, has a place where any specific subject is discussed after a philosophical manner.

#### 5. *A Prose Form, Distinctively.*

There is a species of poetry called Philosophic or Didactic. It is, however, exceptional and questionable. If in addition to the metrical form of verse, it be required that it be essentially poetic, marked by imagination, passion and a purpose to please, it is an

open question with some whether such verse is poetry at all. Pope's *Essay on Man* and on *Criticism* are styled *Prose Poems*, by way of compromise. On the other hand, as we have seen, there is some prose so poetical that it would fairly find place in verse and it is termed, by a similar compromise, *Poetical Prose*.

In the department of *Prose Proper*, however, among all the forms studied, the *Philosophical* or *Didactic* is the most fully prose of all others. It has the least of the elements of the poetic. In fact, the terms—*philosophic* and *poetic*—are mutually exclusive; the one is unimpassioned; the other, as Milton holds “*sensuous and passionate*.” The one aims to instruct; the other, to please. The one is full of imagery and figure; the other is marked by their absence. All the main differences between prose and poetry might be stated in distinguishing *philosophic* prose from poetry. In this respect, *Historical Prose* is the only form that can be compared with it as a typical form, while in narrative, itself, the poetic and descriptive elements are freely applied as is not the case in the form before us.

Prose in the very idea of it is didactic and sedate. It states facts and truths plainly and soberly, for enlightenment and moral effect. When, as in descriptive and oratorical prose, there are added the imaginative and emotional elements, the normal, original idea of prose is somewhat modified and the transition already begun toward poetry itself.

### (B.) Contents or Divisions.

As already noted, *Philosophical Prose* would include in its most general sense, any and every

written production presented in a philosophical manner—unimpassioned, thorough and sedate. It would thus make up the body of its product largely by selecting from other forms what properly belongs to it, and partly from the classification of those writings which belong to it alone as a specific form.

On the first principle, the divisions would be as follows—

(a) *Philosophical Narration.*

This would virtually include all that has been stated in treating of that department, it being emphasized, that Narration Proper has reference only to dates and facts and events in temporal succession and not to causes and effects. Gibbon and Buckle have thus written philosophical history.

(b) *Philosophical Description*, as seen in the general province of description when applied to the abstract and immaterial in ethical fiction. What has been said of this higher kind of description is here in place, it also being marked that Description Proper has reference only to the simple portraiture of visible objects, and not to the invisible or moral. George Eliot has thus written.

(c) *Philosophic Exposition in Oratorical Prose.*

This applies to those elements of judicial, forensic and sacred prose where the unimpassioned feature is the main one—where laws are to be explained, the great principles of political codes expounded or divine truth elucidated. Choate, Webster and Edwards have thus written.

(d) *Philosophic Miscellanies.*

Here would be found everything in the department of Essays and Discussions which in the absence

of historical, descriptive or oratorical features, presents in marked degree, this philosophic character. The style is deliberative rather than discursive.

Most of the best essayists, such as Addison and De Quincey, give examples of this. Critical essays as a class illustrate it.

On the second and more specific principle, a different classification is reached.

Excluding these four classes already mentioned, this division may be said to include all those prose writers who have written philosophically and yet who have not written on Philosophy Proper, or Mental Philosophy, so called.

It would include such classes of prose and authors as the following—already mentioned as illustrations:—

- |     |                           |                        |
|-----|---------------------------|------------------------|
| (a) | The Philosophy of History | by Schlegel.           |
|     | “ “                       | “ Rhetoric “ Campbell. |
|     | “ “                       | “ Language “ Schlegel. |
|     | “ “                       | “ Style “ Bascom.      |

(b) Another large division here classified is where the term Philosophy or Philosophical is not used and yet might be as marking a peculiar character. Some of these have been mentioned as, Hooker, Adam Smith, Barrow and so on. Others are—Bentham, on Ethics and Jurisprudence; Clarendon, on English History; John Foster on Character; Kames on Criticism; Temple, on Politics; Walpole, on Government; Clarke, on The Being of God; Blackstone, on Law; Alison, on Taste; Day, on Science and Dunlop, on Fiction.

Such a list would carry us over all the main departments of human research and reveal, also, higher tendencies of style and thought.

## Notes.

(a) *Rapid Increase of this Form.*

From what has been stated, a clear tendency is visible in our best writers to present subjects from the standpoint of philosophic calmness and thoroughness. It is one of the best literary signs of the times, and serves to guard our prose against the excessive growth of those lower forms of fiction, vapid description and rambling miscellany which are apt to impair the vigor of style.

(b) *Relation to Writers in Formation of Style.*

Though a natural and desirable form of prose, it has less in the way of immediate result for the young writer than either the narrative or descriptive. It reaches a higher range of themes; pursues a more logical method; assumes a good degree of mental insight and strength and is thus, difficult. It belongs to later stages. As a form of prose, however, it should lie in the line of the writer's ambition. In all his literary work it should be in view as desirable. It will thus, indirectly, color and mold his style, save him from grave errors and prepare him, in due time, for its appreciation and personal use.

## CHAPTER V.

### MISCELLANEOUS OR PERIODICAL PROSE.

THESE terms, which have now become generally accepted, are used to express that order of prose which cannot be strictly classified under any one of the four divisions already stated—Historical, Descriptive, Oratorical and Philosophic. Containing numerous examples of each of these forms it cannot be said to have a sufficient preponderance of any one form to mark its special character. The word, periodical, is that which dates from the days of De Foe and refers to the regular appearance—annually, monthly, weekly or daily—of the various literary publications. Periodical Literature is now used in this sense and applies mainly to the magazine and journal.

The term, *miscellaneous*, is somewhat broader. It covers that large area of prose product in which any one or all of the specific forms may be illustrated and may mean very much what we mean by mixed or discursive writing. It confines itself to no one class of themes; follows no one exclusive method; adopts no one species of literary style; shows no particular preference for any one class of prose; and exercises in this sphere a kind and measure of liberty similar to that which the poet possesses in the realm

of verse. Nor is it to be understood that the term, miscellaneous, is used to indicate an *inferior* type of prose, inasmuch as it defies special classification. What it loses in this respect in the line of definiteness of place and function, it gains in another in the line of variety of topic, freedom of method and general scope. Much of its attractiveness to the general reader and even to the student, lies in its very variety, and makes it accessible and helpful where more elaborate treatises could not be mastered. Its miscellaneous character need not make it any the less clear or thorough. That brevity of discussion which is essential to it is a means to clearness while as far as it goes on any one line of discussion it may go thoroughly and effectively.

If, among the forms mentioned, there are any to which it more directly inclines by way of preference, they are the Descriptive and Philosophic. If choice is made between these, the latter would be chosen. In the strict sense of the term literary, there is no portion of miscellaneous prose more prominent than the didactic, as expressed particularly in the sphere of literary criticism. This is a feature, more and more conspicuous. The fact serves to show the high character of this mixed form of prose and makes it a form interesting in itself apart from all others. General as it is, it has an individuality and must be studied, as any of the others, on its own grounds and results.

#### (A.) General Characteristics.

These may be partly gathered from what has been stated by way of exposition of terms.

1. *Variety of Topic and Plan.*

Disraeli in speaking of this says, "When I hold a volume of these Miscellanies, I seem to be in a temple dedicated to the service of the Goddess of Variety."

This embraces a range as wide as the province of written discourse. There is no form of theme, narrative, imaginative, impassioned or philosophic, which it does not logically include as miscellaneous. This scope of topic and treatment is part of the explanation of its origin, its interest and its need of judicious control. Just because it is unrestricted here, all writers feel free to enter it, all readers find something in it, and, yet, it may overreach itself in the direction of the desultory, vague, and superficial. Hence, it is essential to hold that varied as the topics and methods are they must be strictly *literary* in character, removed from the merely technical, on the one hand, and the common on the other. If, as in Addison, they be often homely, they must be so presented as to give them the cast and color of literary art.

Critics speak of the qualities of style as, clearness, force, naturalness, simplicity and so on. With the present form of prose before us, it would seem to be necessary to add, *variety*, to this list as a distinctive quality or to hold that the qualities mentioned cannot exist apart from this as prominent. Monotony, it may be said, is a literary vice, and here it is argued by special lovers of Miscellaneous Prose, that its variety gives it superiority over any specific form. There is some truth in this and an earnest protest is to be made against uniformity of style in English Letters. As hinted, however, special care is to be



taken lest the freedom which is granted entice the writer unawares into a rambling method of expression, passing in a capricious way from theme to theme and not abiding long enough at any one to present it in fitting fullness. As far as it goes, however, variety in prose expression is a literary virtue and Periodical Prose has it distinctively.

## 2. *Brevity of Treatment.*

The words used to indicate this form might be said to be synonymous in popular usage with the word—brevity. Each of the specific forms is so called, mainly, because it follows out in a continuous and complete manner some one line of thought. It may be an historical narrative or a work of Prose Fiction. In this the discussion is presumably limited. The distinction is largely that between the book or treatise and the essay or paper, or between the volume and the pamphlet; the one is exhaustive; the other, suggestive. The one is logical and consecutive; the other discursive. In the one, the writer aims to be as full as possible without being repetitious; in the other, he aims to be as terse as possible without being obscure or epigrammatic. As to their special characteristic, it is not to be argued that every form of discourse possessing it is thereby good and failing to possess it is thereby inferior.

In such a style of prose as this, brevity is natural and effective, while in other forms it might be injurious simply because out of place. In other words, brevity as a literary quality is *relative*. Applied in narrative or history or didactic prose just as it is in miscellaneous, it would be more harmful than helpful

as it would defeat the very purpose of thorough presentation. Its effect depends on conditions just as that degree of variety proper to this form of prose would be subversive of all method in any other species. Appropriateness is a literary law. It is safe to say that Miscellaneous English Prose has suffered, at times, from the extreme application of this principle. Carlyle and his school have been guilty here as have Emerson and his school in America. They have often been terse and curt to a fault, so that the paragraph has taken the form of a riddle to be interpreted by the magi.

Brevity is perfectly consistent with clearness and when so adjusted, adds force and point to the style. It acts as a wholesome check upon that natural tendency to verbosity, especially common among younger writers.

### 3. *Unity of Benefit—Pleasure, Information and Culture.*

If the general reader were asked as to the comparative pleasure to be derived from the perusal of the different classes of prose mentioned, it is well known that the precedence would be given to prose fiction. Statistics of libraries and reading rooms, as well as the receipts of publishing houses reveal this fact. If the question were to be asked, as to the comparative profit by way of information, history undoubtedly would be assigned the first place. If the question turned simply on the matter of intellectual culture, one of the other forms might justly be adduced, as, the philosophic.

Without attempting to answer these questions any

more minutely it is safe to say that if among the varied objects of literary reading, true, æsthetic pleasure, helpful information, culture of style and general culture are sought, Miscellaneous Prose may rightly claim a large place in the realization of such ends to the reader. Its variety and brevity would secure these alike in the way of stimulus and restraint.

The well-read man is he who has, in a true sense, completed the circle of the best literature in all its forms of prose and poetry and, yet, were a man obliged, from varied causes, to confine himself to a separate form, it would naturally be prose, and that, the miscellaneous style as best giving him the substance of every other form with the additional feature of variety. Inside the limits of such a form he could become comparatively well-read and be able to give a good account of the literary spirit of his country. No such alternative, however, is needed, and when to an acquaintance with other classes of prose this is added, just that is added which serves to freshen and fasten what has already been secured.

The phrase—General Culture—has become as current as the phrase—Miscellaneous Prose. The one is, indeed, largely the result of the other. A wide and varied literary training is based on a wide acquaintance with literary product, by which the student secures breadth of outlook and freedom from formalism and narrowness.

As to æsthetic pleasure, everything is here calculated to produce and foster it. As to information, this is as full as the field is wide. As to style, all possible features are found here. If in history and description naturalness, accuracy and graphic skill

are given, and, if in the impassioned or philosophic treatise, force and solidity are found, each of these qualities re-appears in some department of Miscellaneous Prose and the lessons already learned are re-impressed. It is, in this respect, the complementary and supplementary form of prose, as useful in its relations as it is in itself. It unifies all that has preceded. When we take up representative specimens of this form from such a writer as De Quincey or Macaulay, we have in hand a literary product in which narration, description, passion and philosophic reflection may all unite to interest, inform and refine. Miscellaneous Prose is, in one sense, the most compact form of prose, in that it fuses many elements into one. To produce a masterpiece in this department is therefore a mark of intellectual and literary power. Such Miscellanies in English may be easily quoted.

It is this union of qualities that as much as anything else renders this form of prose so popular and current. None other so happily combines profit with pleasure. It is thus that Nathan Drake writes in his invaluable essays on this subject: "A series of papers thus constituted and forming a whole, replete with wit, fancy and instruction has been found, by large experience, not only the most useful but the most interesting and popular of publications." Hence it is, that such a form of prose will find demand in every age and as a matter of literary history has never been so widely current as now.

#### 4. *Increasing Literary and Moral Character.*

The term, classical, in the sense of standard, has, by common consent, been assigned to this order of pro-

duction. British Miscellany, as a body of prose, passes readily under this title. There is much to explain this. The wide sphere opened for the choice of topics and methods gives opportunity for the choice of the best, while in that union of qualities to which reference has been made, there is an element of strength. One of the reasons and indications of the rank of this form is found in the fact that nearly all of the best writers of English Prose in its other classes have done more or less of worthy work in this. It would be difficult to make up a list of any length including these standard writers who did not use this form. This fact not only endorses the form in the way of a proper division of prose, but makes it high in character and proves it to be a fitting medium for the exercise of the best English talent. Not only so, but it is well to note that in the historical development of English Periodical Prose, there has been a corresponding literary development, so that where the first Miscellanies were almost entirely devoted to politics, trade and social life, later examples have as fully magnified the features of taste and style and general culture. In fact, the main difference between these productions, previous to the days of Steele and after, lies just here,—in the non-literary character of the one and the literary character of the other. With this advance, there has been, also, a moral progress, and partly, as the result of the former. Elevation of tone and aim followed close the improvement of theme and scope. Mere drawing-room gossip and society scandal gave way, at length, to sober topics in letters and manners, and the atmosphere was purer. The uniformly ethical cast of the best

miscellaneous prose of England is something as remarkable as it is true, and has no parallel, in this particular in any country of Europe.

The term—miscellany—elsewhere has been a somewhat suspicious word. It seemed to mean to many a broad undefined sphere to which any writer might contribute anything at pleasure. Each of these tendencies to literary and moral looseness has been nobly resisted on English soil. In this particular American literature as now developing, has a lesson to learn from the mother country.

##### 5. *English Origin and History.*

Periodical Prose as a systematic body of prose of high character is especially English. It is certainly more English than it is anything else. Dr. Drake goes so far as to say: "The Tatler presented to Europe in 1709 the first legitimate model." Previous to this, such productions had been attempted in other countries, among the Dutch, and especially in the works of Montaigne and La Bruyere in France and La Casa in Italy. Even in England similar specimens were seen between the days of Elizabeth and Anne; in Bacon's Essays, 1597; in Temple's Miscellanea, 1672; in Collier's Essays, 1697; in Lesley's Rehearsals 1704; in Cowley, Colton and others. It was not however, till the appearance of De Foe's Review, Feb., 1704, that the English and Modern Periodical may be said to have begun. Here, as we believe, is the real origin and not in the Tatler of Steele in 1709. This work, as that of Addison, carried on even more fully what had been introduced and the way was now opened for unlimited progress.

Of all the forms mentioned, this is the most decidedly English and retains to this day the clear mark of its origin and early history. The old Augustan tinge is still visible in Victorian days.

6. *Human and Natural.*

This is a prime characteristic. The keynote was sounded as far back as Bacon, who says, of his Essays: "They come home to men's business and bosoms:" or, in his Preface: "They handle these things wherein both men's lives and their pens are most conversant, of a nature whereof a man shall find much in experience." Addison expresses the same idea in another form in the well known statement: "I have brought philosophy out of closets to dwell in clubs and coffee houses." It is this life-likeness which, as much as anything else, explains the fact that even in the time of the Spectator, twenty thousand papers were sold in a day, and that the day or week was regarded as misspent if the periodical had not been read. It is to the praise of Modern Miscellaneous Prose that while it has increased, as stated, its literary and moral character, it has still retained its naturalness and its truth to life. The style, in the best sense of the word, is worldly. It is of the earth, earthy, and aims to be true to its terrene origin and object. It is, thus, rather to the credit than the discredit of the Augustan Miscellanies that, as a class, they are now but little read. They were written for the age of Anne and mainly apply there, as those of Carlyle are for the nineteenth century and may be out of place in the twenty-first. Certain departments of Miscellaneous Prose, such as Criticism,

have to do largely with the past; but even here the writing is brought down to date and we see through the eyes of our contemporaries. One of the main benefits of this prose to the general reader and to the student of style is, that it is full of life and spirit. The air is tonic and the effect is bracing. No one can make himself conversant with it and keep himself in contact with it and be a dull man or a dull writer.

Literature and Life—has become from the pen of Mr. Whipple a popular phrase. It is worth its popularity. Our English word, prosaic, is a sharp rebuke at this very point and bids the prose writer be a man in living earnest as he speaks to men.

## (B.) DIVISIONS OR CLASSES OF MISCELLANEOUS PROSE.

It is not necessary to repeat the classifications that have been adopted of this branch of English Prose, most of them marking either the extreme of narrowness or that of fullness. The division which we shall adopt and briefly discuss may be thus stated:

1. ESSAYS AND REVIEWS.
2. LETTERS.
3. TRAVELS AND TALES.
4. JOURNALISM.

### (1.) Essays.

This is a term more nearly synonymous with Miscellanies than any other that might be adopted. In a literary point of view they may be said to cover a larger ground than any other and best represent the main characteristics of discursive prose as already mentioned. This order of production naturally finds



abundant application in each of the four special forms of prose discussed.

*Historical or Biographical Essays.*

*Descriptive or Poetic Essays.*

*Impassioned Essays.*

*Philosophical or Didactic Essays.*

Such writers as Macaulay, Lamb, Burke and Bacon will illustrate these respective forms of essay. The various characteristics stated under the four specific forms as separately treated will apply, respectively, to these essays illustrating them. The historical essay is simply the historical form of prose in brief and popular style. So, in turn, as to the others, it being noteworthy that the great body of English Essayists is made up of those very writers who have also distinguished themselves in the production of the separate classes of prose. Each of the authors mentioned above is a case in point. But very few authors have confined their work to the one department of periodical prose.

By the term—British Essayists—is meant, those who, whatever their other and more extended work may have been, have done also an important work in miscellaneous writing,—De Quincey, Goldsmith, Lamb, Johnson, Carlyle, and Ruskin.

The Review, so called, is simply a particular kind of essay and needs no special classification. Its primary idea was to answer the purpose of a somewhat lengthy editorial giving the views of some standard literary organ and founded, generally, on some book or publication. Its method, as far as it was distinct from the ordinary essay, was biographical and critical, as

is seen in Lord Macaulay or Dryden. Thus interpreted, all critics refer their origin to 1802-3, the date of the Edinburgh Review, as founded by Jeffrey, Brougham and Sydney Smith. Its very object was, literary criticism, often destructive in method and result, but still useful. This critical spirit is well exhibited in the comparison of conflicting schools. The Edinburgh Review was Whig in sentiment. The London Quarterly that followed under Gifford and Lockhart was Tory. The first mode was in what was known as the Lake School of Poetry. The second had for its main supporters the very leaders of that school—Wordsworth, Southey and others. Whatever the spirit, however, the establishment of these reviews marked an important epoch in English Prose. It marks the origin of English Criticism as a literary art and is now represented in the prose of Matthew Arnold. Hence, it has come to pass that among all the forms of essay mentioned, the Critical Essay or Review has taken precedence and bids fair to hold it. This, in fact, was the first occasion of Miscellaneous prose-criticism. The difference is, that in former times the subject of criticism was political and social rather than intellectual and literary.

## (2.) Letters.

This is a form of miscellaneous prose that need not detain us. It is to be marked that the term is here used to express that order of correspondence which is *literary* rather than *personal* or official, and which is seen in such intercourse as Goethe and Schiller had together by pen in Germany, or in the correspondence of Fenelon and of Madame Guyon,

of Madame D'Arblay and of Madame de Sévigné, in France.

Literature and Letters are one and the same word. Epistolary writing in a social point of view probably marks the lowest level of artistic composition. It is even lower and less substantial than the most inferior form of newspaper writing. Literary letters, however, have their place as a form of prose. The Letters of the Fifteenth century furnish us an example in English. The celebrated letters of Junius in the reign of George III., are such. The written intercourse of Carlyle and Emerson is of this order. Further instances may be seen in the Letters of Sara Coleridge, of Johnson, of Scott, Swift, Temple and Walpole; of Lamb, De Quincey, Macaulay, Lockhart, Cowper, Lady Montagu and among the members of the Lake School, as a school.

Here is a large variety of names and topics indicative of the high literary character which such correspondence may assume. It will be noticed that in this list are the names of many of the best English Essayists, who, by way of recreative work now and then resorted to the brief and colloquial form of epistle. As far as characteristics and general style are concerned, they illustrate the principles already mentioned save that they are the most informal species of literary prose.

### (3.) Travels and Tales.

These are often written in the form of correspondence. They involve so fully the narrative and descriptive elements of style that they might be called,—Narrative-Descriptive Prose. It is better,

nowever, to place them among Miscellanies, as representing so many different phases of expression.

They so happily combine pleasure and benefit that they are widely current among the people as a readable form of literature, and give to the student of expression some of the simplest and most valuable elements of style. In their best form they are marked by accuracy of statement, graphic delineation and general literary excellence. They are often so closely connected with higher literary forms that they may be said to rise to the rank of the best historical and pictorial prose, while their substantial character as based on fact, gives them something of the philosophic or didactic cast. It is further to be noted that they constitute a comparatively modern form of prose, are fully in keeping with the drift of modern times and rapidly increasing in amount and essential value. The present era is one of rapid movement, of wide and varied observation and the publisher follows the traveler on his journeyings to give to the people the results of his latest experiences. The danger is lest the literary element give way at length to the practical, popular and even mercenary; lest the superficial rule at the expense of thoroughness and artistic finish be sacrificed to the rapid recital of events and scenes.

The phrase—Explorations and Travels—with which we are now familiar, would seem to indicate that these accounts of men and things are assuming a kind of scientific character, and used to convey in the best form the results of such researches in distant lands. These records, however, are more technical than literary as seen in Humboldt's or Livingstone's

Travels and Researches, Layard's Nineveh and Babylon or Dilkes' Greater Britain.

Of the strictly literary order may be mentioned, among American authors, Irving's Tales of a Traveler or Columbus or Alhambra, Howell's Venetian Life, Bayard Taylor's Northern Travel, Thompson's Land and the Book, Hawthorne's Italian Note Book or English Note Book, and Emerson's English Traits. Among English writers, Dickens' American Notes, Hugh Miller's England and its People, Mahaffy's Social Life in Greece or Rambles in Greece, are examples. These works are composed on strictly literary principles and conduce to culture. They serve partly the purpose of Prose Fiction in the line of wholesome entertainment while they are superior to it in having actual historical fact beneath them.

#### (4.) Journalism.

The reference here, is to that form of journalistic writing which is of the higher order and allies itself to thorough, artistic work. This is what Prof. Copee has in mind when he refers to the Augustan Periodicals as "the real origin of the present English Press." There is no room here for the ordinary Newspaper production of modern times, but for high class editorial work as seen in the best specimens of British Journalism. Strictly speaking, Modern Journalism, if by that is meant, the Daily Newspaper Press, does not belong to the province of Literary Prose. Its method, immediate end and actual visible result preclude this. This is no fault of its own. In the nature of the case, it cannot be held to strict account in these particulars. If current journalism is

in the main clear and accurate in style and in the line of moral propriety it has accomplished its end. If by journalism, however, is meant the entire department of magazine production, monthly, bi-monthly and quarterly, as seen in the leading magazines of Modern Times, then it takes on a distinct literary character and is sufficiently described under the general head of Essays and Reviews as discussed. It is suggestive to note that the connection between the lower and the higher forms of journalism, between the newspaper and the magazine, is found in the daily editorial article wherein, on the basis of facts and items the editor rises to general principles and acts, for the time, the part of the literary author. Herein, lies the hope of Modern Journalism and its claim to professional rank. If it is true that the London Times is not only a mighty political and social power in England, but a literary daily in its tone and cast, and acknowledged as such by men of distinction, it follows that such an order of Journalism is possible and should more abound. The Modern Newspaper must exist as a paper of news, but in connection with this, the leaders of the English and American Press can do no better work for popular English, public morality and the general good than by giving to journalism enough at least, of a literary character to ally it with all our best English Prose.

#### Inferences.

##### 1. *The Relation of Prose Forms to Prose Periods.*

The peculiar adaptation of English Prose to the respective eras in which it has been produced is worthy

of special notice. It is not meant that this adjustment can be discerned at every point along the line of the history, but can be so discerned at the salient points as to make the relationship logical and vital.

The names of the periods which we have selected have been selected on this principle; the name indicating both the historical and literary character of the time. The Formative, Transitional, Settled and Expansive periods mark similar types of prose, respectively. Baconian prose was formative, and as such, would have been out of place and time at any later period. Addisonian prose, in the days of Bacon would have been similarly untimely as that of the school of Dryden would be in the modern expansive period of Macaulay and Carlyle. The difference in these periods is nothing more nor less than a difference of literary style peculiar to each separate period. The Spectator was the very thing for the age of Anne, but would not do for that of Victoria. It would be as difficult to conceive of Hooker writing for the Spectator as of Steele writing the Polity, and this, not because of the difference in the men so much as by reason of the difference in the epoch and tendency.

If we inquire more particularly as to this relation of form to era, it may be stated, that in the Formative Period, didactic or ethical prose was prominent as seen in Hooker and Bacon; in the Transitional Period, descriptive and impassive prose, as in Bunyan and Milton; in the Settled Period, Miscellaneous Prose, as in Addison; while the Expansive Period is proved to be such from the fact that all the forms are found in a good degree of fullness and ever develop-

ing. The Historical is seen in the school of Hume, Robertson and Gibbon; Prose Fiction, in the school of Richardson, Fielding and Dickens; Oratorical Prose in the school of Burke; Philosophic Prose in the school of Coleridge; and Miscellanies in the great Essayists.

In this last and present period, now developing, all forms are unified and compacted, by which a variety and vigor are secured never before reached. If, as Bacon holds—"The end of philosophy (knowledge) is the intuition (perception) of unity" such an end has been practically reached in the historic development of our prose.

## 2. *Relative Value of Forms.*

It is scarcely necessary to draw close distinctions here and classify these varied forms on a nicely adjusted gradation of higher and lower. As has been hinted, each in its place, is the best form and so essential that any arbitrary comparison must be misleading.

It being understood that the Miscellaneous Form is illustrative of all the others, the remaining forms, if stated in the order of their importance, abstractly viewed, would be Historical, Descriptive, Didactic, Impassioned. If all the classes of English Prose must be reduced so as to embrace but two, these would be the—Narrative and Descriptive. The most essential types of human expression are the recital of events and the portraiture of scenes. Hence it is, that these two species are so connected in nature and practice that it is difficult and quite unnecessary



sharply to dissever them, while in such a form as Miscellanies they again appear as a substantive feature of the style.

He who is skillful in ordinary narrative and descriptive prose has already reached good results in writing and gives promise of high literary success.

### 3. *Form and Idea.*

The old question as to the relation of thought to style is still an open question, resulting largely from the vicious teaching of certain French and English schools as to the nature and objects of style. Defining it as merely the outward expression of thought in chaste and correct language, and magnifying the external feature out of all due proportion, it came to be held that idea was one thing and style quite another. What is technically called, the Euphuistic style, is of this lower order—where vain verbal conceits take the place of substantial idea and plainness is sacrificed to pomp. On this wise, style, so called, was cultivated for its own sake and naturally degenerated into the veriest bombast. It is to be emphasized here that the form of English Prose as it appears upon the page to the eye is a form that embodies intellectual power. More than that, it is itself instinctive with the mental life that it contains, and varies in feature and power as that life varies.

The forms of English Prose are the forms of English thought visible and open, and cannot be dissevered from that thought of which they are the natural expression.

Descriptive prose is the writer's poetic personality

in written form. It is more than a graphic depiction of objects and scenes. It is a portraiture of the author's mind through such scenes. It is the delineation of the man himself behind the scenes.

Prose Periods are vital by reason of the forces and human agencies at work at their centre and determining them. Prose Forms are immeasurably more so in that they are the express image of the personalities within them. "The style is the Man."

PART THIRD.



PART THIRD.  
REPRESENTATIVE WRITERS  
AND THEIR STYLES.

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(A.) Classification of Prose Authors.

THERE are three distinct principles on which all the writers of English Prose might be classified.

(a) On the basis of Periods:—Formative, Transitional, Settled and Expansive.

This is the *historical* or chronological division and names the writers simply in the order in which they lived and wrote from Hooker to Carlyle.

(b) On the basis of Forms:—Narrative, Descriptive, Impassioned, Philosophical and Miscellaneous.

This is the *rhetorical* division and classifies the various writers as to the manner in which they have respectively illustrated the leading kinds of Prose Discourse.

(c) On the basis of Thought and Style.

This is a purely *literary* division and has advantages of its own. It is on this principle mainly that we speak of a certain order of writers as Representative, all others taking their appropriate places in the various gradations of rank below this.

While such writers of the first order might, as a matter of possibility, be arranged under the respec-

tive historical periods and rhetorical forms of prose still, this literary classification is quite independent of periods and forms and has in view other ends.

These different principles of classification may for convenience be combined in the division of the authors to be discussed into three separate orders or groups.

The discussion of Modern Prose Proper is thus seen to begin with the names of Hooker, Bacon and Milton. They may be said to constitute the Earlier Group. Whatever their literary faults, they are strictly representative. The merits they possessed are too distinctive to be omitted. Though not as modern as their successors, they still are modern authors.

What might be called, The Second or Middle Group of Modern Prose Writers begins with Swift and ends with Burke; including the additional names of Addison and Johnson.

In these writers, earlier literary faults are fast eliminated. The grammatical and literary transition from Middle to Modern-English, so largely effected by Bacon and his colleagues, is now fully effected and authors wrote substantially as they write now. Still more specifically, the latest list begins with the name of Charles Lamb. It is the Modern Group Proper. It is the English Prose of the nineteenth century happily opened by Lamb, Macaulay, De Quincey and Dickens; that order of prose to which Carlyle and a goodly number of others have so brilliantly contributed, and which in its present fullness of promise bids fair to surpass in quality and measure any results already reached.

## (B.) Explanatory Statements.

(a) The dividing line between *representative* writers and those immediately below them is often so *close* and *delicate* as to make *absolute accuracy impossible*; such authors as Bunyan, Hume and Goldsmith being placed by some in the first list; by others, in the second. No dogmatic opinions can here be given. A discussion of *all* representative authors will not be attempted in the present volume but simply enough to exhibit a comprehensive and correct view of prose style.

(b) Here and there, as in the case of Carlyle and Johnson, Hooker and Milton, authors are regarded as *representative* in *spite* of some *gross defects* and *violations* of style. Their thought is so vigorous and trenchant, and most of their merits of style are so marked, that the effect of faults is largely concealed or counterbalanced. Their high literary power cannot be ignored. Representative writers are not, necessarily, in all respects *model* writers.

(c) Representative writers are those who not only have written so many pages of English Prose, but who, back of all visible product are *literary* in *character* and *spirit* and who are identified with the historical and national progress of literature in England. Such a fact will give a rank to their prose above that of others, who apart from this may be authors of merit.

Such writers as Addison and Lamb are thus far superior to Raleigh and Sydney.

(d) There are many writers, who so far as they have gone, have done laudable work in prose, **but who**

have not *gone far enough* to claim a place as *representative*. A large number of our Miscellaneous Essayists are such:—Cowley, Johnson, Wordsworth, Foster, Steele and Temple. Some of these have done their best work in poetry.

(e) All representative writers are not representative in the *same manner*. Bacon is so in one sense, and Macaulay in another. Each is prominent in his own age and way and, as such, cannot be omitted in a discussion of characteristic authors. The variety of the prominence is as great as that of their respective characters. Some representative writers are more representative than others. De Quincey is more so than Hooker; Macaulay is more so than Bacon.

(f) In the study of style as expressed in the best authorship will be seen the true relation of literary principles to literary practice—of formal to applied discourse. The relation holds in literature as in Logic, Mathematics or any other department. Whatever may be theoretically studied in the line of diction, sentence and figure, or as to the laws, qualities, processes and forms of writing is here successfully applied in concrete expression. Each is important in its place, and cannot be safely neglected. Mere rhetorical theory apart from its faithful application or mere literary practice apart from scientific method is alike extreme and fraught with evil. This, however, is to be clearly borne in mind—that the formal is with reference to the practical and loses itself in it. The final end of all study of literary law is personal literary product. Hence it is, that literature as a visible body of thought must always rank above the mere knowledge of the laws of expression. Lit-



erary creation of product is far more than mere literary criticism. English Prose Style, as studied in English Prose authors, will conduce alike to skill in criticism and the higher skill of personal authorship.

### Plan of Discussion.

As stated in the preface, it is not our present purpose to give detailed biographical and historical sketches of the prose authors whom we study. Such a minute method is in place on the part of historians of our literature who aim to be exhaustive in their treatment, as with Morley, in his,—English Writers, or Masson in his—Life and Times of Milton, or Craik, in his—English Literature. At present, our object is purely literary and critical, and we must keep within the bounds assigned us.

To the literary critic is left the analysis of the author's style as a product of literary art quite distinct from biography and history. The life of any author under notice will be referred to, therefore, only in so far as it bears on authorship and style. The discussion at this point is one of *style* rather than of authors—the Prose Style of Prose Authors.

In the study now before us special attention will therefore be called to those leading principles of English Style which have been accepted as such by all literary critics and scholars. It is *substantially* the method which Nathan Drake applies, in his interesting survey of—English Periodical Literature; which Masson applies, in his study of—British Novelists and which Minto illustrates, among other methods, in his Prose Manual and which is becom-

ing more and more fully the accepted method of discussion.

It may be repeated, that our present plan does not necessitate the study of *every* representative prose writer, but simply enough to give to the student and general reader a satisfactory view of the province and quality of our typical English Prose.

We shall discuss the respective styles of the following Representative Names.

SIR FRANCIS BACON.

RICHARD HOOKER.

JOHN MILTON.

JOSEPH ADDISON.

JONATHAN SWIFT.

SAMUEL JOHNSON.

EDMUND BURKE.

CHARLES LAMB.

THOMAS BABINGTON MACAULAY.

THOMAS DE QUINCEY.

CHARLES DICKENS.

THOMAS CARLYLE.

In such a limited and yet characteristic list as this, there may be seen, at once, the Historical Development of English Prose and that of English Prose Style.

## CHAPTER I.

### THE PROSE STYLE OF FRANCIS BACON.

#### **Brief Biographical Sketch.**

BORN in London, January 22nd, 1561. In Cambridge, 1573-6. Thence to Paris with an English Ambassador. Admitted to the Bar in 1582. In Parliament, 1584, from Melcombe; 1586, from Taunton; 1588, from Liverpool; 1592, from Middlesex. Degree of M. A. (Cambridge) 1594. In Parliament, 1597, from Ipswich; 1601, from Ipswich. Knighted by James I., 1603. In Parliament, 1603-4, from Ipswich. Counsel to the Crown. Solicitor General, 1607. Attorney General, 1613. In Parliament, 1614, from Ipswich. Keeper of the Seal, 1617. Lord Chancellor, 1618. Baron Verulam, 1619. Viscount St. Albans, 1620. Convicted and sentenced, 1621. Died in 1626, at Highgate.

#### **Bacon's Use of Latin.**

The most important fact to be borne in mind at this point is, that Bacon wrote most of his works in Latin. He was, as Bede and Aelfric before him, an Anglo-Latin author. It is, of course, with his works in English only that we have to do, save in so far as there

are evident in all his writings those general qualities of style for which he was noted.

It is quite impossible, at this distant date fully to explain the reason of that particular attitude which Bacon assumed relative to English and his decided partiality for the Latin, which he loved to call "that universal language which may last as long as books last." Not only did he compose his favorite works in Latin, but regretted that he had composed any in his native tongue and as speedily as possible, converted them into Latin. Though, as we have seen, the vernacular was then used by the poets—by Hooker, Sydney and others with efficacy, though it was comparatively free from the crudeness of First and Middle-English times, still, Bacon was suspicious of it. Specially jealous as to his reputation, he felt that he might as well commit his works to the flames as to the vernacular. In a letter to Mr. Matthew, shortly before his own death, he says: "It is true, my labor is now most set to have those works which I had formerly published (in English) well translated into Latin, for these *modern* languages, will at one time or other, play the bankrupt with books and since I have lost much time with this age, I would be glad, as God would give me leave, to recover it with posterity." There is far more vanity than piety in this outburst; still, it expresses his view. He applied these sentiments, among other works, to those very essays which by his own acknowledgment to Buckingham "of all his other works had been most current, for that as it seems, they came home to men's business and bosoms." It is strange, indeed, that this far-sighted man could not

have seen the vital connection between the currency of the essays and their appearance in English. It is stranger still that right at the centre of a great awakening of English thought he should not have felt that the path of literary duty, honor, and wisdom, was straight in the line of this home-speech. It was strangest of all that a man of Bacon's acumen could have before him the actual products of the English Language in prose and verse from Hooker and Shakespeare, and think of this speech "playing the bankrupt" with an author's fame, and resorting to the dead languages to secure his reputation with posterity. It may here be suggested, that in Lord Bacon's preference for the Latin and his extensive use of it, there is a strong historical and literary argument against the Baconian authorship of Shakespeare's Plays. These Plays are English to the marrow and bone and could not have been written by any other than an enthusiastic lover of the home-speech. While every English scholar cannot but regret that Bacon should thus have misjudged the genius and ever widening scope of his vernacular, we can yet rejoice in the fact, explain it as we may, that apparently he has outwitted himself and done good work in his native tongue. We cannot say, with a recent English writer, that we have lost in the Latin Bacon an English classic. If some of his best works are what they are in and through their English dress, English scholars should take the benefit of it. Mr. Taine's eulogy is extreme when he says:—"There is nothing in English Prose superior to his diction," still, he has a record as an English Author.

Bacon is not the English writer he might have been had he used nothing but his own speech. Still, he is a standard to the degree in which he uses it nor must it be forgotten that it was mainly in the region of scholastic philosophy outside of the province of general literature that he was Anglo-Latin in his style. To the student of English Prose, as literary and not speculative, Bacon has few relations save as a writer of English.

### His Prose Works in English.

Bacon was a versatile and voluminous author. His writings begin in 1582, when he was just past his majority, and continue nearly to the year of his death.

The list opens with the—*Temporis Partus Maximus*—and closes fitly with a translation of the Psalms. It embraces a vast variety of subject—philosophy, church controversy, speeches in Parliament, legal treatises and discussions, political tracts, ethical disquisitions, natural science, history, translation, apothegms, romance and miscellanies. Mathematics is said to have been the only science with which he was not conversant.

It is with his English Prose only, that we are concerned in the discussion of his style, and in such a discussion there are but few works which need occupy our attention, viz:

THE ESSAYS.

ADVANCEMENT OF LEARNING.

HISTORY OF HENRY VII.

THE NEW ATLANTIS.

The first edition of *The Essays* was published in 1597, and consisted of ten; the second appeared in 1612, to the number of thirty-eight—of the same nature, he says, “which I myself will not suffer to be lost and it seemeth the world will not;” and the third appeared in 1625—one year before his death. This last and present edition numbers fifty-eight and is entitled—*Essays or Counsels, Civil and Moral*. It includes, also, a fragment of an *Essay on Fame*.

These essays embrace a large variety of themes, abstract and practical and are marked throughout by the peculiar features of the author’s style.

*The Advancement of Learning*—was published in 1605, between the first and second issue of the *Essays*. It was afterward translated into Latin and enlarged into nine books under the title—*De Augmentis Scientiarum*—published in 1623. These two books of, *The Advancement*, constitute the first part of his work which he called—*The Great Reconstruction (Instauratio Magna)* as he says in writing to Bishop Andrewes:—“For that my book of *Advancement of Learning* may be some preparation or key for the better opening of the *Instauration*.” He adds significantly—“I have thought good to procure a translation of that book into the *general language*.” As Mr. Spedding suggests:—Bacon had no faith in the English as a classical (standard) language. In the first book he discusses the *Discredits* and *The Dignity of Learning*; in the second, he discusses *Human Learning* and *Divine Learning*. Here again the area traversed is a wide one and the Baconian style is everywhere apparent. This work is especially

interesting in that it shows the close relation of Bacon's philosophical to his literary character.

*The History of Henry VII.*—needs little explanation. In the author's preparatory letter addressed to Prince Charles, he says of Henry VII., "I have not flattered him, but took him to life as well as I could." It is a narrative, pure and simple, rarely ever rising to the discussion of causes and principles. The record goes on with great simplicity and we forget the author in the story. This is a true test of skill in art. In his own language, he would term it a history of "narrations or relations." Minto's statement, "that it is probably the very best history of its kind" is extreme, but reveals the attitude of modern criticism regarding it.

*The New Atlantis*—is nothing more nor less than a romance; as Rawley writes in the preface, "This *fable* my lord devised to the end that he might exhibit therein a model or description of a college instituted for the interpreting of nature." This fabulous element is the main one throughout and is especially interesting as coming from the masculine mind of Bacon. It reads like to More's *Utopia* and has reference to a kind of philosophical golden age yet to appear.

These four works, it will be noted, respectively reveal the miscellaneous, philosophical, narrative and descriptive orders of prose, as already studied, and serve to show, at once, the versatility of Bacon's thought and style.

In the discussion before us, special reference will be had to the *Essays* and—*The Advancement of Learning*.



## LEADING QUALITIES OF STYLE.

## (1.) Condensation and Compactness.

Many of the paragraphs and sentences are burdened with their weight of thought. They remind one of an autumnal scene when the trees of the orchards are bending to the earth with their fruitage. Such a collection as the *Essays* is a real intellectual treasury. The ideas are packed in so closely as to defy any nicer adjustment of truth to truth. It is as if the author had been limited in his province, and was obliged from the outset, to compress his thoughts into the most limited area. This compactness of idea is especially noticeable in that successive readings of the text only serve to deepen the conviction of its terseness. The author himself seems to have been conscious of this characteristic, and to have made it from the outset a prime object in his writing. It is, thus, that in speaking of his *Essays*, he remarks: "They be like the late new half-pence; the silver, good and the pieces small;" "certain brief notes, set down rather *significantly* than curiously, requiring both leisure in the writer and reader." It is worthy of remark, here, that this terseness of style is as true of his Latin as of his English writings and arises from the fact that in whatever language he wrote, his thinking was clear and close and demanded a corresponding form of expression. In what are called The Apothegms, and Elegant Sentences, and Wisdom of The Ancients, this feature of style appears conspicuously, *e. g.*: —

“He conquers twice who restrains himself in victory.”

‘To deliberate about useful things is the safest delay.’

“It is a strange desire that men have, to seek power and lose liberty.”

“Discretion in speech is more than eloquence.”

“In great place ask counsel of both times;—of the ancient time, what is best, and of the latter time, what is fittest.”

“Riches are the baggage of virtue; they cannot be spared nor left behind but they hinder the march;” or as he says in the *Essays* —“ We are to seek them only as we may get them justly, use them soberly, distribute them cheerfully, and leave them contentedly.”

In *The Advancement of Learning*, speaking of the use of the aphoristic style, he gives us in a single paragraph a definition and specimen of it: “It trieth the writer whether he be superficial or solid, for aphorisms cannot be made but of the *pith* and *heart* of science, for discourse of illustration is cut off; recitals of examples are cut off; discourse of connection and order is cut off; descriptions of practice are cut off. So there remaineth nothing to fill the aphorism but some good quantity of observation, and, therefore, no man can suffice to write aphorisms but he that is *sound* and *grounded*.”

This is that kind of condensed utterance which will not allow the reader a moment's leisure, and which in its Spartan and Senecan brevity has called forth the praise of all critics, from Johnson to Dugald Stuart. In its sententiousness, it extorts from a foreign critic of English the avowal, “that Shakespeare and the seers do not contain more vigorous and expressive condensations.”

In the two treatises, specially referred to, we are free to say that there is more *mental stuff* in the same space than in any other similar selection from English literature.

To attempt to quote any farther would be folly. The reader may open these books at random for this Baconian quality.

## (2.) Analytical Clearness and Suggestion.

The subject in hand is always dissected and spread out in its various parts before the reader so that he sees into it and through it. He sees it in its nature, relations and applications. It is a complete rhetorical and logical framework with all the parts in due adjustment to each other. It is thus that his distinctively philosophical writings are seminal and germinal rather than fully developed; suggestive rather than demonstrative. Their special use, therefore, is that of education rather than instruction. They are designed to lead the student on by gradual stages through a series of hints and teachings to the best expression of his personal powers, and the highest forms of mental efficiency. It is thus that the author aptly terms his essays, "grains of salt that will rather give one an appetite than offend with satiety." As examples of this special feature we note the Essay on—Simulation and Dissimulation—and that on—Atheism. In the *Advancement*, as Morley states it, "Bacon makes by a sort of exhaustive analysis, a ground plan of all subjects of study, as an intellectual map, helping the right inquirer in his search for the right path." If the student or reader will consult the analysis of each book given by Wright, in his edition of Bacon's *Advancement*, he will see what is meant by this "intellectual map." His great philosophical work—The *Novum Organum*—affords an illustration of this analytical habit without any parallel in our language.

It is on the basis of this critical and deep reaching dissection of a subject that we have in Bacon that

peculiar form of expression which may be called *indicative* or *exponential* rather than declarative, entitling him to the appellation given him by Taine:—"a producer of conceptions." He suggested far more than he stated.

### (3.) Incisiveness.

The reference here is to a crisp, curt and clean-cut style. It might be called *excisive*. Everything superfluous is removed. The truth is given in its essence. The old terms, conciseness, preciseness express it. Thomas Fuller would call it the "pruning process." It is Bacon's favorite logical method of Inclusion and Exclusion strictly applied to the domain of rhetorical art. While leaving nothing unsaid that is of vital importance, the special object is, to say nothing that is not important. The writer is here on the defensive and resists the common tendency to the verbose and irrelevant. Even what is called amplification in literary art is viewed with caution and retrenchment is the order. It is in this connection that the epigrams and antitheses of Bacon's prose are properly noted. Whatever might be the objections to them in ordinary literature and in the hands of unskilful writers, they were to Bacon the most natural form of expression, and the most essential by reason of the closeness of his reasoning. Bacon's thinking was incisive. There were those of his own time under the influence of Euphuism with whom this incisive characteristic of style was the veriest artifice and who sacrificed to mechanism all beauty and vigor of expression. Antithesis is a dangerous instrument in the hands of a weakling.

The Pointed Style, with such, is all point. As in mathematics, it has position without magnitude; place, but no power. Bacon was intellectually strong enough to use it without abusing it and its effect is telling. 'Tis thus that he speaks in praise of the Queen "that if Plutarch were now living to write lives of parallels, it might trouble him to find one for Elizabeth;" "that God Almighty planted the first garden;" "that in evil the best condition is, not to will; the next, not to can;" "that the best of beauty is that which a picture cannot express;" "that it is good to commit the beginning of all great actions to Argus with an hundred eyes, and, the end of them to Briareus with a hundred hands; first, to watch, and then to speed." Such pithy sayings as these are what Bacon called in another saying as incisive as any of them "the seeds of arguments to be cast up into some brief and acute sentences, not to be cited but to be as skeins or bottoms of threads to be unwound at large when they come to be used." Sentences such as these are sufficient to classify Bacon with the masters of antithesis—with Dryden and Pope, Johnson and Carlyle, and those of other lands who have shown special aptness in the use of the balanced structure. Such a quality of style when isolated from others is objectionable and serves but to reveal their absence and the need of them, while in connection with other and higher qualities, it serves a most valuable end. There is a tonic influence in the pungency of it. It compels attention, if not indeed, assent. It states the case so bluntly that there is no evasion and the alternative must be accepted. It acts as seasoning in food. It makes

the pages spicy and palatable to the most fastidious. "It is with times," says Bacon, "as it is with ways; some are more uphill and downhill and some are more flat and plain." Some styles, we may add, are all downhill or uphill or all flat and plain. There is no variety of contrast. Abruptness is preferable to monotony. Modern English and American prose is in need of this incisive quality. Other things being equal, it marks mental life and spirit and saves the book from being shelved shortly after publication. Bacon's best prose, though written three centuries ago, is still read, not simply because it is in itself so matterfull, but because it is so presented as to awaken interest and fix the truth in the mind.

#### (4.) Strength and Force.

This may be said to result from the united action of the other qualities or to be the ground of them. They interact. The style of Bacon is *solid*. To define style as mere form or external presentation will not suffice here. It is the form of substance. It is itself substantial. It is thus, that in the perusal of the best prose of Bacon, reading rises to the rank of a study and his own theory is carried out as he says in his *Essay on Studies*:—"Read to weigh and consider. Some (books) are to be read wholly with diligence and attention." He despises books that he calls "flashy" and like "distilled waters." As we read the writings of Bacon, we feel that we are engaged in a mental gymnastic. The experience is disciplinary more than entertaining. We feel the healthful pressure of a strong mind and a strong

style, and we are made strong by the contact. The effect on the mind is like to that of an October morning on the body,—bracing and vital.

It is thus that his biographer, Rawley, most justly remarks:—"In the composing of his books, he did rather drive at a masculine and clear expression than at any fineness of phrase." It was this same vigor that elicited from Johnson that high eulogium on Bacon as an orator without which no analysis of his style seems to be complete:—"Yet there appeared in my time one noble speaker who was full of gravity in his speaking. No man ever spoke more *pressly* or more weightily."

There is no one synonym that will better answer to the word Baconian, as applied to style, than the word, vigorous. In this respect, the type of Bacon's mind and style was closely akin to Hooker's. That same philosophic gravity and mental force belonged to each. What Hooker was, in the narrower field of theological controversy, Bacon was as a man and a writer in the wider field of secular thought.

Hence, it may be said of Bacon as of Hooker, that his style will never be popular in the sense in which that of Goldsmith is popular. It is too heavily laden with idea and substance, too condensed, analytic and substantial to admit of this. Whatever its incisive power may be, or its illustrative clearness, it is too full of "sterner stuff" to please most men. Herein, however, lies its special attractiveness to special classes in every age, and herein are found those elements of power which will preserve it as a classic as long as classic prose is valued. It is this very quality of strength which exalts the Essays of Bacon

above the *Areadia* of Sydney, and makes it necessary for every student of modern prose to begin with his writings and those of Hooker as the accepted point of departure.

Bacon is, thus, one of the best examples in literature of the true relation of *thought to expression*. He establishes for us the vital principle that, given a method of thinking, cogent and clear, we have, as a necessary result, a similar style. Instead of shaping the thought to the expression and making the matter subordinate to the form, the aim must be, to reach the manner through the matter. Much of the merit of the Baconian style lies in this, that it magnifies the principle that a well furnished, disciplined mind intent upon the expression of the truth for noble ends, will rarely give utterance to its reflections without a good degree of clearness and force. The expression is not a something apart from the subject matter, but evolved from it by logical and rhetorical laws. Bacon never studied formal expression apart from the thought behind it. It is thus, that while those authors of his day who polished their paragraphs with extreme nicety, are forgotten, the repute of Bacon is fresh and full. It is just because Bacon's prose style is unstudied by him that the careful study of it by others is the part of wisdom. Naturalness is power.

#### (5.) Imagination and Illustration.

This quality is especially noticeable as found connected with those already mentioned. It is questionable whether there is a more striking example in English Prose of the close relation of the intellectual



and imaginative, the philosophic and the poetic. This faculty in Bacon's mind and art was eminently normal. With other prose writers of his time—Sydney, Raleigh and Burton, it was abnormal. With Bacon, the imagination was under the complete control of the judgment and will, so that in all its soarings it rarely rose above the credible and rational. So conspicuous is this feature in his English writings that, with the one exception of the *New Atlantis*, he avoids the sphere of the purely fanciful. In—*The Wisdom of the Ancients*,—written in Latin, he takes special pains to allude to the manner in which allegory has been wrested from its true purpose as an aid to the truth, and made to minister to the wildest fancy. His method here was not so much that of Paul's when he knew not whether he was in or out of the body, as that of Jacob's, who in his vision saw a ladder, the base of which rested on the earth. More philosophic than poetic in its quality, his imagination nicely adjusted the relation of all cognate faculties: "aspiring no higher than to be a faithful interpreter of nature; waiting for the day when the kingdom of man should come." Hence, his similitudes are for the sake of setting forth the truth. His figures are illustrations and have that same incisiveness that marks his literal language. It is thus that in the style of Bacon the gravity of a masculine prose unites somewhat with the freedom and facility of poetic expression. A good test of his style lies just here. To the degree in which he succeeds in making this union and interaction apparent, is he worthy of the title given him by Hazlitt—the "prose laureate" of the time of Elizabeth and James. As far as Hooker

went he was not inferior to Bacon, but Bacon went much further as a writer, and in that respect holds a higher place.

### (6.) Versatility and Variety.

This will be readily admitted when it is remembered that the History of Henry VII; The New Atlantis; The Speeches; The Advancement of Learning and the Essays illustrate respectively each of the five different representative forms of prose as stated. There is a true sense, therefore, in which his prose may be said to be all-inclusive as to classes of style, while it is not to be forgotten that outside of this literary area he did a large and effective work as a writer in the technical department of mental science. History, Prose Fiction, oratorical prose, didactic treatises and miscellanies are all exhibited, unified and controlled by the didactic as the prime characteristic. It is safe to say that we look in vain along the line of English Prose Literature for any author who exhibits a more varied combination of qualities and kinds of style. Johnson and Carlyle approximate him the nearest.

Versatility in itself is not a mark of power. With many it is the very sign of weakness and means the superficial and shallow. With Bacon, it is otherwise. He had "large discourse of reason looking before and after." He complained of the statesmen of his time "that they never looked ahead into universality" and dedicated his *New Atlantis* "to the enlarging of the bounds of human empire." With Bacon, versatility was a necessity. His capacious mind demanded

various outlets and forms of expression. He passes by easy transitions from history to philosophy; from essays to speeches and romance. He aimed to live on his own theory: "Whatever is worthy of existence is worthy, also, to be known." This diversity of intellect and style makes ever new claims upon the interest of the reader and adds new profit. As his biographer states: "He had not his knowledge from books but from some grounds and notions within himself." Had his moral character remained unsullied, he would still be the most commanding presence in English Prose, and next to Shakespeare in English Letters. The open question as to the authorship of the Shakespearian Plays connects the two names more closely still. From the imaginative and versatile elements of his style, this question of authorship has not failed to seek material in his favor.

### MAIN FAULTS OR DEFECTS OF HIS STYLE.

#### (1.) Want of a Pure English Diction.

It is scarcely possible to endorse the extreme view of Minto as to the *simplicity* of Bacon's language. Even if we confine ourselves to his purely English works, there is a noticeable absence of a pure English diction. As in the case of Hooker and all the writers of that age, this defect is scarcely a fault. The language was in such a transition from Middle to Modern forms, that either grammatical or literary purity was quite impossible. This was increased in Bacon's prose by the fact that he was thoroughly versed in Latin lore; was in full sympathy with it and, moreover, the very nature of the subjects he

was discussing called for it. If not controversial as with Hooker, they were largely didactic and somewhat technical. His studies caused him to live, to a good degree, in the past and made it all the more difficult for him to anticipate and further the great movement in the direction of English speech. Whatever the causes, however, his language cannot be called simple. Though far superior to Hooker in the construction of his sentences, he is more at fault in the use of complex and ambiguous terms. Even in the narrative portions of his prose, this error is very common, while in the strictly scientific and technical portions, it amounts to a serious literary evil. He is so extremely fond of Latin quotations and of reference to the older authorities that it lends an air of antiquity to the general style as well as to the words themselves. As in Hooker, so here, words have become essentially modified in meaning: such as—advise, anatomy, artificial, censure, climatic, comfort, convince, delicacy, etc. As to obsolete words, these abound in Bacon's prose: such as—adoptive, adventive, casuosity, cautel, celsitude, dictature, dolation, etc. This modification and loss of words make a glossary needful in the study of Bacon even more than is true of Hooker. Had Bacon been in more decided sympathy with the English and had he seen what its future was to become his vocabulary would have been more native and simple. In this respect, he was quite inferior to the best poets of his day as he was also to some of the less celebrated prose writers, as Sir Walter Raleigh and Sir Philip Sydney. Bacon's strength as a writer lay in those other characteristics to which attention has been called.

## (2.) Want of Development of Idea.

This was Bacon's prime defect.. He was, as we have seen, fertile in thought, vigorous, versatile, incisive, compact and analytical, and yet, in the literary sense of the word, not sufficiently elaborative. His very terseness of statement and variety of suggestion led to an undue brevity as to any one topic under discussion. This is especially noticeable in the *Essays*. Many of them are painfully short. Condensation overreaches itself and the reader looks for the fuller statement and unfolding of the idea. Hence, that apparent *abruptness* of style which critics have marked. It arises from the too rapid transition from point to point ere the subject has been discussed. In *The Advancement of Learning*, this is less manifest but much too frequent. The treatise is made up of a number of principles briefly stated rather than consecutively enlarged and applied. In modern times, this error would be charged to the credit of undue analysis. The logical mechanism of the prose is often too prominent over the rhetorical and literary expression of it. By this method, Bacon escapes everything in the line of the desultory and discursive but falls into the opposite extreme of being too rigid and sententious. The latter is the less frequent and less injurious extreme, but still it is an extreme. The very ideal of prose composition is that of elaboration—the working out of the thought in all its forms and bearings. Analysis and Synthesis are preparative only. Discourse, as the word implies, is going through a subject; it is discussion.

### (3.) Want of Literary Finish.

We have spoken of the imaginative element in Bacon's style but were careful to note that this is present in the line of clearness more than in that of grace or beauty. The cast of his mind was philosophical and not poetic. All his gifts were gifts of power rather than of elegance. He had little to do with the æsthetics of life. He was a literary artisan rather than artist.

One of his collections he calls:—*Ornamenta Rationalia*—Elegant Sentences. In reading them we find that elegant, means forcible or excellent. They are a collection of brief and weighty epigrams. In his *Essays* he writes on Beauty and Deformity, but speaks of them in a physical sense only.

His great aim in writing was didactic. He had no time, inclination or ability to make discourse pleasing for pleasure's sake or even in the interests of literary art. He spoke what was in his mind in a cogent and often a crude form. For finish of style the student must look elsewhere. Even Hooker had more artistic grace. Raleigh and Sydney had far more. What Bacon lacked here, however, he more than supplied in other and higher qualities, and it is on these that his style rests as a standard for "the times succeeding."

### References and Authorities.

Church's Bacon (*Eng. Men of Let.*). Advancement of Learning (*Wright's Ed.*). *Essays* (*Wright's Ed.*). *Essays* (*Whateley's Ed.*). Bacon's Works and Life (*Spedding and Montagu*). Hazlitt's Elizabethan Age.

## CHAPTER II.

### THE PROSE STYLE OF RICHARD HOOKER.

#### Brief Biographical Sketch.

BORN at Heavitree, 1553. At Oxford, 1568. Took degree of B. A., 1573; M. A., 1577. Was Fellow, three years. Entered the Church in 1581. Was appointed to preach at St. Paul's Cross. Settled at Drayton Beauchamp, 1584. Received the Mastership of the Temple, 1585. In the Rectory of Boscombe, 1591-5. Thence to Bishopsbourne. Died, Nov. 2nd, 1600.

#### Prose Authorship.

We find it embodied in one distinct treatise known as, *The Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*, the object of which was to defend the Anglican against the Puritan and Genevan Church; to show specifically that in connection with the authority of Scripture, that of human law and reason, also, should be given a place.

This work consists of eight books. Of these, the first four were published together in 1594, when he was at Boscombe; the fifth, three years later; while as to the history of the remaining three, various views have been current. It is generally conceded that book sixth has been lost or so changed as not to

belong to the original author, and that the seventh and eighth books are so interpolated as to be useless as specimens of Hooker's style.

Of the five books that may be said now to constitute the *Polity*, the first one is not only of special value as preparative, but is a treatise quite complete in itself, having as much reference to the general principles of all law as to the particular discussion in hand. Comparatively little attention has been given by literary critics and historians to the several books that succeed the first. On the basis of this book, as edited by Church, we may secure satisfactory results as to the prose of Hooker.

#### The Timeliness of this Prose Production.

"Hooker," says Disraeli, "is the first vernacular writer whose classical pen harmonized a numerous prose." Says Mr. Hallam, "The finest as well as the most philosophical writer of the Elizabethan period is Hooker. The first book of the *Polity* is one of the masterpieces of English eloquence and excels them all in muscular vigor." Such eulogiums might be largely increased, and must be understood to refer, not so much to the intrinsic quality of Hooker's prose, as to its great superiority to all that had preceded it. In this respect, the *Polity*, as a work of literary art, marks a new awakening in the province of English thought, and in the English language itself as a medium of expression. The sarcastic remark of Cardinal Allen to Pope Clement, that "he had never, as yet, met with an English book where the writer deserved the name of an author," was par-



tially true, the Scriptures aside, with reference to the vernacular prose up to this period. There had, as yet, been no great prose production given to National English Letters, though the need of it, and the expectation of it was felt on every hand. The first English writers had done a timely preparative work, but it was initial only. Chaucer had written long before in racy English verse, and Spenser's "Fæerie Queen" had just been given to the reading public; but among the prose publications of the Middle-English period, there was nothing which in scope and intrinsic worth could at all be compared to these works. It was a time, moreover, of great religious and literary activity. All the most vital interests of Englishmen were before the bar of the popular judgment. It could not, therefore, be brooked that these questions should be debated and decided in any other language than the English, especially when the classical tendencies from Rome and Greece were threatening to become dominant. Right into the heart of these public movements and in fullest sympathy with them, Hooker entered, with his *Polity*, so that it is quite impossible to estimate the influence of such a book at such a time upon the destinies of the English language and Literature. Hence it was that Hooker's great work in prose was more heartily welcomed than Spenser's romance in verse. It revealed to the nation, for the first time, the rich capabilities of their birth-tongue in this direction and made them more hopeful than ever as to its future. It is in this revelation of the hidden power of the language and the awakening of general enthusiasm in its cultivation, even more than in the specific excellence of the style

of Hooker, that his greatest work was done. He stood just at the junction where he could be most helpful to his nation and speech, and was quick to detect and embrace the opportunity.

## CHARACTERISTICS OF HIS STYLE.

### Merits.

#### (1.) *Philosophical Weight and Vigor.*

We have already referred to this in quoting from Hallam, and Walton means the same thing in speaking of his sermons when he says "that he seemed to study as he spoke; the design of his sermons was to show reasons for what he spoke." In discussing the different forms of English Prose, mention was made of the *philosophic* form, as marked by various qualities prominent among which were dignity and sedateness of style. In this respect Hooker is the first philosophical writer of English Prose as distinct from being a writer on philosophy itself as a separate branch of knowledge, and fitly illustrates the difference already suggested between the technical and popular sense of the word—philosophical. It is to this characteristic that Hallam probably refers as he says, "that Hooker should be reckoned among those who have weighed the principles and determined the boundaries of moral and political science." It is thus that the *Polity* enters into the sphere of jurisprudence, sociology and metaphysics.

"There is no learning," says one, "that this man has not searched into; nothing is too hard for his understanding." Hooker was a philosopher in the

etymological sense of the word—a lover of wisdom—and in the wider sense—an inquirer into the nature, causes and relations of things. He was thoroughly intellectual in his method of thinking and writing, and often, in deference to his readers, denied himself the privilege of going as deep as he would like. His favorite words are, foundation, root, origin, principle, reason,—all having to do with the essential and unseen. It was impossible for him to be superficial in his expression of thought. He brings into view, as a philosopher, the completed circle of laws, human and divine; descants upon the origin, nature and application of law; on the relation of will to action; on the doctrine of first truths; on true and false systems of education, and on kindred topics. In the presentation of some of these, such as, the final end of God in creation, his method, diction and general style remind one forcibly of the American Edwards. In this particular he was, also, similar to the distinguished Bacon who was born but eight years later and whose great work on philosophy appeared about a quarter of a century after the first part of the *Polity*.

It was reserved for Hooker to give to his countrymen the first philosophical statement, in English Prose, of the nature of law, the order of the world, the structure of society and the functions of the human mind.

Mr. Whipple goes, perhaps, to a flattering extreme when he says:—"Should the English Constitution, in church and state, be unhappily ruined, the *Ecclesiastical Polity* probably contains materials sufficient for rebuilding the shattered fabric." Deducting from

this all that is overstated, there remains enough to establish the character of Hooker as a philosophical writer and thinker.

The appellation given him, of "The Judicious," was well deserved.

Many of his shorter paragraphs especially illustrate that suggestiveness of meaning so germane to the philosophic style, *e. g.*,

"He that goeth about to persuade a multitude that they are not so well governed as they ought to be, shall never want attentive and favorable hearers."

"The general and perpetual voice of men is as the sentence of God himself. For that which all men have at all times learned, nature herself must needs have taught, and God being the author of nature, her voice is but his instrument."

"The main principles of reason are in themselves apparent, for to make nothing evident of itself unto man's understanding were to take away all possibility of knowing anything."

"The mixture of those things which by nature are divided is the mother of all error."

We have spoken of the element of philosophical dignity in style; it is not too much to say, that in the pages of Hooker, this something rises to the form of natural sublimity and passion, where the mind of the author seems to be overpowered by the great thoughts of law, providence, causation, redemption and God himself. As he yields to that influence and embodies his feelings and imagination in language, the words are infused with the emotion of his soul, and his paragraphs have a Miltonic grandeur about them. There is much in Hooker that prefigures the majesty of Milton.

While these passages of eloquent passion are not numerous enough to accord to Hooker the character

of an impassioned and imaginative writer, still they occur sufficiently often to relieve the didactic heaviness of the style and to reveal the possibilities of the author's literary art. This passionate and poetic element was latent in his soul, and, perchance, with a different theme and aim would have expressed itself in far more pronounced forms. He was a man of large nature and ever tended to rise above the merely expository and didactic into the broader realm of the persuasive and emotional.

(2.) *Logical Sequence and Order—Unity.*

This follows closely upon the former quality and has a similar origin in the mind of Hooker. He wrote as he thought and he thought consecutively. At the very opening of his treatise he formally states the method that he pursues as he says: "I have endeavored throughout the body of this whole discourse that every former part might give strength unto all that follows and every later bring some light unto all before." He could not, as a thinker and writer, relate things that were logically unrelated, or state principles out of their natural connection. It is this quality that, as much as any other, fitted him, on the one hand, to be the champion of the Anglican Church against her opponents, and on the other, to present to the English public a body of prose writing marked by regularity of plan and structure. He disliked what De Quincey has termed—non sequaciousness—and next to the thought itself valued its orderly statement. In this respect, the *Polity* is well worth the study of the writer. Whatever its faults may be, the main subject is kept cen-

tral throughout and all statements bear upon the one point at issue. The rich versatility of thought in it is not allowed to break its logical coherence. The key word of the treatise is—Law.

The subject of the first book is—The nature of all Law, in General. He discusses it in three forms of,—The Law of God in Creation, The Law of Nature in Human Reason, and The Law of Scripture. Throughout the book, this great regulating word and idea is before him until he closes in that celebrated paragraph: “Of Law there can be no less acknowledged, than that her seat is the bosom of God; her voice, the harmony of the world; all things in heaven and earth do her homage; the very least as feeling her care, and the greatest as not exempt from her power; both angels and men and creatures of what condition soever, though each in different sort and manner, yet all with uniform consent, admiring her as the mother of their peace and joy.” So, throughout the other books, this regal word holds sway and subjects every thought to itself. It is a fine example of logical order tending to the climacteric. It gives character and basis to the style, and makes it mentally wholesome to the reader. Such a style cannot be forceless.

These, as we judge, are Hooker's two great characteristic merits as a prose writer—the philosophic and the logical cast. They carry a great deal with them which cannot be fully stated. They embody more than they express, and on the negative side prevent the presence and power of minor errors. They promise the reader something worth the reading, and are so presented as to be intelligible and impressive. There is an utter absence of the puerile

and the frivolous. Everything is solid and germane to the subject, while through it all there is a moral sobriety of tone that is most healthful and uplifting. These are qualities somewhat Elizabethan and English, and for which there is yet room in modern prose. The later periods have improved on the earlier in vocabulary, diction, sentence and artistic finish, but not in mental and moral undertone. Each class of qualities is right in its place and time. Had their order been reversed, English Prose would not have been as stable and substantial as it is.

### Leading Faults.

Passing to the faults of Hooker's style, we note his Diction and Sentence Structure.

Mr. Whipple, in his partiality for Hooker here remarks: "It is doubtful if any English writer since his time has shown equal power in the construction of long sentences." This language is somewhat modified by Whipple when he calls attention to Hooker's frequent inversions and complex periods, "drawing on a whole block of clauses," as Fuller says, "before he comes to the close of a sentence." In this respect, Fuller is nearest the truth. It is, as we believe, in this sphere of the verbal and syntactical elements of style, that Hooker's special errors are manifest. It is just here that we must part company with those critics who insist that in the sphere of diction and sentence formation Hooker and Bacon and Milton are to be favorably compared with their successors from Addison onward. Nor is it natural thus to nullify the law of progressive advance in prose liter-

ature, and expect in the sixteenth century what we find in the eighteenth and later. We may go further, and affirm that it was impossible for these earlier writers to present an order of prose structure equal to that of the later. The language did not admit of it. It was in formation and transition, and not until the appearance of the Augustan Age did it assume a settled form. Elizabethan English was at best, Broken English. It was especially so in prose. The faults were the faults of the age more than of the authors in it. The writers of those days could not achieve literary miracles and use English as if it were finally formed. The marvel is that we have as good specimens as we do have of verbal structure. The wisest critics have strangely erred here, and indulged in groundless eulogiums, as when Dr. Smith affirms "that in correctness and propriety of language Hooker has never been surpassed." Dr. Drake, with his usual judgment has avoided such common error as he says somewhat strongly of all these first writers: "They have completely failed to fix a standard for structure:" and of Hooker, "It must be admitted that the elaboration and inversion of periods are such as to create no small difficulty in the comprehension of the meaning." Mr. Church, in his edition of Hooker, takes a middle ground, and is, in the main, safe in his conclusion. He concedes that the constructions are artificial, but insists that they are not involved, and by patient attention may be understood. Hooker, himself, seems to anticipate trouble here, but charges it to the character of the subject and the dullness of the reader,—“albeit much of that we are to speak in this present cause may seem to a



number perhaps, obscure, dark and intricate, yet, this may not so far prevail as to cast off that which the matter itself requireth." "They unto whom we shall seem tedious are in no wise injured by us, because it is in their own hands to spare that labor which they are not willing to endure."

Apart, however, from the inherent difficulty of the subject is the unwillingness of the reader to exert himself. There is an antique element in the diction, and a rigidity in the structure of the author which somewhat impair the force of the thought, and which reveal too close an imitation of Aquinas and Augustine. This want of flexibility arose largely from the theological bent of Hooker's mind, from the controversial character of his book, from the actual irregularities of Elizabethan English, and from his excessive reference to the pagan authors. Church, in his edition, cites the names of nearly forty such authors whom Hooker quotes, such as, Aristotle, Boethius, Hesiod, Plato, Strabo, and others. While such allusion to the ancient writings disclosed wide reading and gave to the *Polity* a scholarly character, it seriously interfered with the presence of idiomatic English and modern forms of diction and structure.

His love for long sentences, paragraphs and rhetorical periods rather increased than diminished this difficulty, and made it easy for him to become obscure and cumbrous. It was the German construction applied to English and, of course, difficult to adjust. Hence, a want of ease, grace and simplicity, a mechanical connection of words and clauses sometimes amounting to pedantry, and that diffuseness of diction with which the style may be justly charged.

Attention has often been called to the rhythmic character of Hooker's prose,—his fine appreciation of the relation of sound to sense, and of the general principle of harmony. This statement is not without reason, and yet we are not prepared to term it a marked feature of his style. As far as it is found, it seems to indicate in the author the presence of an æsthetic instinct. The poetic as well as the philosophic imagination had a place among his gifts.

Scores of good sentences and periods can be gathered from the "Polity"—enough to mark a decided advance in English Prose; and yet no reader will proceed far without noting that absence of true expression, lucid structure and general neatness, which makes all the difference between formative and settled English Prose. In this respect there is a kind of crude dignity about the style. In modern phrase it would be called heavy or prosaic, requiring on the reader's part an absorbing interest in the theme itself, so as to make its perusal in any event a kind of necessity. The structure is in keeping with the aim of the book as didactic. Everything is controlled by the idea, and in the very attempt that the author makes always to give the main thought the main place, not a few errors ensue, and the result is at times confusing. If ambiguity is at all pardonable, however, it is on such terms and with such a purpose.

It is safe to predict, therefore, that the prose of Hooker with all its excellences will find but very few readers in modern times, apart from restricted theological circles interested in the questions at issue and those literary students who make it their duty to read all that is valuable. The prose is in no

sense popular and adapted to general needs. The occasion that gave it origin is past and the style itself, so dignified and logical, has no attraction for the ordinary reader or even for the educated classes as a body. The mere fact that scores of words then freely used with definite meanings have now become modified so as to make the use of a glossary necessary as to most of them, would alone make the general currency of such prose impossible. Such words as absolute, ascertain, cause, civil, common sense, conceit, discourse, are of this character. Many are obsolete, as impatiency, indifferency, intentive, invertigable, judicials, leastwise, momentary, oftenness, otherwhere, etc.

All students of English Letters, however, must be conversant with this prose and will gather benefit from it by being brought into contact with its philosophic and logical vigor. It would not be amiss for the modern reader of the lighter forms of our literature in narrative description and miscellaneous composition to recur, at times, to this first writer of English Prose in order to see the close relation of thought to style and the solid foundations on which the later unfolding of our prose literature is based. It is, thus, gratifying that an edition of Hooker's first book of the *Polity* is included in that series of English Classics so ably superintended by Prof. Brewer. This of itself is sufficient proof that the prose of Hooker has merit enough to preserve it and to commend it still to modern readers.

#### ADDITIONAL EXAMPLES.

“Dangerous it were for the feeble brain of man to enter far into the doings of the Most High whom although to know be life, yet our soundest knowledge is to know that we know him not as indeed

He is, neither that we can know Him, and our safest eloquence concerning Him is our silence when we confess without confession that His glory is inexplicable, His greatness above our capacity and reach."

"In the matter of knowledge, there is between the angels of God and the children of men this difference. Angels already have full and complete knowledge in the highest degree that can be imparted unto them; men, if we view them in their spring, are at the first without understanding, nevertheless, from this utter vacuity they grow by degrees, till they come at length to be even as the angels themselves are. The sons of man being at the first as a book wherein nothing is and yet all things may be imprinted; we are to search by what steps and degrees it riseth unto perfection of knowledge."

"Now if nature should intermit her course and leave altogether, though it were but for a while, the observations of her own laws; if those principal and mother elements of the world, whereof all things in this lower world are made should lose the qualities which they now have; if the frame of that heavenly arch erected over our heads should loosen and dissolve itself; if celestial spheres should forget their wonted motions; if the times and seasons of the year should blend themselves by disordered mixture, the clouds give no rain and the fruits of the earth pine away as children at the withered breasts of their mothers—what would become of man himself whom these things now do all serve?"

Such paragraphs as these are not infrequent, and they mark the comparatively high development which the native language and prose had already reached. Hooker and Bacon were doing for prose what Shakespeare and the dramatists were doing for poetry. The *Polity* was more than a polemic treatise in favor of the Anglican Church. It was the written expression of what the language could be made to do as thus far advanced and in this particular was a masterpiece in its day.

The way was now fully prepared for all later workers, nor was there long delay. In the same year in which the fifth book of the *Polity* appeared (1597)

there appeared also the Essays of Lord Bacon and the future of English Prose was assured. One philosophic writer gives way to another and the same strong, sturdy, vigorous form of English is still maintained and transmitted. Our Formative Prose, whatever it was or was not, was intellectually vital, and hence, must abide.

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## CHAPTER III.

### THE PROSE STYLE OF JOHN MILTON.

#### **Brief Biographical Sketch.**

Born in London, Dec. 9, 1608. In St. Paul's School, London, 1620. Entered Christ's College, Cambridge, Feb. 12, 1625. Received degree of B. A., 1629; M. A., 1632. Left Cambridge for Horton in 1632—(authorship). Received M. A. (Oxford) in 1635. Remained at Horton till 1637. Went to the Continent in 1637. Returned for political reasons in 1639—(authorship). Was Latin Secretary of State in 1649-60. Became blind in 1652. Retired from Public Life in 1660—(authorship). Died Nov. 8, 1674.

#### **Milton as a Prose Writer.**

To most English readers Milton is known as a poet only—as the author of *Comus* and of *Paradise Lost* and, yet, the remark of Dr. Smith is true “that those who are unacquainted with his prose works are incapable of forming an idea of his entire personality.” Milton is never more himself than in some of these fervid prose utterances. It is not to be forgotten that the prime of his life was almost exclusively spent

in the production of Prose. According to accepted criticism, his style falls into the three periods—

1. From his birth (1608) to his return from European travel in 1640.
2. From 1640 to the Restoration—1660.
3. From 1660 to his death, in 1674.

The first of these periods was devoted to the composition of his shorter poems such as *Comus* and *L'Allegro*. The last period was occupied with his two great epics and *Samson Agonistes*. The middle period, which includes his life from thirty-two to fifty-two, or the best of his manhood, was wholly devoted to prose and even then, as it appears, he ceased from writing in this form on account of the political results of the Restoration rather than by way of preference. "I imagined," he says, "that I was about to enjoy an interval of uninterrupted ease and turned my thoughts to a continued history of my country, from the earliest times to the present." Apart therefore, from the specific character of the prose, the strong presumptive argument would be that we are to look for special excellence in that literary work which absorbed his best energies and best days midway between the experiments of youth and the infirmities of age. This argument is doubly confirmed when it is recalled that during this period Milton was in prosperity and free to use his pen as it pleased him while the return of Charles II., in 1660, opened his career of physical suffering, poverty and political dangers. Great stress has always been laid upon the quaint remark of the author himself as to his prose—"In this manner of writing, knowing myself inferior to myself,

led by the genial power of nature to another task, I have the use as I may account it, but of my *left* hand." As we read this we are not to forget the other declaration of the author modestly made and yet true, that all he wrote—"whether prosing or versing" had "certain signs of life in it." Moreover, taking the language as it reads, it is to be remembered that the "left hand" of a Milton is more skillful and mighty than the right hand of most others. Milton's best work was in poetry. He did, however, a good work on other lines. His prose is, indeed, local in its occasion and reference. It is, also, controversial in its tone and aim. Still, there are "certain signs of life in it" and these must be detected and interpreted. Despite manifest and flagrant errors, Milton's Prose has a *representative* character. Though not an ideal or model prose, it is characteristic and deserves more careful study that is generally accorded it. "It is to be regretted," says Macaulay "that the prose writings of Milton, should in our time be so little read. As compositions they deserve the attention of every man who wishes to become acquainted with the full power of the English Language. They abound in passages, compared with which, the finest declamations of Burke sink into insignificance." So Pattison, his latest biographer, writes of his prose works: "They are monuments of our language so remarkable that they must always be resorted to by students, as long as English remains a medium of ideas." He justly adds "Yet on the score of style, his prose is subject to serious deductions." It is gratifying to note that an edition of Milton's Prose Works, by Mr. Myers, is among recent publications.



### His Prose Works in English.

His Prose as that of Bacon, was partly in Latin and partly in English; the English prevailing, however, as the Latin did with Bacon. These works may be said to consist of—The History of England up to the Norman Invasion and of Pamphlets on various topics. As to the History, it was his purpose to carry it down to his own time, but personal and political events obliged him to close it at the Norman Period. As far as it goes, however, it is valuable in giving us an example of Milton in the narrative style as, also, in revealing a special interest on the author's part in the early history of England. Opening with an account of the oldest British history, it closes with a brief account of Harold, the last of the Saxon Kings, while from first to last no occasion is lost to protest against the abuses of Romanism in Saxon England.

The Pamphlets, about twenty-five in number, are on various subjects—politics and church government, education and divorce, and, with few exceptions, are written in English. The series opens with—Reformation touching Church Discipline in England—and closes with—A Ready and Easy Way to establish a free Commonwealth. Of the series, nine are ecclesiastical; eight are political; four are on the question of divorce; two are in defense of himself; one is on education and one, on freedom of speech. With the exception of the tract on Education, the one object of all is to protest against the exercise of tyranny in church and state and social relations and to plead for

the exercise of that freedom which is the right of every man.

The titles of the most important are as follows:

*Reformation touching Church Discipline in England. Prelatical Episcopacy; An Apology for Smectymnuus. Reason of Church Government urged against Prelaty. The Divorce Controversy—four parts. Considerations touching the Means of removing Hirelings out of the Church. Animadversions on The Remonstrant. The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates. Iconoclastes. Ready and Easy Way to Establish a Free Commonwealth. Areopagitica. History of England (Britain). Tract on Education.*

There are three or four of these which Macaulay seems to prefer as he writes at the close of his celebrated essay on Milton—"We had intended to dwell at some length on the sublime wisdom of the *Areopagitica* and the nervous rhetoric of the *Iconoclast*; to point out some of those magnificent passages which occur in the *Treatise of Reformation* and *The Animadversions on the Remonstrant*."

It is not necessary, in the discussion before us, to emphasize any one of these treatises save to say that by general consent the *Areopagitica*,—*A Plea for the liberty of unlicensed printing*—is accorded the first place among his English works.

His Latin *Treatise on—Christian Doctrine*, published in 1824, and giving origin to Macaulay's *Essay on Milton*, is by far the most valuable prose production of the author.

Confining ourselves to his English authorship, we shall notice first of all,—*The Chief Defects of his style*.

## CHIEF DEFECTS OF HIS STYLE.

### (1.) Anglo-Latin Diction and Construction.

This frequent use of Latin terms and forms is to some extent, pardonable in a mind trained precisely as was that of Milton. He had been educated from a boy in the daily drill of that Latin verse-making so common in all the preparatory English Schools of his time. Before entering the university and while in it, Latin composition was an essential part of his duty. The proficiency which he reached is well known in literary history. In such an example as he gives us at the age of nineteen, under the title of a "Vacation Exercise" written in Latin and English, we see this early habit. Later, in the troublous times of Cromwell, he is chosen to the office of Latin Secretary. Accepting the appointment, his Cambridge drill is utilized and perfected by state correspondence. In the very year preceding his death, his Latin verses are republished in connection with his English poems. Some of his works, as stated, were written in Latin instead of English and left by the author in their ancient form. •

It is not strange, therefore, that we find this foreign element in all his prose. With Bacon, the use of the Latin arose partly from the nature of his subject and partly from his view as to the inferiority of the English. With Milton, the use of it was rather a second nature, the result of carefully formed literary habit. Hence, to a careful reader of the prose of Milton it will appear that the Latinism of his language extends beneath the language itself. When we read

such phrases as—Inquisitorient Bishops; Temporizing and Extemporizing Licensers; Exquisitest Books—it is evident that the Latinizing is not merely verbal. The same element is found in sentence and paragraph and even in the thought beneath them, so that the compromise effected between the native and the foreign makes it difficult to state which has the precedence. Were Milton, in his diction, more like Bunyan and less like Browne and Burton, the inherent worth of his prose would at once give it power and currency. Instead of this we note harsh inversions and cumbrous constructions. Our attention is called, at every point, rather to the earlier and cruder forms of English than to its more modern improvements. It is thus that Pattison properly speaks of “the absence of construction” by which he means—of clear construction. He adds, “Milton does not seem to have any notion of what a period means. He leaves off, not when the sense closes but when he is out of breath.” There is truth in this. Not a few of those passages so often quoted by critics as examples of clear and elegant English, are hopelessly involved and must be annotated and explained in order to be readable. Milton would have presented a clear diction and structure had he known “small Latin” and given full expression to his English speech. It must be added here that the technical and polemic topics discussed by the author did much to encourage this free use of Latin idiom and structure. In fact, it largely made it necessary.

The author seemed to be aware of what the English language could do and ought to do and is found giving special attention to its early forms and varied

uses. Archbishop Trench, in his philological manuals, is careful to call frequent attention to the fact that Milton was one of a few who looked into language etymologically rather than superficially. "He is the first English writer," says one, "who possessing in the ancient models a standard of the effect which could be produced by choice of words, set himself to the conscious study of our native tongue with a firm faith in its undeveloped powers." While this remark applies more particularly to his poetry, it has an illustration as well in his prose. His diction, after all, is better than his construction. He never seems to have at command in his prose, that easy, facile and natural style that is so conspicuous in his shorter poems. He is here at a disadvantage and the composition is labored. In this respect, Hooker and Bacon are vastly his superiors. Milton's style, therefore, is on these grounds inferior in clearness and finish. There are too many "colossal involutions;" too many repetitions and classical phrases to make it a model for the student.

## (2.) Faulty Imagery.

It is excessive, crude and somewhat overwrought. The too frequent use of figure and principal terms seems to have the same effect on the style that excessive emphasis has in elocution. The very end aimed at is defeated. The effect of this on the reader is in the line of mental weariness. The uniformity is oppressive. Scarcely has the attention been called to an image or a series of images, than it is turned to consider another. In the multiplicity of the illustra-

tions, we are often at a loss to discern the truth to be illustrated. Even the monotony of excellence is wearisome. The principle of contrast must enter. This is especially true as to figure, in that it is a use of language aside from the common use. If the uncommon is made common, all distinctions are effaced and the style is as flat as a Western prairie. The faults here alluded to would be of a far less serious character were the imagery itself of a poorer type. That sublime and well governed imagination which safely carries him in his *Paradise Lost* through all heights and depths and which carries the reader with him seems to be absent here. In fine, he is, in his prose, working in a sphere in which there is but little demand for the highest type of the constructive imagination. The author, however, insists upon calling it into play at every point. Here is the explanation of the failure. The times were too stirring and the questions too practical to admit of any fanciful soarings and displays of art. There was very little of the poetic in the Great Rebellion of 1640, or in the Commonwealth reaction, and nothing but solid prose of the most substantial order would meet the case. Milton saw this and yet with his poetical nature yielded too much to poetic instinct. The result is that the imagery is foisted upon the style rather than being its natural dress. The art is too evident. Such expressions as, "new vaulted paganism," "the fangs and gripes of a boiling and queasy conscience" are as much violations of true imagery as of chaste diction. They are an awkward attempt to introduce the metaphorical when it is not demanded. The sum of the matter is well expressed by Taine

as he writes—"Imagination carried him away and enchained him in metaphor." Mr. Pattison, in his recent biography, exalts far too highly, as we think, this imaginative feature in Milton's prose style. If we interpret it aright, it is void of special literary excellence.

### (3.) Personal Allusions and Invective.

It is quite easy for us, with the character of Milton and his times before us, to discover some of the reasons which allured him to indulge in such invective. His feeling toward many of the existing evils in church and state was that of a fiery indignation. His soul was vexed by the prevailing order of things. Failing to draw a sharp dividing line between the sin and the sinner, he poured out his wrath against men and classes with more than Davidic force. He exhausts the language of abuse and often descends to the level of the partisan and public scold. Scarcely a page of his controversial prose is free from this while, at times, entire treatises are devoted to it. Such are—*The Animadversions* and *The Answer to Salmasius*. He speaks of bishops as "ill bred sons" "ravens that will pick out the eyes of Christians." He alludes to the "saucy tongues of the silly Holland scholar" and so on. He indulges in imprecations as David did without David's reason for it. All this gives to his prose a rough, ragged and violent character which is anything but literary and makes it impossible for it to be quoted as in any sense a model of artistic grace and neatness. It is military and menacing in its tone and stirs up the baser pas-

sions of the reader. As we read it we are more inclined than ever to endorse the author's "left-handed" theory and allow him, in the sphere of poetry, to indulge his strongest feelings with Samson the giant, and with Satan. The only bright side to all this is, the revelation that it gives us of the author's passionate hatred of what he felt to be wrong. What he despised he despised with Saxon intensity.

The discussion of Milton's prose, in so far as it is commendable, is now in place.

### LITERARY MERITS OF STYLE.

Prose passages of rarest excellence are found. Such are seen in his "Reason of Church Government" when he "invokes that Eternal Spirit who can enrich with all utterance and knowledge"; when in his—Reformation in England—he appeals "to the Triune God to aid him in his work against the enemies of the church." So especially in the *Areopagitica*. As to special features, we notice.

#### (1.) *Ingenuousness or Sincerity of Style.*

He was, in this respect, the Luther of his day. He was in literature what Cromwell was in the state. What he thought he uttered with all his heart. This lends a moral clearness to his style which is of great value and serves to make it rhetorically clear where it otherwise would not be.

There is no greater need in prose style than this quality of naturalness—the frank expression of the writer's personality in his own way. So potent a



factor is this in the sum total of qualities that it serves to make the previous literary errors somewhat negative in their effect. It involves much more than at first sight appears, such as, the writer's individuality as a man and an author, courage in the formation and maintenance of his own convictions; freedom from everything in the line of the mechanical and servile and a general prevalence of what is healthful and attractive. No man has stronger temptations than the writer to act as a mouthpiece or scribe for others in the sacrifice of his own independence and with no one is ingenuousness more of a virtue. Just to the degree in which literature is time serving and evasive it is worthless either in a practical or artistic point of view. Milton has serious faults as a prose writer but he had the great excellence of Puritan outspokenness. If the writer follows the high counsel—"To thine own self be true," in whatever else he fails he will not fail in securing the attention and respect of his readers. Naturalness is conciliatory in its effect.

## (2.) Directness of Purpose.

Definiteness of idea and object is one of the prime principles of writing. Everything in the writer's plan must have a purpose in it and a controlling purpose. In the etymological sense of the word, there must be nothing impertinent. The language, general method and style must be relevant to the one design. Few authors of English Prose have had a clearer aim in their authorship than Milton. His pamphlets on questions of state were so closely confined to that

topic that they could well be classified in the state archives of England under the head of civil documents. His treatises on ecclesiasticism would find fitting place in a theological library as those on the divorce question would in a library of social science. Whatever the topic, he never yielded the grasp he had taken of it until he had done with it. It is this very directness of purpose and procedure that made his tracts at the time so telling and awakened such bitter opposition. It was not simply because he opposed despotism in politics and religion, but because he offered it as he did in a kind of challenging manner, just as John Knox had done in Scotland and Cromwell did in Milton's time. In fact, in this middle period of Milton's life—the prose period—his style partook of the character of the time. It was aggressive and martial. He aimed his words as the Ironsides did their muskets—right at the mark, and when he struck the target, the result was visible.

Here again, prose style may learn a lesson from Milton, to the effect that pertinence is a literary virtue, that nothing is gained by indirectness. Circumlocution is a figure of speech and, as such, is exceptional. In the writer as in the orator direct address to the audience is all important. This argues clear thinking, a clear knowledge of the subject and a conception of the writer's office as a something more than a literary pastime. This business-like element is not incompatible with high literary art and is a healthful protest against that aimless writing which is so common among us.

These two qualities lead to the third and crowning feature of Milton's style.

## (3.) Impassioned Energy.

Next to clearness this is the most important feature of prose style and, as far as Milton is concerned, ranks as the first. No one can read a page of his best prose apart from the narrative portions, and not be profoundly impressed. As one rises from the reading of such a forensic treatise as—*The Areopagitica*, he feels as Cromwell felt who after its perusal proceeded at once to establish in the realm by official statute that liberty of speech for which it argued.

“When God commands to take the trumpet,” he says, “and blow a blast, it lies not in man’s will what he shall say.” This has a soldierly sound in it and speaks of the masculine cogency for which he was noted. “Though all the winds of doctrine were let loose to play upon the earth, so truth be in the field, we do unjustly to doubt her strength. Who ever knew truth put to the worse in a free and open encounter!” The vigor of this impassioned utterance reminds us of Luther at the Diet of Worms. It is the old Teutonic spirit. So in his trenchant discussion of the divorce question, after remarking that St. Paul did not allow the right of the woman to usurp authority over the man, he indignantly asks—“If the apostle could not suffer it, into what mold is he mortified who can?” Such are some of those cogent passages to which Macaulay must refer when he says, “Not even in the earlier books of the *Paradise Lost* has the great poet ever risen higher than in those parts of his controversial works in which his feelings, excited by conflict, find a vent.” There was everything in the nature of the author and in the peculiar cast of

the age to lead to this fiery utterance. A puritan in his religious tendencies and a republican in his politics, he was obliged to see, on the one hand, the tyrannical authority of the prelatical church and, on the other, the despotic rule of the state. His liberal and catholic nature was profoundly stirred by all this and he protested against it by voice and pen. He saw at once what his relation to the age was. It was one of antagonism and he boldly met it. It was no time for poetry but it was a time for prose and above all for a fervid and effective prose. No later writer of English has surpassed him at this point. He used "words that burn." They are often at a white heat. Hence his language is full of sharp rejoinder, of fiery invective, of the boldest forms of figure, of challenge, protest and accusation, so that even at this late date when the issues at stake have quite disappeared, the reader is aroused by them and must take sides in the questions discussed. Already had the author defined poetry to be "sensuous and passionate" but he rises here to a different order of emotion, and expresses his deepest self. In all this Milton was himself. His forcible writing is but the manifestation of his vigorous spirit. It would have been just as impossible for Milton to have written one of the condensed didactic essays of Bacon as for Bacon to have penned one of those passionate appeals. In this respect he was more nearly anticipated by Hooker although devoid of that philosophic dignity by which the earlier writer was marked. It is just here most of all that Milton's Prose style may be said to be truly representative, and commendable. It is so in its impassioned force and may be consulted by the student

as an example of the vigorous element in style. He is here superior to any of his predecessors and finds in Edmund Burke, Chatham, Grattan, and the modern British orators those who most fitly reproduce him. It is the true oratorical style of prose. These pamphlets are orations rather than treatises or dissertations. They would have sounded better than they read.

Here again we come in contact with a quality of prose as excellent as it is rare. In common with naturalness and directness of purpose, it is seldom seen, so that the charge of dullness or want of spirit made against so much of English Prose is justly founded. The extreme prevalence of the newspaper and the novel is a partial protest against this so called, didactic prose. It is prosaic. The infusion of this impassioned element into ordinary discourse would be of vital value. It should not be confined to the oration or to fiction but have consistent place in all forms. Genuine feeling is potent wherever expressed and has place in prose as well as poetry.

Milton was strongest here and often passed the line of moderation into the denunciatory and severe, but it was a pardonable fault. A tame, insipid, soulless style is no style at all. It is a far more dangerous extreme than that of animation.

A few extracts from the *Areopagitica* will evince this vigorous earnestness—

“Truth and understanding are not such wares as to be monopolized and traded in by statutes and standards. What is it but a servitude like that imposed by the Philistines not to be allowed the sharpening of our own axes but we must repair from all quarters to twenty licensing forges! I could recount what I have seen and

heard in other countries where this kind of inquisition tyrannizes. It was in Italy that I found and visited the famous Galileo a prisoner to the Inquisition for thinking on astronomy otherwise than Franciscan and Dominican licensers thought."

"Give me the liberty to know, to utter and to argue freely according to conscience above all liberties."

"There be those who perpetually complain of schisms and sects and make it such a calamity that any man dissents from their maxims. They are the dividers of unity who permit not others to unite those dissevered pieces which are yet wanting to the body of truth."

"To be still searching what we know not by what we know, still closing up truth to truth as we find it, this is the golden rule in theology and makes up the best harmony in a church."

In noting therefore, the place of Milton in English Prose, it may be stated that his faults and his merits are alike prominent. In studying the faults, we are inclined, at first, to set him aside altogether as a standard. In the survey of the merits, our views change and we accord him a leading place. There is, beyond doubt, much room for diversity of opinion here. In diction and sentence, imagery and finish of style, he is inferior. On the other hand, he is in the main, clear. He is always natural, direct and forcible so that when the balance is struck, it is found to be largely in favor of the author.

It is because his prose exhibits in prominent form some of the indispensable qualities of style that we accord him a place of prominence.

Sir Egerton Brydges has well expressed it in the striking passage.

"He was in his style  
Naked and stern and to effeminate ears  
Perchance even harsh: but who will dare dispute  
His strength and grandeur?"

The fact is, these early styles—those of Bacon, Hooker and Milton while they will not bear the closest critical scrutiny, cannot be spared from the language. With all their faults, they are *typical*. They are so full of thought, character, dignity, personality and power, that they must be assigned a large place in the area of English Prose, nor must it be forgotten that even where these able men were weak, they might have been strong had they lived two or three centuries later. In their place and time they were representative as Addison and Macaulay were in theirs.

It is a most fortunate circumstance in the history of our prose that its first exponents were men of such mental calibre and that its first productions were marked by such depth and power. The foundations of our prose were thus laid so deep and broad as to defy every assault in the line of the superficial and false. Whatever occasional departures may be noticed along the line of English Prose from this original vigor, they will be found to be transient and indications will be noted of a speedy return to the primitive order of things. It is not in the *Arcadia* of Sydney; in Burton's *Anatomy* or in the *Euphuus* of Lyly, but in Hooker's *Polity* Bacon's *Essays* and Milton's *Pamphlets* that we find the basis of our best modern prose. We shall discuss more recent and more excellent prose writers but none more *characteristic* than these earlier names. Modern prose begins as far back as the days of Elizabeth. Before it could become settled, it was formative and transitional.

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## CHAPTER IV.

### THE PROSE STYLE OF JONATHAN SWIFT.

#### Brief Biographical Sketch.

BORN Nov. 30th, 1667, in Dublin. Educated at Trinity College, Dublin, 1682. Thence to England, 1689. Secretary to Sir Wm. Temple. Went to Ireland as Prebendary of Kilroot, 1694. Took Church Orders. Returned to Temple, 1696. In the Vicarage of Laracor, Ireland, 1699. Dean of St. Patrick's, Dublin, 1713. Visited England, 1726. Died Oct. 19th, 1745.

English critics, with but few exceptions, consent to give to Jonathan Swift a prominent place among our standard prose writers. Whatever views may have been entertained by different biographers and readers relative to his moral character or the occasion of his eccentricities, there has been but little difference of opinion as to his authorship. Historians speak of him as the erratic but brilliant Dean. Others declare that whoever relies upon his authority in the use of language may regard himself safe, while not a few go so far as to place him at the very front of the literary talent of his time.

#### His Prose Writings.

Swift was emphatically a writer of prose. It is true that he indulged at times in the composition of

verse as in his Poems to Stella, his Legion Club and The Pindaric Odes, but this was his strange work. The remark made to him by Dryden in reference to the Odes, "Cousin Swift, you will never be a poet," would apply equally well to all his poetic productions. He was even more distinctively a prose author than Addison himself and his fame must rest solely upon what he did in this department.

First in order and rated by many critics as the ablest of his productions is, *The Tale of a Tub*. This was probably written as early as 1692, but not published till 1704. In this pamphlet the author uses allegory as the medium of expression and places before his readers the three prominent ecclesiastical orders of his day, Anglican, Presbyterian and Papal. Under the image of three sons of a deceased father tampering with the will which had been left them, he takes occasion to hold up to ridicule these conflicting sects. At one time, he lashes with unsparing vigor the extreme procedures of the Papal church. In a milder but an equally effective vein, he holds up to derision the heresies of the English Dissenters, taking occasion when decisions must be made, to make them in accordance with the acknowledged claims of the Established Church. Equally sarcastic are what he calls, The Digressions from The Tale. In these, he defines the true and the false critic; treats of instruction and diversion; and gives a digression in praise of digressions. In all these discussions, his weapon is irony and he wields it with pronounced effect. The literary success of the work was unbounded. As to the general moral effect is produced, relative to the pending questions of ecclesi-

asticism, we find the very church it was designed to favor regarded it as conducive to levity and looseness in practical religion. This is the fact despite the author's assertion—"If any one opinion can fairly be deduced from the book contrary to religion and morality, I will forfeit my life."

In the same year (1704) appeared—*The Battle of the Books*. This was based upon a narrow controversy between Boyle and Bentley as to the genuineness of the epistles of Phalaris, based also, on the far wider question as to the relative excellence of the ancients and moderns.

The dispute was opened in favor of the Moderns by the French writers—Fontenelle and Perrault. Sir Wm. Temple, the patron of Swift, answered on behalf of the Ancients. To this, in turn, reply was made by Walton and Bentley on behalf of the Moderns. At this point Swift took up the discussion in his usual satirical vein. Under the image of a battle in the royal library at St. James' between ancient and modern books, he vindicated the old at the expense of the new, and dealt out some merciless criticisms upon the authors of the later school.

Resting awhile from authorship when engaged in the duties of his parish and the state, he appeared in 1708, in several successive papers. In his paper entitled—*The Sentiments of a Church of England Man*—we have the religious and political views of one who with apparent inconsistency called himself—"A Whig wearing a gown." In the same year appeared the highly popular—*Bickerstaff Papers*—elicited by the morbid excess to which the astrology of the eighteenth century was carrying the English people.

The contemptuous burning of the treatise by the Inquisition at Portugal exactly expressed the enraged sentiments of all the almanac compilers in the British realms.

Now appeared also, his famous—*Argument against Abolishing Christianity*—in which irony is expressed in essence and which Dr. Johnson is pleased to call “happy and judicious.” To this there succeeded in the following years—

*A Vindication of Bickerstaff* (1709); *Letter to the October Club* (1711)—a company of a hundred Tories bent upon the reform of the existing government; *A Proposal for Correcting, Improving and Ascertaining* (making sure) *the English Tongue* (1712). *The Conduct of the Allies* (1712). In this state paper he took occasion to protest against the unfair relation in which England stood in the Triple Alliance between Germany and the Low Countries in the Spanish War. He brought to light the sufferings of his country at the hands of the mercenary Marlborough, and called upon the nation for its own protection, to institute immediate peace.

Swift's influence here is seen in the fact that the call was heard and heeded. In the space of two months eleven thousand copies were sold. The cry was for peace, and now was open that national movement, the approaching result of which was, the deposition of the existing authorities, the elevation of the Tories to political power and the final peace of Utrecht in 1713. Dr. Smith pronounces it “the most successful pamphlet ever printed.” In close relation to this, there followed—

*The Public Spirit of the Whigs*, (1714).

*The Drapier Letters* (1724). This occasion, as is well known, was the attempt made by a Mr. Wood, of England, to secure a patent by which he could coin £180,000, of half-pence and farthings for Ireland, so destitute then, of copper money. The patent was ratified by the king and about to be applied. Swift caught at once, the meaning of the movement and the animus of the man behind it. He saw it to be a selfish and purely personal scheme, and began to expose it. The Irish were aroused and such a storm of indignation as burst forth had never been seen in social history. Drapier was the idol of the hour.

*Gulliver's Travels* appeared in 1726, in four parts.

In Part I., is, *The Voyage to Lilliput*, in which is satirized the government of George I.

In Part II., is, *The Voyage to Brobdingnag*, and special reference is made to William III.

In Part III., the learned world becomes the victim of the satire, in a *Voyage to Laputa*.

In Part IV., is the *Voyage of the Houyhnhnms*. The book is a satire on the human race.

Other productions may be cited as follows: *Memoirs as to the Queen's Ministry*. *Journal to Stella*. *Memoirs of Captain Creighton*. *Discourse as to Nobles and Commons*. *Paper on various topics—Religion, etc.*

### CHARACTERISTICS OF HIS STYLE.—FAULTS.

In order to pursue such a discussion impartially, care must be taken to connect the man and the author. His personal peculiarities and his violations

of moral propriety are to be noted as we study his style. There is a sense, in which it may be said, that Swift was a somewhat better author than a man and yet his personality goes far to determine his character as a writer. We remark—

### (1.) Absence of Literary Elegance.

In this particular at least the man and the author agreed. If Swift had been a purer man his literary style would have been more attractive. Comparing his prose at this point with Addison's or Lamb's or with that of Irving, its inferiority is at once seen. The texture of his spirit was too gross and coarse to make it possible for him to conceive of literary grace and finish as Macaulay conceived of them. This defect is seen in subject matter and in style alike. He discusses all topics in a kind of rough-and-ready method better adapted to the satisfaction of the many than of the cultured few. No one is so bold as to connect Swift's name with the highest forms of literary art.

Hence, he is never more at home as a prose writer than in the unrefined imagery of *Gulliver's Travels* or in those harsh invectives which he pours out against his political and ecclesiastical foes. In some of his papers, such as, *The Modest Proposa!* this buffoonery descends to ribaldry and the low water-mark of literary rudeness is reached. His *Journal to Stella* reminds one of *Rosseau's Confessions*. The points of similarity between the French infidel and the English Dean are not infrequent.

The fact is, that with the character he had it is amazing that his style is as clean as it is. His ten-

dencies were low. He would rather pen a quasi-moral letter to Stella than discuss a high class theme on the lofty ground of reason and moral law. Even if his theme be—A Project for The Advancement of Religion—he will succeed in disgusting every sensitive taste ere he has advanced a half dozen paragraphs. In Gulliver's Travels, especially at the close, the effect is simply revolting until we are assured that of all satires on humanity, Swift himself is the most pronounced. Dr. Johnson is rugged in his style; Swift is rude. Johnson lacks smoothness and finish; Swift lacks propriety.

## (2.) An Inferior Order of Imagination.

Though this faculty has its special function in poetry as creative and pictorial, it has in prose, also, rightful place as historic, philosophic and constructive. It saves prose from being prosaic. Both on its mental and moral side, Swift's imagination was of the lower type. Even where it is free in its action from moral obliquity, it takes the form of fancy rather than that of imagination proper, and rarely if ever rises to the level of original constructive power. There is an absence of a high poetic power of representation as applied to prose, and as seen in the prose of Milton and Hooker. In this respect, he was far below Addison, where imaginative ability was sound if not brilliant. One of his biographers—Sir Walter Scott—goes so far as to say—"He never attempted any species of composition in which either the sublime or the pathetic was required of him." In the sphere of allegory, wit and analogy, he was at home, but there are forms of mental action lying on

the borders of true imagery and not within them. Here again, the relation of mind to character is evident. It was morally impossible for Swift to rise to that sublimity of conception which marks the action of natures ethically pure. Such a modus was totally foreign to him nor could he adopt it when offered. The main feature of sublimity in an author is what Longinus terms—elevation of spirit. Of this the Irish Dean was devoid. He walked with his face to the earth.

## FEATURES OF MERIT.

### (1.) Force and Spirit.

Strange extremes exist here among the opinions of English critics. Those who follow the guidance of Dr. Johnson assert that there was little or no force in anything he wrote and that those treatises which seemed to occasion such radical changes in public sentiment at the time did so through the excited passions of the readers. Others see nothing but impassioned cogency in his papers and are willing to credit to him all those general movements in society and the state of which the history of that time is so full. There is apparent truth in each of these positions. The first is plausible in that those political changes might have been due to the good judgment of Swift as an interpreter of the nature of the times rather than to his style as an author. This theory would give him credit on the score of foresight rather than of force. As to the second view, it cannot be denied that some of these questions were so presented as to awaken and maintain attention and modify



materially the secret councils of Queen Anne. No one can note the signal triumph of the *Drapier Letters* as to the social economy of the realm, or the effect produced by the *Bickerstaff Papers* and other writings and consistently charge their author with mental weakness. Many of the topics which he discussed were of such a nature in their practical relation to the state and people that he could not but be fervent in their expression. It is true that the allegorical character of his style detracted somewhat from its literary power, that he had in his style little of the strictly persuasive element of oratorical writing or impassioned strength such as Milton evinced, still, Swift cannot in justice be termed a nerveless or indifferent prose writer. The more prolonged and thorough one's study is of his real character as seen in his writings the more evident it is that he was possessed of true literary vigor and rose at times to the level of true passion. Some of his papers such as, *A Letter to a Young Clergyman*, seemed to decry feeling in favor of cold rational methods. Here he has been misunderstood. He is not pleading against fervent force in style, but in behalf of more decided intellectual skill. One of his trenchant paragraphs well expresses his view as he writes to his young clerical friend, "If your arguments be strong, in God's name offer them in as moving a manner as the nature of the subject will properly admit, but beware of letting the pathetic part swallow up the rational, for I suppose philosophers have long agreed that passion should never prevail over reason." This is perfectly clear and eminently safe doctrine. He holds to a wise and sound rhetorical principle when he insists that dis-

course shall be possessed of as much passion as the subject matter will allow. To come short of that would betray weakness; to go beyond it would expose to ridicule.

In fact, Swift was deeply in earnest in most of his writings. Against the fraud of Wood as to the coinage and against what he conceived to be the political abuses of the time he protested with all the ardor of a Chatham or a Burke.

Swift's style is in no sense tame or insipid. It bristles and sparkles at times, and in its idiomatic terseness often reminds us of the manner of Carlyle. Pungency and point abound. In some of his writings which are morally objectionable and which as Mr. Stephen argues justly "ought to have been burnt" this incisive element is most apparent. In a literary sense, the style is, thus, readable. Its animation attracts to the perusal of it and we are not allowed to become weary.

Swift played a part here that was played in France by Voltaire, or by Rabelais to whom Voltaire compared him.

## (2.) His Satirical Power.

In this he has been rarely, if ever, equaled. He has been aptly called—The Lord of Irony. He is not simply ironical at times by way of a pleasing literary variety but is so throughout. He is more than sarcastic. Sarcasm itself seems to be embodied in him. He was born and bred a satirist. The element is in the blood and bone. It was his meat and drink to indulge in it. He enjoyed nothing more than this

literary dissection of a victim in cold blood. "Swift," says Taine, "has the *genius* of insult. He is an inventor of irony as Shakespeare is of poetry." As he himself proudly asks in one of his own poems—

"Who dares to irony pretend  
Which I was born to introduce  
Refined it first and showed its use?"

This was an honor which truly belonged to him in prose as to Dryden and Pope in verse, and it was unsafe for any of his day to question his right in this realm. Ironical as he was, he was always the master of the irony and, in the main, used it for wise and proper purposes. He knew where and when and whom to strike. It is a redeeming feature in his character and style that he rarely exercises his sarcasm apart from the element of pleasantry. There is always visible a vein of genuine humor and good nature so that however much the language might sting and smart, it did not awaken revenge on the part of its subject. Addison in one of his letters to Swift praises him for this quality of style. One of his intimate friends speaks of it as his "unlucky quality" in that it placed him at the disposal of designing men. Swift himself speaks of

"His vein ironically given,  
As with a moral view designed  
To cure the vices of mankind."

He suggestively alludes to his manner of writing "as his own humorous biting way." In this respect, Swift was something of a humorist. He had a kind nature after all and in this particular reminds

us more of the manner of the genial Cervantes than of the sour and cruel Voltaire. In some of his shorter papers such as,—*An Argument against Abolishing Christianity, A Project for the Advancement of Religion, A scheme to make a Hospital for Incurables*, this playful pleasantry rises to its acme. Beyond doubt, lasting good was done by him in his own day through this serio-comic method. He struck straight and hard, and yet with no malice in the blow. Swift is said to have cultivated, purposely, the cynical, censorious style and to have indulged in irony because he loved to wound a sensitive spirit. Something of this there was here and there evident, but it is not frequent enough to characterize his style as acrid and captious. He believed in the thorough criticism of men and measures and adopted satire as Butler and Pope did and as Horace and Juvenal did—for benign ends. In—*The Apology*—which he wrote as an answer to those who were offended by some passages in—*The Tale of a Tub*—he dwells at length on this very topic and proved conclusively that his motive was good throughout his satire. No one can read this *Apology* and not be convinced, as never before, of the ingenuousness of the author as a literary critic.

### (3.) Individuality and Independence.

Swift is unique in personality and style. He was himself and no other one. In the most wayward of his eccentricities he was consistent with himself. His oddness was to him perfectly natural and had he attempted to imitate any one in any particular he would

have failed as certainly as Dr. Johnson would have done in a similar attempt. Swift never attempted strictly dramatic writing. He could not successfully personate another. Even in his lunacy, there was this personal element. There was "a method in his madness" and it was his own. There was no other lunatic in Britain like him. As this principle applies to literature, it is not strange to read in a preface to one of the editions of his works—"that he had never been known to take a single thought from any writer, ancient or modern." This is, of course, an extreme statement and yet approximately true. No prose writer of English will stand testing at this point better than Swift. He aptly expresses of himself the same sentiment which Denham expresses of Cowley—that he

"To steal a hint was never known,  
But what he wrote was all his own."

In his words of sound advice to a young clergyman he says, in speaking of the excessive use of commonplace books for quotations, "I could wish that men of tolerable *intellectuals* would rather trust their own natural reason improved by a general conversation with books." This was, in fact, his own uniform practice. He was an author in the strict, etymological sense of the word—an increaser of knowledge and ideas. He pursued the plan of his notable predecessor—Bacon—in aiming to add to the sum and enlarge the bounds of human knowledge.

Swift does not appear to have been so much a reader of books as an observer of men and move-

ments and he learned from the latter more by far than he could have learned from the former. He trusted, as he would say, to his own *intellectuals*. In so far as general reading would enable him the better to utilize what he saw and heard, he availed himself of it.

Swift's style indicates clearly that he was a man who observed and thought for himself. His most extensive productions have for their very occasion and leading idea this independence of view in matters secular and religious. In many instances, he ran right athwart the current opinions of the hour and by his bold assertions assumed the part of a reformer of abuses. The opposition that he so provoked by his ecclesiastical and state papers proves alike his independence of view and his personal courage, and when assailed he was always ready to give a reason for his methods.

Mention has been made of the force and spirit of his style. This quality was the direct result of this freedom from servility that marked the man as it did the author. Swift had grave faults but he was not a time-server in an age of time-servers. In this respect, he was even Addison's superior as he was Lord Bacon's and more akin in temper to the intrepid Milton. Swift's style is his own. Its merits and faults are his. This does much to enhance the merits and atone for the faults.

#### (4.) Good Use of English.

No other English writer up to his time had a more sincere love for his native tongue than did Swift.

No one took a deeper interest in its development and proper use.

One of the first questions he asked as to any scholar brought to his notice was, as to his knowledge of English and interest in it. If there were ignorance and indifference that was enough to mark the man as grossly deficient. This feature appears at frequent intervals. In his political treatises he speaks of it. In *Gulliver's Travels*, he speaks of it; in his *Journal to Stella*, he naturally refers to it in that among his early pleasures at Temple's, had been Stella's instruction in English. At times, in the course of his writing when the logical structure would not demand it he would digress to the praise of his native speech. There are two of his papers in which he dwells with special emphasis on this subject; These are,—A Letter to a Young Clergyman, and—A Proposal for Ascertaining, Correcting and Improving the English Tongue. In the name of the educated classes of the nation he protests against the existing imperfections and corruptions of the language, especially as seen in common conversation and pulpit discourse. To the young divine he writes, "I should have been glad if you had applied yourself a little more to the study of the English Language, the neglect whereof is one of the most general defects among the scholars of this kingdom who seem not to have the least conception of a style, but remain in a flat kind of phraseology often mingled with barbarous terms and expressions peculiar to the nation." It is inspiring thus to see a master of English style rebuking and stimulating his countrymen as to their vernacular. It was because there were so few of

such reformers that Swift's position was important. In this respect he was taking up the work which Milton in his own way had furthered and which Dr. Johnson was materially to advance. Scarcely too much can be said on Swift's behalf in that he saw, in this respect, the need of the hour and up to the measure of his personal ability, satisfied it. The debt of modern English Philology to these earlier enthusiasts can never be fully paid.

In his Proposal, he laments that "our language is less refined than those of Italy, Spain or France;" notes the various ways in which a language may change; alludes to the special excellence of English from the time of Elizabeth to the Commonwealth; deprecates the excessive corruptions that came in with the civil wars so that the court was "the worst school in England;" grieves over the tendency to undue abbreviations of words and syllables and to false refinements of language and proceeds to suggest the organization of a body of scholars for the express purpose of "ascertaining (making sure) and fixing our language forever." He closes his Proposal by showing how such an enterprise would add to the glory of the English nation and serve to make the history of that day full of interest to the "times succeeding." No later scholar has ever pleaded for a special educational object with more zeal and disinterested love than did Swift for this Proposal. This, if nothing else, would make his name one of interest to every English student and lead us to expect as we open his writings the presence of a master of English. Hence, we find that in compass, and quality of diction as, also, in correctness and



vigor of sentence, Swift stands on a high literary level. In these respects, no writer up to his time has fewer prominent faults or reads more as a modern essayist. We are no longer obliged to do as is necessary with Hooker and Bacon and even Milton to have frequent resort to a glossary for the exposition of words and phrases. These are so rare as to afford no barrier. The language is English throughout and is a more modern English than the Elizabethan. We are in the period of Settled English rather than Formative or Transitional. We have as yet met no essayist who reads as smoothly and fluently and none to which, in a literary point of view, the student of style can be more safely referred.

In speaking of the author's use of English there are two features of style needing emphasis.

(a) *Ease and Naturalness of Expression.*

He had what is called in Scripture "the pen of a ready writer." He had "the gift of utterance."

Eccentric as he was, his manner as a writer was marked by freedom and naturalness. Whatever art there was in his style was adroitly concealed and every movement was marked by fluency and readiness. However forced his imagery seems at times to be, his diction was spontaneous and always germane to the subject. No writer had more thorough contempt for the affected fancies of Euphuism and the later French school in England than had Swift, and no one more fully carried out his theory. There was nothing artificial. One of the clearest confirmations of this fact is, that in the *Journal to Stella*, containing Swift's private correspondence, there is

no greater frankness of statement than in his more public productions. He is outspoken and ingenuous everywhere and in this respect widely differs from such authors as Goethe, Schiller and Addison who adopted one manner in public discourse and quite another in private.

Swift's ease of style—the absence of studied effect, is worthy of note. If the law propounded by Quintilian is correct and one is to write so clearly that the reader *must* understand him whether he will or not then Swift was clear and natural. He wrote as if it were the easiest thing possible for him to do. The page is in no sense labored but facile and free. The reader as he goes on rarely thinks of the author but of the subject matter. Language with Swift was a means, not an end. To set forth his ideas was the one object and no undue attention was given to the medium itself. Herein lies the perfection of literary style—that in its consummate art it gives the impression of absolute spontaneity. As Pope phrases it—"True ease in writing comes from art, not chance." Swift possessed this ease which is the final result and recompense of all art. His sentences read as smoothly as those of Macaulay and Lamb.

Nor had Swift gained such ease by haphazard but in the line of faithful devotion to authorship and literary law.

(b) *Verbal Plainness.*

In the twelfth chapter of his *Travels* he writes--  
"My principal design being to inform and not to amuse, I rather choose to relate plain matter of fact in the simplest manner."

"Proper words in proper places" is his terse

definition of a good style. In his advice to his clerical friend, he is especially explicit on this point. The first error to which he calls attention is, the use of "obscure terms" of which he adds "that he does not know a more universal and inexcusable mistake." He speaks of it as especially noticeable among the educated "that whereas a common farmer will make you understand in three words that his foot is out of joint, a surgeon, after a hundred terms of art will leave you in ignorance." In a somewhat indignant spirit at the ostentatious diction of the clergy, he writes—"I defy the greatest divine to produce any law, either of God or man which obliges me to comprehend the meaning of ubiquity, entity, idiosyncrasy and the like." He is of the opinion that nine-tenths of the terms used could be changed to the profit of the hearer. He asserts the principle, that the divine should have nothing to say to the wisest of men which the most uneducated could not understand; that the comprehension of washer-women and servant maids and daily laborers, should be the standard, rather than the conversation of savans. He is never weary in speaking of simplicity of style as that without which no human production can arrive at any great excellence. He takes the strong position, that when men are not plain, it is either from malice or pride of learning. He holds that the path of clearness lies in the line of nature. On this theory, a man to be obscure must be somewhat perverse. Continuing his attack against the pride of learning, his wrath gives way to irony and humor as he avows, that all the terms of abstract philosophy have with all

their defects, one great advantage—that they are equally understood by the vulgar and the preacher. He alludes very pertinently in this connection to the style of Bunyan with whose simplicity he was charmed,—“I have been better entertained and more inspired by a few pages in *Pilgrim's Progress* than by a long discourse on simple and complex ideas.” He felt attracted as Mr. Froude has been by the honest Saxon homeliness of the dreamer's diction.

In all this language we have a revelation not only of Swift's theory but of his daily practice as a writer. It is safe to say that in respect to plainness he has no superior in English Prose. No one has written so much and written more clearly. In the study of his style, there is a marked absence of any show of learning; of the drawing of distinctions without a difference or of using words for the sake of using them. So prominent is this feature, that what is called the natural style of prose was often sacrificed to it. He preferred intelligibility to high sounding eloquence of phrase. He was so intent upon saying plain things in a plain way for plain people that he was in danger, at times, of reaching the opposite extreme of tameness or undue familiarity. Hence, some critics speak of his style as *ordinary*. The fact is that because of its simplicity it is quite exceptional. Nothing is more common than literary obscurity. In his Antony-like method of “speaking right on” he needed but few of the devices of the schools and it was his bluntness that offended his enemies and secured his victories. He called things by their right names, used terms in their commonly accepted senses and had no faith in

Talleyrand's theory "that language is the art of concealing thought."

"'Twas his occupation to be plain." As to this quality of style, Swift followed in the line of Bunyan, Taylor, Fuller and De Foe and anticipated all the best essayists of the following centuries. He wrote a simpler English than any one of his contemporaries Addison not excepted, and in phraseology and structure was the most modern writer of the Augustan Age. In this respect, the student of expression may find in Swift much to admire and imitate. It is, certainly, a matter of deep regret that the moral character of the man was such, and many of his discussions of such a nature that the true excellence of the style is not allowed to have its full effect. One additional feature of his style must be noted.

### (5.) Freedom from Pedantry and Hypocrisy.

Mr. Leslie Stephen in the biography of the author makes frequent allusion to this characteristic of Swift's style. If we examine closely we shall find that most of his important writings were occasioned by his intense opposition to sham and parade of every sort. He was the Carlyle of the Augustan Age in his hatred of isms and frauds, and felt himself to be, as Carlyle did, a self-appointed censor and reformer. Thus, *The Tale of a Tub*, was as his biographer writes "another challenge thrown down to pretentious pedantry." So, in *The Battle of the Books*, he fought against scholastic pedantry as distinct from ecclesiastical. In the *Drapier Letters*, he rose to indignant protest against practical corruption under

the pretense of public spirited benevolence, while in *Gulliver's Travels* he indulged in a scathing satire against humanity itself as in turn, the author and the victim of whims and delusions. He feels it to be his mission to expose the disguise. So, even in his sermons and smaller papers, satire is the prominent word. There is, as might be supposed, a dangerous extreme in all this which Swift in his style did not escape. He laid himself open to the charge of cynical criticism and is not yet wholly exonerated. At times, as in *Gulliver*, he fairly prefigures the modern pessimists and lacerates for the sake of morbid pleasure. Hence, the intense bitterness expressed against him in his own day so that on his own confession, no less than a thousand papers were penned against him as a partisan in church and state. At heart, however, he was a better man and the explanation of his rancor is found in his opposition to hypocrisy. As far as this sentiment was healthy and under control it added vigor, point and spirit to his style and made him a practical rather than a speculative writer. His hatred of philosophy arose from its overdrawn distinctions and he thoroughly believed in every-day sense. One is struck in this respect with the business-like character of many of his papers. He did not confine himself to the great questions of church and state, society and letters, but wrote on the most practical topics of common life even down to—Directions to Servants. In his best mood Swift was a helpful critic. In his wayward moods, he was a cruel, heartless cynic, and not a little of his literary defect as a writer must be laid at the door of mental despondency.

In fine, the prose style of Swift had far more merits than faults. Lacking in grace and high imaginative power and often bordering on the censorious and cynical, it still possessed a force, a satirical point, an individuality, an ease and plainness of English usage and a downright practical bluntness that marked it as superior and make it still representative. No one probably will ever know the poignancy of his personal trials. The world was against him from the outset nor has he ever elicited to any degree such sympathy as has been freely accorded to Lamb and Goldsmith in hours of similar discouragement. That he wrote as he wrote amid such experiences is the greatest marvel of all. He has left a style notable for most of the essential qualities of good writing, save literary finish and cannot be said to have had his superior in English prose up to the days of George II.

#### References and Authorities.

Morley's Swift (Eng. Men of Let.). Forsters's Swift. Thackeray's English Humorists. Johnson's Lives of the Poets.

V

## CHAPTER V.

### THE PROSE STYLE OF JOSEPH ADDISON.

#### Brief Biographical Sketch.

BORN at Milston, May 1st, 1672. Entered Oxford, 1687. Traveled in Europe in 1699. Returned in 1703. Was Under-Secretary of State in 1706. Member of Parliament in 1708. Secretary to Lord Lieutenant in Ireland, 1709. Secretary of State in 1717; Resigned, 1718. Died at Kensington, June 17th, 1719.

#### Prose Works of Addison.

In 1709, Steele had begun the publication of his first periodical—The Tatler. He had written but a few numbers before Addison's attention was specially called to the author of them. His services were at once secured by Steele in the further prosecution of the work. Addison's history as a writer of periodical prose literature begins here with, The Tatler in 1709 and ends in 1719 with,—The Old Whig.

The Tatler began April 12th, 1709 and closed January 2nd, 1711. It was begun by Steele under the name of Isaac Bickerstaff and published, thrice a week. Of the two hundred and seventy-one papers comprising it, one hundred and eighty-eight were



written by Steele and forty-two, by Addison. The remainder were written by them jointly and by other less famous authors. The *Spectator* began March 1st, 1711, and was published daily to December 6th, 1712. Of its six hundred and thirty-five numbers, Addison wrote two hundred and seventy-four; Steele, two hundred and forty and Budgell, thirty-seven. The other numbers were written by various literary friends. At this point, The *Spectator* though not completed was temporarily abandoned and The *Guardian* was begun by Steele, March 12th, 1713. It was continued in daily issues till October 1st, 1713. Of its hundred and seventy-six numbers Steele wrote eighty-two, and Addison fifty-three. In June, 1714, The *Spectator* reappeared in its eighth volume. It ran nearly through the year with three papers weekly—"a volume," wrote Macaulay, "containing perhaps the finest essays, both serious and playful, in the English Language."

From December 23rd, 1715, to June 29th, 1716, a paper called, The *Freeholder*, appeared once a week. It was purely political, and Addisonian, written in the interests of the existing government of The House of Hanover against the claims of The Pretender and of The Papacy. Following this, were a few papers called, The *Old Whig* in reply to The *Plebeian* of Steele; an article or two to The *Lover*, and a few scattered tracts on the political and commercial questions of the time. Before these periodicals appeared there appeared, the *Essay on The Georgics* and *Remarks on Several Parts of Italy*, in 1697, and 1705 respectively. A posthumous work—*Dialogues on Medals*—1721, belongs to his English

Prose, as also, a treatise, in 1713, on *The Evidences of Christianity*.

The Essay referred to is prefixed to Dryden's *Virgil*; the *Travels in Italy* are full of interesting references to Roman history and Letters; the *Dialogues* is a learned and curious comparison between the inscriptions on medals and various points of Classical history alluded to in classical authors while the "Evidences" consists of a presentation of Pagan and Jewish testimony to Christ. Incomplete and indifferent as to style, it is important as evincing the author's inner self. As he nears the close of life he turns his thoughts, as Bacon in his *Meditations* and as Milton in his *Christian Doctrine*, to the great subject of religious belief and authority.

### His Preference for Prose.

Addison's poetry is by no means limited. It includes a period of production from 1693, when he wrote in verse to Dryden, on to *The Drummer*, in 1716, and is marked by such substantial poems as—*The Campaign*, *Rosamond* and *Cato*. His taste and talents, however, were in prose. If Milton here used his left hand, Addison used his right. As Milton, he gave to it the best period of his life and power. He did not enter on prose work as a side issue, but as the main issue. Even when engaged in poetry he felt that he was, in a sense, out of place and time and where he could not give to God and man the best account of himself. At the close of one of his poems he gives expression to these feelings as follows—

“I’ve done at length and now, dear friend, receive  
 The last poor present that my Muse can give.  
 I leave the arts of poetry and verse  
 To those that practice them with more success.  
 And so, at once, dear friend and Muse, farewell!  
 Of greater truth I’ll now prepare to tell.”

This greater truth of which Addison the poet spoke was that vast body of practical and miscellaneous prose of which he was to be the author.

### His Prose Style.

The closing sentence of Dr. Johnson’s exhaustive essay upon our author has become widely current. “Whoever wishes to attain an English style, familiar but not coarse and elegant but not ostentatious must give his days and nights to the study of Addison.” This judicial opinion remains to this day substantially in force. Despite the adverse criticism of the modern French school and the modern English school of liberal tendencies, these Addisonian Essays still hold their ground as leading specimens of English prose in many of its qualities. The word “familiar” as Johnson uses it is not yet obsolete, and has been unjustly perverted by the late censors to mean that type of prose which is sharply opposed to the literary. It is familiar in the sense of unconventional and not in the sense of common.

### SPECIAL FEATURES OF HIS STYLE.

#### (1.) Literary Gentleness and Grace.

This quality may be expressed by various terms. Johnson called it—elegance. Mr. Disraeli would

speak of it under—The amenities of Literature, as a neat facility of expression designed to attract the indifferent and please the fastidious. As we examine the nature of the times in which the author lived and study the particular object which he had in view in his periodicals, the explanation of this order of style will appear more plainly.

It was a time when the most *conciliatory temper* was demanded on the part of any one who desired a hearing. The author stood in the centre of the political excitement of Queen Anne's reign. Popular opinion was restless and violent and the standard of popular intelligence was low. It was, thus, of the very first importance for a public instructor to accept the civic and social status as he found it and within the limits of moral rectitude to make all possible concessions. "I must confess," says Addison, "were I left to myself, I should rather aim at instructing than diverting, but if we will be useful to the world, we must take it as we find it." It was the author's aim to conciliate in every worthy way: to adapt himself to his age rather than harshly oppose it; to be gracious even in his criticisms of men and things and thus to lead the populace to higher levels. He knew that in their ignorance they were shy of the teacher and his teachings and that in their frivolity they were suspicious of religious severity. "I must, however," says he, "entreat every person who reads this paper never to think of himself or any of his friends aimed at in what is said for I promise him never to draw a faulty character which does not fit at least a thousand people, or to publish a single paper that is not written in the spirit of benevolence." The error

of the time was thus rebuked while the erring were made to feel that the truest friend they had in England was the reproving and yet kindly Spectator. A further reason for the exercise of this affability of style is found in the fact that special attention was given by the periodical essayists of the time to the delicate questions of *domestic life and manners in England*. The Spectator does not confine itself to the outer circle of public life—to the ship, the market, the place of prayer and the Parliament. A more secluded area is entered and Addison is found in the drawing-rooms of the English homes. The delicacy of the position required most delicate address and description and a skill in literary art possessed by but few. As the populace was to be conciliated, the leaders of the realm were to be pleased. All the graces of prose style were in requisition. Addison saw at once that truth must be conveyed in affable manner. The most sensitive taste was to be consulted so as not to be offended. Criticism must be given in kindly forms and this order of literary gentleness was no more needed than it was germane to the character of Addison.

Addison's style is here the man himself. His prose is marked by suavity because he himself was amiable and generous. It is interesting to note, just here, that he purposely devoted several of his best papers to the discussion of Good-Nature. He defines it, shows the evil that results from the lack of it; states the best methods of its exhibition and exhorts his readers to its daily illustration. By this and similarly attractive features of his prose, the reader, unawares, is led into fullest sympathy with the writer.

Quite apart from the subject matter of his periodicals and their aptness to the ever varying circumstances of the hour, Addison secured his audience at the English breakfast table by reason of his genial good-nature as a writer. Tories and Whigs were alike charmed by it. The political pages of *The Freeholder* were as full of it as the society pages of *The Tatler* and *The Spectator*. Addison was welcome for the same reason for which Butler and Swift were unwelcome. He knew as they did not the more sympathetic side of human nature and how to address himself to it. He was in this respect the Washington Irving of English Prose.

## (2.) Plainness and Precision.

At this point the parallel often drawn between Addison and Swift is a just one. In fact, their literary characteristics may be said to have been common to the age of Anne. There is a studied absence of all such features of style as, redundance, inversion and circumlocution. There was very little verbal tinsel for the sake of effect, and no desire to conceal ignorance under a veil of words. The average intelligence of the time demanded clearness. In the earlier days of Lyly and Sydney when the chivalric order of things somewhat continued, there was a demand for the romantic and Euphuism was the result. Now, things had changed. The new civilization was practical and desired a type of literary expression in keeping with its character. In this respect he did what Bacon did and was aided by the time. "It was said of Socrates" writes Addison "that he brought philos-

ophy down from heaven to inhabit among men. I shall be ambitious to have it said of me, that I have brought philosophy out of closets and libraries, schools and colleges to dwell in clubs and assemblies, at the table and in coffee houses." He saw at once that it would be impossible for him or any one else to teach philosophy to the general public of that day in the strictly philosophic forms as Clarke and Berkeley taught it to the scholars. He therefore introduced it at the tables of English yeomen, divested of all its scholastic features and in the simplest forms of every day wisdom. He taught them philosophy without their suspecting it. It was in the popular meaning of the term, Common-Sense Philosophy. He did not endorse the doctrine that in order to be profound a man must be unintelligible or that because a man was understood by the average mind he was thereby proved to be mentally lacking. He did not believe in the idea that language was the art of concealing thought and therefore, never hesitated to decry that so called literary style which was learnedly obscure and mysterious. The prose writers of this age, as we shall see, had their faults, but they were not in this direction. They wrote plainly to plain people.

A question of interest has been started here by the critics—to what degree this adaptation of style to the middle classes modified Addison's intellectual power? Did he not in common with his colleagues sacrifice himself, at this point, to popular weakness? Did he not, moreover, lower the line of English Prose from the artistic to the plebeian level?

Whatever the order of Addison's mind was, his

clearness of statement and method were natural. Homeliness of speech sometimes bordering on bluntness was as much a part of him as it was of Bunyan or Fuller. Whatever he could or could not do in the sphere of abstract thought, he made it a matter of conscience to write and talk in the language of the many. So marked is this feature that it, at times, is carried to an extreme and he becomes, as Wordsworth in poetry, too familiar. Still, the fault, if a fault, was pardonable, and far more desirable than the frequent error of undue dignity and loftiness of style. Nor can it be argued that this in itself betokened an inferior order of intellectual power. Other things being equal, precision and plainness indicate clear and wide thinking. Some genius is required to present high truth in ordinary forms and it is unfortunate, at least, to view such a result as indicative of average talent only. In short, Addison's mental rank cannot be determined at this point one way or the other. The decision must be made up from the sum total of his writings and doings. It is in point here to note that verbal precision was carried to an unhealthful extreme by Addison and his school. So particular was he in composition, that, according to Warton, he would often stop the press to insert a new preposition or conjunction. He was as fastidious in prose as Pope and Dryden were in poetry. The greatest defect of Addison's style lies here, in close connection with one of his greatest merits. It is the absence of a deep undertone of pathos, what the French call, *unction*. All is clear, correct and elegant, but there is no literary inspiration. The reader would often tolerate a degree of incorrect-



ness, if so be a more emotional expression might ensue.

Addison might have been less correct, indeed, without being incorrect and would have more than gained in power what he lost in precision. It is at this point that Mr. Taine indulges in his most pungent criticism of Addison and not without reason. He speaks of his "commercial common-sense; his business-like resolutions and maxims." "What in the name of heaven," asks Taine, "would a Frenchman do if in order to move him to piety he was told that God's omniscience and omnipresence furnished him with three kinds of motives and then subdivided these into first, second and third? To put calculation at every stage; to come with weight and figures into the thick of human passion; to ticket them and classify them like bales; to tell the public that the inventory is complete and to lead them by the mere virtue of statistics to honor and duty,—such is this Addisonian method." This is irony in essence and, yet, not altogether undeserved. Verbal precision overreaches itself in Addison. It was, indeed, the error of the age. Still more marked in poetry, it was too conspicuous in prose, so that the artificial maxims of Boileau ruled in both spheres. Correctness was confounded with mechanism. Finish and fervor excluded each other. Here and there in Addison's writings there are traces of true passion. In some of his Italian Letters when his soul is stirred by the charms of nature and art; in his sacred lyrics and other poetry, the inner life is revealed. There was some emotion, if indeed, it could be reached. Still, his temperament was not of the impassioned order.

Even in poetry it is not sufficiently evident and is one of the reasons why Addison could never have made an eminent poet. His emotional range was much narrower than his mental. We have compared him to Irving in gentleness and grace. At this point the comparison fails. He lacked the sympathetic soul which marks the highest characters in prose or poetry. Addison, though among the first of our modern prose writers, is by no means the first. Part of the explanation lies in his want of deep-seated, impassioned earnestness. He was careful to a fault.

### (3.) Wit and Humor.

As among the Periodicals of the time in which Addison had a greater or less interest the Spectator revealed his personality more than did the Tatler or Guardian, so it may be said that among all the author's literary characteristics, humor is the most prominent. In fact, no student of Addison can understand him or his prose apart from a clear appreciation of this quality. There is a spontaneous overflow of good-nature in his papers which carries all before it and refreshes the mind of the reader. So decided is this element in the author's personality, and so desirous is he that every expression of it shall be genuine, that he takes occasion in several of his papers to show to his readers the precise nature of this quality of style. He is at special pains to call the attention of all aspirants in prose composition to the principle of *naturalness* as *essential* to all true humor. It was extremely fitting that in the reign of Anne when every member of a club house thought

himself a born wit, Addison should fee' compelled to take up his pen and modestly call attention to his own merits and success as a Humorist. Such papers were as readily called forth by the excessive literary affectation of the time in this direction as were the protests of Jeremy Collier against the immoral drama of his day. If wit was attempted, the result was either burlesque or pedantry. Every writer ventured upon the most absurd allusions and figures. It was the golden age of the anagram, the acrostic and the far-fetched simile. Not to be a punster was an unpardonable literary defect. The Euphuism of the days of Sydney was revived. We may well imagine the excessive limits to which this vicious custom was at length carried until a literature which should be daily increasing in power was in danger of becoming a victim to the most extreme mental conceit of the hour. Among all the other benefits which accrue to English Letters from the work of Addison as a prose writer, there is scarcely a more important one than this—the restoration of English humor to its rightful sphere. In every way he asserted that genuine wit need not be allied to gross vulgarity as was true in Dryden's time, but could do its best work in the interests of virtue and public morals. "Among all kinds of writing," says Addison, "there is none in which authors are more apt to miscarry than in works of humor. Nothing is so much admired and so little understood as Wit." This language is used by the author in close connection with that notable statement—"that the great and only end of these my speculations is to banish vice and ignorance out of the territories of Great Britain." This element of

pleasantry in the papers of Addison is exhibited in various ways, and most especially, in the different characters brought before us as mentioned by Steele in the second number of *The Spectator*. Prominent among these as the central figure of Addison's heroes, no one would fail to place the name of Sir Roger de Coverley. He is a general favorite among the author's readers and, indeed, the author's favorite so that he declared they were born for one another. Sir Roger was a large, natural, eccentric country gentleman and the leading representative of the old October Club. By his strict adhesion to Tory principles in church and state he was a true partisan and politician of his time. Filled to the brim with whims and fancies he was the life of every circle he entered and won the esteem even of the great by his unbounded joviality. Saddened by unsuccessful love; indifferent to the fashions of the world so that his doublet had been "in and out a dozen times"; too impartial not to be an oracle and far too genial not to be a friend, he put all critics of character at defiance and is still Sir Roger—nothing more nor less. Whether due to partial insanity, belief in witchcraft, confirmed rusticity or settled intent to deceive, his acts are best accounted for by Addison himself as he says—"My friend, Sir Roger, with all his good qualities, is something of a hermit. His virtues as well as imperfections are tinged by a certain extravagance which makes them particularly his." Some references will justify this opinion. Sir Roger in the choice of a chaplain made it a requisite that the incumbent should possess a clear voice, a good aspect and a slight knowledge of backgammon. As soon as he

is settled in his charge he makes him a present of all the good sermons which have been printed in English. Of the haunted house on his country estate he tells us, that three-fourths of the rooms are unapproachable on account of strange sights and sounds and that the only way to utilize them is to require his chaplain to occupy them in turn. In describing the conduct of Sir Roger at church the humorous Addison surpasses himself. The walls of the church are hung with texts of Sir Roger's own choosing. In his capacity as landlord of the ecclesiastical estate, he allows to no one but himself the privilege of sleeping during service. In singing the psalms he never finishes when the others do and during prayer stands among the kneeling supplicants to see if any of his tenants are missing. Thus the papers go on, containing some of the richest humor in English Prose. As to Sir Roger, Dr. Drake truthfully remarks—"that with the exception of Falstaff, he is, perhaps, the most humorous character ever drawn." In addition to this leading personage we note the celebrated Tory Fox Hunter, confirmed in his partialities and rough in his bearing, loud mouthed on all occasions in opposition to existing government. There is also, Sir Andrew Freeport, the indomitable London merchant and full of the maxims of trade. Also, Captain Sartoy, retired from the sea and too modest to push his talent to promotion. Also, the well-bred Will Honeycomb, affable and coquettish, and last of all, the aristocratic Wimble. In each of these characters, the versatile Addison finds fitting occasion to express mother wit. The same skill in pleasantry is visible if we examine the papers themselves as distinct from the

characters. In the *Spectator* there may be cited, his paper on Superstitious People; on The Clubs in London, including the Everlasting Club; on Men of Science; his Adieu to the Liberal Professions; his paper on Fans and the various excesses of feminine attire. In the *Guardian* and *Tatler* there may be noted his paper on Courtship and Amorous Deceits. Even in the partisan *Freeholder* called by some—the political *Spectator*, the sterner principles of statecraft as advocated by Tory and Whig are made attractive to the popular taste by a wise infusion of the humorous. Mention has been made of the extreme formalism of Addison's style. It is here in place to add that the great corrective of this error is found in the quality now under discussion. Had Addison failed here, his prose would have failed to reach the popular mind by its monotonous precision. It atoned for the absence of passion and made the periodical welcome in English homes. It gave spice and flavor to every article. It was because the humor of Addison was similar to that of Lamb and unlike that of Swift and Pope that it found a ready reception.

#### (4.) Versatile and Popular.

This feature has probably struck every reader of Addison's prose and needs but brief notice. It reminds us of the later opulence of Dickens and Scott in the sphere of Fiction. He touches on all topics, ancient and modern; in church and state and society and home; in science, philosophy, history, art and criticism. In this particular, he is a distinctively modern writer, rambling in a discursive manner

through the open field of periodical themes pausing at any one point but long enough to glance and sketch and describe. It is thus that he displayed a peculiar adaptiveness to the common intelligence of the time. In this he had no predecessor who was his equal. He was a kind of self-appointed literary representative of the great middle class of his time—the Prose Laureate of the People. This was his ruling idea as a prose writer and he succeeded in applying it. He inclined to the desultory method in the choice and treatment of a theme and studiously avoided whatever he deemed to be outside the area of the popular thought and habit. Addison's papers were read by the educated classes, by the statesmen and leaders of the time. They were, however, written for the masses and were versatile in order to be the more attractive.

It is at this point, once again, that the open question of Addison's mental ability as a prose writer, already referred to, rises into new prominence. It is held by some that this versatility and popularity of style were the necessary result of an inferior order of mind that must atone for want of thoroughness by frequent change of topic and brevity of discussion. Others more charitably refer this order of prose to the definite purpose of the author and, more than this, to a voluntary and yet reluctant sacrifice of personal taste to the public good. He was discursive because he felt he must be so in order to be understood and helpful. The one class of critics holds that Addison could no more have written a prolonged treatise than Wordsworth could have written an epic. The other holds, that he preferred the appreciation

of the people to the applause of the great and could have been more famous by being less useful.

As suggested, whether Addison was or was not a writer of high intellectual power, is not to be determined by the qualities of style in question, but must rest on the sum total of his qualifications as a man and an author.

This much however is to be said—that he is not to be pronounced mentally inferior simply because his style was discursive and readable. It is a theory quite too current and altogether incapable of proof that to make a simple thing complex is the mark of great intellectual acumen while it indicates a lower type of brain power to speak and write so that common minds may apprehend the meaning. This is certainly paying a premium to vague profundity and discourages all that lies in the line of a pure literary simplicity. In so far as Addison's prose is intelligible, in so far is it successful as a form of literary art and ranks above all those examples of prose which seek abstruseness at the expense of plainness. Other things being equal, simplicity is a mark of ability and clearness of expression indicates a clear head.

### (5.) Ethical.

Addison's simple faith in Scripture and morality showed itself in all that he wrote. "There are in these papers," he says, "no fashionable touches of infidelity, no satire upon marriage and popular topics of ridicule. If the stage becomes a nursery of folly, I should not be afraid to rebuke it. In short,



if I meet with anything in city, court or country that shocks morality or good manners, I shall use my utmost endeavors to make an example of it." This is that Addisonian morale, too decided and delicate to be treated with justice by Mr. Taine or even to be appreciated by a Gallic conscience.

To Addison must be conceded the merit of having called the attention of his age to the divinely ordained relation of authorship and character. He was in the strictest sense, a Christian Essayist and penned his papers in behalf of pure morals. If, as many maintain, his periodical prose furnishes us with the first example in English Letters of an absolutely safe model for the imitation of the young writer, then, it becomes a matter of highest moment that such a model is founded on Christian principles. In this respect, he placed himself in line with Hooker, Bacon and Milton and radically apart from the standards of Swift and many of the later novelists. He did much to establish the ethical character of our popular prose and was in every sense a writer of Good English.

This Addisonian influence still remains among us.

### Critical Ability.

Before leaving the discussion of Addison's prose style there remains a topic of special interest.—We refer to the open question of his *Critical Ability* as indicated in his distinctively critical papers. Was it superficial or thorough and philosophic? On the one side, are found the names of Hood and Stewart and on the other, those of Johnson, Drake and Aiken,

while all the later historians of our literature commit themselves to one of these two positions. The specific attention which Addison devoted to this department of prose was by no means limited. In many of his papers which cannot be classed as critical throughout, is found at frequent intervals, the studied expression of critical views on current topics. In addition to his remarks on Wit and Humor already indicated, critical papers are given on—the Opera, Tragedy and Comedy, Early English Poetry, English Language, Genius, Poetry of Pindar, Literature, Oratory, Poetry, Music, The Art of Composition, Pope's Essay on Criticism, The Pleasures of the Imagination and, as most important, The Paradise Lost of Milton. This last production in common with most of the others, has been made the occasion of severe remark. The view which Drake attempts to establish is a plausible one and in the author's favor as a writer bent on the people's good. On this theory, the national habit and literary taste were such at the time that the people would not and could not accept abstract criticism. Addison being desirous of calling their attention to topics of substantial interest, felt bound to adopt the informal method which he did in place of the rigid systems of Aristotle and Boileau. While the beauties or blemishes of any particular writer might be so indicated as that all could see and estimate them aright, he knew that his object would be quite defeated if the reader were invited formally to a learned discussion upon the nature of beauty. He knew that if the subject of poetry was to be presented successfully to the public of his day it was to be by objective example and

not by subjective analysis. It was merely a choice of methods—the technical or the simple. He deliberately chose the latter and for the same reason that he chose a versatile and popular style, in all his prose. This informal method he applied to Milton's great epic after it had been well-nigh consigned to oblivion by the excesses of the Restoration and Revolution of 1688.

To Addison's critical study of *Paradise Lost* was directly due that reawakening of English interest in the poetry of Milton which had for its immediate result the revival of interest in literature itself and for its final result, the elevation of public taste. Just here, it is in place to note the quality of Addison's imagination as bearing on the estimate of his critical power. He speaks of "a sound imagination as next to a clear judgment and a good conscience the greatest blessing of life." In this emphatic use of the word, *sound*, the author has given us the best description of this faculty as he possessed and used it. It was sound rather than sublime; healthy rather than brilliant. It was Baconian in its purity without the Baconian strength and richness. As far as it went, it was normal and potent. It went, however, but a comparatively short distance beyond the bounds of actual life. There was not that mental reach and surety which ever mark the action of genius. Addison's critical ability in literature may be judged here aright when it is said that it was not in his power to have given the best criticism of *Paradise Lost* and kindred works because of the absence of that creative and constructive imagination which must to some degree exist in the censor as well as in the poet.

It was sound but did not soar high enough above the earth to see the supernal and sublime. It is thus, that in Addison's papers we must content ourselves with fable and allegory; with fancy and picture, and not too earnestly seek the presence of "sacred invention." Addison's critical prose is a safe and helpful order of prose but not the highest. He did good work here but his forte was elsewhere. It was rather in the sphere of life and manners than in that of literary art that his critical power was best applied. He wrote better about men and things than about books.

In a word, Addison's prose style, whatever its merits or demerits, was a better practical style than any that preceded the Augustan Age; was in keeping with the needs and spirit of the time and fixed in a real sense a standard of prose on the basis of which later authors have built better and still better forms. Take it together, no writer of his day wrote a better English and while many of his successors have wielded an abler pen in the realm of prose, no one of them has used the talent that he had to better advantage and no one of them would be spared from our literary records with more ingenuous regret.

There is such an order of prose style, still, as the Addisonian. In common with the Johnsonian and De Quinceyan, it holds a place and holds its own. The Spectator and Tatler are now little read but the prose of their author has become an historic and essential part of English Letters and English Style. Macaulay and Dickens have written better because he wrote so well and every English literary histo-

rian must still concede the fact of his presence and his power.

### References and Authorities.

Courthope's Addison (Eng. Men of Let.) \ Essays of Macaulay. Taine's History of Eng. Lit. \ Thackeray's Eng. Humorists. \ The Spectator. Kellogg's Eng. Lit.

## CHAPTER VI.

### THE PROSE STYLE OF SAMUEL JOHNSON.

#### Brief Biographical Sketch.

BORN at Lichfield, Sept. 18th, 1709. In Oxford, 1728. Obligated by poverty to withdraw. Usher of a school at Bosworth, 1731. Working for booksellers in Birmingham. Went to London, 1737, for literary work. A parliamentary reporter, 1740. On a pension, 1762. Visited Scotland, 1773. Died, Dec. 13th, 1784.

#### His Prose Writings.

We shall not attempt to mention in detail the various works of this illustrious author. In aiming to reach a true analysis and theory of his style, the most noted of these are sufficient, as follows:

Periodical—*The Rambler*, and *The Idler*. The Romance—*Rasselas* (Prince of Abyssinia). *The Lives of The English Poets*.

His work as a writer of political pamphlets, as a lexicographer and as an editor and commentator of Shakespeare will not be overlooked, as they evince certain qualities which enter vitally into the structure of his style. In the few productions mentioned it will be noted that with the exception of oratorical

prose we find illustrated all the forms of prose to which attention has been called—narrative, descriptive, philosophic and miscellaneous. Though he was not as voluminous an author as some it is difficult to see the justness of Mr. Stephen's statement, "Few men whose lives have been devoted to letters for an equal period have left behind them such scanty and inadequate remains." Few, we may add, have left so strong an impression upon their age.

### EXAMINATION OF HIS STYLE.

#### (1.) Its Anglo-Latin Element.

This is one of the first features that impress the reader as he studies this prose structure and diction and it becomes more manifest as the perusal goes on. With many, it occasions prejudice at the outset and prevents any continuous and impartial examination of the author. Most men are too definite in purpose to read the Rambler and too busy to read the Idler. There is a widespread antipathy by way of presumption against the Johnsonian Style in this regard so that many even among the educated must confess to an utter ignorance of the pages that they pronounce, Latinized. Few, if any, of the author's biographers and critics have avoided extreme positions here. If Boswell is too flattering, Hawkins is too critical. If Macaulay errs on one side, Taine errs on the other. Drake and Hallam come nearest to a just estimate.

His diction is beyond question a mixed one. The foreign element is prominent enough to call attention to it as foreign and thus to detract from its native

simplicity as seen in Swift and Addison. The student of English must, thus, be cautioned against an excessive deference to Dr. Johnson's phraseology lest he go even to greater lengths than his model and end in the veriest pedantry. The diction of the Rambler is a distinctively classical diction. It is English in Latin dress. In his antipathy to the French he favored the Latin unduly. In his excellent preface to his English Dictionary he thus states—"that our language for, about a century has been deviating toward a Gallic structure and phraseology from which it ought to be our endeavor to recall it." He abhorred all Gallicism, but in deference to the influence of such authors as Sir Thomas Browne and by reason of his personal classical attainments, he gave undue weight to the idioms of Rome. It is thus that we have such terms as—obstreperous, ratiocination and adumbrate—in great profusion. In his effort to state to his readers that practical lessons are to be learned only in the school of life he says—"Experience soon shows us the tortuosities of imaginary rectitude, the complications of simplicity and the asperities of smoothness." He wishes to give a clear description of the different processes through which the ladies at their toilets pass and he writes—"They pass through the cosmetic discipline covered with emollients and painted with artificial excoreations." Such constructions might be greatly multiplied. It was, probably, amid such literary thickets that Mr. Taine found himself when he said—"We turn over the pages of his Dictionary, his eight volumes of essays, his ten volumes of biographies, his numberless articles and we *yawn*."



In this respect Johnson failed just where Bunyan and Swift excelled and to this degree made it impossible to secure for his writings the popular eye. This being admitted, there are certain modifications that deserve mention and go far to admit us to the real nature of the Johnsonian style.

(a) This Latinitic element is not offensively present in *all* of his writings. Most of the extreme criticisms offered have been based upon a study of *The Rambler*. Up to this point, the criticism is just. These essays probably contain as much of this foreign caste as all his other works combined. The author's style simplified somewhat as it went on. He made the study of phraseology more a matter of literary care and conscience so that the difference between *The Rambler* and the later works is noticeable. Johnson seemed to be aware of his own defect and anxious to amend it. He admits that he is inclined to "use too big words and too many of them." He says to Boswell concerning *The Rambler* "that it is too wordy." In *The Adventurer* and *The Idler* there is more direct statement. In *Rasselas*, much of the crude and burly style of the earlier writings gives place to a genuine pathos while in, *The Lives of the Poets* there is a quality of diction and an order of structure that may well be compared to that of any preceding writer.

(b) The state of Intelligence somewhat warranted a more studied style. Nearly forty years had passed since the completion of the last volume of *The Spectator* and we find in Johnson's time a generation of people trained in Addisonian days. The mental status of the masses at the opening of the eighteenth century was one thing and in the latter half, quite

another. What might have been justifiable in Johnson would not have been so in Addison. This is, in fact, what Mr. Stephen means when he says, "Johnson's style is characteristic of the epoch. Attempts are made to restore philosophical conceptions and though Addison is still a kind of sacred model, the best prose writers are beginning to aim at a more complex structure of sentence. Accordingly, Johnson's style acquired something of the old elaboration." This is all true and in point. In addition to change of literary type, there was a radical change in social modes and activities; in the mechanical and practical, in the spirit of the age so that we are not to be supposed as we open the Rambler to find the innocent simplicity of Addison give way to a more cogent and aggressive style.

(c) Such a phraseology as Johnson used was fully in keeping with his *character* and *personal* habit. No style in English Prose has been more decidedly the expression of the author behind it. In all his actions and ways he was precisely what Garrick meant when he called him "a tremendous companion." His tremendousness was a vital part of his nature. Whatever Dr. Johnson was or was not, he was always himself. Though it might have been a misfortune that he was not more simple in style, it was less unfortunate than the result would have been had he attempted to be so unnatural as to be as simple as Addison. Nature made him on a very large pattern. All that he was and did was large. When he began to write, the words were as a matter of course, "big, swelling words" of the same portly make as their author. His literary work reflected his mental and

even physical self and this consistency went far to atone for the "tremendousness" of the diction.

(d) *His Theory as to Diction was correct.*

In addition to these considerations just stated it must be urged that Johnson's theory of diction was a very high one and he aimed to realize it. He never omits the opportunity of praising simplicity of style in others; calls attention to it in literature and devotes some of his papers to its discussion. In the 85th, 115th and 138th numbers of the *Adventurer*, after taking his text from Lord Bacon's essay on reading, he gives his views on various literary topics and dwells with special emphasis upon the subject of Diction as founded on the purest prose models. In number 70 of the *Idler*, the author gives all that could be desired on the subject of phraseology and general style. He tells us "that to find the nearest way from truth to truth is the best proof of a healthful mind." He states "that if an author writes to be admired rather than understood he counteracts the first end of writing." He avows to Boswell, that he conscientiously opposed the use of uncommon terms and had really introduced into the language but four or five new words. In the last paper of *The Rambler*, he speaks of his arduous efforts to refine the language. In justification of his use of unusual terms he says, "When common words were less pleasing to the ear or less distinct I have familiarized terms of philosophy applying them to popular ideas, but have rarely admitted any word not authorized by former writers." Among the statements made in the Preface to his Dictionary, he indicates the true relation of native to foreign words as he says, "I believe that whoever

knows the English tongue in its present extent will be able to express his thoughts without further help from other nations." Even in the pages of *Rasselas* verbal vagueness is condemned while in number 36 of *The Idler* we find a satire on obscurity of style under the title of—*Terrific Diction*. Some extracts from this paper will be of interest.—

"There are men," he says, "who seem to think nothing so much the characteristic of a genius as to do common things in an uncommon manner—like *Hudibras*, to tell the clock by Algebra or like the young lady in *Dr. Young's* satires, to drink tea by stratagem, in fine, to quit the beaten track only because it is known." He calls it "the bug-bear style by which the most evident truths are made obscure, causing the author to pass among his readers as the disguised dancer in the masquerade." A mother tells her children, that two and two make four. The children remember and apply it in life. When they are further told "that four is a certain aggregate of units, that all numbers being only the repetition of a unit which though not a number itself is the original of all numbers," the children either run away in fright or remain to learn once again that two and two make four. These references might be increased to show clearly that *Dr. Johnson's* general theory of style, and, especially, of diction was as high as can be held and that as far as in him lay, he verified it. We can scarcely believe the theory to be that of the *Johnson* of *Boswell's* biography, but so it is. He is the last one from whom we expect discussions on vagueness and ambiguity of phrase.

*Macaulay* in his trenchant review of *Boswell's Life*

of Johnson writes—"It is well known that he made less use than any other eminent writer of those strong, plain words—Anglo-Saxon or Norman-French—of which the roots lie in the inmost depths of our language; that he felt a vicious partiality for terms, which, long after our own speech had been fixed, were borrowed from the Greek and Latin and which, therefore, even when lawfully naturalized, must be considered as born aliens, not entitled to rank with the King's English."

This is a just criticism upon the author's diction. His diction was Latinic, though less and less as his style advanced. It was in keeping, as such, with the man and the age and quite opposed to that theory of simplicity which he was ever urging, but which he could not possibly illustrate as he wished. There are some things that elephants cannot do. They cannot tread softly or walk upon the points of pins.

## (2.) The Want of Flexibility and Adaptation.

This applies to subject matter as well as to method and external form.

We know from his conversations with Boswell that he had seen much of the world of his day and had as he thought, no slight knowledge of human nature, still his observation and experience were but partial. A close examination of his life will reveal the fact that, after all, it was confined to the garret, tavern and club. These served the purpose of a studio, parlor and kitchen. 'Tis true that he made a journey to the Hebrides and to the Continent; that he was

much in the streets of London and in the homes of the great, still the most of his life was passed just beneath the rafters or in the back rooms of the Essex or Turk's Head. "Nobody," says Macaulay, "was so conversant with all the forms of life as seen from Islington to the Thames and from Hyde-Park corner to Mile-end Green, but his philosophy stopped at the first turnpike-gate. He had studied, not the genus man, but the species, Londoner." It is to be emphasized here that his extreme poverty and strong tendencies to melancholy made it impossible for him to attain to anything like a spacious and healthful view of life. The limits of his life were too narrow to admit of much diversity. His style was affected by these circumstances and especially in the line of want of adaptiveness to all classes and phases. His method was rigid and mechanical and the same to all. He would talk to Goldsmith and Savage and the artisan in the same manner. Whatever the topic might be, the treatment of it was the same. The narrative, descriptive, didactic and critical were all run in the same mold and branded with the common mark. They are all in the phrase of Macaulay, "Johnsonese." His prose style, as his body, was very much opposed to change. Starting in one direction and at a certain pace he maintained it to the end. In all this he was true to his nationality. In that he was lethargic, he was English. The phlegmatic element in him was native to the realm. The Gallic verve and sprightliness was as foreign to him as it was to his country. He was constitutionally and mentally heavy and could not face about at will. There are few scenes in literary history so amusing as when this ponderous

man attempts to be playful and unbend himself to passing changes. While he is unbending, the opportunity passes. Here, as in the case of diction, naturalness covers many sins. The very uniformity of his prose is natural. It is a fault and yet modified by the fact that it is purely individual and characteristic.

It is very common for literary historians to compare and contrast Johnson and Addison. With reference to the quality now before us they were opposites. Johnson's defect is Addison's merit. Variety was the spice of the early Augustan prose. It was adaptive to all forms of popular life and all grades of culture. It had, as we have seen, an intelligible word for every one and just in season. It was everything but monotonous. It is very instructive to note how often Johnson himself refers to such a feature by way of praise and as contrasted with his own unyielding style. He writes—"Among the various censures which the unavoidable comparison of my performances with those of my predecessors has produced, there is none more general than that of uniformity." In number ten of the *Rambler*, he alludes to the same censure and is candid enough to state the views of others on this point. One of the letters written by a lady on behalf of her sex takes up the old objection and says—"that the readers of the *Rambler* cannot help a wish, that he would, now and then, like his predecessors, throw in some papers of a gay and humorous turn." Another lady far more sharply desires to know who his friends are, what his amusements and ways are and whether he is a person now alive. If he is a mere essayist, and bothers not himself with the manners of the age, she tells him, that

even the criticisms of an Addison will not save him from neglect. Lady Racket "hopes to see the Rambler interspersed with living characters." The compliment and censure thus go on. The author accepts each in good spirit and in the way of pleasant irony enters into correspondence with his critics. The result is, that he confesses his lack of adaptation and says "that a daily writer ought to view the world." In partial palliation of this uniformity of topic and method, it is to be noted that he was, with scarcely an exception, the only contributor to his periodicals. He had no colleagues as Addison and Steele had. This fact in connection with his multiplied duties and his didactic work as a lexicographer made it difficult for him to be varied and versatile. This apart, however, the style is lacking in diversity and is dull up to the borders of moroseness. For this and other reasons, it is not surprising to hear the author state "that the number of his friends was not great and that he had never been worshipped by the public." Masculine thought presented in foreign idiom and unvarying sameness of form will have but few readers in any age. In the early Georgian Era, such a style was intolerable and yet this sober minded author is not altogether sorry that he had failed to please all classes. In his closing Rambler he writes—"I have never complied with temporary curiosity. I have seen the meteors of fashion rise and fall without any attempt to add a moment to their duration. They were only expected to pursue them whose passions left them leisure for abstract truth and whom virtue could please by its marked dignity."

In fine, Johnson was never designed to be a suc-



cessful periodical essayist. He had a better field in biography, lexicography and general criticism. He was far more than a miscellaneous essayist and in this respect was the superior of Addison. Such critics as De Quincey are led to speak in high terms of Johnson's style not so much on the basis of his periodical work as on that of his entire work as an author and commentator.

### (3.) Absence of Impassioned Energy.

This is a failure common to periodical writing. The want of consecutive discussion in such an order of prose is a partial explanation of this. The topics are too varied and the limits too narrow for the generation of passion. Miscellaneous and oratorical prose exclude each other. In no English essayist after Milton and up to the time of the author is this emotive element at all prominent. If we examine the long list of periodicals issued between the time of the *Tatler*, in 1709 and that of the *Spy*, in 1809, the vast majority are penned either in deference to the frivolities of the day or made up of the common platitudes on morality and social order. There is anything but unction and persuasive feeling. Mr. Taine's criticisms upon Addison and the Augustan essayists as to this defect are in place. In Johnson, the defect is even more pronounced. As we peruse his pages, we seek nothing so much and so vainly as the presence of deep and expressive emotion. We read conscientiously rather than sympathetically. There is nothing magnetic and inspiring; nothing to elicit fervid feeling or high resolve. It does not

absorb us as we read. It is didactic to a fault so that we are taught by way of penance and are not sorry when school is dismissed. There is a good deal of the pedagogue in this and we, at times, are inclined to revolt. This element was undoubtedly deepened by his natural seriousness of mind often tinged with melancholy. Had it not been for this inherited despondency, his large nature might have been healthfully tender and his style, impassioned. In his best hours he was not devoid of susceptibility and incapable of feeling. His profound sympathy for the poor; his affection for his chosen friends and his indignation against what he felt to be wrong, reveal a sensitive nature. In his most mature life, this is not altogether absent, still, the bent was toward the sombre and despondent. He rarely rises in his style to anything like an emotive climax. There is nothing of the projective force of the orator or of the writer who at all hazards must impress the truth. He declares the truth but does not deliver it. He deems it to be sufficient to instruct. Others must inspire. In all this, Johnson was himself again and did a work committed to him. His successes and his failures were his own.

As to the defects of style, thus mentioned, it is to be noted, that they are confined to his *written thought*. All his biographers from Boswell to Stephen have marked the vital difference in Johnson the writer and Johnson, the talker. "When he talked," says Macaulay, "he clothed his wit and his sense in forcible and natural expressions. As soon as he took his pen in hand, his style became systematically vicious. The expressions which came first to his tongue were

simple, energetic and picturesque. When he wrote for publication, he did his sentences out of English into Johnsonese." "There are times," says Stephen, "at which his writing takes the true, vigorous tone of his talk." There is no author in English prose in whom this difference as to written and spoken discourse is so marked. In conversation, his diction was pungent and idiomatic; his method ever varied and his manner marked by personal force and feeling. In that sphere he excelled just where in authorship he failed and paradoxical as it may seem, was equally natural in each rôle. We can scarcely conceive of him talking as he wrote or writing as he talked. He had a kind of dual personality. One was for the coffee-house and street; the other was for the desk. Boswell gives us more of the former than of the latter, and for this reason is readable. It still remains for some psychological critic to co-ordinate these two personalities or to show why the one did not more fully influence the other.

In the discussion of Johnson's style as to defects it is scarcely necessary to add that of—*Literary Grace*. The absence of such a quality is but the natural result of those defects already suggested. It is thus, that the figurative element is not marked.

It remains to state the merits of his prose style.

### (1.) Substantial Clearness.

Despite his Latinic diction, want of variety and passion, Johnson's meaning is generally intelligible. Dr. Drake in his lectures on—*The Rambler*, calls special attention to this feature and remarks: "Pre-

cision in the adoption and use of terms is peculiarly the characteristic of Johnson's composition." This may be extreme and, yet, attention should be called to the important fact that clearness in writers is a relative quality depending on the nature of the subject and the type of mind in author and reader. There is the clearness of brevity and, also, of circumlocution. The former Johnson does not possess; the latter, he does. If judged by the highest historical examples of clear writing, he is seen to fall short of the standard. Still, he can be thoroughly understood by the careful reader. If we follow him, he will bring us safely to the end but by a somewhat indirect route. *The Rambler* failed to receive the popular favor which had been given to the *Spectator*, not because the people could not understand it, but in that it demanded more time and patience than other periodicals. It was not so clear on the face of it as that the idea could be snatched easily between dinner and dessert, but it was clear. Many of the author's essays that contain the longest words and sentences and the most complex structure and give the impression of hopeless obscurity are perfectly intelligible upon due attention. The use of the balanced order of sentence to which he was so inclined aided rather than impaired the general plainness of the style. He is not a lucid writer in the sense in which Bacon, Swift and Addison are lucid, neither is he so conspicuously clear as to make him a model for the student of style. We simply affirm that the common view as to the vagueness and ambiguity of his writing is incorrect and that in a true sense, though not in the highest he is comprehensible.

Though he spoke in terms of praise of the style of Browne and Burton, his own methods of expression were vastly superior to their's in ease of intelligibility. In some of his later authorship, most especially in—*The Lives of The Poets*—he may be said to compare favorably with such writers as Addison and Burke as to perspicuity.

“With all its faults,” says a biographer, “his style has the merit of masculine directness. As Boswell remarks, he never uses a parenthesis. The inversions are not such as to complicate the construction, and his style, though ponderous and wearisome, is as transparent as the smarter snip-snap of Macaulay.”

## (2.) Literary Gravity.

The reference here is not to that excessive seriousness of manner which often ended in confirmed melancholy but to that sober habit of mind and expression which was based on his view of the writer's vocation. All that he did had a kind of natural solidity about it. There was nothing trivial or puerile in it all. He has a more than ordinary sense of the dignity of authorship and addresses himself to his work in Baconian spirit “To the glory of God and the relief of man's estate.” In this respect he reminds us strongly of the “Judicious” Hooker, and of Milton. He was pre-inclined to the reflective and serious and wrote as he felt. We shall, therefore, look in vain, in his writings for the unmerciful satire of a Swift or even the more harmless pleasantness of a Steele and Hawkesworth. There is no vicious abuse of personal or literary character, no serio-comic

burlesque for the sake of burlesque. Even in the unguarded conferences of the club and social reunions, he rarely indulged in literary levity up to the degree in which it was regarded as admissible. His mind was masculine and earnest and he was not inclined to stoop so far from that level as to be the favorite of the many. If he must choose between being a tedious author because so grave in method and an entertaining author by catering to the whims of the populace, he makes the choice at once in favor of the former. In the closing number of the *Rambler* he writes, "I have seldom descended to the arts by which popular favor is obtained."

Fearing lest, at times, he might be carried beyond legitimate limits, he adds—"As it has been my principal design to inculcate wisdom and piety, I have allotted few papers to the idle sports of imagination." As literary criticism so often passes beyond the province of decorous reproof into personal abuse, he places it among the subordinate or instrumental arts. He tells us that he has carefully avoided all arbitrary decisions as to men and authors asserting nothing without a good reason. Even as to the use of figure, he affirms that he has never been so studious of novelty as wholly to depart from all resemblance. Mere declamation and hyperbole are an abomination to him in that they depart from the reality of things. He was thus well aware that his writings were not popular and could not become so by reason of their gravity of style and didactic method.

"Scarcely any man is so steadily serious," he says, "as not to complain that the severity of didactical instruction has been too seldom relieved and that he

is driven by the sternness of the Rambler's philosophy to the more cheerful and airy companions."

He saw all this and yet adhered to his method. Despite his sobriety no one wishes that he had done otherwise. There is a moral attractiveness in the manner in which he moves massively on quite unaffected by current criticism. When all others were anxious to catch the ear of the time, he was content to carry out his own methods. Hence, instead of essays on, Fops and Fans, there are essays on, Prudence, Self-Denial and Habit, History, Friendship, The Art of Thinking and The Struggles of Life. He carries us out of the region of parlors and etiquette and social fashion into the higher realm of ethical teaching. There is a body to the instruction. The food is nutritious rather than merely palatable. The æsthetic gives way to the useful. One can reckon the *specific gravity* of Johnson's style. It has been called ponderous in the sense of being heavy. It is, also, such in the sense of being weighty. With all its defects, it is immeasurably better than the sensuous style of the Restoration or the chiseled correctness of the days of Pope. Its richness in mental instruction and the lofty seriousness of its method do much to atone for its errors. Had the gifted Voltaire been the sober-minded Johnson, common sense would have held the place of flippant wit and the literature of France in the eighteenth century been signally improved. Even Germany has urgent need of such authors. Every literature needs such bulwarks and barriers to arrest the tendencies to national decline. It is to the praise of English Letters that this ethical gravity is an historic part of it from first to last.

There are one or two features in the style of Johnson so closely related to this one of gravity that they need mention here—

(a) This element, at times, showed itself in the extreme form of *rudeness* bordering on severity. Mrs. Boswell spoke of him to her husband as a “bear” in his manners. Now and then, his style had this bearish quality. There is a brusque and harsh tone about it that grates upon the ear. The Sage of Lichfield had a good deal of the animal in his nature and it often ruled the other elements. When thus exercised he would indulge in the most cruel invective and spare no feelings whatsoever. This however, was not the man at his best and in the true interpretation of his style, the student is to look beneath all this to the essential good-nature and moral gravity of the author.

(b) By way of strange contrast to this quality his style is not infrequently marked by the most *playful humor*. Boswell's biography is full of these outbursts of pleasantry when by way of reaction from the inherent sobriety of his nature he would indulge in sallies of wit and repartee. There is just enough of this in his prose to give it flavor and attractiveness, and to redeem the style from excessive seriousness. In, *The Lives of the Poets*, this order of style is well presented.

### (3.) Johnsonianism.

The style of Johnson is eminently individual. It is his own. His full-sized portrait is on every page. He is as clearly distinct among English Prose Writers



as is Peter among the apostles. He is self-revealing in every word and phrase. No style preceding his can be called as unique as his. Among his successors, Thomas Carlyle approaches him most closely in the element of literary personality. He thought as he pleased, said what he thought, said it as it seemed best to him to say it and consulted no one. During the forty years between—*The Spectator* and *The Rambler*, nearly all of the one hundred periodicals that arose were imitative of what had preceded. *The Rambler* appeared in 1730 on its own merits, marking a decided departure from all existing standards and introducing a new era in English Prose. Good or bad, it was natural. "He never seems," says Leslie Stephen, "to have directly imitated any one," and adds "Some nonsense has been talked about his forming a style." This is not altogether "nonsense." The Johnsonian style was a new order of expression as compared with anything in the Augustan Age. It was new not simply because it was Johnson's but because Johnson was so peculiarly a man by himself.

As suggested, we are reminded more of Hooker than of any preceding author. In fact, Johnson was far more Elizabethan than Augustan.

He may, in a true sense, be said to have founded a school. As in his own day, he was an acknowledged leader, so later on he gave direction to literary form. Sir Joshua Reynolds, in referring to his own *Academical Discourses*, remarks—"Whatever merit they have must be imputed in a great measure to the education I may be said to have had under Dr. Johnson. No man had like him the faculty of teaching

minds the art of thinking." This language is simply a ratification of Johnson's personal power over men. Over Goldsmith and others he had a marvellous influence, nor is it too much to say that the historians and essayists of the latter part of the Georgian era were more Johnsonian in general style than they were anything else. They improved vastly upon their model but still they had a model, in the person of Boswell's hero. To this day, that style is among us. A further confirmation of this individual influence is seen in the fact that nearly all the contemporary and subsequent periodicals take occasion to acknowledge it. The Gentleman praises his diction. In—The Olla Podrida,—there is a strong defense of him as against those who would magnify his defects. The Country Spectator, speaks of the sublime philosophy of the Rambler. In The Indian Observer, he is represented as a nervous, original and intrepid genius, in whose presence impiety shrinks away. The author of The Advisor, after noting his merits and demerits concludes in highest praise of his character and the undoubted<sup>d</sup> perpetuity of his writings. In fine, he so impressed himself on his age that his style is marked by his own features and signed with his own signature. It will never be confounded with that of any other English proser.

The lines of Courtenay are here in place—

“ By Nature's gift ordained mankind to rule,  
 He like a Titian formed his brilliant school.  
 Nor was his energy confined alone  
 To friends around his philosophic throne.  
 Its influence wide impressed our lettered isle,  
 And lucid vigor marked the general style.”

The language of Hamilton on Johnson's decease is a testimony to his individuality as he says—"Johnson is dead. Let us go to the next best. No man can be said to put you in mind of him. He has made a chasm which not only nothing can fill up but which nothing has a *tendency* to fill up."

His predecessor—"Rare" Ben Jonson was not so *rare* as he. No other man ate and drank; talked and walked; lived and wrote as he did. He confided in his own judgment as final. The only body he ever consulted for advice was—I, Samuel Johnson and myself. These three always agreed. There is attractiveness in all this. The tendency to literary servility is so strong, that it is refreshing to see an absolutely independent author. The times of Bacon, Dryden and of Swift were full of servility. Every age has too much of it. A writer may as well put up his pen and close his desk if instead of being himself and expressing himself he is aiming to appear in the personality of another. In this particular, Dr. Johnson with all his faults had the first characteristic of a successful author—Personality. This begets originality of thought and style.

### Lexicographer and Literary Critic.

In closing this discussion, mention should be made of the author's work as a Lexicographer and literary Critic.

In his Dictionary of the English Language he did a work not only philological in character, but one in the interests of English Literature and English Prose Style. Faulty as it was on the side of scientific ety-

mology, it did a vast work in the line of clearer definition, in distinction of synonyms and apt quotations to illustrate the sense, and called attention as never before both to the richness and needs of the native-tongue. He carried out the ideas suggested by Dryden and Swift and opened the way for all later English lexicography.

As a Critic, his work was not of the first order as compared with such a writer as De Quincey. His style, therefore, is not a model of critical prose. Even here, however, his prose has been underrated. If he failed as a Shakespearian commentator and in his judgment of Milton, he succeeded in that of Addison, Dryden, Pope and others. Many of his decisions on men and authors are still standard. Modern students of Shakespeare and the English Poets cannot afford to be ignorant of his opinions in this sphere. His style, however, as critical lacks breadth and generosity of view. He had certain pet theories to which he adhered and there is a little too much of the autocratic to make his prose a model in this regard.

Note should also be taken of his skillful use of *antithesis* and of his style as in every sense *morally pure* and ennobling. He, thus, has a rightful place in standard English Prose. If his faults were greater than those of some others, his merits were more pronounced. He could be no more easily spared from the record of English writers than could any one of his predecessors. He had a place and did a work, and prepared a way for still better literary effort. He advises us in the formation of style to give our "days and nights to the study of Addison." The careful

study of the best elements of this Johnsonian method is also needed in the cultivation of a clear, solid and original English Prose.

#### References and Authorities.

∖Boswell's Life of Johnson. Leslie Stephens' Life of Johnson (Eng. Men of Let.). ∖Macaulay's Essays. Essays of Drake. ∖Carlyle's Heroes.

## CHAPTER VII.

### THE PROSE STYLE OF EDMUND BURKE.

#### **Brief Biographical Sketch.**

BORN in Dublin, Jan. 12th, 1730. Entered Dublin University, 1744. Degree of B. A., 1748. Studying Law at Middle Temple, 1750. M. A., 1751. Traveled up to 1756. Studied and wrote. Private Secretary of Hamilton in Dublin, 1761. Returned to London, 1764. Private Secretary to Marquis of Rockingham. In Parliament from Wendover, 1766. Re-elected, 1768. In Parliament to 1794. Retired with honor and pensions. Died, July 7th, 1797.

#### **Variety of View as to His Rank.**

There are few names, if any, in the records of English Prose Literature concerning whom there has been such a wide difference of opinion—at the extremes of depreciation and of unqualified praise.

Mr. Morley, his latest biographer adduces five representative classes of critics, each holding strenuously to its own special estimate of the man and the author.

The reference here is not to the opinions held by the partisan politicians of his time, dependent as they were on Burke's relation to the great Whig and

Tory factions, but to his strictly literary character as a writer. On this basis, some speak of him as Hallam does in connection with the name of Lord Bacon, as a far seeing and profoundly philosophic mind, while others, as Carlyle, regarded him as superficial and unduly verbose. Lord Macaulay, in his brilliant *Essay on Warren Hastings*, refers to him as "the greatest man then living," while others view him as nothing short of a political fanatic evincing some occasional excellence in the department of letters. Mr. Mackintosh speaks of him in the same breath as of Shakespeare and would bear impressive testimony to the imperial quality of his powers, while some have been found who were willing to imply that in the production of his most prominent works he was mentally astray.

The great balance of opinion, however, especially in modern times, has been in favor of this Anglo-Irish author. "Opinion is slowly, but without reaction," says Morley "settling down to the verdict that Burke is one of the abiding names in our history, not because he either saved Europe or destroyed the Whig party, but because he added to the permanent considerations of wise political thought, and to the maxims of wise practice in great affairs and because he imprints himself upon us with a magnificence and elevation of expression that places him among the highest masters of literature." It is no small tribute both to the political and literary genius of Burke given by Mr. Froude in his work on Ireland, "that if Burke had remained in the country where Providence had placed him, he might have changed the current of its history." As to the special style

of his prose, the gifted De Quincey says "that he was the supreme writer of his century," to which Minto in his *Manual of English Prose* subjoins, "Perfect command of English is hard to attain; we must be content to rank Burke among the few that have come nearest to that perfection."

It is evident from such eulogiums as these that we have in Edmund Burke one of the commanding men of English History and English Letters. The very bitterness of some of the accusations made against him but confirms the essential greatness of his nature and his work. In every sense of the term he is a representative writer of English and will well repay most careful study on the part of every critic of English style.

If his great contemporary, Fox, could say—"I have learned more from him than from all books I have ever read," he will have something, at least, of educational and literary value for the student of style.

### His Prose Writings.

As far as mere quantity of production is concerned, Burke ranks among those of our prose authors whose works are limited. Whether we view them as to the variety of their topics or to their actual numerical amount, they are limited. In this respect, the author takes his place with such names as Hooker, and Milton, rather than with such as Johnson and De Quincey. We shall find, however, that his range of subject was varied enough and his area of discussion broad enough to give full scope for the exercise of his literary gifts as well as to afford a sufficiently



full amount of prose work to be a basis for intelligent criticism. An account of what he did in the line of poetry is not here in place.

The distinction that some have made between his writings as literary and political is not a valid one as to the purpose before us, inasmuch as some of his strongest features as a writer come into prominence in his civic compositions. It is true, as often stated, that Burke in one sense left literature for politics and "gave up for party what was meant for mankind." In another and a far higher sense, the statement is misleading, in that he took his literary self with him into the career of public life and through his authorship as a man of affairs became all the more cogent and famous. From being an author by profession he became one by practice and, as we shall see, happily united what is rarely seen in authorship—literary and civic power.

The prose productions in which his style may be judged are as follows;

*A Vindication of Natural Society*, or a "View of The Miseries and Evils arising to Mankind from every Species of Artificial Society." This work was designed to imitate the style of Lord Bolingbroke and to parody his peculiar system of philosophy and ethics (1756).

*A Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of our Ideas on The Sublime and Beautiful* (1756).

In 1757 appeared—*The Account of The European Settlements in America*.

*Observations on The Present State of The Nation*.

*Thoughts on the Cause of the Present Discontents*

(1770).—in which he held that government should be in the hands of an aristocracy.

*Reflections on the French Revolution* (1790), to which Paine replied in—*The Rights of Man*.

*Thoughts on French Affairs* (1791).

*Speech on American Taxation*, April 19th, 1774.

*Speech on Conciliation with America*, March 22nd, 1775, when he offered thirteen resolutions of concession.

*Letter to the Sheriffs of Bristol* (1777).

*Speech on the Nabob of Arcot's Debts* (1785).

*Speech on the India Bill of 1783*.

*Speech on the Economical Reform Bill*, 1780.

*Appeal from the New to the Old Whigs* (1792).

*Letter to a Noble Lord* (The Duke of Bedford), (1796).

*Letters on a Regicide Peace* (1796–7).

*The Impeachment of Hastings* (1788–9).

In addition to these as the most important of his prose works reference might be made to—

*The Annual Register* (1759).

*Hints for an Essay on The Drama*.

*Abridgment of the History of England*.

From this list of titles it will be noted that although the province of authorship is limited, it embraces all the essential forms of prose—narrative, descriptive, oratorical, philosophical and miscellaneous. While the topics are as distinct as the political, on the one hand, and the æsthetic, on the other, most of them are civil in character and given in the form of pamphlets or parliamentary speeches.

### His Prose Style—Conditions.

In the analysis and study of Burke's style, two matters of moment must ever be kept in view.

(a) *His Style as conditioned by his Character:*

This vital relation of the author and the man is noticeable, as we have marked in the history of every prominent English writer. It is an essential part and indication of such prominence. Every master in letters is known for his individuality. Second and third-rate authors imitate others. First-rate authors are self-directing. They write themselves into their words. Burke as a writer is especially suggestive here. The man must be known in order to be understood as an author.

It must be borne in mind that he was by birth and education a Celt. Born in Dublin, early at school at Ballitore within thirty miles of it and then, in Trinity College at Dublin, it was not till 1750, just at his majority, that he is found at London. He had all that loyalty for his country which characterizes the native Celt in whatever part of the world he may be. He had that impatient ambition and fiery zeal which signalizes the Celt and that Hibernian independence which led him to say "I was not made for a minion or a tool; I possessed not one of the qualities, nor cultivated one of the arts, that recommend men to the favor and protection of the great." His loves and his hates were Celtic. His partisan attachment to what he endorsed took the form of a passionate devotion and vented itself in the form of indignant invective against his opponents. "When bad men

combine, the good must associate" was his watchword and stimulus, in party organization, and he believed that nothing could be effectively done save by concerted action. His convictions were so strong and deep that opposition only inflamed them into greater intensity of expression.

In proneness to satire and fondness for imagery and romance he was also a true Celt, while in addition to it all, his character was marked by that sense of personal dignity which no loyal son of Erin is without.

The study of Burke's style is largely a study of these features of the personality of the man. They appear and disappear but are always present in the substantial body of the writing and must be seen in order to its correct interpretation.

(b) *His Style is conditioned by his Age.*

As decided as Burke's individuality was, it was affected in various ways by the peculiar type of the times in which Providence placed him. The age did not control but it did modify the expression of his thought. Though it is true that every master-mind has, as such, more influence on his age than his age has on him, it is, also, true that no man however great can ignore the era in which he lives or rise above it. He would not do it, if he could. Burke wrote differently from what he would have done had he lived a century earlier or later, and yet, no careful observer of the fitness of things can fail to notice that he was adapted to his age as his age was to him. He would not have been the Burke of English Literature apart from his peculiar epoch.

When we ask as to what the special characteristic

of the time was, we find it to have been one of *agitation*. It was an age of destruction in order to construction; of disturbance in order to adjustment. The very titles of his pamphlets and speeches indicate the unsettled condition of the time. It was the era of "Present Discontents," the age of the American and French Revolutions, when taxation and tyranny, conciliation and party, legal right and constitutional privilege were the topics of the hour. The conservative tendencies were in conflict with the progressive. Old traditions were violently displaced by the most extreme policies, "the distempers of monarchy by the distempers of Parliament." There was, therefore, more than mere change and readjustment in the temper of the time. There was a wildness and passionateness about it that marked the influence of France on England and the unwillingness of the mother country to yield up the control of her American colonies.

From all this it will appear that the literature of the time would reflect the character of the time. This would be especially so in the province of prose and on the part of such an author as Burke.

The dispassionate productions of Bacon and Hooker or the didactic papers of Addison and Johnson or the light descriptive sketches of Charles Lamb and of Dickens would have been impossible in such an era. The age was agitative. All was aglow and ablaze. Repeal and reform were in order and this meant preceding dismemberment.

If "the style is the man," the style is the age also. We shall look in the prose of Burke for a pertinent example of Mr. Taine's theory on this subject.

His treatises on, *The Sublime and Beautiful*, and on the Drama, apart, there is nothing that he spoke or wrote that does not bear upon its face the political imprint of the era. Never did a period and a writer more fully represent each other, and this is a fact which not only adds to the interest of the author's prose and to the ease of its analysis, but also, indicates on his part the presence of keen intellectual foresight and literary adaptiveness.

### SPECIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF HIS STYLE.

#### (1.) Forensic and Impassioned.

It was impassioned because it was forensic and political in character. From what has been said as to the Celtic nature of the author and the controversial nature of the age, such an order of prose would be expected. Historians speak of the natural ardor of style; of its glowing and fervent phrases; its interest and sympathy; its persuasive power and unction. This is all in the line of correct criticism and has to do with that special quality now in question. Burke's prose is as prominent an example as there is in English Letters of the oratorical style, in the best sense of that term. The reported speeches of Fox and Grattan, Pitt and Sheridan—his great contemporaries, evince occasional passages of equal excellence but as to the entire body of oratorical prose produced, Burke is the superior of any one of them and marks the highest point as yet attained in England in forensic prose.

His temperament was impassioned. The age was impassioned. His themes were impassioned. His

very auditors and readers were wrought up to the very highest levels of emotive interest. The issues at stake in civil and common life; in politics and public morals were of primary import. Everything depended on their proper settlement. In fact, no author of that time at all alive to pending problems, could have been anything else than positive, intense and impressive in his style. Apart from such a method he would not have been heard or read. Hence, the historical and literary fact that the prose of the period is of the emotive order rather than didactic, and Burke is supreme in this respect only because he rose in his writing to a higher and a more prolonged intensiveness of utterance than did any of his colleagues. While all of his political writings are of this order, there are some of them that are so full of "words that burn" that they cannot be read even at this late date without eliciting the profoundest feelings of the soul, and the reader forgets that he is a century beyond the French Revolution and the impeachment of Warren Hastings.

We have already called attention to some of our prose authors in whom this quality of style is found. It is in Hooker and in Milton; in Swift and Macaulay, but in none, save Milton, as an element of eminence, while even in the Puritan Polemic it is somewhat tempered and weakened by other elements. In Burke, it is supreme and rises to the level of the sublime. There is nothing like it in English annals. It is found in part in Pericles and Demosthenes; in Cicero as the enemy of Cataline; in Mirabeau as he appeared in the French Assembly and in Patrick Henry before the Burgesses of Vir-

ginia. If we inquire as to any special examples of this impassioned style, one can scarcely go astray in the speeches and pamphlets that he penned.

The most prominent of these undoubtedly is what he gives us in connection with the Trial of Hastings. To make selections here would be unnecessary. Never in the history of secular eloquence has a higher point been reached than on that day in the great hall of William Rufus. The excitement of the country on the Indian question was at white heat. Burke, Fox and Sheridan and the advocates of Hastings were moved as never before, and as the famous Irish accuser summed up his charges and detailed the grounds of his impeachment, the effect was nothing less than marvelous.

“Therefore hath it with all confidence been ordered by the Commons of Great Britain that I impeach Warren Hastings of high crimes and misdemeanors. I impeach him in the name of The Commons House of Parliament, whose trust he has betrayed. I impeach him in the name of the English nation, whose ancient honor he has sullied. I impeach him in the name of the people of India, whose rights he has trodden under foot and whose country he has turned into a desert. Lastly, in the name of human nature itself, in the name of both sexes; in the name of every age; in the name of every rank, I impeach the common enemy and oppressor of all.”

Macaulay in his brilliant article on Hastings has given the account and the immediate effect of this impeachment. It is oratorical passion in the essence.

Brief extracts from some other examples will indicate a similar intensity of soul. In the speech on—The Nabob of Arcot's Debts—we read the description of Hyder Ali's desolation of the Carnatic in part as follows:



“When at length Hyder Ali found that he had to do with men who either would sign no convention or whom no treaty or signature could bind, and who were the determined enemies of human intercourse itself, he decreed to make the country a memorable example to mankind. He resolved to leave the whole Carnatic an everlasting monument of vengeance, to put perpetual desolation as a barrier between him and those against whom the faith which holds the moral elements of the world together was no protection. Then ensued a scene of woe the like of which no eye had seen, no heart conceived and which no tongue can adequately tell. All the horrors of war before known or heard of were mercy to that new havoc. For eighteen months without intermission, this destruction raged from the gates of Madras to the gates of Tanjore.

“So completely did these masters of their art absolve themselves of their impious vow, that, when the British armies traversed, as they did, the Carnatic for hundreds of miles in all directions, they did not see one man, not one woman, not one child, not one four-footed beast. One dead, uniform silence reigned over the whole region.”

In a notable letter to Elliot on the question of reform he writes—

“How often has public calamity been arrested on the very brink of ruin by the seasonable energy of a single man! Have we no such man among us? I am as sure as I am of my being that one vigorous mind, without office, without situation, without public functions of any kind, confiding in the aid of God and full of just reliance in his own fortitude, would first draw to him some few like himself and then multitudes would appear. If I saw this auspicious beginning, baffled and frustrated as I am, on the very verge of a timely grave, abandoned abroad and desolate at home yet thus, even thus I would rake up the fires under all the ashes that oppress it. Even in solitude something may be done for society. The meditations of the closet have affected senates with a sudden frenzy and inflamed armies with the brands of the furies. Why should not a Maccabeus arise to assert the honor of the ancient laws and to defend the temple of their forefathers, for when once things are gone out of their ordinary course, it is by acts out of the ordinary course they can alone be re-established.”

But it is needless to multiply these references. In his—*Reflections on The French Revolution*—and his—*Letters on a Regicide Peace*, and, most especially, in his three great efforts in connection with the American War, these impassioned outbursts are on every page, while even in his most didactic utterances there is a kind of suppressed earnestness of soul that influences the reader. All this is forensic and potent, full of the genuine Celtic fervor and fire. It is a quality of prose style that was then at its best expression in England and Ireland and France and which rose to special excellence in America in the persons of Adams, Hamilton, Webster, Clay and Calhoun. Specially adapted to the public audience and to questions uniting political issues, it has, also, a most important place in the province of literary prose and goes far to redeem it from that charge of dullness so often and so justly made against it. When men speak and write on any topic of vital moment, something of this Burkeian emotiveness is essential to the highest effect; Clearness is the first quality of style, but force is next and close upon it—and these should co-exist as mutual aids in writing. In these speeches of Burke we find notable examples of the close connection between written and oral discourse. His speeches after their delivery were revised and sent to the press for publication and became at once a part of the literature of England. They had all the correctness of written language, and yet, all the unction of spoken discourse. While they instruct, they also impress and stimulate us. They serve to teach the valuable lesson in style that there is in all writing an element that may be called oratorical or

impassioned and should ever have its proper place in common with the other qualities of prose expression.

It is pertinent in this connection to state that modern criticism has somewhat objected to the style of Burke as being extreme in the way of *oratorical fervor*, or rather as being more *declamatory* than eloquent. One of his most successful biographers, MacKnight, states "that his vehemence was frequently injurious to the object he had in view." So Carlyle speaks of him as "vehement rather than earnest," while it has rather been the fashion of late in certain quarters to reduce this forensic feature in Burke's style to the minimum. Such a criticism is not unnatural. There is, at times, too much of the declamatory element in Burke. There is too much exaggerated and wayward assertion under the impulse of the moment. There is something of what is termed the grandiose style. This is true, and yet, what is to be made of it as essentially detracting from the high fame of Burke as an intensive writer? His errors here were altogether exceptional. Never did a man more carefully forecast the line of his argument. As Morley remarks of *The Reflections*, "It was no superb improvisation." His pamphlets and speeches cost him study, care, and the most unwearied painstaking. So that as Craik remarks, "His writings are the only English political writings of a past age that continue to be read in the present. In the fiery excitement of the time and the almost oppressive interest that centred about the great questions that were under discussion, it is not at all strange that feeling and imagination, at times, took control of the judgment and led the author into

extremes. This, however, was rare and as in the case of the trial of Hastings when the audience was well nigh unmanned, Burke was self-possessed and master of the hour. It is just here that Burke differs from Macaulay and is his superior, in that, where the gifted essayist so often digresses into vapid declamation without soul or substance, the Irish orator is full of true feeling, fertile in ideas and expresses himself for a valid purpose. The more carefully one understands the temperament of Burke and his times and the more closely his style is scanned, the more manifest it will be that while forensic passion too often passes into extravagance, the great body of his prose is marked by that genuine emotion which tells of a great heart and a catholic interest in the race.

### (2.) Dignified and Manly.

Here again, we touch the close relation of Burke's personality to his style. Even in his boyhood and early school days, there was seen a kind of maturity of manner indicative of thoughtfulness and promising future eminence. Sobriety of temperament was, in a sense, constitutional with him and in fullest harmony with his impassioned earnestness of nature, while his fond devotion to his old Quaker teacher from Yorkshire may have deepened and mellowed this inborn tendency. It is well known what impressions he made in this particular upon some of the leading minds of his time. When Robertson remarked that Burke had wit, Johnson objected, in that he felt that Burke could never condescend to the level of the

punster and the clown. It was Johnson who tells us that any person could see at once that Burke was an extraordinary man, did he but meet him casually by the way for a moment's chat, and he asserted that he was the only man he ever met whose common conversation corresponded with his high intellectual character and fame. He was always the great and manly Burke.

We learn that Burke's view of Sheridan was comparatively indifferent in that there was a lack of moral gravity with which he could have no sincere sympathy. He was specially fond of discussing high themes and conversing about the leading names of history. In this respect, his nature was Miltonic and Homeric. In our own country it might be termed—Websterian. His brow was massive and so was his soul, and he had nothing whatever to do with those numberless petty questions and incidents that seem to absorb the thought of the multitude.

All this in the man, revealed itself in the author. There is a something about the movement of Burke's prose that is majestic and magisterial—nothing base or belittling, nothing puerile or trivial, nothing even merely amusing for amusement's sake, but a kind of judicial gravity everywhere apparent that makes it impossible for a man to be any other than in sober earnest as he peruses it. His treatise on—The Sublime—is characteristic of the man, and marks the uniform quality of his writing. Hence, it is interesting to note to what views of things as a writer this element of personal dignity gives origin—to his broad views of the proper functions and objects of civil government; to his wide and sober schemes as to church and

state, trade and society; to his philanthropic interest in the oppressed classes whether they were slaves in chains or colonists in America or the victims of rapacity in India. It was this high sense of honor that gave occasion to some of the finest passages of his prose. When asked by the gentlemen of Bristol to advocate what he felt he could not, he said—"I should only disgrace myself. I should lose the only thing which can make such abilities as mine of any use to the world—I mean that authority which is derived from the opinion that a member speaks the language of truth and sincerity and that he is not ready to take up or lay down a great political system for the convenience of the hour; that he is in Parliament to support his opinion of the public good and does not form his opinion in order to get into Parliament or to continue in it." "I never will suffer," he said, "any man or description of man to suffer from errors that naturally have grown out of the abusive constitution of those offices which I propose to regulate,—If I cannot reform with equity, I will not reform at all." Such was the manly tenor of his words. Whenever he wrote or spoke, it was under the influence of a high idea of the nature of man, the excellence of truth, the momentous interests at stake. There was a total absence of that cynical view of man which Swift and Carlyle possessed and nothing of that spirit of levity which marked the writers of the Restoration. He had the gravity of Richard Hooker in connection with a wider breadth of intellect and soul.

Morley is right when he says that "Burke had the sacred gift of inspiring men to use a grave diligence

in caring for high things and in making their lives rich and austere.”

It is this feature of the prose before us that gives to it the additional feature of *ethical vitality*. There is a moral tone throughout that is sound and wholesome. There is what Longinus would term—an elevation of spirit and expression that at once impresses the mind of the reader and inclines him to the best things. It is not necessary, here, to inquire minutely into the personal religious life of Burke further than to say that he was a pure, conscientious and upright man. Nor is it necessary to inquire how he adjusted the Protestant beliefs of his father with the Romish beliefs of his mother and these again, with the simple Quaker creed of Shackleton, his early teacher, further than to say that he was brought up in the faith of his father and was an English Protestant. Nor is it necessary to attempt to explain in consistency with his professions certain official acts that a hostile criticism has charged to his account further than to say, that Burke’s parliamentary record of thirty years is characteristically free from those official errors and vices which mark the lives of so many legislators. We are speaking of his prose style in its substantial merit when we say that it is morally elevated and elevating throughout. It brings the reader into the region of the highest and best things and obliges him to take more exalted views of himself and his mission. If this be so, the prose of Burke should find a place in the library of every thoughtful English speaking student. We may say of it, as we may say in regard to De Quincey’s, that young men, especially, will find it full of just the literary and ethical teach-

ing that they need. The record of English Prose will furnish no better prose than Burke's in the line of healthful, literary stimulus and judicious guidance in the expression of thought. Most of all, must they read it who wish to do any worthy work in the sphere of forensic writing. Combining as it does the elements of genuine feeling and ethical dignity, it is calculated to produce the best possible effect upon the mind addressed. Burke is one of the world's dignitaries and is still potent in modern history. His style is full of his great soul and no one can put himself fairly into contact with the moral grandeur of his prose and not be a stronger man and a more effective writer.

### (3.) Practical and Timely.

His style was such by the very force of circumstances, quite apart from the man himself. He could not have been otherwise in the reign of George III., and as a member of the British Parliament. The age was practical. The issues at stake were practical. A few, indeed, such as Bolingbroke were spinning their metaphysical theories, but the great majority of the scholars and writers and people of the time were awake and devoted. The same influences that made men fervent made them advocates of the useful. All this in the age was fully in keeping with the inner spirit and purpose of Burke. He was as far as possible from being a visionary or a mere political schemer. That moral gravity of which we have spoken made it impossible for him to do anything earnestly for any other reason than for its practical value. Burke was a philosopher in the concrete



sense of the term. He cared nothing for abstract speculation and went, at times, to extremes in his language as to the uselessness of mere theory.

“I do not mean to condemn,” he says, “such speculative inquiries concerning this great object. They may tend to clear doubtful points and, possibly, may lead to real improvements. What I object to, is, their introduction into a discourse relating to the immediate state of our affairs and recommending plans of practical government.”

There was everything in Burke's history to make him thus suspicious of all vagaries as a writer. “He was emphatically,” says Mr. Craik, “a practical politician and, above all, an English politician.” His early official life in the Secretaryship, his service of nearly a generation in Parliament; his constant contact with public men and affairs of state deepened this tendency. One of the strongest arguments against the criticism of Burke's oratory as mere declamation is the fact, that he had actually no time for such declamation. As Arnold expresses it, he “was saturated with ideas” and used words only as means to their expression. Even in his great speech at the impeachment which took hours for its delivery, he was too busy for the mere parade of his power nor did he think of it for a moment. What the critics have called digression and flights of fancy, was but the method by which unconsciously he relieved his mind from that almost unbearable tension to which it was stretched. What he was aiming at was the rectification of Indian abuses under the policy of Hastings, and every syllable counted for one, in the solemn indictment.

So, in the pamphlets on the French and American Revolutions and the great questions of reform. His aim was the defense of popular privilege against the exactions of despotism and of official purity against official corruption. Never has a man had a more definite purpose or more definitely worked toward its fulfillment. All his utterances revealed this fact, and most especially do those in which he was contending for popular rights. "I am not one of those," he said, "who think that the people are never wrong. They have been so, frequently and outrageously, in other countries and in this. But I do say that in all disputes between them and their rulers, the presumption is at least upon a par." To press this presumption against all odds was the aim of Burke. He was not at all in favor of a pure democracy and therefore opposed the French Revolution from the outset. He was, however, heartily in favor of a limited democracy and therefore opposed the monarchical despotism of the mother country in her relations to the colonies.

It was this union of conservative stability with progressive ideas as to constitutional reform that made him such a power in the state.

Burke's prose was thus full of this practical business-like element. It was not simply prose as distinct from poetry, but pertinent and utilitarian as distinct from indefinite. It was the real *proversus* or *prorsus*—the straightforward way of stating things.

It is in point here to state that this is a feature of style far too little seen even in authors of note. There is not enough of *direct address*—a speaking and writing to the point in hand, so that the results

are manifest and permanent. In this respect, political prose as represented in Burke has every advantage in that it is addressed directly to the questions at issue. There is nothing merely poetic or fanciful here, but all is serious and definite and the writer is held closely to a practical end by the very nature of his theme.

#### (4.) Satirical and Figurative.

Burke's first production of any note—*A Vindication of Natural Society*—was of the satirical order as directed against the style and philosophy of Bolingbroke, and so complete was the disguise that it was commonly referred to Lord Bolingbroke himself. This element of irony naturally found its best expression in his pamphlets and speeches and naturally took the form of impassioned invective. In his papers on the French and the American Revolutions; in his *Impeachment of Hastings* and his defense of the *Reform Bill*, are to be found some of the finest examples in English Prose of successful satire. It is, also, noticeable that inasmuch as satire essentially involves figurative forms the ironical and figurative elements combine in the prose of Burke.

In—*The Reflections*—when speaking of the National Assembly of France he states—

“It is notorious that all their measures are decided before they are debated. It is beyond doubt that under the terror of the bayonet and the lamp-post they are obliged to adopt all the desperate measures suggested by clubs composed of a medley of all tongues.

Among these are found persons, in comparison of whom Cataline would be thought scrupulous, and Cethegus a man of sobriety. Tenderness to individuals is considered as treason to the public. Liberty is always to be estimated perfect as property is rendered insecure. Amidst assassination and massacre, they are forming plans for the good order of future society."

In his—Letter to a Noble Lord—he writes:—

"I challenge the Duke of Bedford as a juror to pass upon the value of my services. I have no doubt of his Grace's readiness in all the calculations of vulgar arithmetic, but I shrewdly suspect that he is little studied in the theory of moral proportions, and has never learned the rule of three in the arithmetic of state."

In his speech at the trial of Hastings even his own great powers almost seem to fail him in his effort to express the deep intensity of his soul. All forms of irony, from the courteous innuendo to the mock-heroic are used. All species of figure from metaphor to hyperbole are used, because as Macaulay states it, "The thought of the crimes (of Hastings) made the blood of Burke boil in his veins." No ordinary language would at all suffice and he must resort to the unusual and striking.

At times, the style of Burke reaches the extreme of invective and metaphor and no terms can be too violent to vent his indignation. In the main, however, he keeps his prose within the bounds of personal and literary propriety. Less chaste and cautious than De Quincey and Dickens, he is more vigorous than either in his use of imagery, while he surpasses Macaulay himself in some of his imaginative flights. Readers have often noted the descriptive power of Burke's style, its illustrative or imaginative char-

acter, as exhibited, especially, in his parliamentary addresses. Such a feature was a part of his Celtic nature and vastly deepened by his experiences. He had what is termed the historic imagination as distinct from the philosophic or poetic. He was an adept in the re-presentation of the life of the immediate past as seen in India or France, while the stirring events of his own time but served to interpret all the more clearly what had always transpired.

His description of the desolations wrought by the wicked policy of Hastings, of the descent of Hyder Ali upon the Carnatic or of the evils attendant upon popular revolution, take their place as literary efforts by the side of Hugo's Waterloo or Wallace's Vesuvius.

Some of these passages are full of a genuine pathos and while arousing righteous indignation against the oppressed, awaken sympathy for the suffering. In fine, there is in the prose of Burke in addition to vigor and dignity and practical aim a kind of descriptive richness of phrase and form—a comprehensiveness of style that includes the various forms of imagery and irony, of pathos and poetic power. Morley speaks of the "varieties of Burke's literary methods." Such varieties are mainly seen within the sphere of the illustrative and pictorial, in wealth of diction and rhetorical structure and in that flexible aptness by which he was able to adapt himself and his subject to the exigencies of the hour. Too sober-minded in his style to indulge in the expression of much humor and too impassioned, at times, to avoid violations of phrase and sentence structure, he still

succeeded in exhibiting all the substantial qualities of the best prose style.

We note, in closing, the main defect of Burke's prose.

### (5.) The Lack of Literary Finish.

It is at this point that the critics of Burke are most on the alert and most hostile. Even by those who concede all the other qualities referred to, this one of finish is questioned or flatly denied as existing. The origin of this current view is undoubtedly found in the fact that the prose of Burke is specially forensic or political. As such, it is oratorical, it is argued, as distinct from being literary; the prose of the parliament and hustings rather than that of the study and library. The theory here is that the terms—*oratorical* and *finished*—as applied to prose production are in a sense exclusive of each other; that a style which is specially forensic is thereby less apt to be marked by excellence of form. There is some degree of truth in all this and, yet, care must be taken lest the criticism be pushed to an extreme.

It must be conceded that Burke's prose as being essentially political is thereby less marked by grace and elegance than by some other qualities—that it cannot in this respect, be at all compared with Addison's or Macaulay's, with Lamb's or De Quincey's and more nearly resembles the controversial style of Milton in his vigorous state pamphlets. This is so, and yet it is very much to be questioned whether Burke himself would have had it otherwise. Poetic

finish of prose forms was in no sense to his purpose. The practical character of his writings forbade it nor would he have surrendered the greater good for the lesser. If in order to its securing, he must yield one iota of his cogent manner, he was unwilling to make the sacrifice. As we have seen, he had no time for the mere embellishment of word and paragraph but must speak "right on" as "a plain, blunt man."

His literary theory was all in the direction that there were some things infinitely better than literary finish. Hence, his very figures and illustrations were homely, and often, crude and harsh. At whatever cost, he must secure an impressive form of statement. This was, often, at the expense of verbal nicety and neatness.

In his essay on—The Sublime and Beautiful—he teaches that strength and beauty do not coincide and he prefers the former. If in describing the Duke of Bedford or the chief actors in the French Revolution, delicacy and refinement of taste stand in the way of his meaning, then taste must take care of itself and the truth be told in pungent form. It is just here that he often violates propriety, and yet, how could we spare the words that follow such a violation. As Minto aptly states at this point, "Taste is certainly not the special virtue of English Literature." Burke in this respect is a Puritan and a Saxon. He talks as Fuller and Bunyan, Bede and Alfred talked, quite irrespective of the elegance of the phrase.

That the critics are right in calling this a defect no one will question. That they are right in so magnifying it as to make it a criminal offense on Burke's part and an insuperable objection to placing his

prose in the first rank, is altogether questionable. Despite his want of grace of touch, he is at the very front of our English prosers and gains in effectiveness where he loses in elegance. More than this, had he written as Addison or Dickens wrote, his prose would have perished with the events that called it forth. Critics must deal with him where he invites scrutiny—at his strongest points as a writer and not at a point where he makes no pretense to special excellence. Bacon and Burke have been compared, intellectually. They are, also, similar in their prose style in this—that cogency of statement must at all hazards be secured. With them, expression is for impression.

It is interesting and also a matter of justice to note in this connection, that in the wider sense of the word, Burke's style had a degree of literary quality. His scrupulous care in the composition of his writings is well known.

So *literary*, indeed, were his speeches that the indifference of the members of Parliament at their delivery is thus explained. We are told that they read better than they sounded. The early attractions of literature for him are a matter of history to the extent that he seriously proposed to make it his sphere of activity in life. His fondness for reading was intense, and the information he gathered was of such extent as to qualify him for the compilation of *The Annual Register*. He spoke of Spenser and the later poets with the freedom of intimate friendship. His neglect of prescribed study while at Trinity for the more pleasing pursuits of letters is not questioned, and even at the Temple in the nominal study of the



law, he was really engaged in storing his mind with useful information outside of Digests and Commentaries. In happy connection with all this is the account that we have of his literary associates. At the famous Turk's Head, he was one of the habitual guests. With Robertson, the historian, and Garrick, the actor he was intimate. He knew Gibbon and Reynolds, Goldsmith and Johnson, as literary friends and helpers, and was attached to some of them by a passionate devotion. He never left the society of these masters of letters even after he had formally abandoned letters for the stirring life of politics.

So decided was he in his literary tastes and abilities that *The Letters of Junius*, now attributed to Sir Philip Francis were credited to him until he solemnly avowed that he was not their author. He prided himself on basing his style upon the best literary models of England and France. In fine, if he had not the element of literary grace in his prose, he had his full share of literary taste and tendency in his nature.

Had he not abandoned the literary life proper for a more public sphere and service, these tendencies would have been developed in a different direction and he might have given us epics and histories in the place of fiery pamphlets on revolution and reform.

He made a deliberate choice, however, in favor of politics and presents a prominent example in English Letters of the author in Parliament. Unlike Bacon and Milton and Addison and Lamb and Macaulay, he subordinated literature to the offices of state and, yet withal, maintained his reputation as an English writer. As a man and an author he has left an indel-

ble impression on English Letters. He was great in his unique personality and great in the emotive seriousness of his prose. Whenever students of character may desire to see the embodiment of nobility and unselfishness in human nature; whenever students of political science and public questions may desire to see measures and maxims of wide legislative reach, and whenever students of English Style may desire to see an example of impassioned, manly, sober and practical prose second to no other in our literary annals, they must give their attention to the writings of Burke—a man who thought as he pleased and spoke and wrote as he thought and whose separate presence in any era is enough to give it permanent renown in history.

#### References and Authorities.

Prior's Life of Burke. Macaulay's Essays. Morley's Burke (Eng. Men of Let.). Maurice's Friendship of Books. Croly's Historical Sketches.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### THE PROSE STYLE OF CHARLES LAMB.

#### Brief Biographical Sketch.

BORN, Feb. 18th, 1775, in London. Was educated at Christ's Hospital. Thence, to the South Sea House. A Clerk in the India House, 1792. Retired with Pension in 1825. Died in London, Dec. 27th, 1834.

#### His Prose Writings.

Lamb was not a voluminous writer either of verse or prose.

As far as his poetry is concerned, it is of indifferent merit and we are at a loss to understand De Quincey's remark "that Lamb had the dramatic intellect and taste, perhaps, in perfection," save as we interpret this language in reference to Lamb's ability as a critic of the drama. In fact, poetry was not his favorite work. As he sends his sonnets to Coleridge he says with some degree of spirit, "Take them, for they tempt me to go on with the idle trade of versifying which I long to leave off, for it is unprofitable to my soul." In the *Essays of Elia* he speaks of "his proper element of prose."

Even here, the actual amount of literary product is somewhat limited as compared with the essayists

of the Augustan era. As far as our purpose is concerned, we have to do with—*The Essays of Elia*, *Specimens of Dramatists*, *Miscellaneous Essays*, *Rosamond*, and with his *Letters*.

As to any partial Defects of Style which critics have noted we may mention:

## PARTIAL DEFECTS OF STYLE.

### (1.) Diction and Structure.

Despite the general excellence of the author's style at this point, there is something, it is true, to rebuke and correct.

The frequency of complex *parenthesis* is noticeable. In this regard, Lamb is not as discreet as Swift, who under the cover of digressions, included all the indirect material that he wished to use, and yet preserved intact the unity of the thought. As to diction it is, at times, difficult we confess to draw the line between humorous and sober phraseology. Many phrases in themselves improper seem to be used for purposes of wit. 'Tis thus that he speaks of "day-mare" as well as night-mare; of the "knock-eternal" rather than nocturnal; of clergy-gentlemanly; of loco-restive; of a man as parson-ish and of the non-sensorium. Apart from such doubtful usage, moreover, there is too much liberty of coinage until a literary habit of verbal looseness seems to be formed. Thus, we have—unplain, discapacitate, disputaciousness, snugify, and similar barbarisms.

It is to be noted here that Lamb's fondness for the older authors and his constant tendency to the serio-

comic somewhat affected his diction, and not always for the better. Had he written far more than he did his prose in this respect would have been improved. In the main, however, the diction and structure are of merit. They are so thoroughly in keeping with the author's individuality that they must be judged in that light. In many of his critical essays such as—*The Tragedies of Shakespeare*—his vocabulary in richness and compass is of the very first order, while in his lighter humorous papers, the facile use of English is worthy of the best prose writers of our literature. It is extreme criticism to insist that the diction is inferior by reason of those few examples which mark a departure from verbal propriety.

## (2.) Absence of Logical Development.

This defect has, also, been noted and with some reason. There is needed, it is said, the presence of a central idea definitely wrought out and applied.

When Lamb wrote to Coleridge "Cultivate simplicity, or rather, I should say, banish elaborateness," he stated a principle true in itself yet needing explanation. True simplicity is perfectly compatible with "elaborateness" and should so be related in prose discourse. Lamb, we are told, goes to the opposite extreme and is simple at the expense of thoroughness. Even in *Elia* the style is, thus, epistolary and colloquial as well as in the *Letters*. There is not enough of the philosophical and consecutive.

It is this special point on which De Quincey dwells in his criticism of Lamb. He speaks of a want of continuity; refers to him as discontinuous, abrupt

and capricious. In the suggestive language of Coleridge, he is "non-sequacious." A two-fold explanation of this defect is given in, the infringement made upon the *author's time* by the constant visitation of friends, leading to the habit of snatching at learning by fragments and, also, in the fact that it was a mode of composition quite in harmony with the *unsettled tendencies* of his mind. Be this as it may, "the non-sequaciousness" is too apparent, and is rightly emphasized by the critics. Perhaps his early experience in newspaper writing led to this style of English which his latest biographer terms—"eclectic." The style is often fragmentary and transitional, full of discursive sketches and ramblings even where a line of reflection more or less sustained would be in order. It is thus that his biographer cautions us—"If an essay is headed—Oxford in the Vacation—we must not complain that only half the paper touches on Oxford, and that the rest is divided between the writer Elia and a certain absent-minded old scholar, George Dyer, on whose peculiarities Lamb was never tired of dwelling."

This being so, it is maintained that it is in the light of other tests and canons of criticism that Lamb is to be judged and commended. Whatever he is in the line of literary merit, he cannot be called a mentally vigorous writer as Milton was. Allusion has been made to some possible explanations of this defect. The real one has not, as yet, been stated. It is this. Lamb was a pronounced advocate of the *natural* method of writing as distinct from any method based on prescribed literary law. He rather boasted in having no style or method, writing what

and how he pleased, doing in prose what Shakespeare is represented by Milton as doing in poetry—"warbling his native wood-notes wild." On this theory, false as it is, Lamb gains something, perhaps, in the way of apparent naturalness or freedom of style, but loses greatly in the way of strength, solidity and true literary effect. No man can afford to decry thoroughness by arguing superficially or decry method by writing immethodically. The purely "natural school" in every sphere is its own sufficient answer. Admitting all this, we shall find however, that this unrestrained manner was germane to the author's habit and personality and that he could not have succeeded as well as he did on any other principle.

He did not pretend to present a Baconian style and the critics have overreached themselves in protesting that Lamb must write as some others wrote. In fact, he made it a point to break away from the older school as to method. Mr. Taine reaches a better result here when he maintains that Lamb aimed to destroy "the great aristocratical style as it sprang from methodical analyses and court conventions." This want of logical order is a fault. It is so in Lamb, but in him not a great fault as thereby he expressed himself and yet kept within the limits of a general method. To bind him to any rigorous pre-arranged plan would be simply to rob him of his personality as a writer, and of those elements of style which now endear him to the reading public. Such a free-hand style is in its place as useful as a more rigid one and serves to vary that wearisome monotony which would result from the exclusive presence of a more philosophic method.

### (3.) Want of Permanent Literary Effect.

This defect, in so far as it is found, is the inevitable result of the one just stated. It is not within the author's mental possibilities to found a separate school of literature nor is his style, at its best, dominant and shaping. He was not meant to be a leader or reformer. As far as his life is revealed and his writings indicate, he never had as an author any high ethical end to accomplish as Bacon and Johnson had. He accepted the condition of things as he found them and made no sustained endeavor to modify them. His writings are subjective and devoid of the aggressive and polemic element. After the perusal of his works, we stand just where we stood before relative to the great questions of church and state. As we shall see, all this had some purpose in it and such a man was needed to relieve the people from the rigid methods of Baconian days or the moralistic sobriety of Augustan times and put the world in good humor. A softer and more desultory method was demanded and the need was supplied in the prose of Lamb. By this it is not meant that we find in Lamb a style devoid of *morale*.

In the centre of his character he was a serious minded man. His better nature was on the side of the right and the good. His spirit was in harmony with what was fine and exalted. All this conceded, there is the lack of what Chalmers would call "the expulsive power" of moral character—a strong, permanent, ethical impression. His nature was of the subdued rather than of the positive order. There is



a large element of the Melancthon in his style and little of the Luther. It is still true that his prose is read more for its cheeriness and good-nature than for any result in the line of permanent moral good.

Talfourd, his biographer, states it exactly as he says—"Of all modern writers his works are most immediately directed to give us heart-ease and to make us happy." This language indicates the merit and, also, marks the deficiency of the author's prose and prose style.

In noting the more positive and promising merits of his style, we remark—

### PROMISING MERITS OF STYLE.

#### (1.) Its English Character and Spirit.

No prose writer of England has ever been more deeply interested in English Letters and, especially, in its earlier and quaint forms. In his tragedy of *Woodvil*, he refers to his—"Sweet Mother Tongue, Old English Speech." To Mary, his sister, he says, "that they were tumbled early by accident or design into a spacious closet of good Old English reading, without much objection or prohibition and browsed at will upon that fair and wholesome pasturage." As the natural result of such a "browsing" he gave to the English Public his "*Specimens of the English Dramatists contemporary with Shakespeare.*" These were so attractive as to be called "the quintessence of criticism." All through his style, we note the informing presence of the older authors; an ardent devotion to their words and ways and a sacred purpose to restore them, if possible, to their rightful

place in Modern English Letters. The pages of his prose are aptly marked by references to the earlier times. In a characteristic letter to Coleridge in which he is using all his influence to persuade him to concentrate his genius upon the production of an epic, he adjures him to do it "by the sacred energies of Milton" and the "sweet and soothing fantasies of Spenser." He speaks of the "graceful rambling" of Cowley in his essays and of "the courtly elegance and ease" of Addison. Of the names of old Kit Marlowe, of Drayton and of Drummond of Hawthornden he writes, that they carry perfume in the very mention of them. Sydney, Taylor, Fuller, Browne, De Foe and Walton are each in turn the subject of just and fervid eulogium. In the presence of Shakespeare he is fairly overawed and pretends to nothing more than the barest outline of his dramatic wealth. He speaks reverentially of his "divine mind and manners," and calls him, most fittingly, "the immeasurable." With the aid of his sister, he gives to the children of the country an edition of Shakespeare suitable to their needs and as a stimulus to their mental life. As literary historians have noted, all this was at a time when Shakespeare and the earlier English authors were comparatively unstudied save by a chosen few. It was the inborn and cherished love of his native language that impelled Lamb to open the eyes of his countrymen, old and young, to the excellence of what had preceded. It is this which as much as anything else gave to his style that racy, homelike element which made it readable then and preserves it as in amber now. It is thus that Lamb is to be classified in English Prose with Milton

and Swift, with Dryden, Addison and Johnson as a special lover of English. His style is a home product and exponent.

## (2.) Humorous Element.

It is at this point that we come in contact with the innermost nature of Lamb as a man and as a writer.

It was this feature especially that made his intercourse with Southey and Coleridge, Hazlitt and Wordsworth so intensely enjoyable that they in love with the country and he with the city were never at rest in presenting reasons why they should live together. This feature of style is but the reflex of the author's face with its roguish playfulness and serio-comic cast—a face full of the evidences of old-fashioned mother-wit. His face is always promising good things. With his long-drawn visage and clerical tie he seems as sombre as a parson and, yet, there is something under the eyelids and about the mouth that warns one to loosen his bands and prepare for a constitutional shake. As the expression of this inside humor we note some specimens—"On Burial Societies and Undertakers"; "On The Inconvenience of Being Hanged"; "On The Melancholy of Tailors" caused by their sedentary habits; and "On The Convalescent," a man who on his bed changes sides oftener than a politician. The bed is "a wavy, oceanic surface whose every furrow is an historical record of some shifting fortune. Now, he lies at half length; now, at full length; now, obliquely; now, transversely and none accuses him of tergiversation."

On being asked by an editor for a magazine article he replies—"In Articulo Mortis." To Woods, he speaks of an entertaining gentleman who had retired to a green old age on forty pounds a year and one. When suffering from a distressing cold, he writes to Barton "that he can't distinguish veal from mutton; has not volition enough to dot his i's," and adds "that if we should tell him that the world will be at an end to-morrow, he would reply—Will it?" He speaks of the two distinct races into which men are divided—the borrowers and the lenders. In his chapter on—Ears—he tells us, that he has been practicing—God save the King—all his life, whistling and humming it over in solitary corners and has not yet arrived in many quavers of it. He tells us that he has been trying, all his life, to like Scotchmen but gives up the experiment in despair. In his article on "Grace before Meat" he accounts for the origin of it in days of monastic life when a bellyfull was a windfall and regarded as a special providence. In his "Bachelor's Complaint," and "Popular Fallacies," the same pleasantry prevails. In his "Dissertation on Roast Pig," the climax of wit is reached and the buttons all fly. In fine, the humor is all genuine humor, is pervasive rather than occasional. Some of his papers surpass the others in this quality and, yet, it is quite unnecessary to choose. Among all the leading English Essayists there is none in whom humor is so much an essential part of the man and of his style. This omitted, the distinctive peculiarity of Lamb is missed. Let the topic be what it may, there is no cessation of the mirthful jollity. He is as full of it as an egg is of meat or as a spring is of

water. It must flow and overflow. Hence it is, that Gerald Massey and others have pronounced him the first English Humorist and placed his style in this element at the head. In his Preface to the second series of the—Essays of Elia—he speaks of himself in the third person as follows—“He would interrupt the gravest discussion with some light jest.” He could not restrain himself nor did he care to.

He did what Burns did in poetry—gave vent to his inner self. The reference of Carlyle to Lamb’s wit as “make-believe” is as far as anything could be from the truth, and is but one specimen among many of Carlyle’s one-sided opinions.

There is one feature in the pleasantry of Lamb that needs emphasis. It is his partial or confirmed *sadness*. In this particular, he reminds one of Goldsmith, Hood, Sterne, Burns and other less gifted authors. The close relation of smiles to tears is nowhere more manifest than in humor. Even where the element of positive sadness does not enter, there is more or less of sobriety and sudden transition to seriousness in most humorists. The less of this there is, however, the more healthful is the humor. This in Lamb’s case was excessive, at times, and it is the only feature that would cause one to question his position as first among English Humorists. It is quite possible to prove, we think, that the humor of Dickens, Thackeray, Sidney Smith and other kindred prose writers is a higher type than that species which so draws upon our sympathies as, at times, to be painful. The end of true humor is pleasure. A certain degree of sensibility is essential to it, but when wholesome

sobriety develops into sadness and our feelings are enlisted so deeply as to occasion pain, humor overreaches itself and misses its end. Just as the enjoyment of beauty cannot admit of the element of terror so that of humor excludes confirmed sadness. His latest biographer, Mr. Ainger, speaks of this quality as belonging "to the profound humanity of its author; to the circumstance that with him, as with all true humorists, humor was but one side of an acute and almost painful sympathy." Very true, if the sympathy is "almost" and not altogether "painful." Sympathy is one thing, Personal Suffering, is another. This tendency to the morbid apart, the prose of Lamb is a representative example of humorous prose. When he was in the best mood, and most free from that mental waywardness that so marred his life, his humor had no superior in English Prose and it is in these hours that he is to be tested and enjoyed.

He had the root and essence of humor in the *kindliness* of his spirit. He was more than a wit or a punster. He could not indulge in that cruel sarcasm in which Swift so freely indulged. He was full of that *humanity* which Thackeray emphasizes as the basis of humor. Though he says of himself—"that he too much affected that dangerous figure—irony," his satire was always tempered with good will. He "laughed with men" and not "at them." He protested that "he never could hate any one whom he knew." The epithet "gentle" so often applied to his name was well deserved. Worcester's definition of humor as—"kindly pleasantry"—marks the special excellence of his.

### (3.) Naturalness and Flexibility.

Here again we strike one of the great features of the author's prose.

The epithet "delightful" as used by critics of his style, finds its justification here. There was a certain felicity of expression and general literary manner that won its way as it went on and makes it a difficult matter to lay aside the reading of his papers. It is for this reason in connection with their humorous element that—The Essays of Elia—have so charmed the English-reading public. All critics have spoken of a certain indescribable something about the style of Lamb. As Ainger states, "It evades analysis. One might as well seek to account for the perfume of lavender or the flavor of quince." There is a kind of witchery or fascination about it that attracts and entertains us and we ourselves are at a loss to know why we are so interested. Other essayists have had a larger circle of readers but few have had a more devoted circle. Those of his own and succeeding times speak of him in terms of personal affection. They forget the author in the man, or rather in accordance with the experience of Pascal, in looking for an author they find a man—"gentle-hearted" and broad-souled. If asked on what basis this attractiveness of style rests, it must be found in its Naturalness. No writer has ever been himself more than Lamb was Lamb. He was ingenuous to a fault, and often lays his style open to vindictive criticism by reason of his unstudied artlessness. He loved the Confessions of Rosseau, not because they

were Rousseau's but because they were Confessions—the natural outburst of the heart. He preferred the style of Temple to that of Shaftesbury because it was “plain, natural chit-chat,” and not formal or courtly.

Critics who have failed to see into the interior of his character have accused him of *egotism* in its more extreme forms. They have called attention to the first personal pronoun in his writings and contrasted him unfavorably with other essayists at this point. In this judgment they have widely missed the mark and failed to discern one of the very secrets of the author's power—his intense personality, of which his naturalness is but the expression in form. As he says himself, “He would out with what came uppermost,” and was grave or gay, imaginative or plain as the case might be. He had no particular method applicable at all times but in the best sense was a writer at large, freely descanting in his own natural way upon the topic of the time. Hence, the variety and flexibility of the style. It is absolutely free from the literary vice of sameness. There is nothing stilted or made to order—nothing so fixed as not to be capable of change. As we have seen, this tendency, at times, degenerated to illogical rambling, but when at all under control, took the form of a pleasing variety and vivacity. “Few English writers have written so differently,” says one, “on different themes.” The manner is versatile and free so that where we lose in logical directness we gain in diversity and area.

Reference has often been made to the author's apt and frequent use of *quotations* from those English



authors whom he so much loved—from Browne and Burton; from Shakespeare and the dramatists; from Wordsworth and Milton. This habit is characteristic and yet nowhere is he more natural and nowhere is the literary richness of his style more marked. In his quotations no one ever thinks of literary servility or base imitation. There was not the semblance of this. So far from it that he seemed to lend to the references he selected the character and charm of his own personality. This in itself is an art, but an art founded in nature and not feasible apart from it. He individualized and made his own whatever he used. He was an author of unusually wide knowledge of earlier and contemporary literature. No one was more conversant with the best that had been written or could better appreciate it. He tells us in his essay on—Books and Reading—that he could read anything which he called a book. Where others were ignorant he was informed, and spoke of English authors with the ardor of a lover—as of Burns and Walton, Beaumont and Fletcher. All this made it easy for him to quote and, if convenient, to appropriate, while the fact that he quoted without appropriating but reveals all the clearer the naturalness of his style. It is in this feature of style that Lamb's *descriptive* power appears. What he felt and saw he could tell just as it was. Other essayists have surpassed him in delineative skill and reach. As far, however, as *naturalness* of description is concerned, he has had no superior. He depicted the scene or character as he conceived it and in so far as he failed, it was due to other causes—want of comprehensiveness of view and want of constructive imagination. It is in his

humorous descriptions that he is at his best and it is here that naturalness is a vital quality of style. In such papers as—Recollections of the South Sea Home, Oxford in the Vacation, The Old Benches of the Inner Temple, and Imperfect Sympathies, this power of natural portraiture is clearly seen.

#### (4.) Sympathetic Tenderness.

It is difficult to state with clearness the precise nature of the quality to which we here refer. We might call it a kind of sensitiveness of style, deep and delicate as it is attractive. It is what the French critics might call, *unction*. It is what Milton would term in poetry the "sensuous and passionate." A pure and tender feeling suffuses the pages of the author. One has to read but a little in order to see it and yield to its power. It is above all art. It defies explanation or statement. It is simply in the man and in the writing and a something by which the soul of the reader is fused into that of the author. They feel together. This element of style is partly due, beyond question, to that peculiar life of sadness which Lamb so often led and not altogether separate from those hours of mental anguish by which his experience was marked. There was just enough of the melancholy about it to tinge and soften it. We speak of it here, however, as a healthful literary quality and tending to strength. This is a feature more manifest in his Letters and prose romance than in—The Essays. In that personal correspondence which he held with Coleridge, Southey, Manning and others there was

just enough of the intimacy of friendship to elicit and foster this tenderness of heart, while in such a touching story as that of Rosamond Gray, or the Dream-Children, this fineness of feeling reaches its climax. Critics speak of the "religious emotion" that pervades it, while even Shelley was constrained to acknowledge its peculiar charm. Much of the diction of Lamb is sympathetic rather than scholastic. Outside of oratory and lyric verse, there are few specimens of prose more justly entitled to the name of impassioned than that of Lamb.

This quality of tenderness in style is unique and deserves special emphasis. Of all the English writers thus far discussed, not one is any more remarkable for this. The tendencies are all in the other direction—to the dispassionate and didactic or to what might be termed, a state of emotional indifference. The Augustan Age had nothing of it. Milton and Burke evinced a degree of fervor, and, yet, not of this subdued type. Many subordinate writers, such as—Fuller and Walton possessed it more deeply than their superiors. Even where it is found at all, as in Dickens, De Quincey and Eliot, it is generally found as exceptional and not as a pervasive and central quality. Cowper in his Letters and Burns and Wordsworth in their poetry have much of it. The prose that followed the revival of literature in the latter part of the eighteenth century is more marked by it than the prose of earlier times and, yet, Charles Lamb is quite alone in the depth and fullness of it. It is as much a part of his style as is its English character, its humor or its naturalness. These qualities together made up a style that without being

great or brilliant is as attractive and satisfying as any in English Letters.

It remains to speak of the—

### (5.) Critical Element in Lamb's Prose.

We are here on entirely new ground as to the interpretation of the author. No estimate of his ability, style or place in English Literature can be at all just with this element omitted. It is, however, the very last feature that we should expect to find. There is nothing in the qualities thus far examined that necessarily leads to this further one. They would be complete without it. There is nothing in the author's life and character as a man, that would necessitate it. When discerned, it is not seen to be abnormal but simply unexpected. In Addison and Johnson, we look for it. In Lamb, it is a surprise. Hence it is, that most critics and readers come to the study of this characteristic of his style with some degree of literary prejudice. "Is Saul, also, among the prophets?" Can the "gentle-hearted," sensitive and timid author of *Elia* be bold enough to turn censor and sit in judgment on his fellows? Has he the inclination to do it? Has he the mental faculty? However we might prefer to answer these questions, the facts are before us. The author has placed himself on record as a critic, especially of poetry and the drama. These papers form a body of literary criticism and must themselves be criticised as to the style they purport to exhibit. Lamb's critical style must rest on that portion of his prose which is critical as distinct from miscellaneous and descriptive, as follows:—

## CRITICAL ESSAYS.

*The Genius and Character of Hogarth. The Artificial Comedy of the Last Century. The Tragedies of Shakespeare. The Barrenness of the Imaginative Faculty in the Production of Modern Art. The Poetical Works of George Wither. The Characters of Dramatic Writers. Specimens of the English Dramatic Poets.*

In addition to these formal essays and this critical treatise on the poets, many of the Letters addressed to Southey, Coleridge and others were purely critical in character. The epistolary form gave them point and attractiveness. Here it will be noted, is quite sufficient subject matter on which to interpret Lamb's style as a critic and, yet, the most diverse judgments have been held. In his own day he was most cruelly dealt with in certain quarters. He had an experience similar to that which Byron and Wordsworth had and his sensitive nature found it hard to bear it. Later critics have been found who were willing to continue this strain of abuse, or to speak of the author with "faint praise." The burden of evidence, however, is in his favor, some going so far as to attribute to him with Southey "a special genius" in the critical art. In his—Letters—whenever he discusses English Poetry, and in his—Specimens of Dramatists—are to be found the best examples of his critical style.

As to this department of criticism he had certain prime qualifications—

1. *Thorough familiarity with his subject;*
2. *A deep affection for his language and literature;*
3. *A sensitive appreciation of poetic beauty.*

He had "browsed" among the poets till he was full of their life and spirit, and some of his decisions indicate his critical acuteness. His remarks on Southey, Beaumont and Fletcher, Walton and Burns and, most especially, on Shakespeare indicate no ordinary degree of literary insight.

Special attention should be called to his critical style as seen in—*The Specimens*. The best description of his unique method in Shakesperian criticism is given in his own words as contained in—The Preface: "The plays which I have made choice of have been, with few exceptions, those which treat of human life and manners rather than masques and Arcadian Pastorals. My leading design has been, to illustrate what may be called the *moral sense* of our ancestors; to show in what manner they felt when they placed themselves by the power of imagination in trying situations; how much of Shakespeare shines in the great men, his contemporaries, and how far in his divine mind and manners he surpassed them and all mankind." This is ingenuous and it is, for the time all new. There had been nothing like it, even in conception, save in Dr. Johnson's commentaries, and it is questionable whether in the modern "anatomizing" of Shakespeare, there has been any improvement on this old and literal method of interpretation. In this respect Ainger is right in saying, "As a critic he had no master—it might almost be said, no predecessor. He was the inventor of his own art." More than this, he laid claim to no technical knowledge of language, no full acquaintance with classical times. He made no attempt to solve riddles nor did he spend his time in attempting the impossible. His only aim

was, to reveal his author to his readers; to present the inner man to view so that his literary personality is seen and sympathy is established. Such a method is not based on erudition as much as on poetic instinct. Such a style is more the outgrowth of a "sense of beauty" than of a knowledge of its laws. It is more intuitive than logical. This much can be said, that no one of Lamb's predecessors in prose knew anything of this kind of criticism. It was as foreign to Dryden and Pope as it was to Boileau. The essayists of Queen Anne knew but little of it. Lamb was in middle life when it arose and it arose largely with himself. A few suggestions in his trenchant way would throw as much light on a character or scene as long discussions from the pen of Johnson. It is most interesting to note his special love of Shakespeare and the zeal with which he pressed his great claims on others. If Lamb had done no other service for English Letters than this, his name should be ever held in loving remembrance. He entered heartily into that revival of Elizabethan days which marked the century in which he lived and was never weary of sounding the praises of the times preceding.

His discussion of his own principle "that the plays of Shakespeare are less calculated for performance on a stage, than those of almost any other dramatist" is one of the finest pieces of English criticism. Novel as the position was, he ably defended it.

Lamb, however, had his limitations as a critic and his style bears their impression.

The main defects of his prose as critical are two.

## MAIN DEFECTS OF HIS PROSE AS CRITICAL.

## (1.) Want of Impartiality.

His loves were too strong, at times, to allow of dispassionate judgment. He could not put himself into that state of indifference which is said to be essential to the critic. He had the strong *bias*. He was predisposed to this or that. His pre-judgment often controlled his judgment. Hence, it has been urged that he thought too well of the older dramatists to pass a safe opinion on them. It has been said—"Where his heart was, there his judgment was sound." It must be added that there was, at times, so much heart that the clear decisions of the head were unduly modified. It is thus that every reader of his views on English writers of the earlier period must bear in mind Lamb's passionate devotion to those times. Despite this prejudice, however, it is still true that he set forth the real merits of the older dramatists in such a way that most of his critical opinions still pass unchallenged.

## (2.) Want of Comprehensiveness.

Lamb's mind was more acute than it was broad. Some literary historians have applied to him the epithet of Shakespearian. In some respects this was true—as to poetic sensibility and devotion to dramatic art. It is not true, however, as to that broad reach of intellectual power for which the great poet was so noted. Lamb's area as a reader was much larger than his area as a thinker. He can never be properly



credited with a Baconian order of mental power nor did he possess that critical compass of mind which marked De Quincey. As far as his reach extended, he was skillful in the art of criticism. Beyond that limit, he was out of his well defined area and is to be followed with caution.

It is not, however, so much on the critical basis that his style rests as on the other elements to which reference has been made. In the light of those, it must be maintained that although Lamb wrote but comparatively little prose, his name cannot be well spared from the list of our leading prose authors. What he wrote was characteristic, so much so, that his style is definitely marked from that of others. Moreover, with all his defects he wrote so well that he illustrated his own theory of English style—"good thoughts in good language," and is a worthy example to present to the notice of English students. It is probable that as a writer he will always be ranked somewhat above his real merits in that his genial spirit has won so many hearts and disarmed prejudice. What critics themselves would begrudge to such an author as Swift they would cheerfully accord to Lamb. He will always get the benefit of the doubt. The essays of *The Spectator* and *Rambler* may fail to hold their ground when—*The Essays of Elia* still survive in freshness of interest. The same remark may be made of his felicitous papers and of his general productions as a writer which he himself made of Walton's *Complete Angler*, "that it would sweeten a man's temper at any time to read them." The praise which Matthew Arnold borrows from Swift and often affectedly misapplies—"sweetness

and light" may well be applied to that genial and sympathetic style of which Charles Lamb is the natural master.

#### References and Authorities.

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## CHAPTER IX.

### THE PROSE STYLE OF THOMAS BABINGTON MACAULAY.

#### Brief Biographical Sketch.

BORN at Rothley Temple, Oct. 25th, 1800. In Cambridge, 1818; B.A., 1822. A Fellow of Trinity, M.A., 1825. Called to the Bar (Lincoln's Inn) 1826. Entered Parliament, 1830, for Calne. Entered Parliament, 1832, for Leeds. Became Secretary of Board of Control for India. In India 1835-8. In Parliament from Edinburgh, 1839. Secretary of War, 1840. Retired from Parliament, 1847. Lord Rector of Glasgow University, 1849. Re-elected to Parliament, 1852. Raised to Peerage, 1857. Died, Dec. 18th, 1859, in Kensington.

#### Prose Works.

As far as the prose works of Macaulay are concerned, with reference to the study of style, they are included in—*The History of England*, and his—*Essays*.

Although he had proposed to write this history "from the accession of James II. down to a time within the memory of men still living"—as far indeed, as to the death of George IV., it covers, in fact, but a

small portion of the nation's life, closing with the death of William of Orange.

His essays have been judiciously classified by Morison as follows:

1. *English History*—Burleigh, Hallam, Hampden, Milton, Temple, Mackintosh, Walpole, Pitt, Chatham, Clive and Hastings.

2. *Foreign History*—Machiavelli, Mirabeau, Van Ranke, Frederic and Baiere.

3. *Controversial*—Mill, Saddler, Southey, and Gladstone.

4. *Critical and Miscellaneous*—Dryden, Montgomery, Byron, Bunyan, Johnson, Bacon, Hunt, and Addison.

These several series include respectively, twelve, five, four and eight papers, making in round numbers, thirty productions of this periodical order.

It is not necessary here to follow the example of many critics and aim to prove the superiority of these specimens of prose to the History of England. For the purposes of the student of English, it is better to regard them as complements of each other, the one supplying what the other lacks. In what is called the *historical essay* and in which Macaulay so succeeded, there is found the best possible example of the union of these two forms of prose-narrative and miscellany.

### Popular Estimate of his Prose Style.

Popularity, in the looser sense of the term, is not to be regarded as a true criterion either of character or ability. In the higher sense, however, it may be so accepted and enters as an important factor among

others in making up the status of an author or a book.

Lord Macaulay must be classed among the popular writers of English Prose in the first half of the present century. From the date of his formal entrance upon authorship, in his *Essay on Milton*, published in the *Edinburgh Review*, in 1825, on to the date of his death, in 1859, his prose may be said to have been inferior to that of no one of his contemporaries in the hold which it had upon the respect and admiration of the English people. Since his death and the commitment of his writings to posterity and to criticism, his prose still has a substantial place in English Letters. The one who denies his claim to be ranked among the first examples of English style, must see to it that he be prepared to maintain his difficult position. It is probably true, that even at this day, no history of England, covering the era which Macaulay treats, is oftener read or read with more intelligent interest than is his. It is, also, probable that the modern English student is as familiar with Macaulay's essays as with those of any other prominent essayist of the century. Much of his essay prose, it is true, is superseded, as to its subject matter, by the course of events. Much of it was called forth by local and even partisan issues and served its purpose when it was penned.

Most of his readers care but little now as to what he said concerning Walpole, Clive and Hastings, or as to Machiavelli and Mirabeau. Some have gone so far as to say, that the partisan character of his essays, as a class, makes them unreliable for purposes of reference. The same criticism will apply to the historical

prose. Even of these prose productions, however, it may be stated, that the literary form in which they are cast and preserved is such as to make their present perusal an æsthetic pleasure to the intelligent critic of style. Such essays as those on—Temple, Hallam, Hampden and the Pitts, local as was their origin, will maintain their interest as long as English Literature has a history. Even such faulty papers as those on Bacon, Addison and Milton still attract and charm us.

Such a general and sustained literary reputation as this in prose indicates the presence of qualities of excellence. Popularity, in this case, means some degree of merit. No fortuitous combination of circumstances can do for a man what Macaulay did for himself in this particular. The orator and the poet may owe more to native talent than to patient industry. It is not so with the prose writer. A careful study of his style will reveal his excellences and errors.

## ANALYSIS OF HIS STYLE.

### (1.) Skill in Narrative and Descriptive Writing.

This skill is observable in each of these species of prose as, separately, also, in their combination, as Narrative-Descriptive. In that prose which is specifically historical as, in—The History of England—it is natural to find this peculiar type of literary expression. History, as a record of events, must be largely narrative and as involving the portraiture of persons and scenes must be largely descriptive. This feature of style, however, is not confined to the history proper

or even to those of his essays which may be called historical, but finds expression in all the prose he has written.

It is the Narrative-Descriptive style in its best form and when it is seen what are the essential elements of prose discourse included in such a style, the mastery of Macaulay's pen in this special province will be evident.

(a.) *Clearness of Presentation.*

This is the first mark of good writing and is an integral part of that order of style now in question. Whatever may or may not be said of Macaulay's prose, it cannot be justly accused of obscurity. The student is not required, as in the case of Carlyle and Emerson, to read and read again in order to be sure of the meaning. The language used is its own best interpreter and is always chosen with scrupulous care to express in the plainest terms the idea intended. Macaulay had, as every notable writer has had, some unsparing critics. There was everything in the attitude of the Edinburgh Review; in the political history of the time and in his brilliant career as a writer which incited his opponents to the sharpest censorship. The weak points of his style would of course be mercilessly exposed. It is noticeable, however, that very little is said as to *ambiguity* of style. The fact is, that much of the criticism to which he was subjected was itself the best commentary on his literary clearness. His meaning was too well understood. There was no question as to the mark at which he was aiming, what he was saying and why he was saying it. In such an essay as that on Warren Hastings or Horace Walpole, the reader has an ex-

ample as to how Macaulay could make himself understood. The thought is clearly conceived and clearly phrased. If we look more narrowly into this feature of Macaulay's prose, it will be found to bear examination. It is evident from his biography that he made clearness a prime object in writing; that he severely revised his own style with reference to it and that he studied authors and men in the light of it. It is certainly a matter greatly to his credit as stated by his most recent biographer—that the workingmen of England sent him their thanks for writing a history that they could understand.

It is of special interest here to note that the prose of Macaulay in respect to its clearness was in every sense true to the claims of the *home language*. There are but few representative writers of English whose style so happily avoids the extreme of pedantry on the one hand, and that of purism, on the other. His prose is true to that high and safe rhetorical principle in action, that the best word under the circumstances is to be used, whatever its origin may be. It is in carrying out this law that the just claims of all kindred tongues will be met and, yet, the precedence be given to the native speech. Mr. Marsh's estimate of his diction in the Essay on Bacon, as seventy-five per cent as to its English, is below rather than above the truth and will fairly express the average percentage of English throughout his works. His papers are full of Saxon monosyllables and dissyllables. As a rule, he seeks the shorter terms and phrases. While not as fully Saxon as Bunyan and De Foe, he is a long way in advance of Bacon, Hooker, Milton, Johnson, and is, in this respect, a sufficiently safe standard for



the English student. His clearness was largely the result of pure English.

(b.) *Copiousness of Style.*

This quality might be stated in other terms as, Ease, Facility or Fluency. It is an expression of literary art which seems to have all the freedom of nature and gives to the reader the happy impression of the fullness of the author. The older English writers would call the style, *fertile*. It involves what is properly termed, the art of amplification or paraphrase. It is the fullest possible expression of an idea within the limits of rhetorical brevity. No writer previous to Macaulay so richly possessed this element. It is one of the latest and most difficult results of literary labor. Although found in Macaulay's earliest prose, its quality is much higher in his more mature writing. Copiousness in his Essay on Milton is one thing and in the best parts of the History, quite another. Natural gifts apart, it depends on a wide and choice area of reading; on a close study of words, native and foreign, and, above all, on a healthful literary taste to discern and appreciate whatsoever is good. These things make what Bacon calls—"the full man"; what older critics called in the best sense, a *voluble* man. The words roll out in rich profusion. The style is copious. Nor is this ease of expression confined to the diction of his narrations and descriptions, but enters into all the style. The thought itself flows smoothly and freely on. There are no bands or restrictions. Much of the attractiveness of the author's prose is found just here. The reader is not asked to plod through the pages as through the heavy style of Burton and

Browne, pitying, at every turn, the crudeness and bondage of the author, but is carried by the author himself on the high tide of his thought and feeling. One often wonders at the ease with which he is transported from point to point. There is a charm in the verbal and mental fullness. The style is completely elaborated without being labored. It is not denied that danger lurks at the very door of this quality, in the tendency to verboseness—in a copiousness where ideas and words are in the inverse ratio. Macaulay has been sharply dealt with as to *diffuseness* of style. Common readers as well as the critics have noted it. No impartial judge of his prose can deny the justness of the accusation. “When he has to tell us” says Morison, “that the Reformation greatly diminished the wealth of the Church of England, it costs him two pages to say so.”

Macaulay had his own reasons for much of this wordiness. It was partly unavoidable and partly intentional. His habit, from early life, of reading all that came to hand and of seeing what he saw in many different phases; his marvelous memory in holding what he had and reproducing it and his spacious wealth of diction, made it quite impossible for him to be satisfied with the one statement of an idea. He must present it and re-present it. On the other hand, his theory of style, especially as applied to narrative writing, made it necessary for him to be copious up to the verge of prolixity. He often passed that verge and did what Swift and Dickens did in fiction—incurred the charge of tedious redundancy. Despite this fault, however, Pope, had he been living, might have spoken of the copious Macaulay as he did

of the "copious Dryden." There was a real richness of word and phrase—a latent store of resources always accessible at need. The style withal is *natural* and *original*. It is the author's own. His digressions are too many and too long but, in time, he always returns to the main idea as Swift did and as Hooker did not. In the true sense of the term, his prose style is *voluminous*. The best that can be said of it at this point is, that this copiousness at times degenerated to diffuseness, but in the main, kept within the limits of literary law and added interest to the narrative. If he is "one of the best story-tellers" in Modern-English, story-tellers must have some liberty. There is such a theory as Prose-License.

(c.) *Pictorial Skill.*

This is an essential feature of the Descriptive order of prose. It might, without error be called—The Descriptive Style. Critics often refer to it as, the graphic or picturesque form of prose. It is closely allied to that literary clearness and copiousness of which we have spoken and, yet, is a feature distinct in itself. The French speak of it as, the power of depicting or painting. It marks the border line between prose and poetry and is especially prominent in that exceptional kind of prose known as poetical. In this department of style, Macaulay has done notable work. It is difficult to state whether this feature is more prominent in the essays or in the history. It is visible in the style throughout and gives to it that imaginative tinge and vividness of coloring which the most cursory reader of Macaulay must have noticed. In giving us his definition of history this feature is emphasized. He writes—"History is a

compound of poetry and philosophy." The special stress laid upon the poetic or pictorial element is seen as he explains the definition. "It impresses truths on the mind by a *vivid representation* of characters and incidents." As we shall see hereafter, whatever Macaulay intended to do in the way of combining the poetic and philosophic in historical prose, and giving them equal place, he actually magnified the poetic at every point and made the narrative a real story in the sphere of the imaginative. Much of the prose reads as if it were in the realm of fiction. It represents in prose what Historical Plays represent in dramatic poetry.

Here, again, Macaulay exposed himself to the judgment of the critics and has been strongly condemned by many of them as guilty of *excessive ornament* in style. His prose is said to pass the limits of prose proper and enter the domain of the poetic. It is alleged, that as an essayist and historian he attempts the rôle of the novelist and subordinates the didactic element in narrative to the pictorial and attractive.

There is truth in all this. There is a sense in which the radical defect of Macaulay's style lies just here—in the love of excessive finish, in over abundant metaphor, in literary painting rather than in the logical elaboration of the idea for substantial ends. He seems to delight far too much in embellishment for its own sake and would artfully decoy the reader from idea to imagery. Hence, the reader must be constantly awake to the detection and interpretation of the figurative element. Metaphors and Similes become ends in themselves. The description takes

precedence as to interest of the scene or object described and fact succumbs to fiction. It is difficult at times to tell where we are, whether on firm ground or in mid air. Romance and reality are so blended that the result is, at times, confusing. All this conceded, however, much of the peculiar power of Macaulay's prose is in its pictorial feature in so far as it is healthfully exhibited. No impartial critic could afford to decry this. There is a higher grade of delineative skill that marks the author as an historical artist. There is a boldness and definiteness of outline which at once attracts attention, awakens interest and represents the idea more clearly than could otherwise be done. It does with the thought what the old limners did with the typography of the book—sets it forth in such graphic portraiture that the reader may take the sketch as a verbal framework and fill in for himself the completed picture. Some of the author's most brilliant passages are of this picturesque order. After reading them they hang before the mind's eye with all the vividness of a great painting. This characteristic of style is signally present in the History and the historical essays, when the author is delineating some striking character or scene. When he has done, the lineaments are as clear as if they were sculptured in bas-relief and could be approached and touched. There is here an important province of literary art and it is safe to say that no writer of English Prose has excelled Macaulay in it. No one of his predecessors, John Bunyan apart, at all approximated him. De Quincey and the great English novelists—Scott, Dickens and Thackeray—had much of the same skill. Prescott

and Motley of our own country are his closest competitors in this field of historical art.

Critics, such as Leslie Stephens, have gone too far in a wide-sweeping denunciation of this feature of Macaulay's style. Morison, in his excellent biography assumes safer ground when he calls attention to this quality in some specimen passages and challenges the critics to decry it.

Descriptive writing is one of the leading forms of prose and ever inviting more attention. There is such a thing as legitimate Word-Painting by which sameness of style is relieved and the meaning made more effective. Macaulay would have undoubtedly gained reputation and more permanent influence had he used imagery and ornament more sparingly. Still, great care is to be taken lest while this is conceded we lose sight of that exceptional descriptive skill which he possessed and which goes very far to explain the facts that his essays and history are still in demand among us.

## (2.) Excellence of Sentence Structure.

Macaulay was the Lombard of his age—a master of sentences. What his biographer, Mr. Trevelyan, states, would seem to be confirmed, “that he never allowed a sentence to pass muster until it was as good as he could make it,” until every sentence ran as smoothly as running water and every paragraph closed with a telling clause.

He believed, with De Quincey, that there was no more important matter in prose discourse than sen-

tence building—the formation of the frame of the thought. Very much of that devotion to detail, of which we read in his life, was spent in this direction, until he at length formed the habit of shaping his words in the clearest and most cogent manner. All readers of Macaulay must have been impressed with his skill in mere structure, in what has been termed, the “*mechanology*” of style. There is a marked absence of those harsh and crude constructions that indicate the presence of the novice. The successive transitions from clause to clause are so carefully adjusted as to give all the effect of naturalness to the style. Artifice gives place to a genuine literary art. So distinctive is this element in the author’s style that a good manual of sentence-structure might be compiled from the pages of his prose. All writers upon the Art of Discourse must make frequent reference to Macaulay.

There are two types of sentence which are especially frequent not so much because they were favorites with the author as that they are in themselves the best rhetorical forms.

(a) *The Periodic Sentence.*

In this, as is known, the clauses are arranged rhetorically rather than grammatically. The object is not so much to arrange subject, predicate and adjuncts as a matter of syntax as it is to present the parts of the sentence in the order of their relative importance. The thought determines the form. The result is that of the logical climax. In the frequency, correctness and force of this progressive structure, Macaulay’s prose is a model. So apt is he in its use, that almost any page of his writing may be taken at

random for purposes of example. Gross violations of propriety are almost unknown in his prose while even where the Loose Sentence is used, it is so terse and skillfully combined as to give to the leading thought the prominence it deserves. Though, as in most writers, where the periodic sentence prevails, the shorter form is preferred, special attention is to be called to the excellence and comparative frequency in Macaulay of the longer structure. In no English prose of equal amount can there be found so many correctly formed Periodic Paragraphs or Periods. Some of them are of such length and import as to manifest consummate skill in their construction. A series of such paragraphs is often found in which the double and difficult result is reached of maintaining the unity of each separate paragraph and the common unity of all.

It is just here that the *oratorical* feature of the author's prose comes into prominence and finds its explanation. Literary historians have noted this quality. "Macaulay's natural aptitude" says Morison "was oratorical rather than literary." Nor is the reference here exclusively to his special power in parliamentary address when he came face to face with an English audience as a defender of the Reform Bill. His brilliant success here is well known and the eulogiums of Peel and Gladstone are a matter of history. His speeches in the House of Commons, it is to be noted, are a substantial part of his prose work and cannot be left out of the account in determining his rank as a writer. We refer here, however, to his distinctively literary prose as possessed of much of this oratorical force and this, as the



result of skillful periodic structure. The parts of the paragraph are adjusted with reference to their best effect. As we peruse the periods, the result is impressive as well as enlightening. The reader is often aroused to a high degree of ardor and feels the hand of a master. Hence it is, that many parts of Macaulay's history read as an oration reads, while his essays abound in passages which in their emotive vigor remind one of the best selections from Burke and Pitt. There is no marked degree of oratorical grace but the presence of true English stamina is there and it is telling. Most of this effect is due, of course, to the inherent force of the subject matter. Much of it is, also, due to what has been well termed "the luminous order and logical sequence of the parts" of the structure. It is impossible to understand what is meant by a recent critic in calling Macaulay "clumsy" in sentence structure. His bitterest opposers have conceded to him this form of skill as a writer.

(b) *The Balanced Sentence.*

This species of sentence is equally frequent and characteristic. Though not so prominent as in the Essays of Bacon, it is sufficiently so to call for special notice. The reader advances but a short way ere he discovers this antithetical bias. It is in this part of the author's work that there is seen the reason of much of his literary power as an historian. This is especially so in that work of delineation which has been mentioned.

It often occurs that this graphic portraiture of men behind the facts of history can best be set forth by the use of sharp contrast rather than by progressive statement. History and Prose Fic-

tion have this element in common and are thus together related to descriptive discourse. What is known by the dramatist as, the power of characterization, is here needed and illustrated. Macaulay's prose is marked by this. He was fond of studying men and things by their opposites. An idea no sooner presented itself to him than he saw all the possible ideas with which it might be contrasted. He explained the positive and negative by each other. In the province of logic, it is the argument from contraries. This use of antithesis gives point and pungency to the style; lends to it a degree of interest which wins attention and succeeds where other forms would fall. His contrasts between Dante and Milton; between the Puritan and other religious orders; between Hastings and other culprits; between Frederic the Great and other rulers and between his own times and those preceding—all mark him as a master of this type of sentence. He had a keen eye to the differences of things.

Some of the examples of antithesis will be of interest to the student and general reader.

“The poetry of Milton differs from that of Dante as the hieroglyphics of Egypt differed from the picture writing of Mexico. The images which Dante employs speak for themselves. Those of Milton have a signification which is often discernible to the initiated only.”

“Logicians may reason about abstractions but the great mass of men must have images.”

“The character of Milton was peculiarly distinguished by loftiness of spirit; that of Dante, by intensity of feeling.”

Of Charles I., he says—

“We charge him with having broken his coronation oath and we are told that he kept his marriage vow. We censure him for having violated the articles of The Petition of Right and we are informed that he was accustomed to hear prayers at six in the morning.”

“The Puritan was made up of two different men; the one, all self-abasement, penitence, gratitude, passion; the other, proud, calm, inflexible, sagacious. He prostrated himself in the dust before his Maker but he set his feet on the neck of his king.”

Such are some of these numerous examples of contrasted structure. Clause is set over against clause with all the mechanism of architectural law and ideas are made to face and explain each other.

It is suggestive to note, in this connection, that much of Macaulay's power as a prose *satirist* finds its interpretation here. This form of sentence is related to satire somewhat as the periodic is to oratory. The plain straightforward structure is not crisp and terse enough for the purposes of irony. It is, moreover, too honest to give expression to any double meaning or in any way to conceal the truth. In poetry and prose alike, all successful satirists have dealt largely in counter statement. Butler in *Hudibras*; Pope, in *The Dunciad*; Dryden, in his epistles; Swift, in his allegories and Addison, in his papers, have all freely used it. Macaulay knew his forte. He saw, at once, that his age demanded satirical prose as Dryden's did (poetry) satirical. As Plutarch saw fit to describe his characters by parallels, Macaulay chose antithesis and succeeded. The historic scenes and personages that he has thus portrayed form a part of the common literary stock of every age.

At this point, once again, the critics are awake and in arms.

Macaulay's prose is said to carry antithesis too far.

The balanced structure overreached itself. Form, it is argued, takes precedence of subject matter in that truth and good taste are alike sacrificed to complete the verbal contrast. Mechanology is again the vice.

Not a little of the author's prose is clearly open to this accusation, especially so, where the contrasts are multiplied at great lengths so that the thought returns upon itself. There are times when the natural order would seem to be anything but epigrammatic and, yet, the author insists on presenting the idea in this form. Beginning a paragraph with a contrasted sentence, this form is maintained throughout as if from sheer fancy or artifice. His notable lack of genuine humor, as seen in Lamb and Addison, is largely attributable to the fact that the satirical element enters into all his pleasantry. Still, criticism has been unduly severe at this point. In aiming to account for that degree of literary currency which the writings of Macaulay have had in enlightened circles, it would be difficult to assign the leading place to any one quality of prose style. This epigrammatic brevity, however, must be admitted as a factor here, nor is it unworthy of notice that such a structure is all the more a mark of skill in that it reveals insight and discrimination. Literary antithesis when of the true order marks anything but superficiality. It marks the presence of ideas as the basis of contrast.

Every critical reader of Macaulay's prose wishes there had been somewhat less of this type of sentence. As it is, however, it is thoroughly in keeping with the author's theory of style, with the peculiar quality of his mental power and his personal characteristics.

In other hands, it would have been more abused

and can never be safely imitated by the aspiring writer as a cardinal excellence of style.

The Balanced Structure, properly viewed, is exceptional and not regular. Its purpose is to secure variety and occasional point and not to furnish the staple form of sentence.

Macaulay's prose without the epigrammatic element would be another and inferior order of prose. Hence, it follows that antithesis is a good thing in its place, but has its limits. Organism is better than Mechanism. The study of Carlyle will reopen this discussion as to antithesis.

### (3.) Literary Personality.

By this is meant not so much that the style is original as that it is individual. It has a character and tone peculiar to itself by which it may easily be distinguished from that of preceding and contemporary writers. His style was his own to that degree that it carries with it its own interpretation and credentials. The discerning literary age is never at a loss to detect it, whatever its surroundings may be. Hence, it is, that Macaulay did what but few authors of English may be said to have done. He founded and transmitted an English prose style of his own for the introduction of which he was as much responsible as is the inventor for his new patent. Whatever it was in other particulars, it was novel to the eye. It was Macaulayan. In this respect he did what Bacon, Milton, Addison and Johnson did in their respective epochs. He wrote in his own way and did it so effectually as to establish a kind of a standard and to

gather followers. By this individual method in literary art, he raised himself immeasurably above the great majority of his contemporaries, while the large number of his imitators in England and America testifies to the importance of his work.

A remarkable fact as to the personality of Macaulay's style is, that it was so developed and maintained in the face of strong temptations to surrender it. It is known from the statements of his biographers that he was as conversant with preceding and current literature as was any man of his age. He was conversant with all the existent forms of expression many of which had been accepted as models by the best critical opinion of the time. Though his style is antithetical as Bacon's was, it is in no sense Baconian. Though it is clear and copious as was that of Swift and Addison, it is in no sense Augustan.

He used the forms of sentence which Milton and Johnson used, though in a different way, while satire with him was quite a different thing from satire in the essays of Lamb. If, as we are told, the style is the man, then the personality of Macaulay's writings must be assigned a high rank. A question of interest arises here as to the degree in which individuality of style is a test and mark of *personal ability*. It is a question specially difficult to decide in the case of Macaulay. Reasoning abstractly, it must be granted that inventiveness of means and methods, other things being equal, indicates inherent grasp and power. Historically, however, these forms of power are found to be in many cases quite dissevered. Mr. Morison, in his recent biography, decides this ques-

tion against the author while admitting the truth of the principle in theory. "Real novelty of style," he says, "is generally a safe test of originality of mind and character. With Macaulay the test does not extend so far." This we believe to be the safer position. As we shall see, hereafter, Macaulay's theory of style was such that he could easily separate form from substance. With him, therefore, originality of style meant simply—newness of method. It did not necessarily involve or indicate with him high creative genius in the sphere of prose. His style is original in prose as that of Pope's was in poetry, not original as that of Milton, Burns, and Wordsworth was. On this plane, however, of individuality of method, he had no superior. Despite the high examples already existing in the persons of his predecessors, his own *modus* was revolutionary in English Prose. It was neither Elizabethan nor Augustan, but Georgian Prose. It was, in fact, the inauguration of Modern Prose as it dates from the opening of the nineteenth century and as illustrated in the writings of De Quincey and succeeding authors. There was something about it that attracted attention merely as to the novelty of its form. The essay and the history had never been written just so before or in a manner quite so engaging. Whatever it was as a style, it challenged the examination of all those who were watching the historical development of English Prose. There was a freshness about it indicative of newness. Swift and Addison were animated in style but here was an order of prose possessed of still more life and range. It looked forward along the century for its inspiration rather than to the times of the Tudors. It was a

prose fully in keeping with the age that produced it and to that degree marks its author as an interpreter of his time. The notable line of English novelists and essayists that followed owed something, at least, of their literary success to the impulses that were then at work. Charles Lamb and the later British Orators largely contributed to this fresher impulse in prose.

Mere personality in literary art is no mark of excellence. It may belong to authors of second and third-rate excellence. Robert Burton and Sir Thomas Browne were such authors—original in style and in no sense models of prose. In fact, such personality, often, takes the form of literary eccentricity and is in the inverse ratio of literary power. Real individuality of style as in Bacon and Burke must be but one among many qualities of excellence, developing with them and developed by them. In this sense Carlyle and Emerson had styles of their own, and in this sense, personality is a mark of merit. At this point Macaulay is open to just criticism.

## THE CHIEF DEFECTS OF MACAULAY'S PROSE.

### (1.) Want of Intellectual Depth and Vigor.

It may be said with safety that the trend of all later criticism of our author's style is in this direction. Critics are well nigh agreed that the true test here must be at the intellectual point and that the test exposes radical defect. In confirmation of this view, some particulars may be noted.

(a) *Macaulay's Theory of Style was superficial.*



We have alluded to the philosophic distinction that De Quincey makes in his *Essay on Style*, between Mechanology and Organology. By the first is meant, that the main element in style is grammatical structure; that style is purely an external thing subject to rigid rule and that the main object of literary expression, is artistic form in order to gratify the æsthetic taste of the reader. On this basis, the French theory as to the virtue of embellishment as an end in itself is correct and the chief aim of the writer is figurative finish.

By Organology is meant, that matter controls form; that the writer's main purpose is to express his thought and himself: that language is a medium only and not an end; that external adornment is good in its place but incidental; that the grammatical is secondary to the rhetorical and literary, in a word, that Discourse is the expression of intellectual life. It is *organic*.

Of these two methods, Macaulay's prose illustrates mainly the first—the constructive theory of style instead of the vital and natural. Whatever the author's pretensions were, this was his uniform literary practice. Hence, his essays and history, as stated, are so often unduly pictorial. Copiousness runs into redundancy; antithesis, into mechanism; prose into poetry and we are often at a loss to separate the writer from the mere artist. That all true style is based on thought and governed by it, and is worthless as a theory in and for itself, Macaulay seemed to have ignored. The great thing was the form. Even historical facts themselves were made to yield to this ruling passion for artistic presentation. He was

determined as in Bacon and other essays to be readable whether he was reliable or not. So dominant is this theory that it finally leads to moral perversion. No one thoroughly conversant with Macaulay's method can fail to note this servitude to the æsthetic theory of style. Words for words' sake—Structure for structure's sake.—An epigram at all hazards. Art as mere art,—this is the ideal. Style, he would tell us, is the art of verbal execution. All this, it will be noted, is strictly *unintellectual* in the sphere of discourse, and here the method must be sharply condemned. Nothing could be more foreign to the true theory of style, as the expression of *thought*, than this unsubstantial theory, and it has done untold evil. Mention has been made of the author's popularity in his own and subsequent times and of the large number of those who are pleased to shape their literary methods on his. This is all true. It is not to be forgotten, however, that on a different theory of style, he would have had a far more excellent constituency and would have been a far greater aid to the ambitious writer. Few things are more unfortunate in a literary point of view than that this writer's theory of style which dissevers idea from form has received such sanction from such high authority. Macaulay has great merits as a writer. These have been stated. He filled a most important place and did a worthy work but it is ever to be urged that his view of style was, after all, the lower and not the higher one, based on taste rather than intellect and requiring for its illustration nothing of the great qualities of mind. It was fortunate that he was not writing in the days of Bacon, when English was in

shaping for permanent use and, especially fortunate that even as he wrote such men as De Quincey were also writing and strenuously insisting that the first thing in literary style is the mental life beneath it.

(b) His Cast of mind as an author was *æsthetic* rather than *logical*.

The more closely we examine the inner nature of the author's mind, the more clearly it will appear that Macaulay, as a writer, or a man, cannot be ranked among the intellectual powers of England, as Hooker, Bacon, Milton and Burke can be. He had little of that intellectual grasp and reach which marked such men. He is inferior here even to Addison and far inferior to the strong-minded Johnson.

There are many facts in Macaulay's literary life indicative of this.

As to the particular *kind of reading* to which he was most addicted, we know that it was fiction and poetry and the elegant literature of Europe, rather than that order of reading to which Bacon refers as he says "Studies serve for ability." His contempt of all forms of truth that might be called philosophical or abstract, is well known. He spoke in more than offensive terms of the sages of Greece and simply pitied the man who could seem to find in their pages any kind of profit or pleasure.

His essay on Bacon is an indignant protest against the utility of all higher study and ere he is done he denounces all the philosophers as worse than useless. He speaks of metaphysics as Hamilton does of mathematics and with as little sense. Macaulay's criticisms here were harmless in that they were based on prejudice and total ignorance.

His order of mind was not sufficiently *speculative* to lead him to inquire into the philosophy of any theory. He preferred history, and even there, the romantic phase of it. He had no idea of the philosophy of history. Few things are more notable in Macaulay's best prose than the absence of *generalization*. He knew little of logic and cared less for it. The idea of pursuing an argument dispassionately through the gradation of proof to the end rarely entered his mind. He preferred the euthymeme to the full syllogism and often concealed therein his specious reasoning. He discussed men and measures but not germinal principles. He followed processes and methods regardless of the laws on which they are based. The *History of England*, in so far as method is concerned, is narrative and descriptive. As Pope would express it—"it never deviates" into the philosophical. Causes and effects stand by themselves. So, in the historical essays as in those that are controversial, there is the same lack of breadth of brow while as a critic he is hereby made an unsafe leader. All this is in the line of intellectual weakness, and as we read we long for the Baconian order of style.

In fine, Macaulay was an accomplished literary *designer*. His originality was confined to ways and means. He combined the novelist, poet, journalist and general prose writer in one personality. As a union of forms this has value and marks some inventive power. Had he added, however, some qualities eminently intellectual, his influence would have been more than doubled.

## (2.) Want of Ethical Earnestness and Aim.

It cannot be denied that the prose of Macaulay is, to a good degree, emotive and animated. The criticism which questions this is astray from fact. The point is, as to the source and quality of this feeling. Here, we must answer that it is purely literary rather than moral. It is taste and taste only that controls. The impassioned element is not born out of the inner recesses of the soul as the home of the ethical instincts. Biographers tell us of the weakness of his devotion to the truth; of his lack of the "stronger passion" and of the comparative looseness of his view of life. Those who have read Macaulay for years and not discovered this have been desultory readers. Such will be surprised to note throughout an almost studied evasion of what Wordsworth calls "high-thinking"—an indifferent acceptance of the world as it is without any special anxious concern as to its probable future.

We read Macaulay's prose for certain ends and we secure them—narrative and descriptive skill, correctness of structure, copiousness of diction and general artistic excellence. If we look for the presence of a governing moral purpose as a writer, we fail to find it. What we may call the *literary conscience* as it existed in Milton and Addison is an undeveloped faculty. He writes on Byron and Bunyan with equal ease and is satisfied with the result quite apart from any searching analysis of character. His indignation at Hastings is political more than moral. His references to Roman Catholicism and to the English

Reformation are alike in verbal taste while he utterly fails in the discussion of such a subject as Milton or Hampden or the great Puritan order to grasp the sublime moral issues at stake in those times or the heroic character of the men behind them. Macaulay was moral in character and in literary style. He never offended in this regard as Swift and Smollett have done. His pages are as clean as those of any English author. He is open to criticism, however, in that this ethical quality finds no *pervasive* or definite expression in his prose. At this point it is negative and unsatisfactory. As Morison phrases, he has nothing for us "when our light is low." No prominent writer of English Prose has been so free from any offense against moral taste and yet so devoid of a decided moral impulse and purpose. The reader is scarcely the better or the worse, ethically, from the perusal of his papers. He leaves us on moral questions just where he found us. He does not openly and enthusiastically defend any great religious principle for the sake of the principle itself or denounce any great evil because it is an evil. Such matters he delegates to those whose official business makes it their duty. His work is literary and that only. His prose gives no evidence of that Miltonic spirit which led the great Puritan to do all his literary work with an ethical aim as "ever in his great Task-Master's eye."

#### Present and Prospective Rank of his Prose Style.

It is a remark common among English critics of the present day, that Macaulay's influence in the

world of prose letters is on the wane and will, in the near future, quite disappear. It is argued that his fame hitherto has been out of all proportion to his merits and that a more intelligent estimate of literary prose will assign him to his proper place of inferiority.

Such views as these are current enough to demand attention. Extreme as they are in the form of their statement, there is an element of sober truth in them as in similar views relative to the probable future of Dickens and Eliot in prose fiction.

We have called attention to the main merits of his style. As far as they go, they are merits on the basis of which much of Macaulay's past and present renown is built. More than this, some of them are such fundamental qualities of style and withal so comparatively rare, that the presence of them must insure a good degree of literary prominence. No style, for example, can exhibit narrative and descriptive excellence as Macaulay's does and be said to be inferior or doomed to speedy disappearance. His prose as it reads to-day is *representative* English Prose, though not necessarily in all respects a model form. It has enough excellences to give it commanding place and to insure it against extinction.

On the other hand, the two cardinal defects to which we have alluded are so serious in their nature as to make the exact place of the author's prose in English Letters an open question. Even as an expression of true literary art, its want of intellectual depth would preclude its occupying the first rank as does that of De Quincey, while the absence of the ethical element in spirit and purpose would rank it

below the prose of Addison. The best that can be said for it is that by reason of its manifest defects it cannot be placed first, and by reason of its manifest merits it must be placed among those specimens of English which we call representative or leading.

He was in every sense what the French mean by the—*litterateur*—a man of letters for letters' sake—a lover of literary art. As such, he will always be read and especially by those in early manhood and womanhood. Probably no English writer is to-day so influential in molding the prose style of academic students as is Macaulay. His prose lies so on the border land between prose and verse as to escape the dullness of the one and the meaningless fancy of the other. It is sufficiently solid and serious while not prosaic and sufficiently attractive and figurative while not romantic.

Such an order of poetic prose will command large numbers of readers and shape their style. The readable will be read despite all theory and defect. This being so, it is well that the author's prose is as good as it is. With all its faults it has high merit. It is clear, copious, facile and finished. It has delighted thousands of readers and fascinated not a few, and while devoid of Baconian strength is marked by some of the best qualities of standard English style.

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## CHAPTER X.

### THE PROSE STYLE OF THOMAS DE QUINCEY.

#### Brief Biographical Sketch.

BORN in Manchester, Aug. 15th, 1785. In the grammar-school at Bath. In London, poor and unknown. At Oxford, 1803-8. Thence, to the English Lakes at Grasmere. Went to Scotland (Lassuade) 1843. Died in Edinburgh, Dec. 8th, 1859.

#### The Miscellaneous Character of his Prose Works.

Prof. Masson in his admirable life of De Quincey notes the fact that his literary work was mainly periodical; that his books were projected rather than completed and that "as Shakespeare may be described as the author of about thirty-seven plays, so may De Quincey be said to be the author of about one hundred and fifty magazine articles."

It is this diversity or copiousness of our author's prose that first impresses the careful reader and invites examination.

The special classification which Prof. Masson gives is worthy of note and may be said to embrace all the products of the author's pen.

- I.—DESCRIPTIVE, BIOGRAPHICAL and HISTORICAL.
- II.—SPECULATIVE, DIDACTIC and CRITICAL.
- III.—IMAGINATIVE WRITINGS and PROSE POETRY.

This division is founded on one proposed by De Quincey himself. He suggested that a portion of his essays was designed to deal with fact and incident for the special purpose of amusing; a portion, to present the purely intellectual view of things, and another portion still, to reach and affect the feelings. He adopted, in fine, the old triple division of the human faculties into—Intellect, Feeling, Will and Taste, and addressed himself in turn to these respective forms.

This periodical character of his writings carries the reader back to Augustan days. We are reminded of Addison and Steele; of De Foe and Swift and of the later Johnsonian school. The similarity, however, is simply one of external form. Miscellaneous Prose meant with De Quincey something quite different from what it meant with the earlier authors. It was distinct in subject matter, method and general style and, as to rank, marks a higher order of prose. It has some points in common with the style of Macaulay, whose death, in the same year as that of De Quincey, marks their lives as covering substantially the same literary period. Even here, however, Macaulay was not the equal of his gifted contemporary.

There is scarcely a topic within the range of the current literature of the time which this voluminous essayist did not present. It is known from his biography what a student and reader he was. Whether in London or in Edinburgh or at the Lakes, he was

diligently at work in enlarging the bounds of his knowledge. Southey speaks of him as "better informed than almost any person he had ever met at his age." History, Travels, Biography, Fiction, Politics, Metaphysics, Theology and Poetry, all received their full share of attention. While at Oxford, he is said to have been noted for his quiet and studious habits, and even at this early period was looked upon by the heads of the university as a marvel in the line of general information. To all this knowledge of books he added not a little through the medium of travel and keen-eyed observation.

This miscellaneous character of De Quincey's prose gave natural origin both to merits and blemishes of style. We note as to

### MERITS OF HIS STYLE.

#### (1.) Variety and Flexibility of Style.

This very versatility of theme already suggested would call for a corresponding versatility of method and treatment. Rhetorical sameness would seem to be impossible here. The biographical gives frequent place to the descriptive, and the impassioned, to the didactic, while the prose itself is often so imaginative as to border on the poetic. If one is somewhat wearied in the perusal of his paper on—The Essence of the Pagan Oracles, he may easily turn to the Autobiographical Sketches, or to the Confessions, for relief. His Theory of Greek Tragedy may give place to—Murder as One of the Fine Arts—and to his paper on, The English Mail Coach. In fact, there is

here a full-spread literary feast. The opportunity for choice is unlimited. It is the European Plan of diet applied to English Letters. One may call for what he most prefers and it is forthcoming. Such a style, whatever it has or has not, cannot be accused of insipidity or dullness. There is the utter absence of uniformity or of any one method so unyielding as to defy change. Even that stiffness of movement and apparent mechanism seen at times in Addison is absent here. The Johnsonian heaviness of tread is not audible. There is the lighter movement of Swift and Lamb and a flexibility of method not possessed as fully by any literary predecessor. It is extremely easy, however, for such versatility to overreach itself and become superficial.

## (2.) Its English Element.

Devoted as he was to the speculations of the Germans, he preferred the writings of native authors to all others, and at Oxford is found carefully systematizing his studies in this direction. He may be said to be the first prominent English writer who even made the attempt to reduce the study of English Letters to a *philosophical* basis. The work partially begun by Dryden, Johnson and Charles Lamb, he carried on to satisfactory limits in common with Coleridge and Southey, so that on the basis of it we have now the philosophic method as the most prominent one in such a line of study. The historical method is subordinate. The literature of Knowledge is secondary to that of Power.

Referring to his early acquaintance with the most

prominent authors of all times and his consequent mental resources, he remarks "that any vanity connected with power so rarely attained, was in him absolutely swallowed up in the tremendous hold taken of his entire sensibilities by his own English Literature." In giving an account of his father's library, he says—"One thing was valuable—all the books were English." Nor was this a blind devotion to native authors at the expense of a knowledge of all others. As already seen, De Quincey was thoroughly versed in the best that had been written and said, and thus fulfilled Matthew Arnold's ideal of the cultured man. Many of his best papers are on the classical and continental authors and on questions quite foreign to anything British. His position was simply one of intelligent preference for home product in literature. He ingenuously believed that no ancient or modern nation had so worthy a list of authors as England had and was glad to have his judgment and affections so happily combined. It always grieved him to see the tendency on the part of so many of his countrymen to decry English authorship in favor of anything foreign. It was under this feeling that he breaks out in Biblical phrase—"Are Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel?" As early as at fifteen years of age, he is familiar with the leading English poets, while in his more mature years, his affection for Wordsworth and his school rose to the intensity of passionate devotion.

When a student at Oxford, he is pained at the deficiency of the Oxonians in the literature of their vernacular. "It is," he says, "a pitiable spectacle

to any man of sense and feeling who happens to be familiar with the treasures of his own literature, and a spectacle which alternately moves scorn and sorrow, to see young people spending their time upon writers most unfit to unloose the shoe-latchets of many among their own early authors. Surely it is time that these follies were at an end; that our practice was made to square a little better with our profession and that our pleasures were sincerely drawn from those sources in which we pretend that they lie." In writing his varied papers on English Letters and Men of Letters, it is not strange to find a kind of eulogium and enthusiasm far too rare among our literary critics. He speaks of *The Canterbury Tales* as "a work that has not been rivaled and probably will not be, on our planet." Spenser, Beaumont, Fletcher, Pope, Dryden, Addison and Swift, in turn receive encomiums while he seems to fail in his attempt properly to exalt the names of Milton and Shakespeare. After nobly defending Milton against the charge of pedantry and adherence to pagan forms, he sums up his view in the words,—“Milton is not an author among authors, but a power among powers. *The Paradise Lost* is not a poem among poems, but a central force among forces.”

In the presence of Shakespeare he seems confounded as before “the most august among created intellects,” and as he looks with ever increasing wonder, remarks—“Reader, nothing greater can be imagined.” In fact, he was at heart a genuine son of the soil. He prefers Chaucer to Boccaccio; Spenser to Tasso; Shakespeare to Goethe; the essays of Addison to those of Martineau; the critical opinions of

Dryden to those of Boileau, and the Lake Lyrists to Schiller at his best.

All this makes De Quincey's style characteristically English. He escaped the extreme in each direction. While acknowledging all that was worthy of imitation in foreign tongues, he never lowered his own language from the place of honor. His diction is largely native. His structure and general method are native. The object of his writing was largely to exalt that which was home born, while no careful student of his pages can fail to feel the English spirit and impulse which beneath all that is external controls the thought and inner life of the author.

### (3.) Its Intellectual Character.

At this point, the style of De Quincey is sharply contrasted with that of Macaulay and the contrast is in the former's favor. We are dealing now with an author whose words are well weighed, whose object is impressive rather than expressive and who believed that men are to be reached by rational methods.

"For my own part," he says "I may affirm that my life has been on the whole, the life of a philosopher; from my birth I was made an *intellectual* creature; and *intellectual* in the highest sense my pursuits and pleasure have been." Elsewhere in his writings he seems to use this term—*intellectual*—with similar emphasis. His use of it would seem to indicate his devoted fondness for the pursuit of truth. He has been well styled a—polyhistor.

His desire for knowledge was insatiable and he was

never happier than when opening up some new mine of information. Mere knowledge however, is not all that this word includes with him. It designates an order of mind and style that is substantial rather than superficial. It intimates the presence of disciplined faculties and the presence of thought. One is struck in this respect with the high-class character of the topics discussed in the miscellaneous papers of the author. As a rule, they have to do with the most weighty problems of human life. Outside of those examples that are purely humorous and so designed, the themes are serious and substantial. As Masson has well phrased it, "It was De Quincey's laudable habit to put brain into all his articles." In this particular, his periodicals are far superior to those of Augustan days. Steele and Addison were obliged, in deference to what Mr. Courthope calls "the social style" to choose an order of subject and line of discussion somewhat lighter than was now appropriate. Even the sober-minded Johnson is not as intellectual in his themes as is De Quincey.

It will be of profit here, to note some of the forms in which this special characteristic of the author's style, as mental, manifested itself in his literary work.

(a) *Analytic Skill and Philosophic Discussion.*

The author makes a formal claim to the possession of this feature of mind and style and has done a service to English Prose in this respect that is of high value. He thoroughly endorses what may be termed—*method* in writing, as distinct from that loose manner of expression so common in our literature and far too frequent even in standard authors. He saw no great danger in the divisions and subdivis-



ions of a theme, if indeed, they were natural and moderate. He would as much condemn the ignoring of them as he would that extreme use of them prevalent among the divines of the seventeenth century. His mind was of the logical order and when he wrote, he wrote on some well defined plan and purpose. He condemns Hazlitt because he is "discontinuous." He rebukes Lamb for the same literary offense. "No man," he says, "can be eloquent whose thoughts are abrupt, insulated and capricious." He is opposed to what Coleridge calls "the non-sequacious" style. He advocates a style in which the regular progression of the ideas is ever visible; in which the relation of cause and effect, process and product is seen throughout. It is to be conceded, here, that De Quincey indulges too freely, as Swift and Bacon did, in digressions from the main issue and becomes thereby his own judge. His essay on—Hamilton, is an illustration in point. After a half-dozen pages of irrelevant matter, he informs the reader that he is about to begin. After a dozen pages more of matter still less relevant, he coolly states that he will ignore all that has been given and begin anew. He begins anew and again deviates. Had De Quincey penned this essay in Pope's time, he would have been one of the heroes of the *Dunciad*. This digressiveness, however, is quite exceptional, and even as it does exist is fully justified by some critics as a relief from the strict regularity of the style. In the main, he is clear, acute and orderly. He had a deep insight into character and topic, which he calls "an inner eye and power of intuition for the unseen." He had that mental acumen which found such fitting exercise in the

study of men. Some of his biographical papers finely illustrate this analysis of character. Those on Plato, Herodotus, Kant, Shakespeare and Pope are in point. He detects at once the main features of the subject and presents them in their true distinctness. A notable example of this is his paper on—The True Relations of the Bible to Human Science—in which he takes occasion to answer objections and advance positive argument. He ably insists that the Bible is not a manual of science or philosophy and is not to be so studied. In discussing De Quincey's analytic skill as a proof of the intellectual quality of his style, reference is in place to his *critical* power. He had the independence of a true critic and, we may add, that wealth of historic and scholarly information on which all true criticism rests. Despite all that he had read and learned, he insisted on forming and applying his own opinions for himself. This sometimes led him into error, but in the main was a safe guide. When of the philosophy of Plato he says—"that it moves at all only by its cumbrous superfluity of words;" when he speaks of Goethe as designedly using the enigmatical to perplex his readers and refers to Burton and Taylor and Browne as the great models of English style, we feel that his analysis is defective and his consequent criticism fallacious. When he tells us as to the Essenes, that no such sect ever existed as reported by Josephus, that Judas Iscariot was a morbid fanatic more than a wilfull traitor, and when in his papers on Cicero and the Pagan Oracles, he propounds views altogether his own, his independence is at the expense of sound judgment. In the line of *literary* criticism, how-

ever, De Quincey is a master. "No English writer," says Masson, "has left a finer body of disquisition on the science and principles of criticism." We speak unadvisedly of Matthew Arnold as the—father of Modern English Literary Criticism. This honor belongs to Dryden and De Quincey. Allusion has been made to his early study of English authors on the philosophical basis. He began, at once, to analyze the style and the man; to note the defects and the excellences and the causes of them; to give a rational explanation of style on the basis of wide established principles of expression. The amateur critics of the Augustan Age knew little of this. Even the founders of the Edinburgh Review and their respective schools were inferior to De Quincey in this analytic method of criticism. He reduced what he did to a well defined science and proceeded according to law. One may almost choose at random from his papers to illustrate this habit. He gives us in his papers on Rhetoric, Style and Language, the exact theory on which he advances. He calls no style excellent in which the thought is not controlling. He sharply protests against the mechanical element in *expression* and contends that all true expression is an organic process by which the inner soul of the writer is set forth. It is in this connection that he makes his favorite distinction between The Literature of Knowledge and The Literature of Power; between The Principia and The Paradise Lost.

In no one theory is De Quincey's intellectual character seen more fully than in the fact that as a writer and a critic of the writings of others he insists that style is essentially *intellectual*—the embodiment

and expression of thought, and not a mere external adornment or the mere use of words with nothing in them or behind them.

It is for this reason that no body of miscellaneous prose can be more safely commended to young men as a guide, in that it is based on this cardinal principle of the supremacy of intellect in the art of verbal expression. Critics have spoken of the scientific element in De Quincey's style. If by this is meant, the intellectual as distinct from any other quality, the view is tenable. There is an analytical exactness of plan and statement, a strict adherence to the reality of things so that the literary artist is never allowed to supersede the philosopher and teacher of truth. Further study will show how beautifully this intellectual element is combined throughout with that artistic grace and finish by which the thought is made attractive. There is a still additional feature of this mental element that deserves notice and is, in fact, the most important.

(b) *Suggestiveness or Literary Richness.*

This is inventive rather than analytic. It has to do with the work of origination as the highest form of intellectual action. Something more is meant here than that independence of opinion to which allusion has been made or that versatility of view already mentioned. There is in the sphere of prose that which in poetry would be called creative. It is what the metaphysicians call the power of—original suggestion. It is here, as nowhere else, that the intellectuality of De Quincey's prose style is seen. He brings to light and to being that which is his own. He follows here the guidance of no master.

He adopts the creed of no particular school. His work is unique and fresh. It is true that he had a special attachment to the Lake Poets, and, most especially, to Wordsworth. The devotion was, however, in no sense slavish, but intelligent and manly. There is in his nature as a writer a high degree of mental productivity. He was affluent in his resources. The fertility of his nature might be compared to the rich bottom-lands of some countries or to the luxuriant vegetation of the tropics. He has that quality in prose which Mr. Whipple attributes to Shakespeare in poetry—the power of intimating more than is fully stated and thus inviting the research of the reader. De Quincey cannot be termed a profound writer or thinker in the philosophical sense of that term, but he is rich in his literary resources and always gives the reader more than is actually required. Here, he was the superior of Macaulay while no writer of the Augustan Age at all compared with him. He displayed in prose that form and measure of mental opulence that is sometimes called Elizabethan, and which marked the dramatic poetry of that age. Within the province of miscellaneous prose there is nothing equal to it in English Letters. He is the head of that expressive or expansive prose era which takes its origin at the close of the eighteenth century and reaches its fullness in the following century. It is, in fine, nineteenth century English.

#### (4.) Impassioned Vigor.

As to this quality, also, the author makes a special claim in the Preface to his Autobiography. He is

alluding to the subject matter of personal confessions. He speaks of the difficulties which beset the path of him who is desirous of making such confessions and argues that the tone of such composition should above all else be impassioned. He shows the failure of other autobiographers in this particular; indicates his faith in his own ability in this direction and points the reader for an illustration to—The Opium Eater, and—*Suspiria de Profundis*. As far as these two specified works are concerned all would be willing to justify the author's claim to emotive writing. The application of the principle may be extended, however, and it will be seen upon a true interpretation that his style throughout is characterized by this feature. We might naturally expect to find it, from what we know of the man and his peculiar nature, just as we expect to find it in Lamb, Goldsmith or Milton.

In many of its manifestations it is but a portraiture of his unfortunate life. This quality, in De Quincey's prose, takes the two distinct forms of *pathos* and *passion*. The one is subdued and tender. The other is more positive and vigorous. The one takes its character from the inner experience of the man while the other is more modified by external influence.

As to the element of true *pathos*, it is everywhere apparent.

In his graphic account of the—Three Memorable Murders, with their revolting incidents; in his minute description of that wealth of affection which he and his sister mutually dispensed and received; in the specific narrative of the distressing circumstances attending the loss of their parents by some children

on the English hills in the depth of winter; in the personal reminiscences he gives us of his visits to Greta Hall and Rydal Mount; in his Vision of Sudden Death and his account of the death of Wordsworth's daughter and, most noteworthy of all, in his affecting allusions to the death of his own sister—in all these and similar writings there is a genuine pathos that marks the style as impassioned. There is a sympathetic tenderness about them that indicates the heart of the man as keenly sensitive to the deepest feelings of human nature. "Not to be sympathetic," he says, "is not to understand," and, as we know, he prefers the literature of power to that of knowledge, in that the former moves the soul in addition to informing the mind.

This subdued pathos in De Quincey is closely connected with a tendency in his nature to the *grave* and *mysterious*. His own experience of the ills of life and his observation of the ills of others made it easy for him to incline to the plaintive and pathetic. This often went to the extreme of moroseness and a morbid view of character and human history. When avoiding this extreme, however, it lent a mellow softness to his nature and suffused it with a touching regard for the welfare of his fellows. Their apparently unearned sufferings elicited his deepest sympathy and he did not care to suppress it. His fondness for the occult and mysterious heightened this temper of mind. He had what Masson calls—"the metaphysical mood." He was ever moralizing on men and things; on passing events and personal destiny. He indulged in those secret reveries which so often mark the lives of students and authors. His physical

constitution inclined him to it and all his proclivities were in that direction. It seemed at times as in the case of Wordsworth, to take the form of superstitious wonder. He had that childlike awe and feeling of the marvelous which so prevailed among the Lake Poets and to which the solitude of the mountains may be said to minister.

All this was in the line of the emotive. It touched and swayed the springs of feeling within. There was just enough of the religious element in it to soften and deepen it and make it more attractive. De Quincey's style is permeated by this impassioned element on the side of pathos.

So, also, as to its more outspoken expression in passion and strong mental *emotion*.

Many of the best passages of his prose are strictly oratorical, so distinctive is the element of feeling. They read as if taken from Burke or Chatham. We will find such examples in his Autobiography, in his recital of the sufferings of neglected children; in his high eulogium on British womanhood; in his account of the character and age of Cicero; in his captivating narrative of the heroism of Joan of Arc; in his graphic account of the early Christian martyrdoms, and his description of Greece in the Golden Age of Pericles. At times, these expressions take the form of indignant invective. In speaking of Wordsworth's forced acquaintance with Monsieur Simond whose mercenary views were so out of keeping with the high theories of the Lake Poet, he says—"They met and saw *and interdespised*." His righteous soul was stirred to its depths by the manner in which this unpoetic Frenchman failed to grasp the transcendent excel-



lence of poetry as compared with all material good.

It is this impassioned element that explains much of the potency of De Quincey's style and keeps it fresh among us. It gives it that quality of force without which mere intelligibility is of little worth. It most aptly combines with that intellectual element of which we have spoken and forms a rare example of prose. Even in his philosophical and ethical papers this feature is present while in those which have specially to do with the historical personages and great public events it is conspicuous throughout.

#### (5.) Humor and Satire.

This element in De Quincey might be called—  
Satirical Humor.

An exquisite example of it is given in his paper on—"Murder as one of the Fine arts." Beginning with the history of murder in the act of Cain, he finds in the Age of Pericles "no murder of the slightest merit." In Rome, he finds nothing worthy of distinction and then passes over through the Middle Ages to the England of the seventeenth century. He gives a graphic description of proceedings at the sumptuous dinners of the "Thugs" and of the famous character—Toad-in-the-hole. How natural the explanation of the absence of the reporter who had been murdered by one of the party present and about whom inquiry is made. *Non est inventus.*

His advice to one inclined to distinguish himself in manslaughter is—Beware! "If once a man indulge in murder, he comes very soon to think little

of robbing; from robbing he comes to drinking and Sabbath breaking, and from that to incivility and procrastination. Many a man has dated his ruin from some murder or other that perhaps he thought little of at the time: *Principiis obsta.*" The low value set on human life and the low estimate of the criminality of taking it that prevailed at that time in London could have been rebuked and modified in no better way than in this of ironical pleasantry. The popular conscience was too dull to receive direct moral teaching and it must be reached by indirect methods. The satire, however, must be couched in humor.

In his paper on—Sortilege and Astrology—there is a fine specimen of English Humor, as, also, in his serio-comic description of an "English Mail Coach."

What a rich vein of merriment is there in "Dinner, real and reputed," as, also, in the author's ingenious criticism of Lord Monboddo's theory as to the descent of man from the ape. Apart from papers, however, that are specifically of this order, this double element runs through the style. In some of the personal sketches as in—The Confessions, it is mingled with sadness as it is in Lamb and Burns, while, in the main, it takes the form of a hearty, wholesome pleasantry. Even when satirical, it is full of that true humanity which according to Thackeray is essential to its existence. As a feature of style, it lends attractiveness and pointedness and saves the prose from what might otherwise be conducive to heaviness. Part of the readableness of De Quincey's prose comes from the pith of its irony and the pleasure of its humor.

## (6.) Pictorial and Artistic Power.

All that belongs to the sphere of the descriptive, imaginative or poetic is in place here, as making up the element of beauty in discourse and as a necessary complement to the mental and emotive elements hitherto suggested.

In the line of general descriptive skill, we note in the author the faculty of poetic discernment, the detection of those hidden analogies that escape most men and through the medium of which the highest artistic effects may be secured. He possessed what he himself in the "Opium Eater" calls—"the higher faculty of an electric aptitude for seizing analogies." Much of that which critics have attributed to the wide range of reading and grasp of memory is rather due to this "higher faculty" of mental insight—"the logical instinct for feeling in a moment the secret parallelisms that connected things apparently remote." It is thus natural to find critics as a class alluding to De Quincey as a model of exact comparison and descriptive sketching. This skill is very noticeable in his portrayal of natural scenery. To those who have lived among well known scenes, he discloses beauties hitherto unnoticed. So, as to men and movements. Though Southey and Wordsworth may have been known to us for years, De Quincey interprets them quite anew.

Apart from this special descriptive excellence, the prose is marked throughout by poetic taste and finish. There is just enough distinct use of figurative language to lend variety and general vividness to the style and, yet, not enough to controvert his own the-

ory as to the superiority of thought to form. In the matter of melody and rhythm, as a part of good prose structure, the author reaches definite and high results. Whether we refer to euphony as pertaining to the mere pleasure of sounds in themselves or as related to the sense beneath them, there is abundant evidence of skill. His prose possesses what Beethoven calls "pronunciability" and what Masson calls "musical beauty." Vowels, consonants and liquids are happily adjusted while he never so magnifies this poetic element as to pass the limits of substantial prose or make it difficult as to where to classify his writings. In this respect, also, he is Macaulay's superior as he is that of such an author as Jeremy Taylor. Though De Quincey was convinced that prose was his forte and wisely worked in it, he had not a little of that poetic genius which is found in all great prose writers and is intensified as in his case so fully, by an intimate acquaintance with the best specimens of poetry. He had what lies below all high expression in prose or poetry—the instinct of literary form; what Matthew Arnold would call—the sense of beauty. Intellectual as his style was, it was conspicuously artistic, and in this he has done the unspeakable service of showing that the best work in prose literature is neither the purely didactic nor the purely imaginative, but is seen in the judicious combination of these elements in what may be termed—the expression of thought in æsthetic form. The phrase—literary art—if truly interpreted, means an art based on mental laws and proceeding by intellectual methods and, yet, expressive of all that belongs to good taste and finish of form.

In De Quincey, this pictorial and artistic quality rises, at times, to magnificence. There is the element of literary splendor, a kind of majestic movement corresponding to the element of sublimity in poetry. The style is stately without being pompous or inflated. There is something of that lofty bearing so manifest in Hooker and Milton, but conducted with more finish and ease. There is a sustained elegance of form and carriage that indicates high literary breeding and invites respect.

What an absence there is in De Quincey of the coarse and base! How completely does he avoid the extremes of buffoonery and moral impropriety. There is nothing of Jonathan Swift's lower tastes here, but all is clean and clear. This was with De Quincey more a matter of taste than conscience. His morality was mainly literary. His ethics were shaped by his æsthetics. His sense of artistic propriety as an author would have made it impossible for him to have descended to the low levels of Dryden and the Restoration school. He had a religious regard for what was in good taste, and his prose is, thereby, the purer and better.

### HIS ALLEGED DEFECTS OF STYLE.

#### (1.) The Want of Full Discussion of Ideas.

Carlyle speaks of his "wire-drawn" papers. He has in mind his apparent want of elaboration, of greater thoroughness of treatment. Hence, it is noticeable that De Quincey rarely ventured beyond the magazine article into the larger and wider sphere

of prose expression. It seemed to be as difficult for him to address himself to the sustained production of literary work in book form as for Burns or Wordsworth to compose an epic. Miscellaneous writing, is after all, a subordinate form. Its discursive character must rank it below those forms which imply and require protracted mental effort definitely applied to one topic. The historical essay is not history proper nor is the descriptive essay a work in prose fiction. A biographical or a critical paper is not biography or criticism proper. De Quincey, it is true, experimented in extended book production, as in his—*Logic of Political Economy*. In this he sought to combine logic and social science into one unique system. He ridiculed all existing attempts save one in this direction, and on the basis of the learned Ricardo, he aimed to present an acceptable treatise. He called it—“*Prolegomena to all Future Systems of Political Economy*.” With this among other projects in mind, an able critic in the *Quarterly Review* remarks with irony—“He never finished anything except his sentences.” Here and there throughout his writings are intimations of unfinished plans. There is one of these that seems to be of special note—a work he tells us, “to which he devoted the labor of his life—a memorial to his children, of hopes defeated and of the grief and ruin of the architect.” There is the promise of a work nothing less than Baconian in the title he assigns to it: “*De Emendatione Humani Intellectus*.” This great undertaking was never fulfilled while his volume of prose fiction entitled—*Klosterheim*—is not at present accessible in England. His work as thus miscellaneous and irregular rather than continuous,

opened the great literary temptation to narrowness of view and undue brevity of description.

Though he understood the utility of full discussion and gave enough examples of it to show that he could apply it, such a method was exceptional and was not fully demanded by the periodic style. That De Quincey did not carry this principle further, as many of his less able predecessors did, is not altogether a mystery. We must believe that it was mainly due to the debilitating effect of opium, by which he tells us, he had virtually lost the power over his own will and faculties. It is one of the marvels of mental philosophy that under this frequent paralysis of the will, he did anything of worth in English Prose and, moreover, unquestionable that apart from this deadly drug, he would have been second to none in what he has finely termed "the literature of power." This fault apart, however, most of the main features of standard prose will appear as we analyze more closely the style of the author.

As a body of miscellaneous prose, it has no superior in English Letters. For wide richness of subject; for fullness of knowledge exhibited and for general attractiveness, no such example of English writing exists. In making up the estimate of his rank and power, critics have erred in comparing him with those who have worked in other departments of literature for which he had but little ability or taste. He is not to be condemned in that he did not write such a work as Bacon's *Advancement of Learning* or Hooker's *Polity*. He is not to be severely compared with those writers, who, in addition to miscellaneous work have accomplished large results in

other fields,—with such authors as Carlyle or the great historians, novelists and philosophers of England, but with others of the periodical order. Among such, as we shall see, he stands pre-eminent. The most unsparing criticism must concede that in the purely miscellaneous sphere no exception can be taken to this. Compared with Swift, Addison, Johnson and Lamb and all the so-called essayists of our literature, he has no rival or equal. If the modern English student were to be restricted to the perusal of one English essayist with reference either to the formation of style or the experience of literary pleasure, it should be De Quincey. The advice given by Dr. Johnson in reference to Addison “that we must spend our days and nights with him,” is still more in place as applied to De Quincey.

“There are few courses of reading,” says Masson, “from which a young man of good natural intelligence would come away more instructed, charmed and stimulated or with his mind more *stretched*.” In many respects he is *the* essayist of English Prose.

## (2.) Errors of Diction, Sentence and Moral Force.

As to *diction*, the errors here are not enough to justify the assertion made by some critics, that it is loose, irregular and devoid of correctness. The author innocently prided himself on his use of language. He made it a special aim to be precise. In one of his papers, after detecting the violation of this principle he condemns it and adds, “We rarely make such errors in the use of words.” We have already spoken of his pure English style—his preference for



the native language over the Latin or any other foreign tongue. Even where foreign idiom and technical phraseology enter, the English spirit is so controlling as to preserve the composition from pedantry or detract from its naturalness. There are authors, such as—Walton, Fuller, Bunyan and De Foe, who use in their prose a larger percentage of native words. Even Swift is his superior here. Still, the percentage is so large and the general character so home-like that his language cannot be said to mark a wide departure from purity. "The strong point in his diction," says Minto, "is his acquaintance with the language of the thoughts and feelings, with the subjective side of the English vocabulary. If "right words in right places" is a true definition of style, De Quincey might be regarded as a master. As to his wealth of diction nothing need be said.

As to *sentences* and general *structure* the author is more at fault, but not enough so to warrant the statement in connection with his paper on Goethe that the prose was marked by "awkwardness and stiffness." There are, undoubtedly, in De Quincey evident effects of German Grammar. He had made himself so conversant with German authors as to be somewhat affected by their style while, apart from this, he had not that natural facility of shaping prose structure which belonged to Macaulay and Lamb. Specially inclined to the elaborate periodic order of sentence, he found himself, at times, so involved midway in the structure as to make clearness impossible. He indulges too freely in the use of inversion and parenthesis largely induced by his habit of digression. As a law, however, his meaning is clear

and expressed with vigor. As we know, there was no subject to which as a question of style he devoted more attention than to the formation of the sentence. He is ever enforcing the necessity of a plain and emphatic structure, so that even when he errs it is in the face of his better judgment. What he called—The Mechanology of Style—had primary reference to this building of the phrase and paragraph so as to produce the best effect.

As to the positive *moral* vigor of De Quincey's prose, little can be said. "No one could have said of De Quincey, at any time of his life," writes Masson, "that his strength lay in any predominance of the moral element in his nature."

We have spoken of his style as strikingly intellectual. It was so because the author was so and somewhat at the expense of the ethical. He had here the same defect noted in the nature of Macaulay,—the want of that distinctively moral purpose which belongs to high literary art. He was a critic of style, pure and simple rather than of men or character. He never raised the question as to the place of conscience in authorship. He would not have been able to understand what Trollope writes in his *Life of Thackeray*—"that every work of fiction must be morally correct." The more modern theory of the separate existence of ethics and letters would have been more agreeable. The curse of opium is again apparent here in paralyzing the will and motive forces in the man. The ethical is eliminated or deadened.

Had De Quincey possessed this quality, no line could have measured his literary influence. As it is,

he must be viewed apart from it simply as one of the English Men of Letters.

Judged from this standpoint he has, as stated, no superior in English prose. A recent English critic has not overstated it as he says—"The exquisite finish of his style, with the scholastic vigor of his logic form a combination which centuries may never reproduce, but which every generation should study as one of the marks of English literature." In volume and richness of diction, in substantial clearness and strength of structure; in all those qualities of style that may be termed intellectual and in high artistic finish of external form, there is nothing better in our language. Others had excelled him in specific features of style but no one up to his time had so happily unified all the leading qualities. He is not without defects and positive faults; but they are largely neutralized by the presence of many masterly qualities. Representing all that was best in Baconian and Addisonian style, he, also, represents those later excellences which belong to English Prose as distinctively modern and which serve to place it as second to none in the list of the prose literatures of the world.

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Masson's (*Eng. Men of Let.*). Minto's *Prose Manual*. *Hours in a Library* (Leslie Stephen). *Illustrations of Genius* (Giles).

## CHAPTER XI.

### THE PROSE STYLE OF CHARLES DICKENS.

#### Brief Biographical Sketch.

BORN at Landport (Hampshire) Feb., 1812. Studied near Rochester. An Attorney and Student. A Reporter. From 1836, engaged in authorship. Visited United States in 1841. Visited United States again in 1867. Died in 1870.

#### Prose Fiction as a Form.

In discussing the Representative Forms of English Prose in the former part of this treatise, special attention has been called to the Descriptive or Pictorial Form. As there remarked, Prose Fiction, as a distinct species of prose, falls under this form. It is not precisely co-extensive with Descriptive Writing, but has its main features. All fiction as such, is more or less descriptive. It is not true, however, that all descriptive prose is necessarily fictitious in character. As already suggested, it has a large place in ordinary narrative writing and a place larger or smaller in every prominent form of English Prose Literature. The style of Dickens is essentially that of Prose Fiction. There is no writer of our literature who in this particular has been more unique and

individual. Whatever product of his pen we may be pleased to peruse we know, at the outset, just what order of style we shall find,—the distinctive style of the novelist. From early boyhood to the composition of his last work, Dickens was a novelist more than anything else, and he could not if he had so desired, permanently have succeeded in any other sphere. Some of his attempts in biographical editing and politico-literary journalism confirm this view. Even in the closely related form of historical prose, he was not as much of an adept as many of his contemporaries such as—Bulwer, Thackeray, Scott and Kingsley. It is quite noticeable that but two of his numerous novels—*Barnaby Rudge* and *A Tale of Two Cities*—may be strictly called historical, while his—*Child's History of England*—was but partially successful.

As to the oratorical or philosophic forms of prose, he scarcely approached them at any point. His mission was elsewhere. It was in the region of the ideal and the imaginative in their relation to the actual life about him. Hence it is clear that an analysis of Dickens' prose is nothing more nor less than a study of style as seen in works of fiction.

It will be seen to have three pictorial elements that mark it as a kind of pictorial prose. It will reveal the presence of imagination more than any other mental faculty and reveal it on its poetical side more than on its historical or philosophic. Even within the province of fiction proper, the descriptive novel will be seen to take precedence of all others in his works. That combined minuteness and comprehensiveness of style peculiar to the novel as a work of

literary art will appear. In fine, in the study of Dickens' prose, we are, for the time being, on a kind of border line between prose and poetry—the real and the unreal.

The writing is that of prose fiction as Burke's is that of oratory, or Addison's that of the *Miscellaneous Essay*. Whatever disadvantage this may have in the way of restriction, it has the great advantage of precision. We know just where we are.

### His Prose Works.

These are of one order and are numerous. All literary critics have noted the wonderful literary activity which Dickens displayed. He was a conscientious and an earnest worker in the field of English Prose and in this respect alone has left an invaluable lesson for those who follow him and who may be inclined to what is called—elegant literary leisure. Ward and Forster, his most recent biographers are never weary of alluding to this characteristic and always connect it with his great success as a writer and with that fertility of production which he exhibited. Late in life he wrote—"I am become incapable of rest. I am quite confident I should break and die, if I spared myself. Much better to die doing." He early formed the purpose of doing what he did with all his heart. Love of thoroughness and system in his work is everywhere visible. What he lacked naturally, he supplied by the greatest assiduity and even in the days of vacation was storing his mind for his needs as a novelist. He saw and noted everything, and

when he sat down to the definite work of composition was full of his subject and wrote with ease.

Such an author must have been voluminous. From the time that he penned his—Sketches of Boz, and—The Posthumous Papers of The Pickwick Club, on to Our Mutual Friend, and the unfinished—Mystery of Edwin Drood, he was at it early and late—passionately devoted to novel writing, carrying out his own principle—“Whatever I have devoted myself to, I have devoted myself to completely.”

It is scarcely necessary for our purpose to mention here all the prose writings of Dickens. At the close of Mr. Forster’s minute biography, such a list may be found.

As the basis of our criticism may be mentioned the following:—

*Sketches of Boz.*

*The Posthumous Papers of The Pickwick Club.*

*Oliver Twist.*

*Life and Adventures of Nicholas Nickleby.*

*The Old Curiosity Shop.*

*Barnaby Rudge.*

*American Notes for General Circulation.*

*The Life and Adventures of Martin Chuzzlewit.*

*Dealings with the Firm of Dombey and Son.*

*The Personal History of David Copperfield.*

*Black House.*

*Hard Times.*

*Little Dorrit.*

*A Tale of Two Cities.*

*The Uncommercial Traveler.*

*Great Expectations.*

*Our Mutual Friend.*

*The Mystery of Edwin Drood.*

Christmas Stories:—*A Christmas Carol in Prose.*  
*The Chimes.* *The Cricket on the Hearth.* *The Battle of Life.* *The Haunted Man.*

In addition to these typical works might be mentioned some of lesser note, such as his—

*Memoirs of Joseph Grimaldi.*

*The Picnic Papers.*

*Pictures from Italy.*

*A Child's History of England.*

The Serials:—*Household Words.* *All the Year Round.*  
*Master Humphrey's Clock.*

Other works of still less importance may be seen in the list referred to.

There is here manifested unwonted literary industry and productiveness, covering a period of thirty-five years, from 1835-70. Even when a boy at school and an attorney's clerk, he was writing sketches. It is well known that from an early period he was connected more or less directly with journalism, partly in the interests of his special work as a novelist and partly for independent ends in the intervals of regular duty.

As far, therefore, as mere *amount* of authorship is concerned Dickens ranks among the first. Though less voluminous than De Foe or Bulwer he is far more so than Thackeray or Eliot and has written quite enough to entitle him to the place to which modern criticism has assigned him. It is quite possible,



indeed, as in the case of De Foe that he has written too much for his reputation, while it is not to be forgotten, as suggested, that what he wrote was mainly in one direction of literary work. Though he wrote far more than Addison or Johnson or Macaulay, he was not voluminous as they were in the way of a large variety of prose form. Those qualities of style which arise from frequent change of topic as from history to essay or from criticism to descriptive sketching are not as prominent in Dickens as in many of our English writers. On the other hand, the restriction of his work, spacious as it is, to the one department of prose fiction, brings with it certain advantages in the line of concentrated effort and ever improving methods. Dickens has often been held to account by the critics for what he never pretended to do as a prose writer. His prose is to be examined and judged within the limits of that form which he preferred and produced, and that only. Comparing him favorably or unfavorably with Scott or Thackeray is in order, but not so to insist that he shall be in narrative prose what Macaulay was, or in philosophic prose what Hooker or Bacon were.

#### PROMINENT FEATURES OF HIS PROSE STYLE.—MERITS.

##### (1.) Delineative and Dramatic Power.

In this characteristic we touch upon that which many have regarded as the one leading feature of the prose before us. It is certainly as conspicuous as any and would express as fully as any those peculiar features which mark Dickens as a novelist. Among the different classes of novels which critics have seen

fit to enumerate, the novel of *Life and Manners* is a prominent one. It might be called with fairness, the Descriptive Novel, and it was the special form in which Dickens did his best work and which best illustrates his prose style. Attention has already been called to the early development of descriptive skill in the life of Dickens, based as it was on that keen faculty which he possessed of seeing all that transpired about him and of seeing it with reference to portraying it in written form. The first substantial product of his pen—*Sketches of Boz*—happily suggests this primary quality of his style. In the best sense of the word, it was sketchy or graphic—a clear delineation of men and things. It is in this feature of Dickens' style that his imagination as a pictorial and constructive faculty is seen to enter. He had by natural endowment a lively sense of the ideal and fanciful and yet made it a matter of special care to cultivate this part of his being. We note throughout the record of his life that he regarded it as important as any faculty of the human mind and congratulated himself that in his own case it had received constant culture. It is just here that much of the descriptive character of his prose finds its origin and maintenance. He enriched and enlarged the descriptive faculties of the mind just as the logician would expand the logical faculties or the artist the special faculty of æsthetic taste.

It was by this power of actualizing the ideal that his characters were, in the main, as real to him as if they were before him in living personality.

We are told that there is much of the dramatic cast in Dickens' prose. The criticism is eminently

just and lies directly in the line of his power of imagery.

He tells us that he had "always been an actor." When a boy at the Wellington House Academy, he not only wrote the tales which were to be recited, but was the actual head of the private theatrical performances there established. His enthusiastic fondness for the public recitation of his own writings in this country, on the continent and at home, is but another evidence of the presence of this histrionic instinct and skill.

He loved, as a writer, the work of *representation* and in order to express this tendency of his nature still more fully he often resorted to the platform as a reader or to the boards of the stage as an actor. Readers of his life will call to mind the part which he took as manager and actor in the comedy of—Every Man in his Humor—The Light House—The Elder Brother, and other plays.

With Jerrold, Lemon, Collins and Forster, as intimate companions, he went about as the old strolling players were wont to do, partly for sheer jollity and mainly to give due expression to that particular element of his descriptive faculty which may be called dramatic. Ward, in speaking of Bleak House, remarks—"The idea of making an impressional object like a great Chancery suit the centre round which a large and manifold group of characters revolves, seems to savor of a *drama* rather than of a story." This statement has a much wider application than to Bleak House, as in Dombey and Son and elsewhere.

In fact, Dickens' prose in his fiction throughout,

not only evinces that measure of plot and character and catastrophe which marks the novel as a distinct form of prose but that measure of these which marks the comedy as a dramatic product. To say the least, it marks the border line between prose fiction and the prose drama.

Much has been said of late, *pro* and *con*, as to the power of *characterization* visible in the prose of Dickens.

Critics who rank him high at this point speak of—"the photographic power of his pen." Others speak slightly of his power here and deny to him any genius in this direction.

It is difficult to see the basis of such extreme destructive criticism at this point. The author is not to be compared as to this quality with those who are dramatic writers only, with such as Shakespeare or the great Elizabethan dramatists. Characterization on its dramatic side cannot possibly reach in fiction that high level which by right it attains in the drama proper. Somewhat different in its very nature, it is mostly different in the form and degrees of its expression. The prose of Dickens is here to be compared with that of his fellow novelists—preceding and contemporaneous, with that of Scott and Thackeray, Fielding and Richardson. Thus compared, he yields to no one of them. We deem it safe to affirm that in the dramatic or representative description of character, he is far superior to any of his predecessors and had no equal in his day. If he had not this art, he had nothing. It was his strong point as a prose novelist.

Apart from this descriptive feature on its dramatic

side, however, the prose of Dickens is a striking example of *general* descriptive prose. He had that keen and comprehensive view of the outlines of objects which is so essential to delineative success in the writer. He knew just where to stand so as to get the best point of view of the person or scene to be sketched and how to fill up in the most picturesque and attractive manner the outline presented. In his —*Pictures from Italy*; in *Barnaby Rudge*; in *The Tale of Two Cities* and in his *Child's History*, there are good examples of this ordinary descriptive writing on its historical side, while all through his prose those pen pictures appear which mark the style as imaginative. He delights to give the "romantic side of familiar things." The style is illustrated, as he says, "by every-day life and every-day people." It is a happy combination of romance with reality by which the one is saved from groundless fancy and the other, from literary dullness. His description of the Yorkshire Schools, in *Nicholas Nickleby*; of Mark Tapley, Mrs. Gamp, and, especially, of Pecksniff, in *Martin Chuzzlewit*; of Dover, in *A Tale of Two Cities*; of South European life, in his *Pictures from Italy*; of the experiences of Pip, in *Great Expectations* and the inimitable scenes in *Oliver Twist*, *Old Curiosity Shop*, *The Pickwick Papers* and *David Copperfield* will sufficiently indicate that wealth of faculty which Boz possessed in this department of prose art. In fact, it was enough for him to see a thing once to be able to delineate it accurately and interestingly to others.

His—*American Notes*—and portions of *Martin Chuzzlewit* are the only serious exceptions to this

statement and here the sufficient explanation is given in the words of Ward, his latest biographer—"that he had, if not at first, at least, very speedily, taken a dislike to American ways which proved too strong for him to the last." Even here, however, many of the descriptions, which are false as matters of history are attractive as specimens of pictorial art in prose. Dickens' prose is descriptive as Bacon's is philosophic or Burke's impassioned, and no author in English has written so much descriptive prose who has written it better or with fewer substantial literary faults.

## (2.) Pathos or Sensibility.

This quality of style is by no means as frequent in Dickens as the one discussed. As far as it goes however, it is equally characteristic. It is that element of sympathy or sensitiveness which makes impressive any prose in which it is found. One has but to read a short way into the life of Dickens as a man or an author before he discovers the prominent existence of this quality and the grounds of it. In his very first work of any import, he illustrates it. In the *Pickwick Papers*, it appears in the character of Sam Weller in close conjunction with the element of humor. In the *Old Curiosity Shop*, as Ward suggests: "The key-note is that of an idyllic pathos." In—*Hard Times*—even the despicable part of Gradgrind is relieved by genuine strokes of tenderness while the one purpose of the book is in the line of charity for the suffering. This quality is strikingly manifested in those works and characters where the

author seems to aim to counteract or conceal irredeemable features of bad men by emphasizing those that are indicative of some good still remaining. He believed in the better nature of man and would bring it into prominence, as in *Oliver Twist*, in the persons of Bates and the Artful Dodger. As Lord Russell wrote of him, he had a faculty of "finding diamonds hidden far away." So in his personal and generous interest in the poor and unfortunate. His devotion to the cause of Ragged Schools and Hospitals for sick children evinces this. His attempt, as in *Nicholas Nickleby*, *Bleak House* and numerous other works, to right the wrongs of the oppressed is in point. "Be not hard upon the poor," is his maxim and appeal. His interest in children and, especially, in the outcast is proof in point, while in—*The Chimes*, as in all his Christmas Series, his prominent object is to express his tender sympathy with all that can alleviate sorrow and lighten life. He was full of that humanity of which Thackeray so often speaks and in this respect resembled his great contemporary. When as in the case of the death of Little Nell and similar scenes, this pathetic quality of spirit comes to its fullest expression, there can be no longer a doubt that it was a radical part of his nature and literary activity. Such a personal characteristic would naturally become a literary characteristic and be suffused through all that he wrote. It lends to his style what might be called, a mellowness and sweetness of tone, and goes far to nullify any of those coarser elements which are to some extent necessary in fiction. This gentleness of touch is something that is needed in all prose and marks the presence of a chaste and sensitive spirit

behind it. Those who have had the privilege of hearing Mr. Dickens recite his own productions will have seen how deep a hold of his large nature this pathetic element took. Mr. Forster in the third volume of his biography calls frequent attention to this quality as seen in *David Copperfield* and other novels. It casts a charm over the style and has completely disarmed much criticism that otherwise would have been destructive. Some, as Mr. Taine and George Henry Lewes, contend that this pathos overreaches itself, that "the tone is too passionate." They hold that the author is controlled by his feelings and sacrifices correctness of literary art to an undue effusion of sentiment.

Mr. Dickens' recent biographers have sufficiently met this accusation. Coming from such critics as it does it is a compliment more than a rebuke and evinces the fact that his style is so permeated by this element that the most indifferent must admit its presence. There are exceptional instances, indeed, when the pathos is too strong for the idea behind it. In the main, however, it must be conceded that he is master of it and guides it to the best results. To eliminate it from his style would be to rob it of one of its cardinal features. Such a process could be applied to Scott, Bulwer and even to Thackeray and Eliot with far less injurious results.

It is largely through this sympathetic element that the unwonted popularity of the author's prose is explained. "Passion is catching." The reader is at once attracted and enchained. He is brought into the closest relations with the novelist and his characters and for the time being they are one. It is this ele-



ment, it may be added, that will go far to make the writings of Dickens permanent in literature.

### (3.) Humor and Satire.

“His leading quality,” says Mr. Forster, “was Humor. It was his highest faculty.” Without accepting this statement in full, it is safe to class it with his descriptive skill as especially prominent. It was an organic part of the man. Cheerfulness was with him one of the Christian graces. Probably no character in English Letters more fully illustrates the influence on style of a happy, hopeful, hearty temperament. “He was so full of life,” said our own Longfellow, “that it did not seem possible he could die.” This often took the form, at home and elsewhere, of a good-natured expression of gladness of heart by which all others were made glad. Often, it took the form of innocent pleasantry and, still again, often rose in its best expressions to the highest example of humor and satire combined. He could not but see the droll side of men and things. It was as natural for him to detect the eccentricities as the more regular features of character and one glance at an object was sufficient for him to make it the occasion of genuine English mirth.

To attempt to cite examples of this quality from Dickens' prose is almost needless in that it appears upon nearly every page. In *Sketches of Boz*; in the character of Pickwick, Sam Weller and Bob Sawyer, in *Pickwick Papers*; in the history of the Squeer's family, in *Nicholas Nickleby*; in the character of Dick Sniveller, in *Old Curiosity Shop*; in that of

Pecksniff, in *Martin Chuzzlewit*; in that of Mr. Micawber, in *David Copperfield*; in that of the horse-riders, in *Hard Times*; in that of Mrs. Lirriper, in *Christmas Sketches*, and, in fact, wherever we please to turn. As in the case of Charles Lamb and Goldsmith, this literary pleasantry is often closely connected with sadness. It is, often, the serio-comic in its best expression and with the two elements almost equally present. Critics speak of the mirth and sadness of his humor. In fact, the highest forms of humor seem to contain something of this sober element, and yet always kept in due subordination. Gerald Massey has pronounced Lamb the first of English Humorists. The judgment seems to us to be incorrect. There was far too much of the mournful and morose to make it wholesome and tonic.

Dickens was his superior here, in that while there was enough of the serious to give richness and body to the humor, there was not enough to make it in any sense unhealthful. At this point he was superior to Swift, as being free from his morbid propensity, and was even superior to Thackeray, as having less of that cynical element in which the author of *The Newcomes* loves to indulge. That sensitiveness of soul to which allusion has been made entered into the humor of Dickens and softened it without weakening it.

As intimated, this quality is often found in unison with satire in all the varied forms of irony—the mock-heroic, innuendo and allusion. He was a master of what Forster calls “social satire”—the kindly criticism of what he thought should be rebuked. Many of the characters already adduced in the line

of humor illustrate this related quality. Others might be mentioned, such as that of Uriah Heep, that of Littimer the valet; of Mr. Vholes, Mrs Jellyby and Mr. Guppy; of Gradgrind; of Pip, in *Great Expectations* and of a host of others. In a few rare instances, this satire takes the form of harsh invective, when for the time being, as in parts of *Little Dorrit*, he seems to have lost the fullness of his sympathy. He despised everything in the form of pretense, injustice and sham, so that his satire is often directed against systems and policies as well as against persons, as in *Oliver Twist*, his references to parochial management, and in *Little Dorrit*, to British officialism. So, also, in his *American Notes* and in *Chuzzlewit* as, also, in his unjust allusions to persons of his time, in *Oliver Twist* to Landor, and to Leigh Hunt in *Bleak House*. As a quality of style, however, this ironical element enters to play a beneficent part. Its close connection with the humorous saves it from bitterness and makes it more efficient. In speaking hereafter, of the practical character of Dickens' style, it will be seen what an important part satire performed in the sum total of the result. The special point to be emphasized here is, that the humor controlled the satire and not, the satire the humor. Dickens was a man in every sense and a whole-hearted Englishman. He was full of life and good feeling with an eye ever open to the irregular and when he wrote he could not but be jocose and comical. Here, again, is one of the elements that will give perpetuity to his prose. It carries its own impulse with it. It is the salt that saves it. That "freshness and raciness" of style of

which critics so often speak, finds its explanation in this feature. It is more than what Mr. Lewes is pleased to call by way of contempt, "mere fun." It is a natural flow of genuine good-will, by which the reader is made the author's friend. It is to be noted that Dickens, in his prose fiction, is more than a mere wit as Voltaire was in France or Swift in England. He cannot rest content with verbal perversion, with mere punning, but ascends to that higher level of humor where the process is psychological and has to do with character. Such an order of popular-prose is especially in place in modern times when there are so many tendencies in literature that are misanthropic and morose. The despondent philosophy is so current that men must have revealed to them the lighter side of life lest they be discouraged.

We are not speaking now, of the strictly ethical side of Dickens' prose, but it is in place to affirm, that the controlling tendency of it was cheering and uplifting and this largely, through its good-natured pleasantry. He aimed to do in his writings just what at his home at Gad's Hill he aimed to do as a citizen—to make the world around him somewhat cheerier by his presence and effort. He attempted to effect this by journalism, by active participation in measures of public reform, and was urged by some of his advisers to enter the House of Commons in order the better to promote the public good. He found his sphere, however, as a novelist and has presented a body of prose about as wholesome and cheerful as any in our literature. If it is entertaining without being enervating; if it is popular without being devoid of substantial merit; if it is racy and readable

without being superficial, it is largely due to the fact that in it all, humor and generous satire freely combine with all the weightier qualities to interest and relieve. Prose Fiction, in the very nature of the case, must largely admit of this attractive element.

#### (4.) Practical in Character and Aim.

Although the prose before us is properly termed—prose fiction, there is a basis of reality in it all. Fact and fiction combine. The latter is founded upon the former. Nor are we speaking now, simply of that species of the novel, known as the historical, where, as in Sir Walter Scott, it is expected at the outset, that actual recurrences and events are to form the groundwork of the plot. We speak of the novel in all its best varieties as involving this element. The terms, romance, fiction and novel may be misleading here and indicative of the absence of the actual and the trite. It is a significant fact in the history of fiction that as we ascend from the lower to the higher forms of the novel, the element of reality and practicalness more largely enters. In the novel of sentiment, and that only, the merely narrative rules. In the novel of life and manners, however, as the very phrase suggests, we are at once in the region of the real and have to do with the actual world about us. Among all the forms of fiction, this is the most characteristic and is the special form which Dickens illustrates. As Forster and others wisely intimate, it is no less impossible than it is needless to draw minute distinctions between the romantic and the realistic in the best prose fiction. Even in the

ethical or philosophical novel, as seen in Eliot, we have the practical element as seen in its other name—the novel of *purpose*. If Thackeray is more realistic than some of his fellows, this is not to say, that he is in any true sense devoid of that imaginative power which marks the writer who has to do with the ideal.

As attesting the practical character of Dickens' style, attention may be called both to the general and specific purposes he had in view. His general aim was, to disseminate wholesome truth among the people and, on the negative side, to reform all abuses and ameliorate the condition of society. More specifically, wherever he saw existing wrong or possible opportunity for improvement, he addressed himself as a writer of fiction to the case in hand. So strong a tendency was this in Dickens that some critics, as Mr. Ward, admit that the author was in great danger of forgetting his proper work as a novelist in the interests of social reform. However this may have been, he gives us in many of his leading works a rare combination of the highest literary art with the best practical aims, doing a work here so nobly done by his successor—Kingsley.

Undoubtedly, his early experience in journalism and more especially as a parliamentary reporter, gave him that personal insight into affairs which made his course as a novelist clear to him. Readers of his life are familiar with the accounts of his profound interest in all matters of popular progress—on the questions of temperance, prison life, penal laws, Sabbath observance and the rights of the laboring classes.

What he gives us as to the Debtor's Prison, in *Pickwick*; as to the Yorkshire Schools, in *Nicholas*

Nickleby; as to the Court of Chancery, in Bleak House; as to Parish Oversight, in Oliver Twist; as to Administrative Abuses, in little Dorrit; as to Oppression of the Poor, in Hard Times; as to what he calls "Social Flunkeyism," in our Mutual Friend; and as to Hypocrisy in Chuzzlewit, will sufficiently confirm the presence of this principle. All is fact here save the verbal form in which, for the best effect, the author sees fit to present it. The element of the real is almost as prominent a factor as it is in Macaulay's History of England, or Addison's Spectator.

It is this same feature of style that appears in his uniform preference of actual persons and scenes as the material of his works. This, as we have seen, at times, led him to extremes of personal reference. In the main, it was wisely applied and gave to his fiction the force of historic narrative.

In Bob Fagin, of Oliver Twist, is represented one of the boys at the Hacking warehouse at Hungerford stairs. In Mrs. Pipchin of Dombey and Son, was the old lady who kept the lodging-house in Little-College Street. In the character of the Marchioness in Old Curiosity Shop, in his references to the Garland family and Salem House the same principle is illustrated. The originals of Boythorn and Skimpole; of Chancery abuses in Bleak House; of Copperfield, Dora, Miss Moucher and Micawber in David Copperfield; of Miss Blimber and the Little Wooden Midshipman, in Dombey; of the Opium Eater in Edwin Drood: of Mrs. Gamp, in Chuzzlewit; of Satis House, in Great Expectations; of Mrs. Clennam, in Little Dorritt; of Eden, in Chuzzlewit; of the Brothers Cheeryble in Nickleby; of Mr. Fang, in Oliver Twist, and of Pick-

wick in *Pickwick Papers*,—all these are illustrative of that deep desire he had to combine the real and the romantic or indeed to make the one the basis of the other.

Dr. Jowett in his enlogium of Dickens in Westminster Abbey makes special reference to this practical character of the man and the author. "He made it his business to rebuke vice and pretence wherever he found it as he rebukes selfishness in *Chuzzlewit* and pride in *Dombey*." In such characters as Pecksniff and Gradgrind he has not only exhibited high power as a novelist but has personally aided the cause of good morals for all time. There are few scenes more suggestive than those in which he is found, as at the door of Whitechapel Workhouse, striving at the same time to relieve human wants and to secure for future literary use a true account of the sufferings of the poor.

Mr. Ruskin in commenting on one of the author's novels (*Hard Times*) while taking exception to some matters makes the strong statement—"He is entirely right in his main drift and purpose in every book he has written, and all of them should be studied with close and earnest care by persons interested in social questions." The mere cursory reader of Dickens' prose secures no adequate idea of this business-like quality of his style. He was a social reformer as were Howard and Wilberforce, only in a different way. Never has literature been so fully made the instrument of direct national benefit. The wide reception which Dickens' writings have met in Great Britain and elsewhere is not altogether due to their literary character as works of fiction, but to their



practical character as in the interests of the public. He did what Bunyan did—presented life in allegory, and in each case the results were marvelous. He did in his own way what Milton and Addison and Burke did in theirs. There is in all the best English Prose, this utilitarian element. The true and the beautiful are one. He writes the best who writes for a definite objective end.

### (5.) Ease and Naturalness.

Dickens is remarkable as a prose writer in this respect, that it is difficult to tell which one of several leading qualities is clearly the most prominent. Some hold that it is his humor; others, that it is his descriptive power or his pathos, and others still, that it is the marvelous facility and freshness with which he writes. Almost the only critic of prominence who dissents from this view is Mr. Taine who suggests that in the complexity of his narrative he lacks simplicity. This criticism, however, is to be taken with caution and we may safely endorse the judgment of that large body of scholars who have spoken of the pre-eminence of this quality. It appears very largely in that feature of his style already studied as the descriptive, as, also, in the pathetic and humorous elements. Still, it has a distinctive presence and power of its own and deserves separate discussion. But little has been written respecting the *diction or sentence* structure of Dickens' prose and it is just here that much of his rhetorical and literary ease appears. It is in fact because of his comparative freedom from common fault in these directions that so little

has been noted regarding them. As soon as one begins the reading of Bacon or Johnson or Carlyle the questions of phraseology and structure at once arise. In the author before us, the very naturalness prevents the starting of the question as to merit or demerit. Mr. Ward quotes him as saying to Wilkie Collins that "underlining was not his nature." The meaning of the words and sentences took care of itself. The emphasis of the various parts followed the law of nature and could not be easily mistaken. Readers of his novels must have noticed the felicitous way he has of stating what he has to say as he wishes to say it and stopping there. There are instances, indeed, where for the sake of oddity and humor he adopts quaint phrases and paraphrase, as in Pickwick, Pecksniff and in other characters. These however were aside from his regular habit and intensify by contrast the naturalness of his ordinary style. Dickens was in no sense a "bookish" man. He preferred life to literature itself. It was his joy, not so much that he wrote, as that he wrote for the people, as he says, "for the hearth and the home." Hence, his style was eminently popular and became more and more so as his work went on.

The words affixed to his first work—Sketches by Boz—illustrative of Every Day Life and Every Day People, might have been added to each of his novels. He was a student of nature and human nature and wrote a style so homely as to be understood by the common classes and, yet, not so homely as to be neglected by the educated. There is very much in Dickens' prose of the simplicity of Fuller, Walton and Bunyan and the older English writers. His

want of knowledge of the classics, while it had its disadvantages, had also the advantage of shutting him up more closely to a line of diction and form of structure entirely English.

In fine, Dickens wrote a popular prose and largely due to that ease and naturalness of which we speak. His early experience in journalism and his habit of writing in short serial form as in *Household Words* did much to increase the facility of his style. It is at this point as at many others, that Dickens differs in such marked degree from the school of George Eliot. There is nothing of the abstruse and metaphysical either in idea or expression—no learned references to Plato and Tasso and the philosophers, but a “plain, unvarnished tale,” so that “he that runs may read.” He is superior, at this point, even to Thackeray and Charlotte Brontë and fully the equal of Scott and Kingsley, Macdonald and Bulwer. There are but few of those mystic phrases in which the author of *Vivian Grey* and *Endymion* loves to indulge, but an out and out straightforwardness. We have spoken of Dickens’ style as felicitous. There is no better word by which to express it. Its effect is a happy one. It is the transfer of nature to the printed page. It is a facile and spontaneous expression of simple ideas whereby the reader is alike charmed and instructed.

### DEFECTS OF STYLE.

Dickens’ prose has its faults and they have not been allowed to escape. As in the case of Keats and Wordsworth, critics have arisen who seem to be

more desirous of inflicting wounds upon sensitive natures than of serving the highest interests of letters. Students are aware of the application of this destructive criticism in special instances, as at the appearance of *Bleak House*. The "dogs of war" were "let loose" and "Havoc"! seemed to be the cry. It was when the author was in his prime and just after the great success of *Copperfield*. It was, also, in spite of the fact that the success of *Bleak House* was unprecedented and that in construction and general character it marked a high order of power. Still, certain of the critics "of the baser sort" spoke contemptuously of the author and his work, acknowledged some evidences of genius, but—they called him a charlatan and caricaturist, spoke of his plan as crude and of his characters as grotesque and unnatural and greatly lamented that he could not rise to the discussion of the "high born and wealthy." This school of critics has continued since the publication of *Bleak House*, in 1852, and finds its latest exponents, as already suggested, in Mr. Taine and Mr. Lewes. The one may be said to represent the foreign and the other, the English school of criticism, agreeing, however, in serious objections to the wide-famed novelist, as a man whose fancy ran wildly away with him. Suffice it to say, at this point, that Mr. Taine's relation to French Fiction, as illustrated in Balzac, Sand and others, and Mr. Lewes' relation to that school of English Fiction of which his wife was the head, made it impossible for either of them fairly to sit in judgment upon Dickens' work. In each case there were ends to serve while quite apart from this, the adverse criticism so overreaches itself as to have

but little weight with candid minds. Sensitive as he was to the opinions of others he would willingly have yielded to the sentiment expressed by Wordsworth—"I am not at all desirous that any one should write a critique on my poems. If they be *from above*, they will do their own work in course of time; if not, they will perish as they ought." As he says in his will, "I rest my claim to the remembrance of my country upon my published works."

This conceded, there is safe ground on which some features of the style of Dickens may be judged and condemned. He had defects and blemishes and, yet, not enough to depose him from that high rank he has so long occupied as an able and a facile writer of English.

Some of these defects of style we shall briefly consider.

### (1.) Want of Philosophical Power.

Of the four great classes of novels—The Descriptive Historical, Sentimental and Psychological, Dickens would not have succeeded in the last as he did in the first. The structure of his style follows the structure of his mind. Even as to his earliest relations to literature we are told "that the artists of the stage, whom he most admired, were not those of the highest mental type." It has been strenuously held by some as confirmed by his works, that the portraiture of the highest type of man was outside of his sphere and power. The genius for characterization as distinct from that for mere caricature, is denied him. It is just here that Taine and Lewes deal their

sharpest blows against him, as being more of an enthusiast than a thinker. They contend that his style is not marked by that "high thinking" of which Wordsworth speaks, but rather by the presence of those elements which make it readable and popular only. His imagination, they say, was poetic and in no sense, philosophic; that he gives us the description rather than the thorough analysis of character, and that, thus, the highest effect of his fiction is a genial form of literary pleasure rather than an intellectual discipline and profit. There is an element of truth in this and, beyond question, it marks the point at which the author is the weakest. Dickens was in no definite sense a scholar. Apart from the sphere of nature and human life, he was not in the mental view of it, a student. Some of his views on the great political questions of his day and, more especially, his hasty conclusions as to American life and character, manifest an order of mind which had but little to do with logical processes. Mr. Ruskin, in commenting on—*Hard Times*—well remarks—"I wish, when he takes up a subject of high national importance, that he would use severer and more accurate analysis." Critics speak correctly of his want of logical constructive power as seen in most of his earlier novels, as in *Pickwick*, and in the later, as in *Nickleby* and *Copperfield*. The charge against *Bleak House* is "absolute want of construction," and though ably met by Forster is still in place.

In fact, Dickens' mind and style, in this respect, are *discursive* rather than *didactic*. He observes facts better than he reasons on the facts furnished him by observation. The serial method which he

adopted so largely in his publications had some advantages in the way of viewing a continuous story or plot in separate sections, but it had the great disadvantage of magnifying the part above the whole and of cutting in twain at various points the logical sequence of the thought. Serial as the method was, it was "discontinuous." Allusion has been made to the wide difference between George Eliot's style and that of Dickens. The difference lies mainly at this point and with reference to it exclusively is decidedly in favor of the former. Dickens' style has its great merits and mission, but it is not in the sphere of the purely intellectual. Prose Fiction is not the highest form of prose, partly because of the nature of it as semi-poetical and partly because of its ultimate purpose.

It is still an open question whether Dickens did not owe much of his success to the fact that he worked in a literary sphere where the highest forms of intellectual power were not demanded in order to the best results. Even in this sphere, however, he confined himself to descriptive work, save in *Barnaby Rudge* and *A Tale of Two Cities*. He had but little aptitude for the historical novel as compared with Scott and Kingsley, and none whatever for the philosophical, as compared with Eliot. Here, therefore, is limitation of area and of power. The student of style must look to Dickens for that only which he has to offer him. He must not expect to find any great examples of psychological dissection. His prose is entertaining rather than educating and stimulating. It leaves the reader happier, and on the whole, better, but none the stronger in mental fiber and possibility.

In this respect Dickens' style fails just where Prose Fiction as an order of prose fails—in mental enlargement and suggestion. Good as it is in its proper place, it may be safely said that as long as it continues to form the larger part of the people's intellectual food, so long will the popular mind fail to reach the highest levels of intelligence and mental growth.

### (2.) Want of Artistic Finish.

The question here, is not that started by some critics—which is the more important, essential excellence of subject-matter or external execution? On this there need be no doubt. The principle is that these should exist together in all the highest forms of prose. In fact, the more excellent the idea, the more excellent the outer form should be. When thought and style exist in the inverse ratio in any writer it proves on his part total ignorance as to the vital relation of the two and nullifies the value of each. There is, undoubtedly, in fiction as a form of prose, a strong temptation to the coarse and clownish. It is far easier for the novelist to violate the "proprieties" and feel guiltless than it is for the biographer, historian or literary critic so to do. It is the prime object of fiction to present life just as it is and as the writer is engaged in his personations, he unconsciously passes from legitimate freedom of manner to looseness and grossness. The æsthetic element in its best form is too often absent as we read Dickens. He often yields, for supposed effect, to undue license here.

Some of the forms of this error may be noted.



It is seen, often, in the way of *exaggeration* as in *Hard Times*, *Little Dorritt*, and other examples; in that *verboseness* so common to the best specimens of fiction, and most especially in what may be called the —*artifice* or *mannerism* of his style. Repeated attention has been called to this artistic defect both by friends and foes. This error is noticeable in *Oliver Twist*; in *Barnaby Rudge*; in *Bleak House* with its “overstrained tone”; in *A Tale of Two Cities*; in *Our Mutual Friend*; in *Chuzzlewit* and *Nickleby*. Mr. Ward in forecasting the probable future of Dickens as a prose writer alludes to the error now before us as one of his “characteristic faults.” He justifies it, however, on the ground that “mannerism is incident to every original manner”; to Carlyle, Thackeray and Macaulay. This is true and yet its presence mars the style. Nor must mannerism be confounded with originality, as Mr. Ward seems to confound it. Inventive genius is one thing, artifice is quite another, and our author is found far too frequently at fault in the latter. The error of “forced construction” is somewhat incident to all fiction. At this point Dickens would have written better had he written less. He had scarcely the time to complete his work as to artistic form and detail. *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* is not his only *unfinished* work.

#### Probable Permanence of his Prose.

As to the future of Dickens' fame as a novelist and writer of English Prose, various opinions have been broached. Naturally, those of the school of Lewes and Taine predict a brief and uncertain reputation in

history. Others, less extreme, see no special reason for an ever-widening popularity and would not be surprised to mark a gradual decadence of influence. Others still, pass to the other extreme of forecasting an earthly immortality for the author equal to that for which they contend in the case of Shakespeare. In the analysis of the author's style, already given, enough has been said to mark both the extent and the limitations of his future renown, and to indicate, as we judge, a good degree of literary influence in the years to come. Local as much of his fiction is in the occasion of its origin, the issues at stake were, after all, living issues for the most part and as such have to do with the continuous history of the race. There are Pecksniffs, Fagins and Gradgrinds in every age and as they arise they need rebuke. Hypocrisy, pride and selfishness are the same now as then, while the nobler characters and virtues that he portrayed will ever elicit affection and respect. Quite apart from all this, as a mere question of style and literary art, the qualities mentioned are enough to conserve any authorship in which they inhere. No writer can evince such descriptive skill, pathos, humor, practical purpose and verbal ease and not continue to hold a prominent place in current literature. The want of close logical acuteness and of external finish cannot so seriously impair such a style as to prevent its historical continuance. This is especially so when the subject-matter itself is in the sphere of fiction as the most popular form of prose. Dr. Jowett remarks substantially that Dickens, for the last thirty-five years of his life (1835-70) occupied a larger space in the minds of Englishmen than any other writer. Mr.

Forster opens his eulogistic biography with the reference to Dickens as "the most popular novelist of the century." Each of these statements was true when made.

Modern critics, favorably disposed, need not, however, insist upon such high eulogium at present in order to prove the probable continuance of the author's fame, but only show that he still holds a prominent and substantial place in English Prose and bids fair to retain it for generations. "He would be a bold man," writes Ward, as to Pecksniff, "who should declare that its popularity has very materially diminished at the present day." This remark may apply to all his best productions and to his general style as a novelist as he adds—"There is no reason whatever to believe that since his death the delight taken in his works through England and North America, as well as elsewhere, has diminished. Morley and Tyler, in their recent *Manual of English Literature*, go so far as to say that "he is still the most widely read novelist that England has produced." This assertion is made in view of Beaconsfield, Brontë, Bulwer and Thackeray, and he who denies it must prove its falsity.

As to the influence of his style, reference is made by critics to what even Carlyle and Eliot obtained from him by way of impulse and suggestion; to what Continental and American romancers, such as Auerbach and Harte have owed to him, and to the general stimulus which all must have gotten from him who attempt in any worthy way to pen the novel of Life and Manners.

In estimating more accurately the probable future

of the author, the most serious argument against the conservation of his full power, lies in the direction of the ethical. "It has been objected," says Mr. Forster, "that humanity receives from him no addition to its best types; that the burlesque humorist is always stronger in him than the reflective moralist; that the light thrown by his genius into out-of-the-way corners of life never steadily shines in its higher beaten ways; and that beside his pictures of what man is or does, there is no attempt to show, by delineation of an exalted purpose or a great career, what man is able to be or do." The criticism is acknowledged by his biographer as abstractly just, and he attempts to answer it fully by showing that indirectly, if not directly, the author served the highest moral ends, that as a genius he must be allowed to take his own way and not be held responsible for not doing good just as Milton and Addison did it. There is truth in this adverse criticism and some truth in the refutation. The answer, however, is not satisfactory. Dickens was a moralist of a high order. He was a genuine philanthropist. He saw "good in everything" and aimed to show the "soul of goodness in things evil." He did a vast and generous work, as we have seen, on the side of social and public morals and for the common weal of his fellows. The moral purity of his style is such that the most delicate taste need not be offended. All is correct and in good order.

Still, there is something wanting to the fullest force of the style on its ethical side. The allusion here is not to his intense hatred of cant, Puritanical straitness, ecclesiasticism and all forms of Pharisaism, nor to his advocacy of a somewhat liberal Sabbath for the

people and an "undogmatic theology." As far as Romanism was concerned, he was a Protestant, and but little, if anything more can be said. Connected by birth and training with the English Church, he is found in middle life an advocate of Unitarianism, which for the time, meant for him simply freedom from restriction of creed or form. He based his beliefs on the New Testament and ignored the Old. He let no occasion pass for turning his satire on special goodness in the form of piety, and could scarcely speak of the clergy without injustice and prejudice. There is something suspicious in all this and the keen-eyed reader of Dickens' prose will detect between the lines that something is absent that should be present. The usual question at this point is—whether Dickens, as a writer, will stand the full Baconian test, "for the glory of God and the relief of man's estate," or that exemplified in John Milton—"as ever in my Great Task-Master's eye." We believe not. His prose is an example of classic English and is ethically pure. It is instinct with noble sentiments and pervaded by a worthy purpose on the behalf of men. This is its merit but this is its limit. At this point he is immeasurably superior to Swift and Smollett, whom he too fondly loved, but far inferior to such English writers as Bacon, Milton, Addison and Kingsley. In the broad daylight of our life, when all is bright and all is well, his prose is a source of additional happiness and hope, but he has little for us when the night cometh and the "lights are low" and we need the safest guidance through the darkness into day.

Dickens' prose will be permanently popular, but mainly among those who read it purely as a product

of literary art and for the ends of literary profit and pleasure. To those who look for higher things, other minds must minister.

He was a novelist out and out. His style is unique and masterly in that sphere of authorship, and will ever be studied with profit by him who desires to write an order of English, which, though it may not be marked by logical acuteness, philosophic breadth, deep religious life or exquisite finish, is withal, clear, simple, facile and practical.

#### References and Authorities.

Forster's Life of Dickens. Ward's—Dickens (Eng. Men of Let.). Whipple's Lit. and Life. Taine's Eng. Lit. Field's—Yesterday with Authors. .

## CHAPTER XII.

### THE PROSE STYLE OF THOMAS CARLYLE.

#### Brief Biographical Sketch.

Born Dec. 4th, 1795, in Ecclefechan, Scotland. Educated at Parish School and at Annan. Entered Edinburgh University, 1810. Left in 1814. Taught at Annan and Kircaldy. From 1823, devoted to authorship. Lived at Craigenputtoch, 1828-34. Thence to Chelsea, London. Lord Rector of Edinburgh, 1865. Died in 1881.

#### His Prose Writings.

These may be mentioned substantially, as follows:

*French Revolution* (1837).

*Oliver Cromwell's Letters and Speeches* (1845).

*Life of Schiller* (1823-4), *Examination of his Writings*.

*Life of John Sterling* (1851).

*History of Frederic II* (1858-65).

*Sartor Resartus* (1833-65).

*Lectures on Heroes, Hero Worship* (1840).

*Past and Present* (1843).

*Latter Day Pamphlets* (1850).

*Chartism* (1839).

*Critical and Miscellaneous Essays* (1838).

*Translations from the German* (1825-7).

*Wilhelm Meister* (translation) (1823-4).

*Specimens of German Romance* (1827).

*Early Kings of Norway*.

Unpublished: *Lectures on History of Literature* (1837).

*Restoration of Modern Europe* (1839).

Other productions such as, his *Translation of Legendre's Geometry*, need not here be mentioned.

### CHARACTERISTIC MERITS OF HIS STYLE.

#### (1.) Original.

If the prose of Carlyle has but one feature, it is this. Critics who doubt and discuss as to all other qualities are at one here. The reader has but to turn at random to any page in the best specimens of the author to see the illustration of this. It is safe to affirm that this characteristic may be said to belong to Carlyle as a writer with as little question as any literary quality belongs to any separate writer. Some prefer to call it by different names, but it is, in reality, one and the same element. It may be termed the eccentric or quaint or unconventional or inventive. In any case, it is original. It is the real Carlylese. We read in his life, that as a man he liked that "independence through which he could be enabled to remain true to himself"; that he sought retiracy in order that he might think for himself and not merely as the multitude.

He did not so much "strive to invent a new sort of style," as Mr. Hutton has it, but wrote naturally in a manner and order of his own, quite irrespective



of the canons of the schools or the habits of his contemporaries. As Bacon introduced a new method of philosophy into England, so Carlyle, in his prose, widely departed from all existing models and became his own example and guide. He had opened, in a sense, a new literary world and asked no one to dictate to him as to how it should be worked. There is a way of putting things that marks inventive ability, and Carlyle was an adept in the art. On almost every page the evidences of this originality appear, in the form of passages that are so striking as to arrest and hold attention. The ideas themselves we may have heard a score of times, but in the novelty of their form they give, at the time, the impression of absolute freshness of utterance, as in the following: "I should not have known what to make of this world at all," said Carlyle to Froude, "if it had not been for the French Revolution." In his wonderful correspondence with Mr. Emerson, as ably edited in this country by Prof. Norton, of Harvard University, we find a passage of this order which is but the representative of numbers in the same series of letters.—

"There is," he says, "a word, which if spoken to men, to the actual generation of men, would thrill their inmost souls, but how to *find* that word, how to *speak* it when found!" This paragraph is Carlylese throughout and indicates the presence of that ruling passion—to find and utter the one right truth of all others.

In his diary kept at Craigenputtoch, he writes—

"To me there is nothing poetical in Scotland but its religion."

"The only inspiration I know of, is that of genius. It was, is, and will always be of a divine character."

“The Devil has his elect.”

“One great desideratum in every society is, a man to hold his peace.”

“God is above us, else the future of the world were well nigh desperate. Go where we may, the deep heaven will be round us.”

Similar sayings from other writings may be briefly mentioned.

In *Sartor Resartus*, he says—

“Cast forth thy act, thy word, into the ever-living, ever-working universe: it is a seed grain that cannot die.”

In the *Latter Day Pamphlets*, he writes—

“Contrive to have a true opinion, you will get it told in some way, better or worse: and it will be a blessing to all creatures. Have a false opinion and tell it with the tongue of angels, what can that profit? The better you tell it, the worse it will be.”

Again—

“Contrive to talk well, you will get to Heaven, the modern heaven of the English. Silence means annihilation for the Englishman of the nineteenth century. *Vox*, is the God of this universe.”

In *Past and Present*, we read—

“Think it not thy business, this of knowing thyself; thou art an unknowable individual; know what thou canst work at and work at it like a Hercules.”

And again,—

“It is like jesting Pilate, asking—What is Truth? Jestling Pilate had not the smallest chance to ascertain what was Truth. He could not have known it, had a god shown it to him.”

In these and similar passages capable of large multiplication, there is the evidence of a “new organ” of style—a special phase of statement, always striking and, sometimes, startling. It is personality

and peculiarity combined. There is an individuality here amounting to genius. The author seemed to have a kind of gift in this direction whereby all that he uttered was ratified at once as his and needed no further witness. *due to peculiarity*

Readers must have noticed, at this point, how absolutely free the author is from reference or quotation in any servile sense. His quotations are comparatively rare, but when he does use them from his favorite authors, such as, Goethe and Richter and the English poets, he uses them independently and as subordinate to his own opinion. Everywhere he is himself and only so. His prose is as clearly traceable to its author as is that of Pickwick to Dickens, or that of the Rambler, to Dr. Johnson. There is high rhetorical and literary merit in this and it is full of suggestion to the ambitious student. It means that, first of all, is ingenuousness of style—the candid expression of the man on the page, unmoved by the thousand influences that tend to dictate to him just how he shall deliver himself. “To thine own self be true,” is the word of guidance. “Be thyself. Express thyself. Speak thy words in thine own way and there will always be listeners.” *due to*

Such originality of style is too rare ever to pass unnoticed.

## (2.) Cogent.

This second characteristic of the prose before us is equally manifest and is, in fact, vitally connected with the first. Other things being equal, to be original in method is to be potent. If “knowledge is power,” creative genius is a greater power.

"In Carlyle," says Minto, "the central and commanding emotion is power." It is so in his style. One has to read but a short way in order to see and feel the presence of personal force. Whatever the writing is, or is not, it is strong and energetic, taking hold of the mind and feelings with unusual grasp. It is suggestive to note how this quality manifests itself in Carlyle's prose, appearing in special measure in special writings, such as—The French Revolution, The Life of Cromwell, and his political pamphlets.

At times, it takes the form of sharp and pregnant antithesis, equaling the skill of Bacon himself in the line of apothegm and epigram. In his contrast, between Schiller and Alfieri, there is a fine example of vigorous contrast, reminding us of Junius and Dryden.

In his—Death of Goethe—he writes,

"Let the reader have *seen* before he attempts to *oversee*."

"Under the intellectual union of man and man, which works by precept, lies a holier unison of affection, working by example. For love is ever the beginning of knowledge as fire is of light."

"This man (Goethe) became morally great by being in his own age what in some other ages many might have been—a genuine man. His grand excellency was this, that he was genuine."

So elsewhere—

"The fearful unbelief is unbelief in yourself."

"Do the duty which liest nearest thee. Thy second duty will already have become clearer. Find out your task; stand to it; the night cometh when no man can work."

At times, this vigor of style takes the form of an intense passionateness of expression wherein the very soul of the author seems to be embodied. He illus-

trates in such passages that gospel of activity which he was so constantly preaching—doing with one's might what one had to do. He holds that "the end of man is action and not thought"; that every one has a mission and must fulfill it or be false to conscience. His style is full of this active principle by which in its effect it becomes impulsive and stimulative. There is to the reader a quickening agency in it so that he is all astir and alive to effort.

Much of the cogency of Carlyle's prose comes from a kind of "rugged sublimity" that is seen in it. His earnestness takes an impassioned and fiery form and often rises to the region of the heroic, illustrative of many of those principles presented in his lectures on Hero Worship. Not infrequently he speaks with the tone and commanding force of a prophet; in serious and intrepid manner and demands audience and assent.

Carlyle's admiration of Luther did not stop at mere admiration. There was in his nature and style that Lutheran cogency by which telling effects are produced. The cast of the prose is, at times, Hebraic in its moral sobriety and must be heeded. There is nothing of the imbecile and vacillating in Carlyle. What he was, he was intensely and what he wrote, he wrote from the soul out. He believed he had a message to men and he uttered it as if he believed it.

This cogency and warmth of utterance led Carlyle, at times, into extravagance of statement. When he says, "that the essence of all science lies in the Philosophy of Clothes"; "that the art of speech is the saddest of curses," he speaks at random. His state-

ments as to the wild disorder of these "latter days"; as to the French Revolution and the times of Cromwell; his forebodings as to the immediate future of society and law and his frequent use of the most extreme form of hyperbole and exclamation are in the line of this extravagance. In these and similar declarations the author must be allowed much margin and be followed with a wise reserve. Such cases, after all, are exceptional, and mark the overflow of that deep energy of feeling of which he was the subject and sometimes the servant. He had in his soul much of that passionateness of feeling which Burke possessed and each alike gave violent vent thereto in special emergencies. Carlyle's prose is energized by this passion and the reader is soon convinced that he is perusing an author whose language is the expression of his innermost self and is, therefore, cogent. Goethe, as quoted by Mr. Froude, seems to refer alike to his force and originality as he says of Carlyle, "that he was fortunate in having within himself an originating principle of conviction out of which he could develop the force that lay in him."

### (3.) Versatile and Suggestive.

A cursory survey of the writings of the author, as we have detailed them, will reveal something of this versatility of talent in the department of English Prose Literature. We find substantially all the great forms of prose authorship represented—History, Biography, Description, Miscellany, Criticism, Didactic or Speculative Prose, Translations and Letters. In these various forms all the important pending

questions of the time are discussed as they arise in politics, society, philosophy and practical life. It is not to be forgotten that in the prose of Carlyle we are dealing with the productions of an accomplished scholar. From the time of his entrance into the University of Edinburgh, in his fifteenth year, he was a student of scholarly habits and attainments, specially versed in classical and scientific knowledge. His knowledge of the literature of Germany was greater than that possessed by any Englishman of his time and accounts for that most important work which he did in awakening on British soil special interest in Teutonic Letters.

As to the reading of all that was best in home and foreign literature he was fully the equal of Macaulay. Some of his essays, especially those on Goethe, Richter and German Literature, will reveal to the student something of the extent and variety of his knowledge.

Carlyle's prose reveals the fact that he was out and out a lover of letters. He was an author in heart, and an author by profession. He was proud to be called "a writer of books." He believed with Fichte, "that the true literary man is the world's priest, continually upholding the Godlike to man," or as he says in one of his essays, "Could ambition always choose its own path, all truly ambitious men would be men of letters." It was thus that he loved to write and to keep himself in close relation by study and reading with all other writers of ancient and modern note.

It is true, as we are told, that Carlyle has his favorite topics which he is never weary of discussing, and where constant discussion seems somewhat to detract from this quality of versatility. Such themes as,

Labor, Democracy, Heroes and Heroism, The Everlasting No and Yes, German Literature and the Discords of Modern Times, he was fond of presenting whenever opportunity offered. The forms of their presentation, however, were endlessly diversified while, as we have seen, outside of these special topics, his prose reveals what he would call a "wide-acred" range on all subjects of human interest. Carlyle had his intellectual hobbies. All great writers have had them. The criticism is extreme, however, which insists that he was thereby contracted in his area and literary variety. A rapid perusal of the different subjects which make up the seven volumes of his Miscellaneous Essays would be sufficient to reveal the injustice of such criticism. Nor is there mere variety of theme in the prose of Carlyle, but mental *suggestiveness* and stimulus—a true intellectual impulse which, after all, is the best benefit that one gets from the study of an author. It is not necessary to go as far as Minto when he says, "Probably more intellectual force has been spent upon the production of Carlyle's books than upon those of any two other writers in general literature." It is sufficient to affirm here that the prose of Carlyle is, in the main, an intellectual order of prose and thus fruitful in suggestion. As it required mind to produce it, it requires mind appreciatively to peruse it. It is "mixed with brains," as John Brown would phrase it. Though Carlyle was not a metaphysician in the technical sense and could not sit with patience under the teachings of Thomas Brown at Edinburgh, he was a thinker and a philosopher. He held that a man should be measured by his intellectual power. He



believed as Bacon did in "mental stuff" and aimed to compact in his writings as much substance as possible. No writer of English has, at this point, better illustrated the vital relation of thought to style. Carlyle's style is, simply his thought in form. The style itself is intellectual. Hence, the explanation of the fact that his prose must be read and read again, if the full benefit is to be secured. It is a prose that must be pondered and studied. Nor is this because it is enigmatical and complex. Something of this element enters, as we shall see, but in those portions of his writings that are substantially clear, the meaning must often be reached by patient re-perusal. The sentences are pregnant with ideas. In many of them the thoughts are so closely packed that the most intense and undivided attention is needed to unfold them. Carlyle was a thinker. He was more of a thinker than he was a logician. He was always cogitating and with his eyes wide open to men and things about him, so that when he took his pen in hand it was not to utter mere truisms or platitudes but germinal ideas and suggestions. No one can read him and not be intellectually quickened. His prose is not given us as a pastime but as a mental stimulant. Whatever its faults may be, it has the great merit of being a wide departure from the sentimental, ornate or merely entertaining. It is thoughtful—full of thought.

#### (4.) Delineative and Graphic.

This is not as striking a feature in any of its phases in Carlyle as the others already mentioned. It is too prominent, however, to be overlooked in any just

estimate of his style, especially manifest in the writings of his later years.

This descriptive talent is expressed in various forms. They may be said to be Historical Sketching, Power of Characterization and Figurative Language.

As to the *first* of these, abundant evidence is given in his biographical and strictly historical works, most especially, in *The French Revolution* and in *Frederic the Great*. There are passages here, as indeed in *Cromwell* and the *Essays*, that are worthy of the best paragraphs of Burke, De Quincey or Victor Hugo, while some critics have not hesitated to give him here the first place in English Prose. His description of the disorders that followed the taking of the Bastille; of the attack upon the palace at Versailles; of Louis XV. and his courtiers; of Frederic and his times; of the execution of Raleigh; of events under Cromwell; of the Pragmatic Sanction and of natural scenery are among the best specimens of word-painting and seem for the time to place Carlyle among the prose-poets of our literature.

In fact, Carlyle's historical style was more descriptive than narrative. He did not write history in that didactic manner in which Hume wrote it or as Mr. Froude has written it, but in a manner so graphic and pictorial that it may be said to belong to delineative writing. As the French would say, he *depicts*. Scenes take precedence of facts, and imagery of reality.

The *History of the French Revolution*, in its three great parts—*The Bastille*, *The Constitution* and *The Guillotine*—is the best example of this narrative-descriptive style.

In the sphere of *dramatic representation* or the portraiture of character, he was even more successful, being mentioned by Minto and others in the same breath with Shakespeare himself. There is delineation here on the dramatic side for which the author has fitting opportunity in his biographical and miscellaneous papers. His *Life of Sterling* is a model in this respect, as, also his presentation of the great German Emperor and the great English Commoner. His depiction of the Revolution of 1848; of the growth and working of the democratic element in government; of the right of franchise; of the presumption of aristocracy; of the inmates of the "Model Prisons"; of *The Soldiers of Literature* in *The Republic of Letters* and of the Heroic in *History* is of this dramatic order of description. There is a decided histrionic talent manifest here which seems alike to show the breadth of the author's power and to infuse into his prose the element of poetic interest.

As to *figurative language*, a large amount of this might naturally be expected in such a writer as Carlyle. On the basis of that originality, passionate energy and versatility referred to, this symbolic feature would rest. Such a mind could not abide as a writer, within the narrow limits of literal usage, but must accept the privilege of poetic license accorded it in the use of the pictorial. He was a man in whom imagination had its full place and did its full work. The speculative tendencies of his mind led him toward the romantic and figurative. It was Carlyle himself who held the view so often quoted, that metaphors make up the largest part of language and that he acted unwisely who ignored this funda-

mental fact. He called them "its nucleus and tissues." In historical description and in characterization he freely used them, while in all his writings they enter as a radical element. Even where they are somewhat overwrought and rugged, they answer his purpose of giving increasing force and vividness to the meaning behind them. He used them more for effect than for ornament.

In his speculative writings—*Sartor Resartus*, *Latter Day Pamphlets* and *Past and Present*, his figures are often of this character.

"Unanimity of voting--that will do nothing for us. Your ship cannot double Cape Horn by its excellent plans of voting. The ship to get around Cape Horn, will find a set of conditions already voted for and fixed by the ancient Elemental Powers, who are careless how you vote."

Again.—

"A certain people, once upon a time, clamorously voted 'Not He; Barabbas, not He!' Well! they got Barabbas: and they got of course, such guidance as Barabbas could give them: and, of course, they stumbled ever downwards and devilwards in their stiff-necked way."

His description of the possible future of the American Republic is of this order as he says—

"Cease to brag to me of America—its model institutions and constitutions. America's battle is yet to fight. New spiritual Pythons, plenty of them, loom huge and hideous out of the twilight future. Brag not yet of our American cousins. What have they done? Doubled their population every few years!"

This is certainly figurative and on the rough-and-ready side.

It is the same original Carlyle, talking as it suits him and aiming to hit. With all its ruggedness, it has power. So inclined is he to this departure from literal use that the figurative often takes the place of the real. Personifications become persons. Dryasdust and Herr Teufelsdrueckh live and have being. He dealt largely in Hyperbole, Interrogation, Antithesis and Apostrophe, using figures in the line of boldness rather than beauty. In his essays, especially, his metaphors are more subdued and chaste. In such articles as those on Burns and Richter, his prose reads more like that of De Quincey or Macaulay, while even in the historical writings, the deviations from propriety are not marked. His contrast by figure in his Essay on Voltaire between the haughty Tamerlaine and the humble Johannes Faust; the contrast between the joy and the closing sadness of the life of Marie Antoinette; the metaphysical description of the most striking scenes and personages of the French Revolution, are all in the line of high graphic skill. In the use of figure for purposes of embellishment, he had many superiors. In their use for bold and blunt delineation, he had none.

### (5.) Caustic and Acute.

Carlyle has been called "The Censor of his Age." He was so by self-appointment and was devoted to his work. He was fonder of nothing than of censorship as it applied to men, manners, institutions and policies. If the basis of this is said to be a profound Egoism, be it so. Carlyle did believe thoroughly in himself. This was his weakness and his strength.

and it led him to the office of judgeship. He was "nothing if not critical," and as wit, when made an end in itself degenerates into buffoonery, criticism when pursued for the love of it and on the ground of personal infallibility, degenerates into cynicism and caustic irony. Carlyle's very humor was satirical. It was a "prickly sarcasm." It flayed and scorched the victim. It had but little of that humanity in it which marks the pleasantry of Lamb and Dickens. At this point, in his style, the author is the true successor of Dean Swift and the English representative of Voltaire. He had a thought to express and a fault to rebuke, and if the process was painful to the subject of the rebuke, so much the worse for the subject.

The reference, here, is to the main drift of Carlyle's prose as ironical and humorous. He was not altogether devoid of tenderness as his Essay on Burns and his writings on human life,—evinced.

Even his humor is, at times, playful and light-hearted as in his thoughts on—The Tramp Orator—The World in Clothes and Tailors.

In the main, however, he indulges in the cynical and derisive. He sees the ludicrous side of things as Swift saw them in Gulliver's Travels, or Butler, in Hudibras, or Pope, in The Dunciad, and deals with it in the same unmerciful way and with even stronger grasp. He loves invective and assumes at once the polemic attitude. While he says of America "that it would ill bese many Englishman to speak unkindly" of it, he adds—"They have begotten eighteen millions of the greatest bores ever seen in this world."

The main explanation of this bitter element in

Carlyle's prose, is his innate and ever deepening hatred of what he called "Shams, Unveracities and Phantasms." Whenever he thought of them or saw them, his soul was stirred as was Burke's in the view of Hastings' crimes in India. He had what he would call a righteous indignation against pretense and deemed it God's work to rebuke it.

So prevalent was this in the world and so deep-rooted, that he thought it folly to attack it mildly. Innuendo and allusion must take the form of sarcasm, and wit must become scorn and vituperation.

There is good and evil in this. It makes the author's prose crisp, pungent and positive, while it also serves to keep it down to the lower level of personal reference and reproach. While it adds to that originality and cogency that mark his prose, it also adds to that quality of ruggedness and crudeness which we have yet to note.

Whatever the subject he had in hand, whether history, criticism or essay, he was ever on the watch for the presence of that demon of imposture which he believed to be the worst spirit on the earth and which he was determined to oppose. Carlyle's prose, in this respect, takes its place among the satires. It reads as Junius and Aristophanes read. It is a protest throughout against imagined wrong and with all its faults is sincere and effective.

## CHARACTERISTIC DEFECTS.

### (1.) Unfinished.

We use the word here in its figurative sense, as indicating want of grace and beauty. In no stand-

ard English prose is the absence of this more marked. There is no writer who so openly discarded all attempt at form. The main thing with him, and in fact, the only thing was the idea. That he must express at all hazards. If the form of it pleased others, well; if not, equally well. It always pleased him for he had no choice.

He would pass from the sublime to the grotesque with no thought of inconsistency. His rugged English was not rugged to him for it conveyed his meaning. He would not concede that there was any such thing as grace or finish of style as elements of literary art. If told that his descriptions were often coarse and his figures crude and harsh, he would answer—Do they not express the idea? If so, they are in order and in taste. He was, in fine, a law unto himself here as everywhere—the same original and self-sufficing Carlyle. There are indications, at times, that Carlyle did not ignore literary art. In some of his best works, the utmost pains seem to have been taken. He urges authors to write slowly; to compress much meaning in a small compass; to write prose rather than poetry; and he endorsed, by his own example, the value of care as to details. Still, art for art's sake, he despised, and naturally went to the extreme of gracelessness. His very originality and cogency were without finish. His words, sentences, figures and general style are devoid of neatness.

The reader must look elsewhere for "The Amenities of Literature." Milton, Johnson, Hooker, Bacon and Burke were deficient here, but not as Carlyle is. His prose is as unartistic and unæsthetic as it well



can be and be as good as it is. In this, Carlyle is at fault and must himself be judged and condemned. No standard writer can afford to deery literary taste and grace. It has a place in all true authorship and will, in some way, avenge its neglect. Carlyle's prose has fundamental merits and will be read, but not by numbers of those who would be attracted to its pages were its external form such as that of Thomas De Quincey's.

## (2.) Irregular.

This is, in some respects, the main error in the style of our author. Nor is the reference here, to that of quaintness and eccentricity, of which we spoke in connection with the quality of originality. It is an irregularity of style for which there is no just warrant and which, in so far as it is found, impairs both the clearness and the force of the writing. There are various ways in which this departure from established principles manifests itself.

It appears, first of all, *logically*.

Allusion has been made to the fact that Carlyle was a thinker rather than a reasoner. This statement applies at this point. His reflections were far safer than his mental processes and conclusions. He inclined to that form of argument which is found in mathematics, and as such, is based on axioms and is demonstrative. In the sphere of probable evidence, he was far weaker.

The special manner in which this fault indicates itself in Carlyle's literary prose is, in the want of logical *nexus*—that orderly sequence of thought which

secures unity and symmetry and the best effect. Just here he failed where De Quincey succeeded. Readers will note in much of his prose the frequent recurrence of abrupt transition—a certain looseness of adjustment of part to part. From early educational life at Edinburgh, he had but little taste for logic. His mind revolted at what is called by the schools—analysis—so that he generally fails when he attempts to apply it. In such works as—*Sartor, Past and Present* and *Latter Day Pamphlets*, most of the themes discussed are mere hooks on which to hang the thought rather than germinal topics out of which the subject is gradually evolved. In the discussion itself he preferred the discursive and desultory method to that of a sharply defined and progressive line of argument. In a word, he was irregular here rather than regular. He failed to follow those pre-established methods which the careful writer is bound to respect. And if it be said, that he gained much by this independent waywardness, in the line of freedom and side suggestion, it is also to be noted that he lost that most important element of style which may be called, logical,—the element of connection, sequence and climax.

This irregularity is, also, *grammatical*. We refer here, mainly, to structure and syntactical relation. It would not be correct to say of Carlyle's prose as he says of Werner's, "It is contorted into endless involutions and well-nigh inexplicable in its entanglements," but there is much, at this point, to which the impartial critic must take exception. It is difficult to see how Mr. Minto can assert, on one page, as to his sentences "that they are ex-

tremely simple in construction," and on another, "that they are faulty, in that they depart from the ordinary structure of written composition." He uses the incorrect loose sentence as freely as Macaulay uses the periodic or Dryden, the antithetical. His parentheses are frequent and often involved, while as to the ordinary distinctions supposed to exist among the different parts of speech, he takes but little account. Often in reading Carlyle's prose, one is reminded of the transitional English of Elizabethan days. His grammar seems to be unsettled, and he passes freely from one form to another as if all were alike in vogue. We note such peculiarities as the following:

"He is to know of a truth that being miserable he has been unwise, *he.*"

"The sum of it, visible in every market-place, fills one *not* with a comic feeling."

He uses such superlative forms as, *precisest*, *piti-fullest*, *inevitablest*, *totalst*, and *remarkablest*. Such exceptional usages as these are not to be referred to eccentricity as much as to positive violation of idiom and formation. In so far as they exist, they seem to carry the prose back to the Middle-English Period and detract, therefore, from its influence in modern times.

Undoubtedly, something of error, here is due to Carlyle's proficiency in German and his fondness for it. He made no effort to give precedence to the English when the two languages conflicted as to any particular usage. In speaking of the style of Teufelsdrückh, he writes—"Of his sentences, perhaps not more than nine-tenths stand straight on their legs.

The remainder are buttressed up by props (of parentheses) and dashes." This language is, in a sense, autobiographical. While in the author's prose, and especially in his essays and biographies, numerous examples may be found of faultless grammatical structure, error here, is far too frequent in a writer whose merits are so conspicuous.

It is, however, when we come to study style *verbally*, that Carlyle's irregularity is most apparent. Here the violation of precedent and principle amounts to a literary offense. There is much written at present on—The English of Carlyle. where the reference is to his diction. It may be said to be an open question and not a few are found who are eager to defend, at all hazards, our author's phraseology.

It is admitted that it is peculiar, often harsh and mixed and often so aside from usage as to be unintelligible. Still, we are told, it is Carlylese and therefore, admissible; that it manifests the man in his individuality; that he cannot be expected to write English as Bunyan or as Swift did, or even as Dr. Johnson did. In a word, the originality is admitted but condoned on the ground of personal peculiarities. This principle is certainly unsafe as a general test, and in the case before us leads us often to justify what cannot be commended. The reference here, is not to the extent of his vocabulary. This was as wide as his reading and equal to that of any contemporaneous writer. Especially in the description of character and in the sphere of technical terms, his verbal wealth was unbounded. We speak of the quality of his diction when we call it in many cases, outlandish and unmeaning. It is not that he always

uses foreign words in preference to Saxon, for this is not the case; nor is it that he uses words which when used may seem somewhat odd, but to which we become reconciled because of their final fitness and force. It is in the use of terms obsolete and obsolescent that he seems to revel and which, if allowable, would not be the best. In such a sentence as this—"Turn away from their lacquered sumptuosities, their belauded sophistries, their serpent graciosities"—however admissible the words may be, they are not the best.

Pages of words might be culled from Carlyle for which no apology can be made save that they are his. A few examples will suffice:

disimprisoned,	vehiculatory,
elsewhither,	antecessors,
astucity,	maleficent,
to vilipend,	vestural,
dislikable,	complected,
dubiety,	stertorious,
fuigiously,	misresults.

Here is something more than personality of style. It is a species of verbal irregularity which is not venial. It tends to nullify the good influences of those high qualities to which attention has been called, and to make language according to Talleyrand, "the art of concealing thought."

There is far too much of this logical, grammatical and verbal looseness in Carlyle. Even with his great individuality behind it, it has not escaped deserved rebuke. If the author had written when Bacon or Milton wrote or even at the time of Addison, more

excuse might have been offered, but an author living in the nineteenth century can scarcely be forgiven for using the diction of the sixteenth or worse than that, for using a diction objectionable at any era. Carlyle is never weary of allusion to the simplicity of Goldsmith and Burns. He could have learned much from either of them in the line of verbal plainness.

### (3.) Mystical.

Next to the feature of originality, this may be said to be the most salient characteristic of our author's style. It is, also, the most radical fault. It might be called mythical and the one for which Jeffrey is constantly reproving him. The reference here, is to a kind of haze or shadowiness hanging over the thought and expression. It is especially noticeable in those productions that are speculative but it is not confined to these. That long and valuable correspondence which he carried on with Emerson is full of it, as also, are his essays and even histories. At no point are Carlyle and Emerson more at one than here in this transcendental atmosphere looking at the partially revealed forms of truth and surmising the rest. In chapter tenth, of *Sartor Resartus*, the author speaks in suggestive language of his hero—"His grand peculiarity is, that with all this Decendentalism, he combines a Transcendentalism no less superlative." Such tendency to Mystification is everywhere traceable. Nothing that he sees but has two meanings. "There is this old Platonic element visible throughout—something of the 'Sphinx' in it

all." He contended for the principle in style that the meaning of an author should not be seen at once. In many cases, in his own prose, it is not seen at all.

Though it would not be improper to call Carlyle an ethical writer, who can gather from his writings any well defined code of ethics?

Though he is ever discoursing on government, social order and feasible public policies, who can reduce these suggestions to a practicable system? Emigration and education are the catch-words, but just what is meant is doubtful. In Chartism and similar pamphlets, it is difficult to find solid ground on which to stand.

In fine, there is much here that is visionary and chimerical—a kind of weirdness that attracts and bewitches and that is all. Sometimes, the author reaches the sphere of rhapsody and all is fantastic and airy.

Hence, the phrase and names so frequent in his prose, as—The Destinies, The Eternal Melodies, The Eternities, The Divine Silence, The Sphere Harmonies, The Necessities, The Eternal Forces. So far as this goes, it is unreal and illusory and belongs much more to the region of poetry than to that of solid prose.

Carlyle could not have corrected this had he wished or striven. It was in him as an elemental part of the man while his home "in the loveliest nook in Britain," and his strange career only intensified it.

He was the "Seer of Chelsea." He "saw visions and dreamed dreams," and even when he wrote on events transacting right before him, he looked at them from the heights above.

The result of this element as far as it had influence was to make it impossible for Carlyle to be an absolutely clear writer as he himself confesses: "Mystical in most cases will turn out to be merely synonymous with—not understood."

That irregularity of which we have spoken would contribute to this obscurity, but mysticism still more so. In his *Life of Sterling* he says,—“ I have heard Coleridge talk two stricken hours and communicate no meaning whatever.” The remark is not inapplicable to Carlyle. He often defies all attempt to understand him and often compels the reader to unwilling study to determine the sense. In his *Essay on German Literature*, he refers to the two great faults with which the German authors have been charged—Bad Taste and Mysticism. The first charge he denies. The second, he admits and defends even though he defines Mystics to be “men who either know not clearly their own meaning, or at least, cannot put it forth in formulas whereby others may apprehend it.”

Here again, German influence deepened what was already in the man.

It is necessary to add here, that this feature in Carlyle and his prose expressed itself, at times, in the *morbid* and *despondent*. What a doleful tone pervades some of his work! In *The French Revolution* and in *Cromwell*, this is apparent as, also, in his political papers, while in such works as are speculative this tone controls. This explains his devotion to the name and writings of Goethe. It is not strange that he translated *Wilhelm Meister* and reveled in such works as *Faust* and *The Sorrows of Werther*. They



ministered directly to his mystical tendencies and on their morbid side. His very portraits are noted for this settled sadness. There is not a little of the pessimistic in it all. The secret of the difficulty lay in the fact that while the great problem of human life and destiny was the one problem he aimed to solve, the method of its solution was totally wrong as he applied it and, thus, but added to the mental disquietude already existing.

To this extent, the prose of Carlyle is not only obscure, it is *unhealthy* in its influence. Instead of that clear view of common life that marks the prose of Bacon, Addison and Burke there is a misty, half intelligible and sombre view which more befits the monastery than the world without. Carlyle has great merits, but at this point he is an unsafe guide in style. Less and not more of the visionary is what is needed. In the historical and literary progress of English Prose, that authorship will meet with greatest favor which is hopeful in tone and which may be understood at sight.

In our study of Carlyle, one topic of interest remains to be noticed—we refer to—

### His Character as a Critic.

There is room here for great diversity of view. There were elements both of mind and character in Carlyle which fitted him for successful critical work, while it cannot be denied that he also possessed characteristics which, as certainly, unfitted him for such work.

As to his qualifications, it may be said that he was a man who thought for himself on all subjects that

might come before him and to this extent would certainly pass judgment in the words of no other. Whatever his verdict was as to a man or work, it was his own. He was an independent critic as well as an independent writer. He had the courage to speak what he believed, and as far as he knew his own mind and motive, he decided always in the interest of truth.

He possessed in rare measure a further qualification for this work in his character as a man of letters. As we have seen, he was an author by profession and by practice. Whatever the early tendencies of his life may have been in the direction of the law and the ministry or in that of educational work, he soon found that his tastes and talents were in the line of literature. To that he devoted himself with his characteristic zeal holding strictly to the view, that whatever a man does he should do wholly. He magnified the work of authorship. He knew the trials and encouragements of authors. His own experience had been varied enough to incline him fully to sympathize with those who made literature their life-calling. Still further, his range of reading was such as to acquaint him with the "best that had been thought and said." He was thoroughly versed in classical lore; was a proficient in German, and to some extent, in South European authorship; knew the literary men and books of England as well as he knew his native language, and was thus able to judge of any given production in the light of all that had been produced.

In addition to all this it may be said that he seems to have had as a critic, right views in the main as to

the laws, standards and methods of criticism. Some of these he states in connection with his critical opinions. In one of his Miscellanies he writes:

“Criticism, it is sometimes thought, should be a cold business. We are not sure of this.”

Referring to the crude opinions passed on Faust and Wilhelm Meister, he says:

“We have heard few English criticisms of such works, in which the first condition of an approach to accuracy was complied with—a transposition of the critic into the author’s point of vision, a survey of the author’s means and objects, and a just trial of these by rules of universal application.”

Speaking of the advanced state of literary criticism in Germany, he writes—

“The grand question is not now a question concerning the qualities of diction, the coherence of metaphors and the fitness of sentiments, but a question on the essence and peculiar life of the poetry itself. The problem is not now to determine by what mechanism Addison composed sentences and similitudes, but by what far finer and more mysterious mechanism Shakespeare organized his dramas and gave life and individuality to his Hamlet. Criticism stands like an interpreter between the inspired and the uninspired to clear our sense that it may discern the fine brightness of this element of beauty.”

Pages of such high teaching as this may be gathered from the prose of Carlyle. He utterly condemned the artificial methods of Pope and Blair; of Boileau and the French school; and exalted into prominence the principle of the German critics who, though somewhat decrying elegance of finish, saw into the real essence of a work of art and exposed its

merits or demerits. From his *Essay on German Literature*, it is safe to say that a full and philosophic theory of literary criticism might be deduced as he conceived it, verbally phrased it, and aimed to apply it.

In so far as the theory and final aim of criticism are concerned, therefore, Carlyle's prose reveals the truth. The theory was philosophical and the aim was the highest good of English and European letters. If we inquire as to how Carlyle carried out his own views, the difficulty begins. Partially, at least, he succeeded in applying them. We are not speaking, now, of his strictly political productions or even of those where the historical element is lost in the political. The reference is to his purely literary judgment on authors and books. In this, he partially succeeded, as in his view of Coleridge, given in—*The Life of Sterling*; in his judgments on Burns, Voltaire, Heyne, Richter and Schiller, as given in his essays; in his general views on History, on European Literature, and on German Literature in itself and as related to English; in the main, in his decisions on Goethe, his place and work; and in his views of English writers, such as Goldsmith, and especially, Shakespeare.

Special instances of his critical correctness may be given. His *Essay on Burns* is sympathetic and discerning throughout. In the course of it, he remarks:

“To the ill-starred Burns was given the power of making man's life more unerrable, but that of wisely guiding his own life was not given. The excellence of Burns is, his sincerity. In his greatness and his littleness, he is ever clear, simple and true.”

Again,—

“Independently of the essential gift of poetic feeling, a certain rugged, sterling worth pervades whatever Burns has written. No poet is more graphic. Three lines, and we have a likeness.”

How aptly he hits the Frenchman right on the head when he says of Voltaire—

“The chief quality is adroitness.”

Further,

“There is one deficiency in Voltaire’s original structure—his inborn levity of nature, his entire want of earnestness. We find no heroism of character in him from first to last.”

He speaks of his expertness, facility, wit, in the shape of cynical ridicule; contrasts him in his deceiving brilliancy with the great and gifted Shakespeare of England, and is not content to leave him till he rebukes him for ever having written on Christianity without the slightest practical knowledge of its nature.

On the whole, however, Carlyle’s prose reveals the want of keen, clear, impartial and comprehensive power as a literary critic. There were reasons, also for this. Dyspepsia and poverty and misinterpretation did much to embitter his nature and unfit him for ingenuous judgment of others. His want of æsthetic taste increased the inability. He had not that full-orbed and sensitive eye which comes only through the medium of the artistic. This need is especially manifest in the sphere of poetry.

That logical, grammatical and verbal irregularity of which we have spoken is a further ground, to which may be added that mystical element by reason

of which a kind of haziness enveloped all that he beheld. As already seen, he was without that analytic power which is essential to the critic in his interpretation of authors. He must be able to dissect and to give a safe and full diagnosis. Moreover, his independence so overreached itself as to make it difficult for him to carry out his theory and assume the standpoint of the author whom he was judging. He was full of notions peculiar to himself—originating and developing in his own brain. Everything must be viewed through them. An author was or was not successful as he conformed or failed to conform to these whims and schemes. Hence, Goethe was his favorite poet and Sir Walter Scott was not. The one was just visionary enough to suit him and the other had too much sober common sense. Hence, Coleridge was a favorite prose writer and Scott was not. Hence, Sartor Resartus was a favorite subject and evoked his best power.

Hence, it is, that he is not a clear critic of style. He deals with men and things and events rather than with the exact subject matter of authors, and whatever may be the theme he is soon adrift on some one of his specially attractive vagaries. In the German authors, as a class, he is led to overlook great defects in that they think somewhat as he thinks, while of Scott he can say nothing better than that he has "a general healthiness of mind."

In a word, Carlyle's great lack as a critic may be expressed in one word—want of *Objectivity*. He was purely subjective and, hence, dogmatic, visionary, eccentric and ruled by prejudices. At this point, he falls far below De Quincey and even Macaulay, while

the later school of English criticism, as represented by Arnold, is seen to excel just where he failed.

His bitterness towards some of his contemporaries as evinced in his published *Reminiscences*, is enough to confirm the statements here made. His references to Charles Lamb will no sooner be condoned by the English-speaking public than Voltaire's contemptuous slurs on Shakespeare.

In the *History of His Life in London*, lately given by Mr. Froude, he speaks of the noted men of his time in the most contemptuous terms.

Of Southey he writes, "A well-read, honest, limited man"; of Wordsworth, "Very loquacious, worth little now, intrinsically and extrinsically small"; of Sydney Smith, "Mass of fat and muscularity with no humor or even wit, seemingly without soul"; of Macaulay, "Of essentially irremediable common-place nature, all gone to tongue"; of Gladstone as, "Addle-pated nothingness, one of the contemptiblest men, incapable of seeing any fact whatever"; and even of Emerson to whom he owed so much he says, "Very exotic. Good of him I could get none. He came with the rake rather than the shovel." When he does deign to praise, as in the case of Webster and Dickens, it is so faint as to be worthless. This is more than bad criticism. It is bad blood and venom and but one of the many ways he had of exalting Thomas Carlyle at the expense of others. Such an egoist could not be a critic.

All this was unfriendly to that dispassionate mood in which the censor should sit in judgment upon his fellows. Though Carlyle was clear headed enough to establish a just theory of literary criticism,

he was not impartial enough to apply it, and English Letters has received but little from him in this direction.

His work in English Prose has been of service in other directions. As a body of prose it is instinct with intellectual and literary life. Original, suggestive, cogent, impassioned, graphic and incisive, it teaches all who read it to think freely and think profoundly; to speak their thought with the courage of their convictions and with terse compactness; to regard human life as the greatest of mysteries and possibilities; to exalt ideas above things and circumstances; and to address themselves to their ascertained mission with that "dreadful earnestness" that is born out of the deepest experiences and promises the grandest results.

Whatever Carlyle is or is not, he is a *representative* writer of English Prose. Though as a standard for imitation, he is inferior to many of his predecessors and colleagues, he is, still, strictly representative, as much so, at least, as any one of the twelve authors whose style we have studied.

In the language of Mr. Hutton—"No literary man in the nineteenth century is likely to stand out more distinct, to the centuries which will follow." He has done what few among men have done. He had more influence upon his age than his age had upon him, and for this alone deserves the most careful study. His very faults are historic and add to his wide-reaching fame. Despite the gravest violations of literary propriety, he is quoted as a model and leader. He took his own way despite of precedent, and what he leaves is his own. Outside of the region of prose



fiction, it may be said that no works of English Prose are better known at this moment among educated circles. No essays are read with keener avidity by young and old. Despite their mysticism and their "barbarous diction," they are *read* and this is one of the best of tests.

Of the prose of Carlyle this much can be said—it has such merit that every literary student must be conversant with it.

It is so faulty, that when the student reads it, it must be with judgment, caution, dissent and not infrequent protest. A few such writers are needed in every century to stimulate and emancipate, and but few, lest irregularity take the place of literary law. Carlyle was a Scotchman. English Prose will always need something of the Scotch element in it to give it tone and point and literary bluntness and Christian obstinacy.

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## CONCLUSION.

WE have thus briefly surveyed the leading periods, and forms and some of the leading authors of our English Prose from Elizabeth to Victoria.

In reviewing this historical development of three centuries of English Prose from Bacon to Carlyle, the first and deepest impression is that of *Literary Richness*.

We have noted but here and there a name of prominence among scores that might have been adduced, and it is a matter of mingled pride and surprise to fill up the list of English Prose Writers as illustrative of the various characteristic forms of prose.

IN HISTORY and BIOGRAPHY, there are such historic names as—Grote, Green, Raleigh, Boswell, Strickland, Hume, Clarendon, Gibbon, Hallam, Mill, Buckle, Turner, Alison, Lingard, Mahon, Warton, Craik, Collier, Tytler, Stanley, Palgrave, Knight, Southey, and Merivale.

IN DESCRIPTIVE PROSE and PROSE FICTION are—Bulwer, Edgeworth, Thackeray, Richardson, Bunyan, Fielding, De Foe, Sterne, Austen, Porter, Reade, Disraeli, Kingsley, Brontë, Marryat, and Eliot.

IN ORATORICAL PROSE are the names of—Barrow, Taylor, Hall, Fuller, Bolingbroke, South, Chatham and Chalmers.

IN DIDACTIC, CRITICAL and PHILOSOPHIC PROSE, are—Dryden, Bentham, Wordsworth, Whateley, Chillingworth, Shaftesbury, Junius (Francis), Browne, Cowley, Temple, Adam Smith, Paley, Blackstone, Bentley, Warburton, Boyle, Locke, Cudworth, Butler, Hobbes, Harrington, Maurice, Miller, J. S. Mill, and Coleridge.

IN MISCELLANEOUS PROSE, the name is legion and in no department of our Letters is there a greater display of solid wealth—Gifford, Hazlitt, S. Smith, Lardner, Forster, Brougham, Jeffrey, Drake, Thomas Arnold, Newman, Chesterfield, Collier, Goldsmith, Steele, Mackintosh, Disraeli, Arbuthnot, North, the brothers Hare, and Pattison.

We have here an approximate list of authors of English Prose from the time of Bacon, exclusive of those noted writers still living and at work on English ground.

It is perfectly safe to say that there is nothing like it for opulence and variety in any European or classical literature, while it would be presumptuous on the part of any critic to draw an exact boundary line between the first and second orders of English Prose. There are many writers that stand on the border line itself and seem to look each way.

The list is rich in any point of view from which it may be studied—intellectual, literary and ethical. To the lovers of literary art as verbally expressed it affords a large and inviting field of personal profit in the hours of mental leisure.

To the student of literature as an historical and philosophical development from crude beginnings to advanced maturity, it opens the widest area for safe research, analogy and induction.

To the student of style, in its various laws, processes, qualities and forms, it becomes alike the all-sufficient guide and stimulus, while to intelligent thinkers and readers at large it presents in its spacious contents, at once the evidence of past literary power and the promise of what the Prose of English may yet become.

There is nothing of which English-speaking peoples should more justly boast, while there may be said of our prose what the German Grimm was pleased to say of our language—"It may with good reason call itself *universal* and seems chosen like the people, to rule in future times in a still greater degree. In richness, sound reason and flexibility, no modern (prose) can be compared with it."

If this be so, every educated man should be *thoroughly* conversant with it in its best periods, forms and exponents. It is to the reproach and shame of multitudes of the intelligent and even of the liberally cultured that they are so little versed in its history, processes and leading names, and ignorantly resort with avidity to foreign sources for that literary discipline that lies accessible at their own doors in the ample resources of their vernacular prose.

Most of all should the statesman, the jurist, the journalist, the minister of the truth to men and all those who in any way by pen or voice seek to guide and govern their fellows, be so thoroughly acquainted

with this rich department of our prose literature that when they write and speak they may do it in the light of what has been done for them and with a determined purpose to maintain the honor of the past. Clear, forcible and elegant English has been a steady literary growth from the days of Elizabeth to those of Victoria.

It has never been written more ably and acceptably than in the last twenty-five years. While English Poetry, even in the persons of its best exponents is perceptibly marking a decline of power and revealing tendencies in the line of verbal mechanism and sensuous undertone all adrift from its earlier character, English Prose is advancing with the advance of modern civilization and bids fair to keep abreast of it through the future. It is, in fact, one of the great exponents of such civilization. In all the primary forms of prose, this evidence of life is still visible—in history and biography, as represented by Froude and Freeman, Masson, Forster, Morley, Stubbs, Rawlinson, Lecky, and others; in description and fiction, as seen in Black, Collins, Macdonald, Muloch and others; in impassioned prose as seen in the best public and Parliamentary addresses of Bright, Gladstone and others; in didactic and philosophic prose as seen in, Froude, Brooke, Procter, Symonds and Shairp; in criticism and miscellany as seen in, Matthew Arnold, Newman, Mahaffy, Leslie Stephen, Hughes, Ruskin and an almost limitless list of worthy writers in the leading periodicals of the day.

If in this wide variety and wealth of prose production, there is any one element of danger, it is in the rapid increase of the *lighter forms* of prose as

found in fiction, descriptive sketching, miscellaneous essays and journalism, somewhat at the possible expense of the more intellectual and weighty forms—the historical and philosophic. This danger, however, is more apparent than real. Even in the lighter species of prose (save that of fiction) work of a more substantial value is now done than hitherto was the case, while the great departments of narrative and didactic prose writing are developing with almost commensurate rapidity.

There is no tendency in modern English more pronounced and more hopeful than the increasing tendency to the best forms of instructive prose as distinct from that which is merely entertaining and transient.

This is especially true in that grand development of *historical* writing now going on before us in England as, also, on the Continent and in America.

At no period of our prose has there been a larger number of able historians at work, or a more readable and acceptable body of historical literature.

Nor is this work confined to the province of civil or political history, but ranges through all the forms of narrative writings—the history of philosophy; of literature; of art, science, religion and the industries; of medicine, jurisprudence and Biblical doctrine; of society and the church; of education and of journalism. Historical methods and aims were never so thoroughly studied as now. It is a kind of golden era of narrative prose which makes it one of special promise for prose in all its forms.

Those cardinal principles of all style that are so richly found in history—clearness, simplicity, cor-

rectness, definiteness, delineative skill and didactic aim—are the principles that are needed in every national literature and which will do much to preserve it pure and stable in the face of lower literary tendencies.

Such is the drift of Modern English Prose on its intellectual side and such is its literary promise. In the rush and pressure of modern civilization, in that poetic decline and material advance which are so manifest, there may be some loss of æsthetic tone and finish in our prose. This can scarcely be avoided. We may expect less and less of Macaulay and more and more of Burke and Carlyle. There will be compensations for this loss of artistic grace in greater freedom, force and practical directness. The prose of the century will be in keeping with the character of the century, vivacious, pungent and informing, while at the incoming of a more poetic era, it may assume, at demand, a more poetic form and finish. As Bacon wrote for his age, so did Carlyle for his, and however the ages may differ, they are alike in this particular—that in each, great intellectual and material activity prevails and authors must write as men of the world. In the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries alike, English prose must needs be cogent and practical rather than æsthetic. The History of Literature, as all history, repeats itself and Modern English Prose is characteristically Baconian. Thus it is that the centuries are united.

As to the Ethical Character of English Prose, little need be stated. It may be said to speak for itself. It is scarcely necessary for such critics as Morley and Principal Shairp to call the special attention of read-

ers to this salient feature of our prose. It is so salient as to be everywhere apparent.

X With the one exception of Jonathan Swift, the authors who have come before us have been ethical throughout,—in thought, diction and general style.

Though Hume and Gibbon, Buckle and Hobbes are ranked among skeptics, their pages are comparatively pure in a literary point of view. Even in the department of prose fiction, where the danger is greater, the leading English prose novelists, with scarcely an exception, have been those whose teachings are morally sound. Such authors as Smollett and Aphia Behn are excluded from high place in the province of fiction, not only on intellectual, but on moral grounds.

In this respect English Prose has a far brighter record than English Poetry. There are no such eras of moral decline and looseness as are found in the Dramatic Poetry of the Restoration and the later times of Byron and Shelley. The atmosphere is more bracing and the moral effect more wholesome.

There is no body of prose in any literature that will better stand the moral test. The ethical basis that was laid in our letters as far back as the days of First and Middle-English, in Alfred, Aelfric and Wyelif is still the basis of our best literature. That great religious awakening that renovated the English mind of the sixteenth century, deepened and broadened this moral basis so that it can, under Providence, never be essentially disturbed.

Those erratic tendencies, now at work in the line of a skeptical philosophy and a more indifferent view of human life, will not be able, materially, to affect



it. The best English Prose extant is the prose of the English Bible as given in the versions of Wyclif, Tyndale, and King James. Right at the centre of our developing prose literature stands the Word of God in purest English form to guard and stimulate that development. English Prose is more than ethical. It is in its origin, history and promised unfoldings both Protestant and Biblical and quite apart from its high intellectual and literary character takes its place as one of the great moral agencies of modern times.



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