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ENGLISH LANDS LETTERS AND KINGS

Queen Anne and the Georges

BY

DONALD G. MITCHELL

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ENGLISH LANDS LETTERS AND KINGS

By Donald G. Mitchell

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LETTER OF DEDICATION

[To Mrs. Grover Cleveland.]

MY DEAR MADAM:

Many bookmakers of that early Georgian period covered by this little volume eagerly sought to dignify their opening pages with the name and titles of some high-placed patron or patroness. It is not, my dear Madam, to revive this practice that I have asked permission to inscribe this little book to so worthy an occupant of the Presidential Mansion; but, rather, I have had in mind the courteous reception which—while yet an inmate of a college on the beautiful banks of Cayuga Lake—you once gave to some portions of the literary talk embodied in these pages; and remembering, furthermore, the unswerving dignity, and the unabating womanly gentleness by which you have conquered and adorned the trying conditions of a high career, I have wished to add my applause (as I do now and here) for the grace and kindliness which have ennobled your life, and made us all proud of such an example of American womanhood.

Very respectfully yours,
Don^d. G. Mitchell.

Edgewood, June, 1895.

CONTENTS.

CHAPTER I.

CHAPTER II.

CHAPTER III.

CHAPTER IV.

CHAPTER V.

CHAPTER VI.

CHAPTER VII.

CHAPTER VIII.

INDEX.

ENGLISH LANDS, LETTERS, & KINGS.

CHAPTER I.

We open in this book upon times—belonging to the earlier quarter of the eighteenth century—when, upon the Continent of Europe, Peter the Great was stamping out sites for cities in the bogs by the Finland gulf—when that mad-cap Swedish King Charles XII. was cutting his bloody swathe through Poland—when Louis XIV., tired at last of wars, and more tired of Marlborough, was nearing the end of his magnificent career, and when King Mammon was making ready his huge bloat of the Mississippi Bubble for France and of the South Sea Company for England.

Queen Anne, that great lady of the abounding ringlets—so kindly and so weak—was now free {2} from the clutch of Sara of "Blenheim"; and veering sometimes, under Harleyan influences, toward her half-brother the "Pretender;" and other times under persuasion of such as Somers, favoring her cousins of Hanover.

The visitor to London in those times could have taken the "Silent way" along the river—a shilling for two oarsmen and sixpence for a "scull"—from the Bridge to Limehouse; or he might encounter, along the Strand, sooty chimney sweepers and noisy venders of eggs and butter, with high-piled baskets upon their heads. Sir Roger de Coverley coming to town—if we may believe Addison—cannot sleep the first week by reason of the street cries; while Will Honeycomb, on the other hand, likens these cries to songs of nightingales: always and everywhere this difference of ear, between those who love the country and those who love the towns!

There were lumbering hackney cabs in London streets to be hired at ten shillings a day (of twelve hours) for those who preferred this to the "Silent way"; and there were grand coaches for {3} those who could pay for such display; evidences of wealth were growing year by year. The Venetian Republic, now in its last days of power, made a brave if false show upon London streets in those times. Luttrel[1] says, under date of May, 1707:—

> "Yesterday the V^n ambassadors made their public entry thro' the city to Somerset House in great state and splendor; their coach of state embroidered with gold, and the richest that ever was seen in England: They had two with 8 horses, and eight with 6 horses, trimmed very fine with ribbons; 48 footmen in blue velvet covered with gold lace; 24 gentlemen and pages on horseback with feathers in their hats, etc."

Dr. Swift, four years after, writes to Stella—"The Venetian coach is the most monstrous, huge, fine, rich, gilt thing I ever saw."

An Irish Bishop.

It could not have been more than two or three years after this sight of the Venetian Coach that Dean Swift introduced to his friend Miss Vanhomrigh (Vanessa) a young protégé of his, {4} whom he had known at Dublin, and who had made a great reputation there among thinkers, by an ingenious *Theory of Vision*, and by his eloquent advocacy of an Idealism, which he believed would cut away all standing ground for the materialism that threatened Christian Faith.

Bishop Berkeley.

This protégé was George Berkeley[2]—afterward Dean and Bishop—a most engaging and winning person then and always. Addison befriended this young philosopher, who wrote half a dozen papers for Steele's *Guardian*, with much of Steele's grace in them, and more than Steele's Christian earnestness. He went over to the Continent in the wake of a British Ambassador—was four or five years there, variously employed, equipping himself in worldly knowledge, and came back to warn[3] Englishmen against that extravagance and greed for money, which had made possible the South-Sea disaster. New {5} Yorkers might read the warning with profit now. For himself, he comes presently to the Deanship of Derry, and to a considerable legacy from that Miss Vanhomrigh—the acquaintance of an hour—so impressed had she been by Berkeley's promise of good. Nor was the promise ever belied.

With an altruism unusual then, and unusual now, he braved the loss of his Deanship, and current friendships in England, and set his heart, his energies, and his fortune upon a scheme for building up the English colonies in America in ways of Christian living, and of learning. Long before, the devout George Herbert had said that Religion was "ready to pass to the American Strand;" and now Berkeley, fresh from the sight of dearth and decay in Europe, was earnest in the belief that Christian civilization was to win its greatest coming conquests "over seas." His enthusiasms had, for once, carried him into verse, of which a prophetic refrain has tingled in many an American ear:—

Westward the course of Empire takes its way!

The nidus of the good Dean's hopes and schemes lay in a great college which was to be built up in the Summer Islands (Bermuda) where the air "is perpetually fanned and kept cool by sea-breezes." But his stepping-stone on the way thither was Rhode Island; and for the harbor of Newport he sailed, with a few friends, and a newly married wife in the year 1728, after long and weary waiting for a grant, which at last is made good on parchment, but never made good in money. {6}

Berkeley at Newport.

Yet he has faith; and for nearly three years lingers there at his farm of Whitehall (the old house still standing), within sound of the surf that breaks upon the ribbed and glistening sands of Newport beaches. The winter is not so mild as in England, but he "has seen colder ones in Italy." Possibly it may be well to set up the college in Newport rather than the Summer Islands—when the grant comes: but the grant does *not* come. He makes friends of the farmers about him—of the Quakers, the Methodists; sometimes he preaches at Trinity Church (still there), and his sermons are unctuous with the broadest and most liberal Churchism: "Sad," he says in one, "that Religion, which requires us to love, should become the cause of our hating one another." He corresponds with Samuel Johnson, of Stratford, Ct.;[4] also, possibly, with Mr. Jonathan Edwards, not as yet driven away into the wilds of Western Massachusetts, by theologic contumacies, from his pleasant Northampton home. In the hearing of the pleasant lapse of the waters upon the beaches—while he waits—the Dean sets himself to that pleasant, curious writing of *The Minute Philosopher* in which he adroitly parries thrusts with the whole tribe of Free Thinkers, and sublimates anew his old and cherished theory—that the spiritual apprehension of material things is the only condition (or cause) of their being. {7}

Children are born to him—and death winnows his small flock—while he waits. John Smibert, who was fellow-voyager with him, painted that little family of the Dean, and the picture is now in possession of Yale College. At last, in despair of receiving the royal grant, he goes back with his family to England (1731). Many of his books,[5] and eventually his Whitehall farm, were bestowed upon Yale; and in that lively institution year after year, there be earnest students who contend still for Berkeley scholarships and Berkeley prizes; while the name of the good Dean is still further kept in American remembrance, by that noble site of a Great Pacific University, which on the Californian shores, looks through a Golden Gate to a pathway still bearing "Westward." {8}

We may well believe that the Dean was disheartened by the breaking down—through no fault of his own—of the great scheme and hope of his life. But he found friendly hands and hearts upon his return to England. Through the influences of Queen Caroline (consort of George II.) he was given the bishopric of Cloyne—seated among the heathery hills which lie northward of the harbor of Queenstown. All the poor people of that region loved him: and who did not?

He was never so profound a thinker, as he was ingenious, subtle, and acute. Though his philosophies all were over-topped by his sweet humanities,[6] yet American students may well cherish his memory, and keep his *Alciphron*—if not his *Hylas and Philonous*—upon their book-rolls. {9}

A Scholar.

Richard Bentley

It is certain that in your forays into the literature of these times—if made with any earnestness—you will come upon the name of Dr. Bentley;[7] if nowhere else, then attached to critical footnotes at the bottom of books.

His demolition of the claims, long maintained by an older generation of scholars, respecting certain *Epistles of Phalaris*, commanded attention at an early stage of his career, and showed ability to cross swords, in a scholastic and bitter way, with such men as Atterbury and Boyle; and —if need were—with such others as Sir William Temple and Dr. Swift. {10}

As early as 1700 he had come to the mastership of Trinity College, Cambridge (where a portrait of him by Thornhill now hangs in the Master's Lodge), a proud position—made prouder by his large hospitalities. He had a sensible wife, courteous "for two"—as many scholars' wives have need to be—and two daughters; one of whom inheriting the father's sharp tongue, made a good many young fellows of the college sing; and made some of them sigh too—marrying at last a certain young Cumberland, who became the father of Richard Cumberland, the poet and dramatist.[8]

Some small chronicler tells us of his preference for port over claret; indeed he loved all intense things, rather than things diluted, and was inaccessible to those finer, milder, delicater graces—whether of wine or poetry—which ripen under long reposeful workings. I spoke of a portrait of him in the Master's Lodge; there was another in Pope's *Dunciad*—not so flattering: {11}

> "The mighty scholiast, whose unwearied pains
> Made Horace dull, and humbled Milton's strains;
> Turn what they will to verse, their toil is vain,
> Critics like me shall make it prose again."
>
> —Lib. iv., 211 *et seq.*

Bentley's scholarship

He left no great work; yet what he did in lines of classical criticism could not by any possibility have been better done by others. He supplied interpretations—where the world had blundered and stumbled—which blazed their way to unquestioned acceptance. He mastered all the difficulties of language, and wore the mastership with a proud and insolent self-assertion—a very Goliath of learning, with spear like a weaver's beam, and no son of Jesse to lay him low. One wishing to see his slap-dash manner and his amazing command of authorities should read the *Dissertation on Phalaris*; not a lovable man surely, but prince of all schoolmastery lore: and how rarely we love the schoolmaster! When you meet with that name of Bentley you may safely give it great weight {12} in all scholarly matters, and not so much in matters of taste. Trust him in foot-notes to Aristophanes (a good mate for him!) or to Terence; trust him less in foot-notes to Milton,[9] or even Horace (when he leaves prosody to talk of rhythmic *susurrus*). You will think furthermore of this Dr. Bentley as living through all his fierce battles of criticisms and of college mastership to an extreme old age, and into days when Swift and Pope and Steele and Addison were all gone—a gray, rugged, persistent, captious old man, with a great, full eye that looked one through and through, and with a short nose, turned up—as if he always scented a false quantity in the air.

Two Doctors.

We approach a doctor now as mild and gentle as Bentley was irritable and pugnacious; a man not often enrolled among literary veterans; treated with scorn, maybe, by the professional critics; {13} and yet this name now brought to your attention is I think, tenderly associated with New Englanders' earliest recollections of rhyme or verse; and it is specially these literary firstlings of the memory that it is well for us to trace and hold in hand. Let us listen for a moment to that old cradle hymn:

"Hush, my dear, lie still and slumber,
Holy angels guard thy bed;
Heavenly blessings without number
Gently falling on thy head."

How the quaint, simple melody lingers yet, coming from far-away times, when it drifted over hundreds of New England homes, which as yet knew not *Pinafore* nor Mr. Sankey!

Isaac Watts

It is of Dr. Watts's[10] familiar name that I speak: he was the son of a lodging-house keeper in Southampton—in which city a Watts memorial Hall was dedicated as late as 1875. Being a dissenter, he was debarred the {14} advantages of a university education, but he taught dissenters how to put grace into their hymns and sermons; and without being a strong logician, he put such clearness into his *Treatise upon Logic* as to carry it for a time into the curriculum of Oxford.

Our American poet, Bryant, had great admiration for the familiar Watts's version of the 100th Psalm:—

We'll crowd thy gates with thankful songs,
High as the heavens our voices raise;
And earth, with her ten thousand tongues,
Shall fill thy courts with sounding praise.

And what pious tremors shook the air, when the country choirs in New England meeting-houses lifted up their voices to the old hymn, commencing:—

There is a land of pure delight!

I don't know but these bits of moral music may have been hustled out from modern church primers for something more æsthetic; but I am sure that a good many white-haired people—of whom I hope to count some among my readers—are carried back pleasantly by the rhythmic jingle of the good Doctor to those child days when hopes were fresh, and holidays a joy, and {15} summers long; and when flowery paths stretched out before us, over which we have gone toiling since—to quite other music than that of Dr. Isaac Watts. And if his songs are gone out of our fine books, and have fallen below the mention of the dilettanti critics, I am the more glad to rescue his name, as that of an honest, devout, hard-working, cultivated man who has woven an immeasurable deal of moral fibre into the web and woof of many generations of men and women.

By the generosity of a friend he was endowed with all the privileges of a beautiful baronial home (Abney Park) where he lived for thirty odd years—reaching almost four score—never forgetting his simplicities, his humilities, his faith, his sweet humanities, and never having done harm, or wished harm, to any of God's creatures; and this cannot be said of many who preach, and of many of whom we are to talk.

There was another clerical poet of less private worth, who had a very great reputation early

Edward Young.

in the eighteenth century. Fragments of his sombre-colored and magniloquent *Night Thoughts* are still frequently encountered in Commonplace Books of Poetry; while some of his picturesque or full-freighted lines, or half lines, have passed into common speech; such as— {16}

"The undevout astronomer is mad;"

"Tired Nature's sweet restorer, balmy sleep;"

"Procrastination is the thief of time."

Doctor Young.

You will recognize these as old acquaintances; and you are to credit them to Dr. Edward Young,[11] who was born about two hundred years ago down in Hampshire, son of a father who had been Chaplain to King William III. He was an Oxford man, lived a wild life there—attaching himself to a fast young Duke of Wharton, who led him into many awkward scrapes—and developing an early love, which clung by him through life, for attaching himself to great people. He wrote plays which were not good, and odes which were worse than the plays, but touched off with little jets of terrific adulation:—

"To poets, sacred is a Dorset's name,
Their wonted passport thro' the gates of fame;

It bribes the partial reader into praise {17}
And throws a glory round the sheltered lays."

And so on—to a Compton, a Lady Germaine, a Duke, in nauseous succession. In fact, he seemed incapable of using any colors but gaudy or resplendent ones, and is nothing if not exaggerated, and using heaps of words. Would you hear how he puts Jonah into the whale's mouth?—

"As yawns an earthquake, when imprisoned air
Struggles for vent, and lays the centre bare,
The whale expands his jaws' enormous size.
The prophet views the cavern with surprise,
Measures his monstrous teeth, afar descried,
And rolls his wondering eyes from side to side,
Then takes possession of the spacious seat
And sails secure within the dark retreat."

This is from his poem of the *Last Day*, which has some of his best work in it. He wrote flattering words of Addison, which Addison could not return in the same measure. He had acquaintance with Pope, with Swift, with Lady Mary Montagu, and others whom he counted worth knowing. He made a vain run for Parliament, and ended by taking church orders somewhat late in life—staying one of his plays,[12] which was just then in rehearsal, as inconsistent with his {18}
new duties. He married the elegant widowed daughter of an earl, who died not many years thereafter; and from this affliction, and his brooding over it, came his best-known poem of *Night Thoughts*. It had great currency in England, and was admired, and translated, and read largely upon the Continent. For many a year, a copy of Young's mournful, magniloquent poem, bound in morocco and gilt-edged, was reckoned one of the most acceptable and worthy gifts to a person in affliction.

Young's Night Thoughts.

But of a surety it has not the same hold upon people in this century that it had in the last. There are eloquent passages in it—passages almost rising to sublimity. His love of superlatives and of wordy exaggerations served him in good stead when he came to talk of the shortness of time, and the length of eternity, and the depth of the grave, and the shadows of death. Amidst these topics he moved on the great sable pinions of his muse with a sweep of wing, and a steadiness of poise, that drew a {19}
great many sorrowing and pious souls after him.

This is his Apostrophe to Night:

"O majestic Night!
Nature's great ancestor! Day's elder born!
And fated to survive the transient sun!
By mortals and immortals seen with awe!
A starry crown thy raven brow adorns,
An azure zone thy waist; clouds in Heaven's loom
Wrought through varieties of drapery divine
Thy flowing mantle form, and heaven throughout
Voluminously pour thy pompous train."

There is no well-considered scheme or method in his poems; but his august sorrowing and devout meditations, clothed in a great pomp of language, chase each other over his mind, as vagrant high-sweeping clouds chase over the sky. You may watch and follow them in dreamy hours, with a languid pleasure; but a real sorrow, or a real task do not, I think, find much help in them.

Dr. Young believed, in the moodiness of his grief, that he was going to bid adieu to the world; but he did not; we find him back at court long after the funeral bells had sounded in his verse:—back there too, in search of offices of some sort; bowing obsequiously to those who had gifts in their hands. {20}

Good Mrs. Hannah More tells us that being on one occasion at a Parliamentary party, where some volumes of original letters were shown, she was specially anxious to see one of her dear Dr. Young, for whose *Night Thoughts* she expressed enthusiastic admiration. Her anxiety was gratified, and she adds that she had

> "the mortification to read the most fawning, servile, mendicant letter that was perhaps ever penned by a clergyman, imploring the mistress of George II. to exert her interest for his preferment."

I do not like to tell such things to those who admire the poet; but we are after the truth—first of all. A curious mixture he was, of frugality and piety—of love for reputation and emotional religion. He essayed the writing of some of his tragic episodes in a dark room, "with a candle stuck in a skull;" and such love of claptrap abode with him and qualified most of his work.

Night Thoughts has some unforgetable things in it: there is a lurid splendor in many of the lines, and great imaginative range. But his was an imagination not chastened by a severe taste or held in check by the discretions of an elevated and cultured judgment. Upon the whole, I have more respect for the memory of Dr. Watts, than for the memory of Dr. Young. {21}

Lady Wortley Montagu.

Mary Wortley Montagu.

It is a lady that I next introduce; a very much admired lady in her day; and much admired by many even now. She was correspondent at one time of Dr. Young, as well as of Pope, Steele, and Swift (who was one of the few men she feared). She knew and greatly admired Congreve, had free entrée to the palace in time of George I., could and did translate Epictetus before she was turned of twenty, and wrote letters to her daughter, Lady Bute, that were long held up to young ladies as patterns of epistolary work: of course it is Lady Mary Montagu,[13] of whom I speak.

Lady Mary Montagu.

She was born at Thoresby Park, a little northward of Sherwood Forest in Nottingham; was the petted daughter of the Earl of Kingston, and he introduced her (as the story runs) when only eight years old to that famous Kit-Kat Club, which held its summer sessions out by Hampstead Heath; and the applause that greeted her beauty and sprightliness there, very likely fastened upon her that greed for public triumphs which clung to her all her life. She presided at her father's table, was taught in Greek, Latin, French, Italian; was full of accomplishments, and at twenty-one fell in with Mr. Montagu, similarly accomplished, whom she had a half mind to marry. Her father, however, had other views, against which the self-willed young lady rebelled; she had, however, her hesitations—sometimes flinging a new bait to Mr. Montagu and then showing a coquettish coolness. Finally, between two days, she decides; orders Mr. Montagu to have his chaise and four in readiness and makes a runaway match of it. {22}

Their life for some time is in a suburb of London; where the Lady Mary chafes at the retirement, in a way which is not very agreeable to Mr. Montagu and nettles him; and the nettles creep into their future correspondence. But her husband being appointed (1716) ambassador to Constantinople, her Ladyship sets off delightedly with a retinue of attendants to the shores of the Bosphorus; and writes thence and on her way thither, letters full of piquancy and charm. {23}

To the distinguished Mr. Pope, who has addressed her in almost a lover's strain, she says:

> "'Tis certain that I may, if I please, take the fine things you say to me for wit and raillery; and, it may be, it would be taking them right. But I never in my life was half so well disposed to believe you in earnest as I am at present."

And thereupon she goes on to describe a Sunday at the opera in the garden of the Favorita at Vienna.

First of all Englishwomen, she had her son inoculated for the small-pox; this method of prevention being practised at that time in portions of Turkey. Succeeding in this, she brought the method, and strong advocacy of it, back to England with her. It was a bold thing to do, and she {24}
always loved boldnesses. It was a humane thing to do, and her humanities were always active. The medical professors looked doubtingly upon it; even the clergy preached against it as contravening the intentions of Providence—just as some zealots, fifty years ago, declared against the employment of chloroform and other anæsthetics. But Lady Mary succeeded in her endeavors, and inoculation became shortly after an approved and adopted practice.

On the return from the Turkish embassy Mr. Montagu, perhaps at the instance of Pope, bought a home for her at Twickenham, a delightful suburb of London, where the poet was then residing, and at the zenith of his fame. His poetic worship at her shrine was renewed with all the old ardor. He gave Sir Godfrey Kneller a commission to paint her portrait in Turkish dress, with which she had done great execution at court balls.

"The picture," says Pope, in a letter to her, "dwells really at my heart, and I have made a perfect passion of preferring your present face to your past."

What the past had been we may infer from this bit of verse, written while she was in the East: {25}

"In vain my structures rise, my gardens grow,
In vain fair Thames reflects the double scenes
Of hanging mountains and of sloping greens.
Joy dwells not there; to happier seats it flies,
And only dwells where Wortley casts her eyes.
What are the gay parterre and checkered shade,
The morning bower, the evening colonnade,
But soft recesses of uneasy minds
To sigh unheard into the passing winds;
So the struck deer in some sequestered part
Lies down to die, the arrow at his heart;
There, stretched unseen, in coverts hid from day
Bleeds drop by drop and pants his life away."

But this worship is not for very long; there comes a quarrel, which is so sharp and bitter, and with such echoes in ode or satire, as to become the scandal of the neighborhood.

What brought it about cannot be so distinctly told. Lady Mary persisted in saying that the crippled sensitive poet had forgotten himself to so impudent an avowal of love that she had repelled him with a shout of laughter, and so turned his heart into gall.

That his heart was all gall toward her thereafter there needed no proof beyond his stinging {26}
couplets; and though he denied her tale with unction, he never told a story of his own in respect to this affair which made *her* character seem the worse, or *his* the better.

In an evil hour her ladyship (who had written verse already, which for her fame's sake it were better she had never written), undertook, with the aid of her friend Lord Hervey, to reply to the lampoons of Pope. Thereupon the shrinking, keen-smarting poet made other burning verses, by which the Hervey and the Montagu were both put to the torture. It must have been uncomfortable weather for her ladyship at Twickenham in those days. True, Hervey, Peterborough, Bolingbroke, and many of the courtiers were at her service; and she was a favorite of George I.—so far as any respectable woman could be called a favorite of that gross creature; but Pope's shafts of ridicule had a feather of grace about them that carried them straight and far. Mr. Montagu himself was a husband who loved London and his coal-fields without her ladyship, rather better than Twickenham gardens *with* her ladyship.

Twenty years of gay "outing" she lives, between London and its suburbs; happy, yet not {27}
happy; courted and not courted. She writes to her sister Lady Mar[14] in these times:

> "Don't you remember how miserable we were in the little parlor at Thoresby? We then thought marrying would put us at once in possession of all we wanted.... One should pluck up a spirit and live upon cordials, when one can have no other nourishment. These are my present endeavors, and I run about though I have five thousand pins and needles running into my heart. I try to console myself with a small damsel [her daughter, afterward Lady Bute] who is at present everything I like; but, alas, she is yet in a white frock. At fourteen she may run away with the butler."

And when this maiden in white had married (better than the mother dared hope), and her son, a vagrant, had gone out into the world and the night, Lady Mary—believing in "cordials"—gathered her robes about her, and took her fading face into the blaze of the Continental cities.

Her reputation for wit, and daring, and beauty has gone before her, and she writes piquantly and with great complacency of the attentions and greetings that meet her in Venice, Florence, and Milan. The appetite for this life grows with feeding; so it becomes virtually a separation from her husband, though cool, business-like letters regularly pass between them. Her son, though grown up into an "accomplished" man, is a scoundrel—drifting about Europe; and when they encounter the mother insists that he shall drop his name, and deny relationship. {28}

Twenty-two years she lives in that Continental exile, writing all the while letters to her daughter, which she loved to compare with the letters of Madame de Sévigné. They are witty and sparkling and have passed into a certain place in English literature, but they are not Sévigné letters. Toward the last of her residence abroad she bought an old ruinous palace in Lombardy, not far from Lago di Guarda, equipped three or four of its rooms, and with a little bevy of servants, lived in retirement—busied with reading, with her ducks, her pigeons, and her garden.

She writes her daughter:

> "The active scenes are over at my age; I indulge, with all the art I can, my taste for reading. If I *could* confine it to valuable books; they are almost as scarce as valuable men.... As I approach a second childhood I endeavor to enter into the pleasures of it.... I am reading an idle tale, not expecting wit or truth in it; and am very glad it is not metaphysics to puzzle my judgment, or history to mislead my opinion." {29}

She is well past sixty and has lost all her old graces when she falls into this misanthropic spirit; has grown strangely neglectful of her person too; she says that for eleven years now she has not looked in a mirror.[15]

But presently Mr. Montagu dies leaving an immense fortune; there are business reasons demanding her return; so she brings back that shrunken, unseemly face, and figure of hers to London; takes a house there and fills it with servants. A cousin, speaking of a call upon her, says:

> "It is like the Tower of Babel; a Hungarian servant takes your name at the door, he gives it to an Italian, who delivers it to a Frenchman. The Frenchman to a Swiss, and the Swiss to a Polander; so that by the time you get to her ladyship's presence you have changed your name five times, without the expense of an Act of Parliament."

Horace Walpole pays her a visit, and says, "she was old, dirty, tawdry, and painted." But he did not like her: I do not think she liked him. {30}

Could it be that this old lady—past seventy—with her fine house and her polyglot of service and her flush purse, thought to call back the old trail of flatterers? I do not know. I know very well she did not, and that within a twelvemonth she died.

There is in Lichfield Cathedral a cenotaph representing Beauty weeping the loss of her Preserver; it was placed there by some grateful person to perpetuate the memory of the Lady Mary's benevolence in introducing inoculation; and I think it is the only eulogy to be found on any memorial tablet of this strange, witty, beautiful, indiscreet, studious, unhappy, disappointed woman.

Alexander Pope.

Alexander Pope.

We close our chapter with some mention of that proud, shy, infirm poet of whom we have caught shadowy glimpses in the story of Wortley Montagu. {31}
There are scores of little crackling couplets floating about on the lips of people well known as Pope's.[16]

> "A wit's a feather and a chief's a rod,
> An honest man's the noblest work of God."
>
> "Know then, this truth, eno' for man to know,
> Virtue alone is happiness below."
>
> "Honor and shame from no condition rise,
> Act well your part; *there* all the honor lies!"

These must be familiar; and your school must differ from most schools, if some of these or other such, from the same author, have not one time done service as snappers at the end of a composition, or as a bit of decoration in the middle of it.

All know, too, in a general way, that Pope was an infirm man, without perhaps a clear idea of what his infirmity may have been; some of those fierce lampoons already alluded to, which went {32}
flying back and forth around the shades of Twickenham, speak of the poet as an ape, a hunchback, a monster. The truth is that he inherited from his father a feeble and crooked frame

with some spinal weakness which did give a measure of excuse to the coarse and brutal satirists of those days. His height was much below that of ordinary men, so that cushions or a higher chair were always necessary at table to bring him to the level of his friends; his legs were thin and shrunken and he walked feebly; his countenance was drawn and pinched; yet he had good features, with the delicate complexion of a woman, and a great blue eye, full of expression. His toilette was always a serious affair for him—specially when he went abroad or would appear at his best (as he always wished to do)—involving the assistance of one or two attendants to adjust his paddings, his stays, his canvas jackets, and his twice doubled hose.

I have dwelt with more particularity upon his personal aspect, because it serves to explain, or at least largely to qualify, a great many apparent mysteries in his social career.

He was a London boy, born of Romish parents; his father being a small trader in the city, but {33}
retiring, about the time of this weakly boy's birth, to a home at Binfield—a country parish lying between Windsor and Reading, where they show now a grove of beaches which was a favorite haunt of the boy poet. He caught schooling in a hap-hazard way, as Romanists needed to do in those times; but had a quick, big brain, that made up for many shortcomings in teachers. Before twelve he had his Latin with some Greek, and had written verse; and after that age was his own master—sucking literary sweets where he could find them.

Before twelve, too, he had made many London visitations—partly to study French there and partly to find his way to Will's coffee-house, and catch sight of old John Dryden, then drawing near to the end of his worldly honors. And this thin, white-faced, crippled boy looking stealthily up at the master, even then had wild ambitious dreams of the day when he too should have his dignities and lay down the law for English letters.

Out by Binfield he happened upon good friends. Among others a Blount family to which {34}
belonged two daughters Blount—sympathetic companions to him then and long afterward; scores of letters, too, there were, to which now Teresa Blount and now Miss Patty Blount were parties: He seeming in those romantic days (upon the edge of Windsor Forest) sometimes in love with one and sometimes the other; and they, in this mixing of letters getting probably as confused as he, and a great deal more vexed; and so came coldness and short-lived quarrelling, making one thing pretty sure—that when a young man or woman begins to play with the different tenses of the verb "I love," a single correspondent is much better than two. However, his friendship with Miss Patty Blount lasted his life out.

An old baronet of the neighborhood, who had been diplomat in James I.'s day, took a fancy to this keen-thoughted lad and made a companion of him. He came to know old Wycherly too, and scores of men about town; even Jacob Tonson, the famous publisher of those times, had written to Pope before he was twenty, asking the privilege of printing certain pastorals of his writing, which had been handed about in the clubs; and thought them—what they really were— {35}
astonishing for their literary finish.

His Poetic Methods.

Poetry of Pope.

But young Mr. Pope does not think much of the pastorals, save as stepping-stones; they paved his way to a large acquaintance with the London wits; and it would seem that at one time he thought of living at the dreadful pace of these gentlemen—in bottles and midnight routs; perhaps he tried it for a while; but his feeble frame could stand no such neck-breaking gallop. He can, however, put more of wearisome elaboration and pains-taking skill to his rhymes than any of the verse-makers of his time. He has by nature a mincing step of his own—different as possible from the long, easy lope of Dryden—and that step he perfects by unwearied practice, and word-mongering, until it comes to the wondrous ten-syllabled movement, which for polish, and rhythmic tric-trac is unmatchable.

The *Essay on Criticism*, *Windsor Forest*, and the *Rape of the Lock*, all belonged to those early {36}
years at Binfield, and I give a test of each; first, from the *Essay*:—

"Where'er you find 'the cooling Western breeze,'
In the next line, it 'whispers through the trees:'
If crystal streams 'with pleasing murmurs creep,'
The reader's threatened (not in vain) with 'sleep;'
Then, at the last and only couplet fraught
With some unmeaning thing they call a thought,
A needless Alexandrine ends the song,
That, like a wounded snake, drags its slow length along."

Next this bustling bit, from *Windsor Forest*:—

"See, from the brake the whirring pheasant springs
And mounts exulting on triumphant wings.
*   *   *   *   *
Ah! what avail his glossy, varying dyes,

His purple crest, and scarlet-circled eyes,
The vivid green his shining plumes unfold,
His painted wings, and breast that flames with gold."

And again, this, from the *Rape of the Lock*:—

"Just then, Clarissa drew with tempting grace
A two-edged weapon from her shining case;
So ladies in romance assist their knight,
Present the spear, and arm him for the fight,
He takes the gift with reverence, and extends
The little engine on his fingers' ends;

This just behind Belinda's neck he spread, {37}
As o'er the fragrant steams she bends her head.
Swift to the lock a thousand sprites repair,
A thousand wings, by turns, throw back the hair;
And thrice they twitched the diamond in her ear,
Thrice she looked back, and thrice the foe drew near."

And yet again—this worthier excerpt from the same dainty poem:—

"Fair nymphs, and well-drest youths around her shone
But every eye was fixed on her alone.
On her white breast a sparkling cross she wore,
Which Jews might kiss, and infidels adore.
Her lively looks a sprightly mind disclose,
Quick as her eyes, and as unfixed as those;
Favors to none, to all she smiles extends;
Oft she rejects, but never once offends."

Ten pages of extracts would not show better his amazing attention to details—his quick eye—his gifts in word-craft, and his musical exploitation of his themes. I know that this poet works in harness, and has not the free movement of one who gallops under a loose rein; the couplets fetter him; may be they cramp him; but there is a blithe, strong resonance of true metal, in the clinking chains that bind him. No, I do not think that Pope is to be laughed out of court, in our day, or in {38} any day, because he labored at form and polish, or because he loved so much the tingle of a rhyme; I think there was something else that tingled in a good deal that he wrote and will continue to tingle so long as Wit is known by its own name.

The good word spoken for him in the *Spectator*—the great printed authority in literary matters—brought him into more intimate association with the Literary Guild of that paper; he wrote for the *Spectator* on several occasions. An early contribution is that of 1712 (November 10th), where he calls attention to the famous verses which the Emperor Adrian spoke on his death-bed; he says:—

> "I was in company the other day with five or six men of learning, who agreed that they showed a gayety unworthy that prince in those circumstances;" and he quotes the lines:
>
> Animula vagula, blandula
> Hospes Comes que Corporis
> Pallidula, rigida, nudula, etc.
>
> "But," he says, "methinks it was by no means a gay, but a very serious soliloquy to his soul at the point of his departure."

And out of this comment and thought of Pope's, contributed casually (if Pope ever did {39} anything *casually*) to the *Spectator*, came by and by from the poet's anvil, that immortal hymn we all know,—

"Vital spark of heavenly flame,
Quit, oh quit, this mortal frame;
Trembling, hoping, lingering, flying,
Oh the pain, the bliss of dying!"

The Rape of the Lock.

Rape of the Lock

I cited two significant fragments from the *Rape of the Lock*, a poem belonging to Pope's early period, and which is reckoned by most poets and critics,[17] as well as biographers, his masterpiece, and a beautiful work of the highest literary art. I recognize the superior authority, but cannot share the exalted admiration; at least, it does not beget such loving approval as brings one back again and again to its perusal. It does not seem to me to furnish very inspiring reading.

The setting of this little poem is not large; the story is of a stolen lock of hair, and of the resentments that follow; and if one might venture upon a synopsis of so delicate a feat of workmanship, it might run in this way:—Belinda, the despoiled heroine, sleeps; sprites put dreams in her head and give warning of impending woe. "Shock" (her dog) barks and wakes her; she betakes herself to her toilet—the fairy-fingered sylphs assisting: {40}

> Some thrid the mazy ringlets of her hair;
> Some hang upon the pendants of her ear,

—all pictured like carving on a cherry-stone. At last, fully equipped, she goes to a fête upon the Thames; pretty glimpses of the river scenes follow; a crazy baron covets a lock of Belinda's hair. The zephyrs play; day fades; cards come; crowding sprites pile into the game, and twist all into a fairy cable. The covetous baron snips off a lock of Belinda's hair, while she bends over the tea-pot. The nimble sylphs bring from the "Cave of Spleen" a stock of shrieks, and tears, and megrims. Sir Plume ("of amber snuff-box justly vain") champions Belinda, and demands satisfaction of the ravisher—which he does not win; so the battle rages—"Fans clap, silks rustle, {41} and tough whalebones crack," and in the hurly-burly the stolen lock gets wafted into "lunar spheres," and comet-like, closes the shining tale:

> "This lock the muse [thus] consecrates to Fame
> And midst the stars inscribes Belinda's name."

Yet Belinda's sovereignty is of an ignoble sort; her tiara made up of pins and pomades; indeed the women all are as small as the sylphs; toy creatures, and creatures of toys; no nobility, in or about them; and very much to make an honest, self-respecting woman of our time fling down the silvery poem with a wearisome distaste.

All this is said with a thorough recognition of its art—its amazing dexterities of verse—its playful leaps of fancy—its bright shimmer of over-nature; and yet those gossamer gnomes seem to me like an intrusion; I cannot forget that they were an afterthought of Pope himself; I cannot bring myself to think of the charming fairy-folk of Fletcher, or of Drayton's *Nymphidia*, or of the *Midsummer Night's Dream* wallowing in pomades, and straining at whalebone stays! These live {42} through an eternal frolic in the air; those—of the *Rape of the Lock*—lie in a literary show-case, like a taxidermist's trophies.

In the sobered time of life, when the iris hues have only fitful play, I think a man goes away from these earlier poems of Pope (if he reads them) with new zest, to those wonderful metric condensations of old truths, which flash and burn along the lines of his moral essays. There could be few more helpful rhetorical lessons, for boy or girl, than the effort to pack some of Pope's stinging couplets, or decades of lines, into an equal number of lines in prose; the difficulties would be great indeed and would vitalize the lesson; and the lesson, I think, would be far fuller of profitable ends, than the old "parsing" exercise, and syntactic analysis and description of sentences according to the nomenclature of Mr. Lindley Murray or of Mr. Somebody-else.

Pope's Homer, and Life at Twickenham. {43}

Homer of Pope.

Notwithstanding his much writing, Pope in those early days under the beeches of Windsor forest, was not winning such financial rewards as his friends thought he deserved. The *Spectator* did not pay much money for little poetic trifles—such as the *Messiah*; and Jacob Tonson was the screw which some publishers are. There can be no doubt that the poet, with his fine tastes, felt the restraints of a limited income; his old father, who perhaps did not carry sharp business habits into his retirement, had been compelled to leave the country house of Binfield, and had gone over to a suburban street dwelling near to Chiswick. In this emergency, (if emergency it were,) was it not the oddest thing in the world that his friends should have advised a translation of Homer?

Yet they did; and so this dauntless young fellow, not over-critical in his Greek knowledge, but with an abounding sense of the marvellous beauties that lay in the old Homeric hexameters, sets {44} about his task; and after five years' toil accomplishes it in such a way as makes it probable that there can never be an English Homer that will quite match it. There are juster ones; there are faithfuller ones; but not one that has been so enduringly popular. Steeping himself in the mythologies and the Trojan traditions, he has grafted thereupon his stock of British word-craft: Ajax, Achilles, and the rest range to their places in the martial clank of his couplets, with a life and charm which, if not imbued with Homeric limpidities and melodies, possess an engaging picturesqueness that belongs to few long English epics.

And the poem took: that trenchant Dean Swift strode into the ante-rooms of the great men of Court, and swore that he must have a hundred or a thousand pounds subscribed for the new Homer of Mr. Pope; and he got it; Mr. Pope was the fashion.

Up to that time in the whole history of English literature there had been no such payment for literary wares as accrued to the author of the new Homer—the sum reaching, for both Iliad and {45}
Odyssey, some £9,000; with which the shrewd poet bought an annuity (cheaper then than now) of some £500, and a long lease of the Twickenham house and gardens; where, thereafter, amidst his willows and his grottos, he lived until his death.

The house[18]—if indeed any part be now the same—has been built over and enlarged, and has a jaunty suburban villa pretension that does not look Homeric; but the grotto, or tunnel, which he cut under the high road running parallel with the Thames, and through which he might pass unobserved from garden to garden and from his house to the river, is still to be seen there; and trees of his planting still hang their limbs over the pretty greensward that goes down in gentle slope to the Thames banks. He put the same polish upon his grounds he did upon his verse: his grotto flashed with curious spars, glass jewels, and prismatic tinted shells; his walks were decorously paved and rolled and his turf shorn to a nicety. He entertained there in his {46}
thrifty way, watching his butler very sharply, and by reason of his infirmities, was very measured in his wine-drinking. Swift, who used to come and pass days with him, may have made the glasses jingle: and there were other worthy friends who, when they came for a dinner, kept the poet in a tremor of unrest. The Prince of Wales, after the Georges of Hanover had come in, used sometimes to honor the poet with a visit; and the rich and powerful Bolingbroke—what time he lived at Battersea—used to come up in his barge, landing at the garden entrance—as most great visitors did—and discuss with him those faiths, dogmas, truisms, and splendid generalities which afterward took form in the famous *Essay on Man*.

Though the Twickenham home was on a great high road from London to Teddington and Hampton Court, and the greater high road of the river, it had, like all English suburban places now, its high enclosing walls that gave privacy; and the river shores had their skirting of rhododendrons and willows and great beds of laurestina, so that the weak, misshapen poet might {47}
take his walks unobserved. He had his vanities, but he did not love to be pointed at. He carried a mind of extreme sensitiveness under that dwarfed figure; and is mad—maybe, sometimes, with destiny, that has crippled him so; and bites that thin lip of his till the blood starts. But he does not waste force or pride on repinings; he feels an altitude in that supple mind of his which lifts him above the bad lines of portraits or figures. He knows that the ready hand and brain, and the faculty of verse which comes tripping to his tongue, and the wit which flashes through and through his utterance, will make for him—has made for him—a path through whatever beleaguerments of sense, straight up and on to the gates of the Temple of Fame.

Pope's vanities.

We have had many vain men to encounter in these talks of ours—men assured of their own judgment and taste; but not one, I think, as yet, so thoroughly and highly conscious that his cleverness and scholarship and deftness and wit were as sure of their reward as the sun was sure to shine.

I can fancy him pausing after having wrought some splendid score of Homeric lines, which {48}
blaze and palpitate with new Greek fire: I can fancy him humming them over to himself—growing heated with the flames that flash and play in them—his slight, frail figure trembling with the rhythmic outburst, and he smiling serenely at a mastery which his will and wit have brought to such supreme pitch of excellence that no handling of English will go beyond it.

His Last Days.

Last days of Pope.

I have spoken of one face—I mean Lady Mary Montagu's—which used sometimes to light up the grotto of Mr. Pope, and have told you how that badly managed friendship went out in a great muddle of sootiness and rage; nor were the mud and the filth, which he used in that direction with such cruel vigor, weapons which he was unused to handling: poor John Dennis, a poet and critic of that day, had been put in a rage over and over. Lord Hervey had been scarified. Blackmore and Phillips and Bentley had caught his stiletto thrusts; even Daniel Defoe had been subject of his sneers; and so had the bland, {49}
courteous Addison. This sensitive, weak-limbed man saw offence where other men saw none; and straightway drew out that flashing sword of his and made the blood spurt. Of course there were counter-thrusts, and heavy ones, that caused that poor decrepid figure of his to writhe again—all the more because he pretended a stoicism that felt no such attack. To say that he often made his thrusts without reason, and that much of his satire was dastardly, is saying what all the world knows, and what every admirer of his fine powers must lament. But he had his steady friendships, too, and his tendernesses. Nothing could exceed the kindly consideration and affectionate watchfulness which belonged to his protection and shelter of his old mother, lingering in that poet's faery home of Twickenham till over ninety. A strange, close friendship knit him to Dean Swift, who had seemed incapable of rallying this sensitive man's—or, indeed, any man's—affections. Pope, and Bolingbroke—the brilliant and the courted—were long bound together in very close and friendly communion; the tears of this latter were among the honestest which fell when the poet died. Bishop Warburton, too, was most kindly treated by Pope in all his {50}
later years, and to this gentleman most of his books were left. There can be no doubt, also, that

the poet felt the tenderest regard for that neighbor of his, Miss Patty Blount, who had grown old beside him, and who used at times to bring her quiet face into the parlors of Twickenham. Pope in his last days would, I think, have seen her oftener—did covertly wish for a sight of that kindly smile, which he had known so long and perhaps had valued more than he had dared to confess. But in those final days she had gone her ways; maybe was grown tired of waiting upon the peevish humors of the poet; certainly was not seen by him more often than a fair neighborly regard would dictate. Yet he left her all his rights there at Twickenham, and much money beside.

Death of Pope.

They say that at the last he complained of seeing things dimly—seeing things, too, which others did not see (as the bystanders told him). "Then, 'twas a vision," he said. Two days thereafter he entered very quietly upon the visions all men see after death; leaving that poor, scathed, misshapen body—I should think gladly— {51}
leaving the pleasant home shaded by the willows he had planted; and leaving a few wonderful poems which I am sure will live in literature as long as books are printed.

[1] Narcisse Luttrel: *A brief historical Relation of State affairs* from September, 1678, to April, 1714.

[2] George Berkeley, b. 1685; d. 1753. His works (3 vols.) and Life and Letters (1 vol.); edited by Fraser, in 1871. See also very interesting monograph on Berkeley, in Professor Tyler's *Three Men of Letters*, Putnam, 1895.

[3] *An essay toward preventing the Ruin of Great Britain*, 1721.

[4] Dr. Samuel Johnson, afterward, 1754, first President of King's (now Columbia) College, New York; he was a graduate of Yale; life by Dr. Beardsley.

[5] In 1730, he writes to Samuel Johnson, of Stratford, Ct.: "Pray let me know whether they [the college authorities] would admit the writings of Hooker and Chillingworth to the Library of the College of New Haven?"

[6] One of his last publications was, "*Siris: a chain of Philosophical Reflections and inquiries concerning the Virtues of Tar-water.*" And it is remarkable that its arguments and teeming illustrations have not been laid hold of by our modern venders of Tar-soap.

[7] Richard Bentley, b. 1662; d. 1742. Native of Oulton, Yorkshire. Was first Boyle Lecturer, 1692; Master of Trinity, 1700; *Works*, edited by Dyce, London, 1836 (only 3 vols. issued of a proposed 8 vol. edition). *Life*, by Jacob Mähly, Leipsic, 1868.

[8] B. 1732; d. 1811. Best known by his *Memoirs*, 1806; among his plays is *False Impressions*, in which appears Scud, the forerunner of Dickens's *Alfred Jingle*.

[9] All along the foot-notes in a great Quarto of the *Paradise Lost* (London, 1732) Bentley's critical pyrotechnics flame, and flare; and he closes a bristling preface with this droll caveat;—"I made [these] notes *extempore*, and put them to the Press as soon as made; without any Apprehension of growing leaner by Censures, or plumper by Commendations."

[10] Isaac Watts, b. 1674; d. 1748. *Horæ Lyricæ*: Memoir by Southey (vol. ix., *Sacred Classics*: London, 1834). Lowndes (*Bib. Manual*) says, that up to 1864, there were sold annually 50,000 copies of Watts's Hymns.

[11] B. 1681; d. 1765. Works, with memoir, by J. Mitford. 2 vols., 12mo. London, 1834.

[12] Only *staying*; since the play (of *The Brothers*) was brought out in 1753, some twenty years after his establishment in the rectory of Welwyn.

[13] Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, b. 1690 (or 1689?); d. 1762. Works (3 vols.), edited by her great grandson, Lord Wharncliffe: Later edition (1861), with life by Moy Thomas.

[14] Wife of Lord Mar, who was exiled for his engagement in the abortive rebellion of 1715.

[15] Dilke; *Papers, etc.*, vol. ii. pp. 354-5.

[16] Alexander Pope, b. 1688; d. 1744. Editions of his works are numerous. I name those by Bowles and Roscoe, with that of Elwin and Courthope; see also Dilke's *Papers of a Critic*, Leslie Stephen's *Life*, and notices by Lowell, Minto, and Mrs. Oliphant.

[17] Lowell, Professor Minto, De Quincey, Hazlitt, Covington, etc. De Quincey says, "It is the most exquisite monument of playful fancy that universal literature offers."

[18] The identity of the house of Pope was destroyed by a lady owner (widow of Dr. Phipps, the Court oculist) in or about 1807. Pope loved landscape gardening and was aided by Kent and Bridgeman. Warburton speaks extravagantly of the poetic graces which he lavished upon his grotto.

CHAPTER II {52}

The name of Dean Berkeley—an acute and kindly philosopher—engaged our attention in the last chapter. So did that ripe scholar and master of Trinity, Richard Bentley;[1] then came that more saintly Doctor—Isaac Watts, whose Doxologies will long waken the echoes in country churches; we had a glimpse of the gloomy and lurid draperies, with which the muse of Dr. Edward Young sailed over earth and sky; sadly draggled, too, we sometimes found that muse with the stains of earth. We spoke of a Lady—Wortley Montagu—conspicuous for her beauty, for her acquirements, for her vivacity of mind, for her boldness, for her contempt of the convenances {53}
of society, and at last, I think, a contempt for the whole male portion of the human race.

Then came that keen, discerning, accomplished poet, Alexander Pope, with a brain as strong and elastic as his body was weak and shaky; and who, of all the poets we have encountered since Elizabeth's day, knew best how to give to words their full forces, and how to make them jingle and shine.

But the lives of these I have now named, and of those previously brought to your notice[2] overreached the reign of Queen Anne, and dropped off—some in the time of George I., some under his son George II., and others in an early part of the long reign of George III.

From Stuart to Brunswick.

But how came the Georges of Hanover and Brunswick to succeed Anne Stuart? Yes, there
was a son of the deposed and exiled James II. (whose mother was an Italian princess—making {54}
him half-brother to Queen Anne) known, sometimes as James Edward, and sometimes as The Pretender. He had favorers about the Court of Anne; and if the Queen had lingered somewhat longer, or if the Jacobite or Tory political machine had been a little better oiled and in better play, this Pretender might have come to the throne instead of Hanover George. Poet and Ambassador Prior, who was suspected of favoring this, was one of those who went to the Tower, and came near losing his head in the early days of King George; and Bolingbroke, the friend of Pope, a known plotter for the Stuarts, took himself off hastily to France for safety.

James Edward, however, did not give the matter up, but made a landing in Scotland in 1715 and led that dreary rebellion, in which the poor Earl of Mar went astray, and in which Argyle figured; a rebellion which gives its small scenes of battle and its network of conspiracies to Scott's story of *Rob Roy*. The Pretender escaped with difficulty to France, made no succeeding
attempt, lived in comparative obscurity, and died in Rome fifty years later. He was, according to {55}
best accounts, a poor, weak creature, of dissipated habits—of melancholy aspect—dubbed King of England[3] by the Pope—given a stipend by the over-gracious Holy Father—and at last a costly tomb in St. Peter's, which is dignified by some good sculptural work. Travelling sentimentalists may meditate over its grandiose inscription of James III., King of England!

James Edward had married, however, a Princess Sobieski of the Polish family, by whom he had two sons, Charles Edward and Henry. The elder, Charles Edward, an ambitious, handsome, gentlemanly, and amiable man—known as the Young Pretender—did, by favor of French aid, and stimulated by larger French promises, make a landing in Scotland in 1745, which was successful at first, but ended with that defeat on Culloden Moor, which—with pretty romantic broidery—gives a gloomy setting to Scott's first novel of *Waverley*.

A second plotting of some friends of the Young Pretender, somewhere about 1751-1752 {56}
(dimly foreshadowed in the story of *Redgauntlet*), proved abortive. Thenceforward he appears no more in English history. We know only that this bright, clever, brave Chevalier, who bewitched many a Highland maiden, lived a corrupt life, made a dreary and unfortunate marriage (1772), and, bloated with drink and blighted in hopes, died at Rome in 1788.

His brother Henry was a priest, and was made a cardinal. He spent all his money in pompous living, became miserably poor, and died in Venice early in the present century—the last of his family. There is in St. Peter's Church at Rome, in the Chapel of the Presentation, a great tomb, showy with the sculptures of Canova, which commemorates all these Stuarts, and—so far as Latin inscriptions can do it—makes kings and princes of these unfortunate representatives of the family of King James II.

Still we are without an answer to our question: How and why did the Georges of Hanover come to the British throne?

Those who recall my mention[4] of that slip-shod pedantic king, James I., who came from {57}
Scotland, and who brought the Stuart name with him, will remember an allusion to an ambitious daughter of his, Elizabeth Stuart, who married a certain Frederic of the Palatinate, and possessor of the famous chateau whose beautiful ruins are still to be seen on the hill above Heidelberg. You will remember my mention of that extravagant ambition which brought her husband to grief and to an early death. Well, she had many children; and among them one named Sophia, who married, in 1658, Ernest Augustus, Duke of Brunswick and—afterward—Elector of Hanover. She was a good woman, a fairly pronounced Protestant—unlike some sisters she had; so that in casting about for a Protestant successor to William III. and to Anne, the orthodox wise ones of England fixed upon this Sophia, the grand-daughter of old James I. She died, however, before Anne died and in the same year; so that the succession fell to her son George Louis, who became

George I. of Great Britain.

He was well toward sixty when he came to England—did not care overmuch to come; loved {58} his ease; loved his indulgences, of which he had a good many, and a good many bad ones; was a German all over; not speaking English even, nor ever learning to speak it; had been a good soldier and fought hard in his day, but did not care for more fighting, or fatigue of any sort; had little culture, and minded the welcoming odes which English poets sang to him less than he would mind the gurgling of good "trink" from a beer-bottle. Yet withal, he was fairly well-intentioned, not a meddler, never wantonly unjust, willing to do kindnesses, if not fatiguing; a heavy, good-natured, heathenish, sottish lout of a king.

Yet, as I have said,[5] Addison could not find words noble enough to tell this man how Anne was dead and he was king; if Addison had made his letter as noble as the drama of *Cato*, George I. would have yawned and lighted his pipe with it.

This George I. had married in early life a beautiful cousin, and a rich one, but without much {59} character; perhaps he treated her brutally (it was certainly a Georgian fashion); and she, who was no saint, would have run away from that Hanover home—had plotted it all, and the night came, when suddenly her lover and the would-be attendant of her flight was savagely slain; and she, separated from her two children and speaking no word more to her grim husband, was consigned a prisoner to a gloomy fortress in the Aller valley, where she dragged out an embittered and disappointed life for thirty odd years; then, Death opened the gates and set the poor soul free.

This was the wife of George I., and the mother of George II.; this latter being over thirty at the time of his father's coming to England, and not getting on over-well with the king—the son, perhaps, resenting that confinement of his mother in the Ahlden fortress.

This Prince of Wales had no more love for letters than his father George I.; would have liked a jolly German drinking song better than anything Pope could do; was short, irascible, as good a fighter as the father, swore easily and often; had a good, honest wife though, who clung to him {60} through all his badnesses. He had a city home in Leicester Square and a lodge in Richmond Park, whence he used to ride, at a hard gait, with hunting parties (Pope speaks of meeting him with such an one) and come home to long dinners and heavy ones.

It was at this lodge in Richmond Park (which is now less changed than almost any park about London and so one of the best worth seeing) that a messenger came galloping in jack-boots one evening, thirteen years after George I. had come to the throne, to tell the Prince that old George was dead (over in Osnaburg, where he had gone on a visit) and that he, the Prince, was now King George II.[6]

"Dat is one big lie"—said the new and incredulous King with an oath. But it was not a lie; the {61} King was wrathy at being waked too early, and wanted to swear at something or somebody. But having rubbed his eyes and considered the matter, he began then and there those thirty-three years of reign, which, without much credit to George II. personally, were, as the careful Mr. Hallam says in his history, the most prosperous years which England had ever known.

Remember please, then, that George I., who succeeded Anne, reigned some thirteen years; and after him came this short, sharp-spoken George II., who reigned thirty-three years—thus bringing us down to 1760. I have dwelt upon the personalities of these two monarchs, not because they are worthy of special regard, but rather that they may serve more effectively as finger-posts or clumsy mile-stones (with wigs upon them)—to show us just how far we are moving along upon the big high-road of English history.

Samuel Richardson. {62}

Quite early in that century into which these royal people found their way, there lived over beyond Temple Bar, near to St. Bride's Church, in the City of London, a mild-mannered, round-faced, prim little man who was printer and bookseller—in both which callings he showed great sagacity and prudence. He was moreover very companionable, especially with bookish ladies, who often dropped in upon him—he loving to talk; and to talk much about himself, and his doings, and the characters he put in his books. For this was Samuel Richardson[7]—the very great man as many people thought him—who had written *Pamela*, *Clarissa Harlowe*, and *Sir Charles Grandison*. It is doubtful if he knew Pope or Swift or Berkeley; he was never of the "Spectator set." Pope we know read his *Pamela* and said there was as much good in it as in {63} twenty sermons: yet I do not think he meant to compliment it—or the sermons. Neither did Bookseller Richardson know people in high position, except Hon. Mr. Onslow the Speaker, who gave him some of the public printing to do and put him in way of business by which he grew rich for these times and had a fine large house out by Hammersmith, where he kept a little court of his own in summer weather; the courtiers being worthy women, to whom he would read his books, or correspondence relating to them, by the hour. Possibly you have not read his novels; but I am sure your grandmothers or great-grandmothers have read some of them, and wept over them. He was not learned; was the son of a country carpenter, and in his early days was known for an easy letter-writing faculty he had; and he used to be set upon by sighing maidens—who were suffering under a prevalent contagious affection of young years—to write their love-letters for them; and so at last, in busy London, when his head was streaked with gray, he began to put together books of letters—written as if some suffering or wishful one had whispered them all in his ear. There was no machinery, no plot, no classicism, no style—but sentiment in abundance and vast prolixity, and ever-recurring villanies, and "pillows bedew'd with tears." The particularity and fulness of his descriptions were something wonderful; every button on a coat, every ring on the fingers, every tint of a ribbon, every ruffle on a cap, every ruffle of emotion, every dimple in a cheek is pictured, and then—the "pillows bedew'd with tears." {64}

There's a great budget of Richardson correspondence that shows us how the leaven of such stories worked; letters from Miss Suffern and Miss Westcomb, and Mr. Dunallan, and a dozen others, all interlaced with his own; for it does not appear that the old gentleman ever refused the challenge of a letter, or grew tired of defending and illustrating his theories of literary art and of morals, which in his view were closely joined. The stories were published by himself—volume by volume, so that his correspondents had good chance to fire upon him—on the wing as it were: "Poor Clarissa," they say; "my heart bleeds for her, and what, pray, is to become of her; and why don't you reform Lovelace, and sha'n't he marry Clarissa? And I do not believe there was ever such a man as Sir Charles in the world." The old gentleman enjoys this and writes back by the ream; has his own little sentiment of a sort too, even in the correspondence. Mme. Belfour wants to see him—"the delightful man"—without herself being observed; so entreats him to walk some day in the Park (St. James') at a given hour; and Richardson complies, giving these data for his picture:— {65}

> "I go through the Park, once or twice a week to my little retirement; but I will for a week together, be in it, every day three or four hours, till you tell me you have seen a person who answers to this description, namely, short—rather plump—fair wig, lightish cloth coat, all black besides; one hand generally in his bosom, the other a cane in it, which he leans upon under the skirts of his coat ... looking directly fore-right as passers-by would imagine, but observing all that stirs on either hand of him; hardly ever turning back, of a light brown complexion, smoothish faced and ruddy cheeked—looking about sixty-five, a regular even pace, a gray eye sometimes lively—very lively if he have hope of seeing a lady whom he loves and honors."

Then he writes to Miss Westbrook—an adopted daughter as he calls her:— {66}

> "You rally me on my fears for your safety, and yet I know you to be near a forest where lies a great wild bear: I am accused for these fears—I am accused for playing off a sheet-full of witticisms, which you, poor girl, can't tell what to do with. Witticism! Miss W. Very well, Miss W—— But I did not expect—but no matter;—what have I done with my handkerchief—I—I—I did not really expect; but no matter, Miss W——"

A man who can put tears so easily, and for so little cause, into a letter, can put them by the barrelful in his books: and so he did, and made Europe weep. Rousseau and Diderot from over in France, philosophers as they professed to be, blubbered their admiring thanks for *Clarissa Harlowe*.

I have spoken of him not because he is to be counted a great classic (though Dr. Johnson affirmed it); not because I advise your wading through six or seven volumes of the darling *Sir Charles Grandison*—as some of our grandames did; but because he was, in a sense, the father of the modern novel; coming before Fielding; in fact, spurring the latter, by *Pamela*, to his great, {67} coarse, and more wonderful accomplishment. And although what I have said of Richardson may give the impression of something paltry in the man and in his works, yet he was an honest gentleman, with good moral inclinations, great art in the dissection of emotional natures, and did give a fingering to the heart-strings which made them twang egregiously.

Harry Fielding.

The British Guild of Critics is, I think, a little more disposed to *admit* Richardson's claims to distinction than to be proud of them: it is not so, however, with Fielding;[8] if Richardson was "womanish," Fielding was masculine with a vengeance; gross, too, in a way, which always will, and always should, keep his books outside the pale of decent family reading. Filth is filth, and always deserves to be scored by its name—whatever blazon of genius may compass it about. I have no argument here with the artists who, for art's sake, want to strip away all the protective {68} kirtles which the Greek Dianas wore: but when it comes to the bare bestialities of such tavern-bagnios as poor Fielding knew too well,[9] there seems room for reasonable objection, and for a strewing of some of the fig-leaves of decency. And yet this stalwart West-of-England man, "raised" in the fat meadows of Somersetshire, and who had read *Pamela* as a stepping-stone for his first lift into the realms of romance, was a jovial, kind-hearted, rollicking, dare-devil of a man, with no great guile in him, and no hypocrisies and no snivelling laxities. He had a great lineage, tracing back to that Landgrave of Alsace, from whom are descended the kings and emperors of the House of Hapsburg: and what a warrant for immortality does this novelist carry in those words of Gibbon!—

> "The successors of Charles V. may disdain their [Somersetshire] brethren of England; but the romance of *Tom Jones*—that exquisite picture of humor and manners— {69}
> will outlive the Palace of the Escurial and the imperial eagle of Austria."

It was at home or near by that Henry Fielding found his first schooling; at the hand—a tradition runs—of that master who served as the original for his picture of Parson Trulliber: if this indeed be so, never were school-master severities so permanently punished. After this came Eton, where he was fellow of Lord Lyttleton, who befriended him later, and of William Pitt (the elder), and of Fox—the rattle-brain father of Charles James. Then came two or more years of stay at the University of Leyden, from which he laid his course straight for the dramatic world of London; for his father, General Fielding, had a good many spendthrift habits, with which he had inoculated the son. There was need for that son to work his own way; and the way he favored was by the green-room, where the sparkle of such lively elderly ladies as Mrs. Oldcastle and Mrs. Bracegirdle had not yet wholly gone out.

He wrote play upon play with nervous English, and pretty surprises in them; but not notable for any results, whether of money-making or of moral-mending. He also had his experiences as {70}
stage manager; and between two of his plays (1735 or thereabout) married a pretty girl down in Salisbury; and with her dot, and a small country place inherited from his mother, set up as country gentleman, on the north border of Dorsetshire, determined to cut a new and larger figure in life—free from the mephitic airs of Drury Lane. There were stories—very likely apocryphal—that he ordered extravagant liveries; it is more certain that he gave himself freely, for a time, to hounds, horses, and friends. Of course such a country symposium devoured both his own and his wife's capital; and we find him very shortly back in London, buckling down to law study; very probably showing there or thereabout the "inked ruffles and the wet towel round his head," which appear in the charming retrospective glasses of Thackeray.[10]

But times are hard with him; those fast years of green-room life have told upon him; the "wet {71}
towels" round the head are in demand; some of his later plays are condemned by the Lord Chancellor;[11] in 1742, however, he makes that lunge at the sentimentalism of Richardson which, in the shape of *Joseph Andrews*, gives him a trumpeting success. It encourages him to print two or three volumes of miscellanies. But shadows follow him; a year later, his wife dies in his arms; Lady Wortley Montagu (who was a cousin) tells us this; and tells us how other cousins were scandalized because, a few years afterward, the novelist, with an effusive generosity that was characteristic of him, married his maid, who had lamented her mistress so sincerely, and was tenderly attached to his children. At about the same period he accepted office as Justice of the Peace—thereby still further disgruntling his aristocratic Denbigh cousins. But the quick-coming volumes of *Tom Jones* and their wonderful acclaim cleared the space around him; he had room to breathe and to play the magistrate; it is Henry Fielding, Esq., now,—of Bow Street, Covent {72}
Garden. *Amelia* followed, for which he received £1,000; and we hear of a new home out in the pleasant country, by Baling, north of Brentford, and the Kew Gardens.

Finally on a June day of 1754 we see him leaving this home; "at twelve precisely," he says in his last Journal, "my coach was at the door, which I was no sooner told than I kissed my children all around, and went into it with some little resolution." There needed resolution; for he was an utterly broken-down man, the pace of his wild, young days telling now fearfully, and he bound away for a voyage to the sunny climate of Portugal—to try if this would stay the end.

But it does not; in October of the same year he died in Lisbon; and there his body rests in the pretty Cemetery of the Cypresses, where all visitors who love the triumphs of English letters go to see his tomb, among the myrtles and the geraniums. If he had only lived to pluck away some of those grosser stains which defile the pages where the characters of an Allworthy and of a Parson Adams will shine forever!

Poet of the Seasons. {73}

It was just about the opening of the second quarter of the eighteenth century—when Fielding was fresh from Eton, fifteen years before *Pamela* had appeared and while George II. was in waiting for the slipping off of Father George at Osnaburg—that a stout Scotch poet found his way to London to try a new style of verses with the public which was still worshipping at the shrine of Mr. Pope. This was the poet of *The Seasons*,[12] whose boyhood had been passed and enriched in that bight of the beautiful Tweed valley which lies between Coldstream and the tall mass of Kelso's ruin,—with Melrose and Smailhome Tower and Ettrickdale not far away, and the Lammermuir hills glowering in the north. He had studied theology in Edinboro', till some iris-hued version of a psalm (which he had wrought) brought the warning from some grim orthodox
friend—that a good Dominie should rein up his imagination. So he set his face southward, with {74}

the crystal scenery of a winter on Tweed-side sparkling in his thought. He lived humbly in London, for best of reasons, near to Charing Cross; but by the aid of Northern friends, brought his *Winter* to book, in the spring of 1726.

It delighted everybody; the tric-trac of Pope was lacking, and so was the master's arrant polish; but the change brought its own blithe welcome.

We will try a little touch from this first poem of his which he brought in his satchel, on the boy journey to London:—

"Thro' the hushed air the whitening shower descends,
At first, thin, wavering, till at last the flakes
Fall broad and wide and fast, dimming the day
With a continual flow....

Low, the woods
Bow their hoar heads; and ere the languid sun
Faint from the west emits his evening ray,
Earth's universal face, deep hid and chill,
Is one wide dazzling waste.

The fowls of heaven,
Tamed by the cruel season, crowd around
The winnowing stone....

One alone, {75}
The red-breast, sacred to the household gods,
Wisely regardful of the embroiling sky
In joyless fields and thorny thickets, leaves
His shivering mates.

Half afraid, he first
Against the window beats; then, brisk, alights
On the warm hearth; then hopping o'er the floor
Eyes all the smiling family askance
And pecks, and starts, and wonders where he is."

That robin red-breast has hopped over a great many floors in his time; and now after a hundred and sixty years he comes brisk as ever out of that Winter poem of Thomson's. This Scotch poet is wordy; he draws long breaths; he is sometimes tiresome; but you will catch good honest glimpses of the country in his verse without going there—not true to our American seasons in detail, but always true to Nature. The sun never rises in the west in his poems; the jonquils and the daisies are not confounded; the roses never forget to blush as roses should; the oaks are sturdy; the hazels are lithe; the brooks murmur; the torrents roar a song; the winds carry waves across the grain-fields; the clouds plant shadows on the mountains.

Thomson was befriended by Pope, who kindly made corrections in the first draught of some {76}
of his poems; and that you may see together the wordy ways of these two poets I give a sample of Pope's mending.

Thomson wrote—speaking of a gleaning girl:—

"Thoughtless of Beauty, she was beauty's self
Recluse among the woods; if city dames
Will deign their faith; and thus she went, compelled
By strong necessity, with as serene
And pleased a look as Patience ere put on,
To glean Palemon's fields."

And this is the way in which Pope does the mending:—

"Thoughtless of Beauty, she was beauty's self
Recluse among the close embowering woods.
As in the hollow breast of Apennine,
Beneath the shelter of encircling hills,
A myrtle rises far from human eyes,
And breathes its balmy fragrance o'er the wild;
So flourished, blooming, and unseen by all,
The sweet Lavinia; till at length compelled
By strong necessity's supreme command,
With smiling patience in her looks, she went
To glean Palemon's fields."

There are more words, but the words gleam! Pope is the master, yet mastered by rules; Thomson less a master, but free from bonds. {77}

He tried play-writing, in those days when Fielding was just beginning in the same line, but it was not a success. After a year or two of travel upon the Continent, on some tutoring business, he published an ambitious poem (1734-1736) entitled *Liberty*—never a favorite. He had made friends, however, about the Court; and he pleasantly contrived to possess himself of some of those pensioned places, which fed unduly his natural indolence. But all will forgive him this vice, who have read his fine poem of the *Castle of Indolence* in Spenserian verse. It was his last work—perhaps his best, and first published in 1748, the year of his death.

One stanza from it I must quote; and shall never forget my first hearing of it, in tremulous utterance, from the lips of the venerable John Quincy Adams, after he had bid adieu (as he thought) to public life and was addressing[13] a large assemblage in the university town of New {78}
Haven:

> "I care not, Fortune, what you me deny!
> You cannot rob me of free Nature's grace,
> You cannot shut the windows of the sky
> Through which Aurora shows her brightening face;
> You cannot bar my constant feet to trace
> The woods and lawns by living streams at eve;
> Let health my nerves and finer fibres brace
> And I their toys to the great children leave,
> Of fancy, reason, virtue, nought can me bereave."

Most readers will think kindly and well of this poet; and if you love the country, you will think yet more kindly of him; and on summer afternoons, when cool breezes blow in at your windows and set all the leaves astir over your head, his muse—if you have made her acquaintance—will coo to you from among the branches: but you will never and nowhere find in him the precision, the vigor, the point, the polish, we found in Pope; and which you may find, too, in the fine parcel-work done by Thomas Gray, who was a contemporary of Thomson's, but younger by some fifteen {79}
years.

Thomas Gray.

You will know of that first poem of his—*Ode to Eton College*; at least you know its terminal lines, which are cited on all the high-roads:—

> "Where ignorance is bliss
> 'Tis folly to be wise!"

All the world knows, too, his *Elegy*, on which his fame principally rests. Its melancholy music gets somehow stamped on the brain of nearly all of us, and lends a poetic halo to every old graveyard that has the shadow of a church tower slanted over it.

Gray[14] was, like Milton, a London boy—born on Cornhill under the shadow almost of St. Paul's. The father was a cross-grained man, living apart from Mrs. Gray, who, it is said, by the gains of some haberdashery traffic which she set up in Cornhill, sent her boy to Eton and to {80}
Cambridge. At Eton he came to know Horace Walpole, travelled with him over Europe, after leaving Cambridge, until they quarrelled and each took his own path. That quarrel, however, was mended somewhat later and Walpole became as good a friend to Gray as he could be to anybody—except Mr. Walpole.

The poet, after his father's death, undertook, in a languid way, the study of law; but finally landed again in Cambridge, and was a dilettanteish student there nearly all his days, being made a Professor of History at last; but not getting fairly into harness before the gout laid hold of him and killed him. Probably no man in English literature has so large a reputation for so little work. Gibbon regretted that he should not have completed his philosophic poem on education and government; Dr. Johnson, who spoke halting praise of his poems, thought he would have made admirable books of travel; Cowper says, "I once thought Swift's letters the best that could be written, but I like Gray's better."

The truth is, he was a fastidious, scholarly man, whose over-nicety of taste was always in the {81}
way of large accomplishment. He was content to do nothing, except he did something in the best possible way. He so cherished refinements that refinements choked his impulses.

A great stickler he was, too, for social refinements—distinctions, preferments, and clap-trap—wanting his courtesies, of which he was as chary as of his poems, to have the last stamp of gentility; thus running into affectations of decorum, which, one time, made him the butt of practical jokers at his college. Some lovers of fun there sounded an alarm of fire for the sake of seeing the elegant Mr. Gray (not then grown famous, to be sure) slipping down a rope-ladder in undress, out of his window; which he did do, but presently changed his college in dudgeon. He had, moreover, a great deal of Walpole's affected contempt for authorship—wanted rather to be counted an elegant gentleman who only played with letters. He writes to his friend that the proprietors of a magazine were about to print his Elegy, and says:—

> "I have but one bad way to escape the honor they would inflict upon me, and therefore desire you would make Dodsley print it immediately, without my name, but on {82}
> his best paper and type. *If he would add a line to say it came into his hands by accident, I should like it better*."

I think he caught this starched folly (if it were folly) from Walpole. I have heard of over-elegant people in our day with the same affectation; but, as a rule, they do not write poems so good as the *Elegy*.

Gray died, after that quiet life of his, far down in the days of George III., 1771, leaving little work done, but a very great name. He was buried, as was fitting, beside his mother, in that churchyard at Stoke, out of which the Elegy grew. And if you ever have a half day to spare in London, it is worth your while to go out to Slough (twenty miles by the Great Western road), and thence, two miles of delicious walk among shady lanes and wanton hedges, to where Stoke-Pogis Church, curiously hung over with ivy, rises amongst the graves; and if sentimentally disposed, you may linger there, till the evening shadows fall, and repeat to yourself (or anybody you like)—

> "The curfew tolls the knell of parting day,
> The lowing herd winds slowly o'er the lea.
> The ploughman homeward plods his weary way
> And leaves the world to darkness and to me."

A Courtier. {83}

I have spoken of the association of Walpole with Gray; it was not an intimate one after the two had outgrown their youth-age; indeed Walpole's association with nobody was intimate; nor was he a man whose literary reputation ever was, or ever can be great. He was son[15] of that famous British Minister of State, Sir Robert Walpole, who for many long years held the fate of England in his hand. But his son Horace cared little for politics. He was unmarried, and kept so always; had money in plenty (coming largely from Government sinecures) and a fat place at Twickenham—called Strawberry Hill; which by his vagaries in architecture and his enormous collection of bric-à-brac, he made the show place of all that region. He established a private press
at this country home, and printed, among a multitude of other books, a catalogue of royal and {84}
noble authors—not reckoning others so worthy of his regard; indeed, he had a well-bred contempt for ordinary literary avocations; but he wrote and published (privately at first) a romance called *The Castle of Otranto*.[16] It was "a slight thing," he told his friends, which he had dashed off in an idle hour, and which he "had not put his name to; but which succeeded so well that he did not any longer entirely keep the secret." It is a tale, quite ingenious, of mingled mystery and chivalry; there are castles in it, and huge helmets, that only giants could wear; and there are dungeons, and forlorn maidens; ghosts, and sighing lovers; mysterious sounds, and pictures that come out of their frames and walk about in the moonlight—it is a pattern book to read at night in an old country house which has long corridors and deserted rooms, where the bats fly in and out, and the doors clang and clash.

But this strange creature, Horace Walpole, is known best of all by his letters[17]—nine solid {85}
volumes of them, big octavo—covering nearly the whole of his life and addressed to a half score or so of men and women on all possible topics except any serious one; and all made ready, with curious care, for publication when his death should come. On that one point he did have serious belief—he believed he should die. This great budget of his letters is one of the most extraordinary products—if we may call it so—of literature. It is hard to say what is not touched upon in them; if he is robbed, you hear how a voice out of the night said "stop"—how he slipped his watch under his waistband—how he gave up his purse with nine guineas in it—how Lady Browne was frightened and gave up *her* watch; if the king has gout in his toe you hear of that; if he goes to the palace he tells you who was in the ante-room and how two fellows were sweeping the floor, dancing about in sabots; how the Duc of Richelieu was pale except his nose, "which is red and
wrinkled." Great hoops with brocade dresses come sailing into his letters; so do all the scandals {86}
about my lady *this*, or the duchess *that*; so do the votes in Parliament and reports about the last battle, if a war is in progress; and the French news, and new things at Strawberry Hill—over and over. And he does not think much of Gibbon, and does not think much of Dr. Johnson—who "has no judgment and no taste;" and why doesn't his friend Mason[18] (a third-rate poet) "show up the doctor and make an end of him?"—which is much like saying that Mr. Wardle's fat boy should make an end of Mr. Pickwick.

Yet do not think there is no art in all this, and that you would not like them: there is art of the highest gossipy kind; and I can readily understand how his correspondents all relished immensely his letters whenever they came. There is humor and sparkle, and there are delicate touches; he
approaches his lighter topics as a humming-bird approaches flowers—a swift dart at them—a {87}

sniff, a whirl of wings, and away again.

Then he has that rare literary instinct of knowing just what each correspondent would like best to hear of—that's the secret of writing letters that will be welcome. You cannot interchange his letters. He tickles Lady Ossory's ear with sheerest gossip, and Lady Suffolk with talk of dress and of the last great Paris ball, and the poet Mason with bookish platitudes, and Conway with the leakings of political talk, and Cole with twaddle on art or science. You want to turn your back on him again and again for his arrant snobbish pretensions or some weak and violent prejudice; yet you want to listen again and again. It is such a pretty, lively, brisk, frolicsome, *pétillant* small-beerish talk, that engages and does not fatigue, and piques appetite yet feeds you with nothings.

He grew old there in his *gim-crack* of a palace, cultivating his flowers and his complexion; tiptoeing while he could over his waxed floors in lavender suit, with embroidered waistcoat and "partridge silk stockings," with *chapeau bas* held before him—very reverent to any visitor of {88}
distinction—and afterward (he lived almost into this century), when gout seizes him, I seem to see still—as once before[19]—the fastidious old man shuffling up and down from drawing-room to library—stopping here and there to admire some newly arrived bit of pottery—pulling out his golden snuff-box and whisking a delicate pinch into his old nostrils—then dusting his affluent shirt-frills with the tips of his dainty fingers, with an air of gratitude to Providence for having created so fine a gentleman as Horace Walpole, and of gratitude to Horace Walpole for having created so fine a place as Strawberry Hill.

Young Mr. Johnson.

And now what a different man we come upon, living just abreast of him in that rich English century and that beautiful English country! We go into Staffordshire and to the old town of Lichfield, to find the boy who afterward became the great lexicographer[20] and the great talker.
The house in which he was born is there upon a corner of the great broadened street, opposite {89}
St. Mary's Church. We get a pleasant glimpse of the house on a page of *Our Old Home*, by Hawthorne; and another glimpse of the colossal figure of Dr. Johnson, seated in his marble chair, upon that Lichfield market-place.

His father was a bookseller; held, too, some small magistracy; was eminently respectable; loved books as well as sold them, and had a corresponding inaptitude for business. The son added to indifferent schooling, here and there, a habit of large browsing along his father's shelves; was a great, ungainly lout of a boy, but marvellously quick-witted. With some help from his father, and some from friends, and with a reputation for making verses, and tastes ranging above bookstalls, he entered at Oxford when nineteen; but the stings of poverty smote him there early; {90}
and after three years of irregular attendance, he left—only to find his father lapsing into bankruptcy and a fatal illness. On the settlement of the old bookseller's estate, £20 only was the portion of the son. Then follow some dreary years; he is hypochondriac and fears madness; he is under-teacher in a school; he offers to do job-work for the book-makers; he translates the narrative of a Portuguese missionary about Abyssinia; he ponders over a tragedy of *Irene*. Not much good comes of all this, when—on a sudden, our hero, who is now twenty-six, marries a widow—who admired his talents—who is twenty years his senior and has £800. Johnson was not a person to regard closely such little discrepancies as that difference in age—nor she, I suppose.

The bride is represented as not over-comely, and as one—of good judgment in most matters—who resorted to some vulgar appliances for making the most of her "good looks." Lord Macaulay[21] uses a very rampant rhetoric in his encyclopædic mention of the paint she put upon {91}
her cheeks. With the aid of her £800, Johnson determined to set up a boarding-school for young gentlemen; a gaunt country-house three miles out of Lichfield was rented and equipped and advertised; but the young gentlemen did not come.

How could they be won that way? The mistress frowsy, simpering, ancient, painted, and becurled; and Mr. Johnson, gaunt, clumsy, squinting—one side of his face badly scarred with some early surgical cut; one eye involved and drooping, and a twitchy St. Vitus's dance making all uglier. What boy would not dread a possible whipping from such a master, and what mamma would not tremble for her boy? Yet I do not believe he ever whipped hard, when he had occasion; he was kind-hearted; but his scolds at a false syntax must have been terrific and have made the floors shiver.

Among the boys who did venture to that Edial school was one David Garrick, whose father had been a friend of the elder Johnson; and when the school broke up—as it did presently—
Johnson and David Garrick set out together for London, to seek their fortune—carrying letters to {92}
some booksellers there; and Johnson carrying that half-written tragedy of *Irene* in his pocket. Garrick's rise began early, and was brilliant, but of this we cannot speak now. Johnson knocked about those London streets—translating a little, jobbing at books a little, starving and scrimping a great deal. He fell in early with a certain Richard Savage,[22] a wild, clever, disorderly poet, as hard pinched as Johnson. According to his story, he was the son of the Countess Macclesfield, but disowned by her—he only coming to knowledge of his parentage through accident, when he was grown to manhood. Johnson tells the pathetic tale of how Savage paced up and down, at night, in sight of his mother's palatial windows, gazing grief-smitten at them, and yearning for the maternal recognition, which the heartless, dishonored woman refused. So, this castaway runs to

drink and all deviltries; Johnson staying him much as he can—walking with him up and down through London streets till midnight—talking poetry, philosophy, religion; hungry both of them, and many a time with only ten pence between them. {93}

Well, at last, Savage kills his man in a tavern broil; would have been hung—the mother countess (as the story runs) hoping it would be so; but he escapes, largely through the influence of that Queen Caroline, to whom Jeanie Deans makes her eloquent plea in Scott's ever-famous novel of *The Heart of Mid-Lothian*. Savage escapes, but 'tis only to go to other bad ways, and at last he died in a Bristol jail.

All this offered material for a pathetic story, and Johnson made the most of it in his *Life of Savage*—afterward incorporated in his *Lives of the Poets*, but first published in 1744, about seven years after his coming to London. The book appeared anonymously; but its qualities gave it great vogue; and its essential averments formed the basis of all biographic and encyclopædic[23] notices for nearly a century thereafter.

But was the story true? There were those who doubted at the time, and had an unpleasant sense that Johnson had been wheedled by an adventurer; but demonstration of the imposture of Savage did not come till the middle of the present century. The investigations of Moy Thomas[24] would go to show that the Savage friend of Johnson's early days in London was the most arrant of impostors; and that of all the shame that rests upon him, he can only justly be relieved of that which counts him a child of such a woman as the Countess of Macclesfield. I have dwelt upon the Savage episode, not alone because it provoked one of Johnson's best pieces of prose work, but because it shows how open were his sympathies to such tales of distress, and how quick he was to lift the rod of chastisement upon wrong-doers of whatever degree. {94}

In *London*, too, that imitative classic poem, there shone in a glitter of couplets (which provoked Pope's praises) the same righteous indignation, and the stings—pricking through all his big Staffordshire bulk—of supperless-days and of shortened means:— {95}

"By numbers here from shame or censure free
All crimes are safe, but hated Poverty;
This, only this, the rigid Law pursues,
This, only this, provokes the snarling muse.

"The sober trader at a tattered cloak
Wakes from his dream, and labors for a joke;
With brisker air the silken courtiers gaze
And turn the varied taunt a thousand ways."

Better than this was that poem (*Vanity of Human Wishes*) in which, even now, some of us—admiringly—

"In full flown dignity see Wolsey stand,
Law in his voice, and fortune in his hand."

And the couplet leads on through Wolsey's story to the poet's coupleted sermon, with its savors of a church-bell—

"Still raise for good the supplicating voice,
But leave to Heaven the measure and the choice.
Safe in his power whose eye discerns afar
The secret ambush of a specious prayer;
Implore his aid, in his decisions rest,
Secure whate'er he gives, he gives the best.
*   *   *   *   *

Pour forth thy fervors for a healthful mind, {96}
Obedient passions, and a will resigned;
*   *   *   *   *
For faith, that, panting for a happier seat,
Counts death kind nature's signal of retreat."

We must note also that famous Prologue, spoken at Drury Lane in 1747, when the theatre came first under control of his old friend, Garrick. Never had the stage, before nor since, a nobler summons in worthier verse: it closes—

"Then prompt no more the follies you decry,
As Tyrants doom their tools of guilt to die:
'Tis yours, this night, to bid the reign commence
Of rescued Nature and reviving Sense:
To chase the charms of Sound, the pomp of Show,
For useful Mirth and salutary Woe:

Bid scenic Virtue form the rising age
And Truth diffuse her radiance from the Stage."

Garrick must have been proud to act under such banner of song as that. The tragedy of *Irene* came to its first representation a short time afterward; and surely it would have been worth one's while to see the stout, awkward gerund-grinder of forty, slipping into a side-box, or even behind {97} the scenes "in a scarlet waistcoat, with rich gold lace and a gold-laced hat!" The play, however, did not prove a great success either then or thereafter. The Dictionary, for which proposals had already been issued, promised better things. That Dictionary did ultimately give him a great lift—as it has to a good many, since. The ponderous volume furnished very many New England households seventy years ago; and I can remember sitting upon it, in my child-days, to bring my head properly above the level of the table. An immense and long-continued toil went to the Dictionary. Lord Chesterfield,[25] the finished orator and the elegant man—not unwilling to have so great a work bear his name—called attention to the book and the author, when nearly ready; but Johnson was too sore with hope deferred to catch that bait; he writes an indignant letter (not {98} published until 1790) to the elegant Chesterfield:—

> "Seven years have now passed, my Lord, since I waited in your outward-rooms, or was repulsed from your door—during which time I have been pushing on my work, thro' difficulties of which it is useless to complain, and have brought it at last to the verge of publication without one act of assistance, one word of encouragement, or one smile of favor.... The notice which you have been pleased to take of my labors—had it been early—had been kind; but it has been delayed till I am indifferent and cannot enjoy it; till I am solitary [his wife dead now] and cannot impart it, till I am known and do not want it."

This does not show the stuff which went to the making of such a man as Walpole!

The *Rambler*, too, it must be remembered, is making its periodic visits in those early days of the Dictionary toil. Heavy it is, like the master; and his prejudices as arrant Churchman and sturdy Tory do indeed break through its piled-up pages; but never insidiously: he sounds a trumpet before he strikes. Perhaps a little over-fond of trumpeting; loving so much his long sonorous roll of Ciceronian vocables.

But I have not the same dislike of long Johnsonian periods that a good many people have— {99} provided always there is a Johnson to utter them. They belong to *him*; they match with their wordy convolutions his great billowy make of mind; and short, sharp sentences would be as incongruous as a little spurting *jet d'eau* where great waves come rocking on the beach.

In fact, I have a large unbelief in much of current pedagogic talk about style, and "getting a good style," and "reforming style," and "Saxon style," and so on. To be thoroughly possessed of one's own thought, and then to tell it, in the clearest possible way, is the best law I know for a good style; and a proper following of it will give to every mind that has any color of its own a style of its own. To putter about the rhetorics in search of fine phrases to wrap your thoughts in, is like going in masquerade; furbish it as you will, people will see the smear of old wear in the tinsel trappings, and smell it too.

If short, homely Saxon will serve one's purpose best in giving sharp, shrewd expression to thought, as most times it will, use Saxon; but if a Latin derivation will hit the very shade of your thinking more aptly, do not affect to scorn the Latin. Even if a French word—provided always it {100} be at once and easily comprehensible by all whom you address—shall touch the very eye of your purpose better than another, do not scruple to use it.

But we must ask pardon for this intrusion of small school-mastery talk, while the great master of the Dictionary and of the *Rambler* waits. As yet we have followed him through only half of his career; a stalwart man, still in the full prime of his years; and I see grouping about him at the Turk's Head many another whom we wish to follow; a Boswell and a Burke; Reynolds and Beauclerk and Goldsmith—these all are in waiting. But for a fuller and nearer view of these old club-men of more than a century ago, we open upon another chapter of these *Lands and Letters*.

[1] Whoso would take measure, of his scholarly thoroughness, his reach, his pertinacity, and his capacity for striking sharp blows, should struggle through his *Dissertation on Phalaris*.

[2] Swift, Addison, Steele, Gay, *et al.*, in preceding volume of *Lands, Letters, and Kings* ("Elizabeth to Anne")

[3] He lived for many years in the *Palazzo Muti* near to the church of the *SS. Apostoli*, in Rome; his disorderly life there made it a *Regio Palazzo*!

[4] *Lands and Letters*: "From Elizabeth to Anne," p. 100.

[5] *Lands and Letters*: "Elizabeth to Anne."

[6] This is one contemporary account of it—adopted by Thackeray; but Wraxall (1st vol., pp. 384-385 American reprint, Lea & Blanchard) says that the Duke of Dorset was commissioned to carry the news; but some little time being required to make himself ready, the Duchess was sent in advance. She arrived at Kew (where the Prince was staying) just as that Prince had gone to bed, as was his wont, after dinner. The Princess undertook the announcement—though demurring at the duty, and anticipating a brutal reception for one who should disturb his after-dinner nap; he was in a huff and *did* make the comment, noted in the text; but it was not (says Wraxall) to a messenger in jack-boots, but to the Princess of Wales herself.

[7] Richardson: b. 1689; d. 1761. Various editions of his works. Known quite generally to buyers of cheap books in our day by an abbreviated issue of *Clarissa Harlowe* (Routledge & Sons).

[8] Henry Fielding: b. 1707; d. 1754. Editions of his works have been edited by Arthur Murphy, William Roscoe, and Leslie Stephen; (10 vols., 1882-1883.) Life by Sir Walter Scott in Ballantyne Library; more trustworthy one is that by Austin Dobson.

[9] It is perhaps to be doubted if the bare-faced coarsenesses of Fielding (much as they are to be condemned) would provoke pruriency so much as the sentimental and sensuous languors of Richardson.

[10] *History of Pendennis*, Household Ed., Boston: Chap. xxix.

[11] It was in virtue of some altercations growing out of Fielding's plays that British censorship was established in 1737, and (perhaps) Fielding thereby diverted to the study of Law.

[12] James Thomson, b. 1700; d. 1748. Various editions of his poems; a very elegant one, illustrated by the Etching Club, published 1842-62.

[13] *The Jubilee of the Constitution*, a discourse delivered by request of the New York Historical Society, April 30, 1839, and repeated shortly after in the old "Ludlow" Church, (now "Dime Theatre"), in Church Street, New Haven.

[14] Thomas Gray, b. 1716; d. 1771. See Gosse's recent biography for critical as well as sympathetic account of his life and writings. See also Mitford's edition of his works, with life, London, 1836.

[15] Horace Walpole, b. 1717; d. 1785. The enumeration of his books, pamphlets, and of titles relating thereto fill a dozen columns of *Lowndes*. His letters give best measurement of the man.

[16] It purported to be a translation from the Italian of Onuphrio Muralto.

[17] Peter Cunningham Edition. London, 1857-1859. See also *Horace Walpole and His World*, by L. B. Seeley. 1884.

[18] Rev. William Mason, b. 1725; d. 1797; author of *The English Garden*, published at intervals (its successive books) between 1772 and 1782. It has little merit—Walpole to the contrary.

[19] *Wet Days at Edgewood*, p. 239.

[20] Samuel Johnson, b. 1709; d. 1784. Boswell's the standard life of him, and Birkbeck Hill's the best edition of that life. We miss in it, indeed, some of the "Croker" notes, which made such inviting quarry for the sharp huntsmanship of Macaulay. But the editing is done with a love and a tirelessness which are as winning as they are rare. See, also, Leslie Stephen's sketch—which is the best short life.

[21] *Ency. Britannica*; Art. Johnson.

[22] B. 1698; d. 1743. Poet and dramatist. Collected edit. of his writings published in 1775. His largest claim to distinction is due to the *Life of Richard Savage*, by Samuel Johnson; first published 1744.

[23] *Vide* old edition of *Ency. Britannica*, also Strahan's *Biographical Dictionary* of 1784; *Biographie Universelle, et al.*

[24] See *Notes and Queries*, November and December, 1858.

[25] Philip Dormer Stanhope (Earl of Chesterfield), b. 1694; d. 1773, best known by his *Letters to His Son*, first published in 1774. Johnson said they taught "the morals of a courtesan, and the manners of a dancing-master." This was perhaps over-severe. People who do not love to disport in fashionable waters are apt to be severe upon those who spend their faculties upon the coquetries of bathing costume.

CHAPTER III. {101}

It was a little after the middle of the last century that our story opens again. George II., whose virtues and vices were clock-like in their regularities, was on the throne; Queen Caroline, whom he had always abused and always venerated, was in her grave for twelve or more years past. Outside politics were ripening for that French and English war—in which a Montcalm and a Wolfe figured upon our side the water, and which has been put in picturesque array by Francis Parkman; the geraniums and oleanders were blossoming over the Portuguese grave of Harry Fielding; Thomson had sung his last notes in his *Castle of Indolence* and was laid to rest—not in

Kelso, or Dryburgh, where his body should have mouldered—but in a little Richmond Church, within gunshot of the "Star and Garter." Gray was still studying the scholarly measures of the *Bard*, in his beloved Cambridge; Horace Walpole playing the *élégant* was fattening on his revenues at Strawberry Hill; while Dr. Johnson—notwithstanding the Dictionary and the *Rambler* —had been latterly (1756) in such sore straits as to appeal to his friend Richardson for the loan of a few guineas to save him from jail; and Richardson, fresh then in his triumphs from *Clarissa Harlowe* and the great *Grandison*, was not slow to grant the request,[1] and to enjoy all the more his Kingship among the women, in his great house out at Hammersmith. {102}

London streets.

A sharp walk of a quarter of an hour from St. Paul's would, in that time, take one into the green fields that lay in Islington; and beyond, upon the Waltham road, were the hedges, pikes, and quiet paddocks, through which went galloping—at a little later day—that citizen of "credit and renown," John Gilpin, instead of the clattering suburbs that now stretch nearly all the way between Cheapside and the "Bell" at Edmonton.

Of the many bridges which now span the Thames, only two[2] representatives were in existence; the old Westminster was there in its first freshness, and ferrymen quarrelling with it, because it spoiled their carrying trade to Vauxhall and parts adjacent; and the old London Bridge was cumbered by lumbering houses, held up by trusses and cross-beams, while its openings were so low and its piers so many as to make, at certain stages of the tide, furious cascades which drove great wheels geared to cumbrous pumping machinery, to throw up water for the behoof of London citizens. The old Fleet Prison was in existence, and its smudgy stifling air hung over all that low region above which now leap the great arches of the Holborn Viaduct; and round the corner, in the reek and smoke of Fleet Street, half way between the spire of St. Bride's and the spire of St. Clement's Danes—up a grimy court that is, very likely, just as grimy to-day, lived that Leviathan of a man, Dr. Samuel Johnson. {103}

Johnson and Rasselas. {104}

Rasselas.

He had passed through his green days, and the nights when he strolled supperless about London with that poor wretch of a poet Richard Savage. The school at Edial with its three pupils was well behind him; so was the dining behind the screen at Cave's (the bookseller who presided over the *Gentleman's Magazine*, with St. John's Gate on the cover then, and on the cover now): so was his age of sentiment ended.

His wife Tetty had gone the way of all flesh (1752) and he had mourned her truly: in proof of this may be counted the presence under his roof of a certain old lady, Miss Williams, who is peevish, who is tempestuous, who is blind, who tests the tea with her fingers, who *will* talk, and then again, she *won't* talk; yet Johnson befriends her, pensions her—when he has money,—sends home sweetbreads from the tavern for her; and when his friends ask why he tolerates this vixen, he gives the soundest reason that he has—"she was a friend of Tetty; she was with poor Tetty when she died!" {105}

And his brain was as big, or bigger, than his heart; it had made itself felt all over England by long, honest work—by brave, loud speech. He had snubbed the elegant Lord Chesterfield, who would have liked to see his name upon the first page of the great Dictionary. Not an outcast of the neighborhood but had heard of his audacious kindness; not a linkboy but knew him by the chink of his half-pence; not a beggar but had been bettered by his generous dole; not a watchman but knew him by his unwieldy hulk, and his awkward, intrepid walk; and we know him—if we know him at all—not by his *Rambler* and his *Rasselas*, so much as by the story of his life. Who rates *Rasselas* among his or her cherished books of fiction?

What an unlikely, and what a ponderous beginning it has!

> "Ye who listen with credulity to the whispers of fancy and pursue with eagerness the phantoms of hope; who expect that age will perform the promises of youth, and that the deficiencies of the present day will be supplied by the morrow, attend to the history of Rasselas, Prince of Abyssinia!"

When, in days long past, I have read thus far in this elephantine novelette to my children, they were pretty apt to explode upon me with—"Please try something else!" Yet this elephantine novelette has a host of excellent and eloquent moral reflections in it, shouldering and elbowing themselves out from its flimsy dress of fiction. Shall I give a hint of the scheme of this old story? An Abyssinian prince living in the middle of a happy valley, walled in by mountains that are beautiful, and watered by rivers that are musical, in the enjoyment of all luxuries, does at last become restless—as so many people do—not so much from a want, as from the want of a want. So he conspires with Imlac, a poet, to escape from the thraldom of complete ease: a sister of the prince and her handmaid steal away with them; and with plenty of jewels the party enter upon their exploration of the ways of outside life. They encounter hermits whose solitude does not cure their pains, and shepherds whose simplicities do not conquer misfortune, and philosophers whose {106} philosophy does not relieve their anxieties, and scholars whose learning does not make them happy.

Imlac, the poet, sums up their findings in saying—"You will rarely meet one who does not think the lot of his neighbor better than his own." This is its whole philosophy. There are interlarded discourses upon learning, and marriage, and death, and riches, which might have been cut from a *Rambler* or from a sermon. They travel through upper Egypt, and sojourn in the grand Cairo; but there is no shimmer of the desert, and no flash of crescent or scimitar, and no dreamy orientalism; its Eastern sages talk as if they might have thundered their ponderous sentences from the pulpit of St. Bride's. As a finality—if the tale can be said to have any finality—the princess thinks she would like—of all things—Knowledge: the poor handmaid, who has had her little adventure, by being captured by a Bedouin chief, thinks she would like best a convent on some oasis in the desert; while the prince would like a miniature kingdom whose rule he might administer with justice as easily as one might wind a watch; but all agree that, when the Nile flood favors, they will go contentedly back to the happy valley from which they set out upon their wanderings. It is interesting to know that the story was written by Dr. Johnson on the evenings of a single week; and written—before he had come to his pension[3]—to defray the expenses of his mother's funeral; and it is interesting further to know that the magniloquent tale did forge its way into the front rank of readers at a time when *Roderick Random* and *Tom Jones* were comparatively fresh books, and only five years after Mr. Richardson had issued from his book-shop under the shadows of St. Bride's, hardly a gunshot away from the house of Johnson, the voluminous history of *Sir Charles Grandison*. {107} {108}

The Painter and the Club.

Sir Joshua Reynolds.

Among the friends the Doctor made in those days of *Ramblers* and *Idlers* was one Joshua Reynolds,[4] some fourteen years the junior of the Doctor, but sedate and thoughtful beyond his age; with an eye, too, for the beautiful faces of young English girls which had never been opened on them before; and doing artist work that is quite different in quality and motive from that of the old stand-by Mr. Hogarth, who not long before this time had been preaching his painted sermons of the *Rake's Progress*. {109}

Reynolds had made his trip to Italy, and had brought back from Rome, in addition to his studies of Raphael—an affection of the ear—caught, as he always said, in the draughty corridors of the Vatican, which obliged him ever after to carry an ear-trumpet; but his courtesy and grace and precision of speech made the awkwardness forgotten. Looking at the exquisite child's face of his little Penelope Boothby, expressing all that was most winning in girlhood for him who was so reverent of exterior graces, and looking from this to the leathern, seamy face of Johnson, and his unlaundered linen, and snuffy frills (when he wore any), and it is hard to understand the intimacy of these two men; but there was a tenderness of soul under the Doctor's slouchy ways which the keen painter recognized; and in the painter there was a resolute intellection, which Johnson was not slow to detect, and which presently—when the new Royal Academy was founded by George III.—was to have expression in the great painter's discourses on Art—discourses which for their courageous common-sense will, I think, outrank much of the art-writing of to-day. {110}

Turks-Head Club.

In 1760 (the year after *Rasselas* appeared) Reynolds moved into a fine house, for that day, in Leicester Square—a quarter now given over mostly to French lodgers; but in its neighborhood one may find a marble bust of the eminent painter; and the house where he gave great steaming dinners—famous for their profusion and disorderly array—is still there, though given over to small artists and sellers of bric-à-brac. His good sister, Miss Fanny, who was his housekeeper, loved painting and poetry, and a drive in the painter's chariot, which he set up in later days, better than she loved housewifery. Over-shrewd ones said that Sir Joshua (the title came to him a few years after with the presidency of the Royal Academy) did not marry because he had wholesome dread of a wife's extravagance; certain it is that he remained a bachelor all his life, and thereby was a fitting person to discuss with the widowed Johnson the formation of a club. The Doctor was always clubably disposed; so he caught at the idea of Sir Joshua, and thence sprung that society—called "The Literary Club" afterward, which held its sessions, first at the Turk's Head, in Gerrard Street, Soho Square—on Monday evenings at the start, and afterward on Fridays—numbering among its early members Johnson, Burke, Reynolds, Hawkins, Beauclerk, and Goldsmith. This famous club, though moving from place to place in the closing years of the last century, still preserved its identity; it took a new lease of life in the first quarter of the present century, and it still survives in a very quiet old age, holding its fortnightly meetings—rather sparingly attended, it is true—at Willis's Rooms, St. James's Street, in the west of London. Among recent members may be named Gladstone, Sir Frederick Leighton, Lord Salisbury, the Duke of Argyle, Tennyson, and Matthew Arnold.[5] {111}

Some Old Club-men. {112}

Edmund Burke.

Burke,[6] who was among the original nine members, was very much the junior of Johnson; but known to him as a sometime Irish student at law, who had written only a few years before two brilliant treatises; one on *Natural Society*, and the other on the *Sublime and Beautiful*.

Later he had done excellent historic work in connection with *Dodsley's Annual Register*; but he had not yet entered upon that sea of political turmoil over which he was to sweep in so grand a way and with such blaze of triumph. It is possible indeed that he was indebted to the associations of the club for some of the initiative steps toward that wonderful career whose outcome in Parliament, in the courts, and in pamphleteering, has become a component part of the literature of England. Burke, even at that early stage of his progress (his first speech was {113}
made in 1766) had all his vast resources at ready command; Johnson did not wish to meet him in debate without warning; true he was afraid of no mere eloquence; he was used to puncturing bloat of that sort; but Burke's most fiery speeches were beaded throughout with globules of thought, which must be grasped and squelched one by one, if mastery were sought. He was impetuous, too, and aggressive, but reverent of the superior age and reputation of the Doctor; and I daresay coyly avoided those American questions which later came to the front, and upon which they held views diametrically opposed. In after years it used to be said that Burke's speeches would empty the benches of the Commons—ye philosophized; and when not heated, spoke with a drawling utterance and a touch of Irish brogue flavoring his voice; indeed he talked so well he was never tired of talking; his sentences so swelled out under the amplitude of his illustrations and allusions that I think he came at last to take a pride in their very longitude, and trailed his gorgeous convolutions of speech with the delighted eagerness with which a fine {114}
woman trails her sheen of satins and velvets.

Topham Beauclerk.

Dr. Nugent, a physician of culture, father-in-law of Mr. Burke, was also one of the original members of the club—getting the preferment—as so many in all times do get preferment—simply because son-in-law, father-in-law, or nephew—to somebody else. Another noticeable member of the club was Topham Beauclerk, not by any means the man a casual observer would have taken for an associate of Johnson. He was courtly and elegant in bearing, a man of fashion, smiled upon by such as Lord Chesterfield and Horace Walpole, and who traced his descent back through the first Duke of St. Albans to Nell Gwynne and Charles the Second. He inherited by right, therefore, gayety and humor and wit, and rare histrionic power, and Satan-ry to match. Old Dr. Johnson fairly languished in his admiration of the way in which Topham Beauclerk could tell a story. "It costs me fearful pains," he was used to say; "but this fellow trips through with an airy grace that costs him nothing."

Beauclerk was proud of his membership, and brought his own share of wit, of general {115}
information, and of cheery *bonhomie* to the common reckoning. He married a certain well-known and much-admired Lady Diana Bolingbroke—a divorcée of two days' standing—and treated her shamefully; that being the proper thing for a fashionable man to do, who was emulous of the domestic virtues of George II. At his death, with a large jointure in hand, she had peace; and Burke said, with a humor that was uncommon to him: "It was really enlivening to behold her placed in that sweet house, released from all her cares: £1,000 per annum at her disposal, and her husband dead! It was pleasant, it was delightful, to see her enjoyment of the situation!" Beauclerk was too fine a fellow to think well of the domesticities; there was a good deal of the blood of Charles the Second in him. Over and over we come upon such—men of parts squandered in the small interchanges of fashionable life; perpetually saying slight, good things for a dinner-table; telling a story with rare gusto; the envy of heavy talkers who can never catch butterflies on the wing; looking down upon serious duty whether in art or letters; and so, leaving nothing {116}
behind them but a pretty and not always delicate perfume.

David Garrick.

Another of the clubmen was David Garrick—not one of the original nine, but voted in a few years after. Dr. Johnson does indeed give a characteristic growl when his name is proposed—"What do we want of play-actors?" but his good nature triumphs. Little Garrick was an old scholar of his at Edial; and though he has conquered all theatric arts and won all their prizes, he is still for him, "little Garrick." A taste for splendor and dress had always belonged to him. In his boy-days he had written to his father, who was stationed at Gibraltar, "I hope, Papa, you find velvet cheap there; for some one has given me a knee-buckle, and it would go capitally with velvet breeches. Amen, and so be it!"

That love for the buckles and the velvet clung to him. When Edial school broke up, he tramped with Johnson to London—the master with the poor tragedy of *Irene* in his pocket, and the boy with such gewgaws and pence as he could rake together. Perhaps, also, the tragic splendor of Shakespeare's verse shimmering mistily across his visions of the future, making his {117}
finger-ends tingle and his pulse beat high.

But a legacy of £1,000 comes to the Garrick lad presently, which he invests in a wine business, in company with his staid brother, Peter Garrick, who looks after affairs in Lichfield, and who is terribly disturbed when he hears that David is taking to theatric studies;—has acted parts even!

And Davy writes back relenting, and sorry to grieve them at home; but keeps at his parts. And Peter writes more and more disconsolately, lamenting this great reproach, and David writes pretty letters of fence, and the wine business leaks away, and Peter is in despair; and Davy sends remittances which are certainly not legitimate business dividends, thus propping up the sinking wine venture; and before Peter is reconciled, has become the hero of the London boards, with a bank credit that would buy all their ports and clarets twice over.

And this wonderful histrionic genius, probably unparalleled on the English stage before or since his day, so gay, so brisk—so witty betimes—so capable of a song or a fandango, brought life to the club. Nor was there lack in him of literary qualities; his prologues were of the best, and he {118}
had the charming art of listening provocatively when the great doctor expounded.

Mr. Boswell.

James Boswell.

Another early member of the club, whom I think we should have liked to see making his way with a very assured step into the Turk's Head, of a Monday or a Friday, was James Boswell, Esquire.[7] It is a household name now, and will remain so for years to come by reason of the extraordinary life which he wrote, of his master and patron, Dr. Johnson. Yet it was only a year or so before the formation of the club that this jaunty Scotch gentleman, son of a laird, and of vast assurance—having been a tuft-hunter from his youth—caught his first sight of the great Doctor, in the little shop of Davies the bookseller; and the great man had given a snubbing, then and there, to the pert, but always obsequious Boswell; the future biographer, however, digested excellently well provision of that {119}
sort, and I think the Doctor had always a tenderness for those who took his flagellations without complaint. Certain it is that there grew up thereafter an intimacy between the two, which is one of the most curious things in the history of English Men of Letters. I know that hard things are said of Mr. Boswell, and that every tyro in criticism loves to have a blow at the well-fed arrogance of the man. Macaulay has specially given him a grievous black-eye; but Macaulay—particularly in those early review papers—was apt to let his exuberant and cumulative rhetoric carry him up to a climacteric which the ladder of his facts would scantly reach. To be sure Boswell was a toady; but rather from veneration of those he worshipped than desire of personal advancement; he was an arrant tuft-hunter, thereby enlarging the sphere of his observations; but he was fairly up in classical studies; had large fund of information; was sufficiently well-bred (indeed, in contrast with the Doctor, I think we may say excellently well-bred); he rarely, if ever, said malicious things, though often impertinent ones; his conundrums again and again gave a new turn to dull {120}
talk; and he had a way, which some even more stolid people possess in our time, of *baiting* conversation by interposing irrelevant matter, with an air of innocence that captivates; then there was the pleasant conceit of the man—full-fed, sleek, and shining out all over him—over his face, and his erect but somewhat paunchy figure; all which qualities were contributory to the humor and fulness and charm of that famous biography which we can read backward or forward —in the morning or at night—by the chapter or by the page—with our pipe or without it—with our knitting or without it—and always with an amazed and delighted sense that the dear, old, clumsy, gray-stockinged, snuff-ridden Doctor has come to life once more, and is toddling along our streets, belching out his wit and wrath, and leaning on the arm of the ever-ready and most excellent and obsequious James Boswell, Esquire.

Such a book is not to be sneered at, nor the writer of it; perhaps we think it would be easy for us or anybody to write such another, if we would only forget conventionalisms and have the {121}
courage of our impressions; but if we made trial, I daresay we should find that to forget conventionalisms is just what we can't and do not know how to do; and so our impressions get bundled into the swathings of an ambitious rhetoric which spoils our chances and vulgarizes effort. I do not say Boswell was a very high-toned man or a very capable man in most directions; but he did have the art of easy narrative to a most uncommon degree; and did clearly perceive and apprehend just those points and qualities which go to make portraiture complete and satisfying.[8] I do not believe that he stupidly blundered into doing his biographic work well; stupid blundering never did and never could accomplish work that will meet acceptance by the {122}
intelligence of the world.

Gibbon.

Edward Gibbon.

I come now to speak of a more respectable personage—one of whom you have often heard, and whose resounding periods, full of Roman History you will most surely have read; I mean Edward Gibbon[9]—not an original member of the club, but elected at an early day. His life has great interest. He was the sole survivor of seven children; his father being a Member of Parliament—very reputable, but very inefficient. There were fears that his famous son would be a cripple for life, so weakly was he, and so ill put together; but growing stronger, he went to Oxford; was there for only a short time; did not love Oxford then, or ever; inclined to theologic inquiry and became Romanist; which so angered his {123}
father that he sent him to Lausanne, Switzerland, to be re-converted under the Calvinist teachers of that region to Protestantism. This in due time came about; and it was perhaps by a sort of compensating mental retaliation for this topsy-turvy condition of his youth that he assumed and cultivated the pugnacious indifference to religion which so marked all his later years and much of his work. He had his love passages, too, there upon the beautiful borders of Lake Geneva; a certain Mademoiselle Curchod, daughter of a Protestant clergyman, lived near by; and with her the future historian read poetry, read philosophy, read the skies and the mountains, discoursed upon the conjugation of verbs, and upon conjugalities of other sorts; but this the English father disapproved as much as he had disapproved of Romanism; and by reason of this—as Gibbon tells

us, in his delightful autobiography—that "sweet dream came to an end." It is true the French biographers[10] put a rather different phase upon the story, and represent that while {124} Mademoiselle respected young Mr. Gibbon very much, she could not return his ardor. Two colors, I have observed, are very commonly given to any sudden interruption of such festivities.

Mademoiselle, however, did not pine in single blessedness; she had a career before her. She became in a few years the distinguished wife of Necker, the great finance minister of France in the days immediately preceding the Revolution, and the mother of a still more famous daughter—that Mme. de Stael who wrote *Corinne*.

Though Gibbon lived and died a bachelor, he always maintained friendly relations with his old flame Mme. Necker, being frequently a guest at her elegant Paris home; and she, on at least one occasion, a guest of the historian in London. It was in the year 1774—ten years after its foundation, that Gibbon was elected member of the Literary Club; he being then in his thirty-seventh year and well known for his wide learning and his conversational powers. He was recognized as an author, too, of critical acumen, and great range of language; some of his earlier {125} treatises were written in French, which he knew as well as English; German he never knew; but the first volume of the *History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* did not appear until the year 1776—a good tag for that great American date! That first volume made a prodigious surprise, and immense applause. Poor Hume[11] (whose story waits), struggling with the mortal disease which was to carry him off in that year, wrote his praises from Edinburgh. Horace Walpole, who had the vanity of professing to know everybody worth knowing, says, "I am astonished; I know the man a little; I could not believe it was in him; I must get to know him better."

Yet Gibbon was not a modest man in the ordinary sense; never, except when—very rarely—warmed into a colloquial display of his extraordinary learning, did he impress a stranger with any sense of his power. He was short and corpulent; had a waddling walk and puffy cheeks and a weak double chin; with very much in his general aspect and manner to explain the miscarriage of {126} his love-affair, and nothing at all to explain the Decline of the Roman Empire. Withal, he was obsequious, studiously courteous; had ready smiles at command; had a mincing manner; his wig was always in order, and so was his flowered waistcoat; and he tapped his snuff-box with an easy dégagé air, that gave no warrant for anything more than an agreeable titillation of the nerves. But if an opening came for a thrust of his cumulated learning in establishing some historic point in dispute, it poured out with a gush, authority upon authority, citation on citation, as full and impetuous and unlooked for as a great spring flood.

He went over to Paris with his honors fresh upon him; was cordially received there; the Necker influence, and his familiarity with French, standing him in good stead. He affected a certain style too. "I have," he says, "two footmen in handsome liveries behind my coach, and my apartment is hung with damask." He loved such display, though only the hired luxury of a hotel. He had never a taste for the simpler enjoyments of English country life; never mounted a horse {127} and scorned partridge shooting or angling. In a letter to a friend he says, "Never pretend to allure me by painting in odious colors the dust of London. I love the dust, and whenever I move into the Weald, it is to visit *you*, and not your trees."

It does not appear that he went frequently to the Turk's-Head Club. The brusquerie of Johnson would have grated on him—grated on him in more senses than one, we suspect; and the gruff Doctor would have scorned his dilettanteism as much as his scepticism. Gibbon took kindly, though, to Goldsmith; but he hated Boswell honestly, and Boswell honestly hated back.[12]

His letters were never strong or bright, nor were his occasional literary criticisms either acute or profound; all his great powers were kept in reserve for his *magnum opus*—the History. For the quietude he thought necessary to its completion he went again to the home of his youth at Lausanne, and there, in sight of that wondrous panorama of lake and mountain, upon a site {128} where now stands the Hotel Gibbon,[13] and a few acacia trees under which the historian meditated, the great work was brought to completion—a great work then, and a great work now, measured by what standard we will. To say that one approaches the accuracy of Gibbon is to exhaust praise; to say that one surpasses him in reach of learning is to deal in hyperbole. Even the historian, Dr. Freeman, who, I think, did much prefer saying a critical thing to saying a pleasant thing, testified that—"He remains the one historian of the eighteenth century whom modern research has neither set aside, nor threatened to set aside." Modern high critics sneer at his large, ceremonious manner; Ruskin pronounces "his English the worst ever written by an educated Englishman"[14] (the same Ruskin who found a "mass of errors" under the sunshine of Claude). But let us remember what burden of knowledge those grandiloquent sentences of {129} Gibbon had to carry; what reach of empire they had to cover! Here be no pigmies, predicating the outcome of little factions, no discourse about the smallness of word-meanings; but vast populations are arrayed under our eye. We cannot talk of the stars in their courses as we talk of the will-o'-wisps of politicians. Rome marching to its dissolution, with captive nations in its trail, [15] must put a lofty strain upon the page that records her downfall.

Through all, this corpulent, learned, dainty, keen-eyed, indefatigable little man, is cool—over cool; he has no enthusiasms but the enthusiasm of knowing things. No wrongs that he records seem to chafe him; his blood has no boiling-point; his love no flame; his indignation no scorching power. A great, imposing, processional array of sovereigns, armies, nations—of the wise, the vicious, the savage, the learned, the good; but not a figure in it all, however pure or innocent, which kindles his sympathies into a glow; not one so profligate as to make his anger burn; not {130} one so lofty or so true as to give warmth to his expressions of reverence.

Yet notwithstanding, if any of my young readers are projecting the writing of a history, I strongly advise them to avoid the subject of the *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*.

Oliver Goldsmith.

Oliver Goldsmith.

And now we come to another member of our club, who reaped far fewer of the substantial rewards of life.——Who, with any relish for the beatitudes of letters, has not tender reverence for the memory of Goldsmith? He was the youngest member of the club at its start, and yet the thirty-four years he then counted had been full of change and adventure: he had wandered away early from the beautiful paternal home of Lissoy in Ireland; had studied in Scotland and in Leyden; had idled in both; had been vagrant over Europe; had tried medicine, tried flute-playing, tried school-keeping, tried proof-reading for the old shopkeeper, Samuel Richardson, and had finally landed in a court not far from Johnson's, {131} where he did work for the booksellers. Amongst this work were certain essays which attracted the old Doctor's attention by their rare literary qualities; and the old gentleman had befriended the author—all the more when he found him a man who did not befriend himself; and who, if he had only sixpence in his pocket (and he was not apt to have more), would give the half of it to a beggar. A little over-love for wine, too—when the chance of a tavern dinner came to him—was another weakness which the great Doctor knew how to pardon; and so Goldsmith became one of the original clubmen; Reynolds, with all his courtly ceremony, growing to love the man; so did Burke; but Boswell was always a little jealous of him, and Goldsmith caught at any occasion for giving a good slap to that sleek self-consequence which shone out all over Boswell—even to his knee-buckles and his silken hose. I do not suppose that Goldsmith contributed much to the weightier debates of the club, and can imagine him sulking somewhat if he found no good opening in the troubled waters in which to feather his dainty oar. Again there was an {132} awkwardness, partly self-consciousness, partly organic tremor, which put him at bad odds in promiscuous talk; to say nothing of the irascibility which he had not learned to control, and which sometimes put a stammer to the tongue; hence, Boswell says, "poorest of talkers;" but around in his chambers, with one or two sympathetic listeners only, and perhaps a bottle of Canary flanking him, and with a topic started that chimed with the emotional nature of the man, and I am sure he would have talked out a whole chapter of a new *Vicar of Wakefield*.

But whatever the tongue might do, there was no doubt about the pen; we find him even undertaking discourses upon *Animated Nature*, and history—of Greece or of Rome. Has he then the plodding faculty, and is he a man of research? No; but he has the aptitude to seize upon the plums in the researches of others, and embody them in the amber of his language. He poaches all over the fields of history and science, and bags the bright-winged birds which the compilers have never seen, or which, if seen, they have classed with the gray and the dun of the sparrows. His {133} poetry, when he makes it, may not have so much of polished clang and witty jingle as the verse of Pope; it may lack the great ground-swell of rhythmic cadence which belongs to Johnson; but—somewhere between the lines, and subtly pervading every pause and flow—there is a tenderness, a suave, poetic perfume, a caressing touch of both mind and heart which we cannot describe—nor forget.

Of the original club-men, Goldsmith[16] died first, in 1774, at Brick-court in the Temple; he was forty-five years old, and yielded to a quick, sharp illness at the last, into which all the worries of a much worried life seemed to crowd him. He had been plotting new works, and a new life too; a getting away (if it might be) from the smirch that hung about him in the Temple corridors, out to the Edgware farmery, where primroses and hedges grew, and where there was a scent upon the air, of that old country home of Lissoy:

> "I still had hopes my latest hours to crown,
> Amidst those humble bowers to lay me down;
>
> To husband out life's taper at the close, {134}
> And keep the flame from wasting by repose.
> I still had hopes, for pride attends me still,
> Amidst the swains to show my book-learned skill;
> Around my fire an evening group to draw
> And tell of all I felt and all I saw.
> And, as a hare, whom hounds and horns pursue,
> Pants to the place from which at first he flew,
> I still had hopes, my long vexations past,
> Here to return, and die at home at last."

A stolid physician, called in consultation in those last days, and seeing his disordered state, asked, "If his mind was at ease?" Mind at ease! Surely a rasping question to put to a man whose pulse is thumping toward the hundreds, whose purse is empty, plans broken up, credit gone, debts crowding him at every point, pains racking him, and the grimy Fleet Prison close by, throwing its shadow straight across his path. No, his mind is *not* at ease; and the pulse does gallop faster and faster, and harder and harder to the end; when, let us hope—ease did come, and —God willing—"Rest for the weary."

The Thrales and the End. {135}

Meantime Dr. Johnson has been withdrawing somewhat from his old regular attendance upon the club. New men have come in, of whiggish tendencies; he hears things he does not like to hear; the Americans are at last making a fight of it; he is a heavier walker than once; besides which his increased revenue has perhaps made him a little more free of the Mitre tavern than of old; then he has made the acquaintance of Mr. Thrale and of Mrs. Thrale—an every-way memorable acquaintance for him. Mr. Thrale is a wealthy brewer, one while Member of Parliament—his works standing on the ground in Southwark now held by Barclay & Perkins, some of whose dependencies cover the site of that Globe Theatre where William Shakespeare was sometime actor and shareholder. Withal, Mr. Thrale is a most generous, sound-headed, practical, kindly man, without being very acute, or cultured, or any way accomplished. Mrs. Thrale, however, has her literary qualities; can jingle a little of not inharmonious verse of her {136}
own; reads omnivorously; is apt in French or Latin; is full of esprit and liveliness, and is not without a certain charm of person. She is small indeed, but with striking features and picturesque; easily gracious at her table; witty, headstrong, arch, proud of association with the great Dr. Johnson; really having strong friendship for him; enduring his rudenesses; yielding to him in very much, but not so submissive as to take his opinion (or that of any other man) about whether she should or should not marry Signor Piozzi, when afterward she came to be a widow. In fact, she had in fine development the very womanly way—of having her own way.

The Thrales owned a delightful country place at Streatham, a pleasant drive out from the city, down through Southwark and Brixton and on the road to Croydon; and there Johnson went again and again: Mr. Thrale was so kind, and Mrs. Thrale so engaging. At last they put at his service a complete apartment, where he could, on his blue days, growl to his liking. Who can say {137}
what might have been the career of the great lexicographer if he had fallen into such downy quarters in his callow days; should we have had the Dictionary? Surely never the life of Savage, with its personal piquancy, and possibly never the Boswelliana.

Tour to the Hebrides.

But Johnson was not wholly idle; neither the luxuries of Streatham, nor the chink of his pension money, could stay the unrest of his mind: he writes dedications for other people—shoals of them; he re-edits twice over the great Dictionary; publishes *The False Alarm*; completes his *Lives of the Poets*; and in the interim—between visits to Oxford, Brighton, and Lichfield—he makes that famous trip, with Boswell, to Scotland and the Hebrides; and never, I think, was so unimportant a journey so known of men. Every smart boy in every American school, knows now what puddings he ate, and about the cudgel that he carried, and the boiled mutton that was set before him. The bare mention of these things brings back a relishy smack of the whole story of the journey. Is it for the literary quality of the book which describes it? Is it for our interest in the great, nettlesome, {138}
ponderous traveller; or is it by reason of a sneaking fondness we all have for the perennial stream of Boswell's gossip? I cannot tell, for one: I do not puzzle with the question; but I enjoy.

Last days of Johnson.

In the year 1779 his old friend Garrick died,—leaving nearly a million of dollars, which came to him by that stage following and thrift which had so worried the orthodox and respectable brother Peter of the wine-shop. The interesting Mrs. Garrick came, after a time, to a lively widowhood on the Adelphi Terrace—looking out over what is now the London Embankment, and with such friends as Miss Hannah More, and "Evelina" Burney, and the old wheezing Doctor himself, to cheer her loneliness and share her luxurious dinners. The year after, in 1780, Topham Beauclerk died; and so that other bright light in the Turks-Head Club is dashed forever.

These, things may well have put new wrinkles in the old Doctor's visage; but he still keeps good courage; works in his spasmodic way;—dines with the printer Strahan; dines at the Mitre; dines at Streatham; coquettes, in his lumbering way, with Mrs. Thrale, and goes home to the fogs {139}
and grime of Bolt Court.

Shall I quote from a letter to the last-named lady, dating in the year 1780?

> "How do you think I live? On Thursday I dined with Hamilton and went thence to Mrs. Ord. On Friday at the Reynolds'—on Sunday at Dr. Burney's with the two sweets [daughters of Mrs. T.] from Kensington; on Monday with Reynolds; to-day with Mr. Langton; to-morrow with the Bishop of St. Asaph. I not only scour the town from day to day, but many visitors come to me in the morning, so that my work [*Lives of the Poets*] makes little progress.
>
> "You are at all places of high resort, and bring home hearts by dozens, while I am seeking for something to say of men about whom I know nothing but their verses.... Congreve, whom I despatched at the Borough, is one of the best of the little lives: but then *I had the benefit of your conversation*."

This is very well for a plethoric old gentleman of seventy-one. The next year, 1781, his friend and patron Mr. Thrale died. This loss was a grievous one for Johnson. He had relished his kindliness and his large, practical sagacity: indeed I think he had relished in him the lack of that literary talk and allusion which so many of his acquaintances thought it necessary to throw out as {140}
bait for the Leviathan. But was the Doctor to enjoy still the delights of that Streatham retreat? It is certain that a year did not pass before there was much gossip, in neighboring gossiping circles, that associated the name of Johnson with the clever and wealthy widow, as a possible successor to Mr. Thrale. I do not think any such gossips of the male kind ever ventured within easy reach of the Doctor's oaken cudgel. There is no evidence that any thought of such alliance ever came into Johnson's mind; but I *do* think he had sometimes regaled himself with the hope of a certain kindly protectorate over the luxuries and the mistress of Streatham, which would keep all its old charms open to him, and permit of a fatherly dalliance with the family there. It appeared, however, that the clever lady had other views; and did marry three years after—very much to the disgust of her children—Signor Piozzi, a musician of very fair reputation; did live a happy enough life with him; did publish a book or two full of sparkle and many errors, and some mischievously strong cuts at people she disliked; did live thereafter to a great old age, and carried roses in her cheeks {141}
amongst the eighties; though I think these roses came from the apothecaries. She was always fond of decoration.

In 1783 the Doctor had a stroke of paralysis, from which, however, he rallied and was himself once more—dining with Dilly, with Reynolds, at the Mitre too, with Boswell; he even projects new work—suggests the formation of another club in the city, and more within reach: So tenaciously do we cling, and so hopefully do we keep plotting! Finally in June, 1784, he takes his last dinner at the old club; Reynolds and Burke and Langton and Boswell are there, with others he does not know so well; he is feeble at this sitting and ill at ease; clouds gathering over him, from which, however, there flashes out from time to time a blaze of his old wit.

Thereafter, it is mostly Bolt-court—poor blind Miss Williams gone, by this time, and also the sorry physician who had been long a pensioner on him, and whose nostrums he had taken out of charity. Of all the faces that once welcomed him there in their way, only his black man Francis {142}
left.

Langton comes to see him; and Reynolds comes bringing more cheer, though the ear trumpet is awkward for the sick man; Burke comes and shows all the melting tenderness of a woman; Boswell, too—before he goes north—bounces in and out, his conceit and assurance mollified and decently draped by the sorrow that hung over him. Little Miss Burney rushes in to the ante-room and stays there hours, hoping some shortest last interview with the great man who had said kindly things to her—never thinking that he could not relish her gossippy prattle about the court, and the royal George, now that a great, swift tide was lifting him into the presence of another king.

Death of Johnson.

The old superstitious awe and dread of death, which had belonged to him throughout life, disappeared in these latter days, and the gloom—with its teasing vampires—was rarefied into a certain celestial haze that hung over him tenderly. He did not excitedly wrestle with the awful possibilities the change might bring, nor work himself into any craze of pious exhilaration to bridge the gap; but was restful as a babe {143}
at last, and so was led away tranquilly, by his own child-like trust, over the threshold of the mysteries we must all confront.

[1] See note, Hill's Boswell, p. 304, vol. i.

[2] Blackfriars was not built until 1769, and the old Westminster in 1750.

[3] Pension granted, 1762: *Rasselas* published, 1759.

[4] Joshua Reynolds, b. 1723; d. 1792. His *Discourses* published, 1771. Life by Leslie, 1867.

[5] It is from this latter gentleman—whom I had the good fortune to meet in the course of his visit to this country—that my information in regard to the latter *status* of the club is derived.

[6] Edmund Burke, b. 1729; d. 1797. Editions of his works are various. Best life of him is by John Morley (1867).

[7] B. 1740; d. 1795.

[8] There is, to be sure, a great deal of what the natural reserve of most men would lead them to withhold. But if this "free-telling" does add some of the finer lights and most artistic touches to his picture, and if he perceives this to be so (and have we any right to assume the contrary?) shall we not credit it rightly to his book-making art and commend it accordingly?

That his gentlemanly reserves are not of a pronounced sort may count against the delicacy of his nature, but not necessarily against his capacity as a literary artist.

[9] Edward Gibbon, b. 1737; d. 1794. Dr. Milman's is the standard edition of his History. Bowdler's edition (1825) is noticeable for its expurgations. The work, through its translations, holds as large a place in the historic *curriculum* of French, Italian, and German students, as in that of English-speaking nations.

[10] *Biographie Universale*; Article Necker (Mme. Necker, *née Susanne Curchod*).

[11] Hume's first volume of English History appeared in 1754—just twenty-two years before the *Decline and Fall*. Hume was about twenty-six years Gibbon's senior.

[12] Boswell says in his Diary (1779): "Gibbon is an ugly, affected, disgusting fellow, and poisons our literary club to me."

[13] The old house has wholly disappeared; the hotel covers a portion of Gibbon's garden.

[14] Letter in the *Pall Mall Gazette* in relation to Sir John Lubbock's "List of Hundred Best Books." Reprinted in *Critic* (American) of March 20, 1886.

[15] See, for instance, account of Julian's march, and of the taking of Constantinople.

[16] Oliver Goldsmith, b. 1728; d. 1774. Fullest and best *Life*, that of John Forster.

CHAPTER IV. {144}

We parted company, in our last chapter, with Dr. Johnson, of whose work and career every educated person should know; we parted company also, with that more lovable, though less important man, Dr. Goldsmith—of whom it would have been easy and pleasant to talk by the hour; we all know him so well; we all would have wished him so well—if wishes could have counted. And as we sidle into the Poets' corner of Westminster Abbey—on whatever visit we make there—we put a friendly eagerness into our search for the medallion effigy of Goldsmith over the door, which we do not put into our search for a great many entombed under much greater show of marble. But Goldsmith's bones do not lie in the Abbey; he was buried somewhere under the wing of the Old Temple Church—the particular locality being subject of much doubt; {145} while the memorial statue of Johnson—his body lying in Westminster—must be sought for, still farther down in the city, under the arches of St. Paul's Cathedral.

Garrick has what we might almost call melodramatic monument among the marbles of the Poets' corner; Reynolds has abiding memorials in the dashes of mellowed coloring and in the tender graces of those cherished portraits, some of which belong to every considerable gallery of England; Burke and Gibbon lie in quiet country places—the first near to his old home of Beaconsfield; and the historian among those southern downs of Sussex which look upon the Channel waters; his books may never have touched us to tenderness; but he bows his way out of our presence, with the grandest history belonging to the eighteenth century for a memorial.

A Scottish Historian.

David Hume.

We must not forget that hard-headed man who wrote Hume's History of England, who was born twenty-two years before the historian of Rome, and {146} died in the year in which Gibbon was reaping his first rewards. He[1] was a sceptic too of even more aggressive type than Gibbon—was, like him, somewhat ungainly in person, and though of larger build and of coarser mould, possessed a cheery good humor, and a bright colloquial wit which made him sure of good friends and many. Like Gibbon he lived and died a bachelor: like him, he leaned toward continental ways of living, and like him garnered some of his highest honors in France. Of course you know his History of England—where it begins, where it ends—but we do not press examination on these points. In most editions you will find—(it should be found in all)—among the foreleaves, a short autobiographic sketch, written in his most neat, perspicuous, and engaging manner, which is well worth the close attention of every reader, even if he do not wade through the royal extensions of the History. You will learn there that David Hume was born in that pleasant border land of Scotland which is watered by the {147} Tweed, the Yarrow, and the Teviot—where we found the poet Thomson. North of his boyish home stretched Lammermoor, and westward within easy tramping distance lay Lauderdale; but in that day these names had not been illuminated by a touch of the magician's wand, nor was his mind ever keenly alive to the beauties of landscape. Hume's childhood knew only great stretches of brown heather, bounded by bare bluish-gray heights, with the waves of the German Sea pounding on the rocky, desolate shores—where stands the ruin of Fast Castle, the original of "Wolf's Crag" of the Master of Ravenswood.

You will learn further from that precious bit of autobiography—which he calls with a naïve directness, "My Own Life"—that he was younger son of a good family; that he came to fairish education thereabout, and in Edinboro'; that his family would have pushed him to the study of law; but he—loving philosophy and literature better, and in search of some method of increasing his means for their pursuit—wandered southward to study business in the city of Bristol. This was a place of much greater commercial importance, relatively, then than now: but Bristol {148} merchandizing presently disgusts him; and husbanding carefully his small moneys, he goes across the Channel—to study philosophy, while practising the economies of French provincial life in a small town of central France. A few years thereafter he prints his first book in London on

Human Nature; and he says it fell "dead-born" from the press; but he is still sanguine and cheery; writes other essays after his return from France—hovering between Edinboro' and his old Berwickshire home; studying Greek the while, and for a year serving, as secretary, the crazy Marquis of Annandale. Shortly thereafter (1746) began his official connection with the General St. Clair, involving a new and pleasanter experience of European life. On his return, after three years, he goes to cover again in his old Berwickshire home, where he elaborates the *Political Discourses*—setting forth those broad views of trade and commerce, which came to larger illustration later, under the pen of his good friend Adam Smith.[2]

Hume's England.

In 1751 he removed from country to town—the true scene he says "for a man of letters," and established himself in a small flat of one of those lofty houses which still look down over the New City and the valley gardens, and lived there comfortably—with his sister for help mate—on some £50 a year. He tried vainly for a professorship in one of the Scottish universities, but was counted too unsafe a man. As Custodian of the Advocates' Library of Edinboro', a place which he secured shortly after—largely through the influence of lady friends—he came to that familiar fellowship with books which prompted him to the making of his History of England. He does not begin at the beginning: he tells of the Stuarts first; then goes back to the Tudors; and then back of these to the dull (dull to him and dull to us) Anglo-saxon start point: Stubbs and Freeman had not in that day made their explorative forays and set up their scaffoldings. {149} {150}

Hume's ambition was high and sensitive: he was intensely disappointed with the reception of the earlier volumes of his history. "I was discouraged," he says, "and had not the war been at that time breaking out between France and England, I had certainly retired to some provincial town of the former kingdom, have changed my name, and never more have returned to my native country."

But his writings had qualities which were sure in the end to provoke the reading and discussion of them by thoughtful men and women. He is known wider than he thinks; his books have been translated; Montesquieu has corresponded with him; so has a certain Mme. de Boufflers—a pet of the Paris salons—who has written gushingly of her admiration; and the stolid, good-humored, cool-blooded Hume has responded in his awkward manner; other missives, with growing confidences have passed; she always clever, and witty and full of adulation; and he clumsy and clever, and with such tenderness as an elephant might show toward a gazelle. And the shining side of life opens bewitchingly upon him when he goes to Paris in 1763 as an attaché to the Embassy of Lord Hertford. {151}

Hume in Paris.

In place of Scotch kerseys, his square, massive figure is set off with the golden broidery of a diplomat. His reputation as a philosopher and as a historian had been confirmed by all the literary magnates of Paris; and the queens of society in that gay capital, Mme. de Boufflers among them, pounced upon the big Scotch David, to be led away through the pretty martyrdoms of the salon. And he bore it bravely; he had feared, indeed, that his inaptitudes and inexperience would have made such a life irksome to one of his quiet habits; but he good-humoredly and complacently accepted the sacrifice and came to love the intoxicating incense. Sterne, who happened in Paris in those days, says that Hume was the lion of the city; no assemblage was complete without his presence. Yet he did not lose his cool philosophic poise. He carried his good humor everywhere, and an indifference that made him engaging; if arrows of Cupid were launched at him, they did not pierce through the wrappings of his thick Scotch phlegm.

Mme. d'Épinay tells a good story of these times about his taking part in some tableau where he was to personate an Eastern sovereign, seated between two beautiful Circassian damsels, to whom he was expected to show devotional assiduities of speech. But the frigid philosopher, banked in between those feminine piles of silk and jewels, only rubs his hands, slaps his knees, purses up his mouth, and says over and over, in his inconsequent French,—"Eh bien, Mesdemoiselles, vous voilà! vous voilà donc! Eh bien, nous voici!" Whereat we may be sure that his pretty companions let fall slily a disparaging "*qu'il est béte!*"—As if the man who had traced to their ultimate issues the subtleties of the *Principles of Morals* could parry and thrust with the pretty conversational foils of a Pompadour! {152}

David Hume.

It chanced that by the unexpected withdrawal of Lord Hertford, Hume was for a time chief of the Embassy, and for the first and last time (in so full a sense) did a historian of England thus become British Ambassador to the Court of France. But Hume does not love the English or England; he resents their neglect of him; he never forgets that he is a Scotsman; it twangs in his speech; it twangs louder in his heart; he would like to live in that pleasant country of France:—"They are all kind to me here," he says; "but not one of a thousand in all England would care a penny's worth if I broke my neck to-morrow." And though his reputation is now largely upon the growth at home, still he is not pleasantly *lié* with the masters. Somewhat later, when by another unexpected good turn he is made Under-Secretary of State and has official position in London, he writes to Dr. Blair, of Edinboro', who has offered to give him a letter to Bishop Percy—"I thank you, but it would be impracticable for me to cultivate his friendship, as men of letters have here no place of rendezvous; and are indeed sunk and forgot in the general torrent of the world." And yet this was at a date (1763), when the Turk's Head gathering was all alive, when Sterne had recently published the last volume of his *Tristram*; when poor Smollett[3] (of *Roderick Random* fame) has won success by a flimsy, but popular continuation of Hume's History; when the *Vicar of* {153} {154}

Wakefield was fresh (though as yet unprinted); when Mason and Gray and Warburton and Johnson were all sounding their trumpets. With such feelings of alienation it is not strange that Hume did not nestle into the hearts of great Londoners as he had nestled into the good-will of Parisians.

Under the influences of Mme. de Boufflers he tried to make a home in England for that strange creature, Rousseau, who had become an exile, and who brought with him—to the torment of Hume—all his eccentricities, his peevishness, his inhuman vanities, his abnormal sensitiveness, his wild jealousies, and his exaltations of genius. These things work a rupture between the two in the end—as they should and ought to do,—and the next good sight we have of the Scotch philosopher is in a new home of his own (1772), which he has built in the new part of Edinboro'. Twenty odd years before he had lived in the old city on an income of £50 a year; and now he lives in the new with an income of £1,000 a year. In the old times he had hardly secured place as {155}
Custodian of the mouldy Library of the Advocates; now he is the marked potentate in the literary world of Scotland. Stanch Presbyterians do indeed look at him askance, and shake their heads at his uncanny beliefs, or rather lack of beliefs. Old nurses put hobgoblin wings upon him to frighten good children; but he has stanch, loving friends among the best and the clearest sighted. Dr. Blair is his friend; excellent Dr. Robertson is his friend; his good nature, his kindness of heart, his rectitude of life, his intellectual charities, won even those who shuddered at his disbeliefs; that sceptical miasma—born in his blood—and harmful to many (as it was to himself), seemed to lose its malarious taint in the large, free, intellectual atmosphere in which the philosopher lived. Honest doubts were then, and always will be, better than dishonest beliefs; just as honest beliefs are a thousand fold better than dishonest doubts.

Death of Hume.

It was in our year of 1776—when his reputation was brightening and widening month by month, that David Hume, the author of the first scholarly History of England, died, and was buried on a shoulder of the Calton Hill, from {156}
which one may look eastward across the valley (where lies Holyrood Palace) to the Salisbury Crags on the left and to the Castle Rock on the right.

It is probable that his History will long hold place on our library shelves; its style might almost be counted a model historic style—if we were to have models (of which the wisdom is doubtful). It is clear, it is precise, it is perspicuous, it is neat to a fault. It might almost be called a reticent style, in its neglect of those wrappings of wordy illustration and amplification which so many historians employ. He makes us see his meaning as if we looked through crystal; and if the crystal is toned by his prejudices—as it is and very largely—it is altogether free from the impertinent decorative arabesques of the rhetorician. Many of the periods of which he gives the record, have had new light thrown upon them by the searching inquiries of late days. Old reputations with which he dealt reverently have suffered collapse; political horizons which were limited and gave smallness consequence, have widened; but for good, straightforward, lucid, {157}
logical setting forth of the main facts of which he undertook the record, Hume will long remain the reference book. There will be never a time when lovers of good literature will not be attracted by his pathetic picture of the career of Charles I.; and never a time when the judicious reader will accept it as altogether worthy of trust.

The life of the historian—by Dr. Huxley—is rather a history of his philosophy than of his life; in which the eminent scientist—with due apology for intrusion upon literary ground—sets his logic to an easy canter all around the soberer paces of the great Scotch charger—showing nice agreement in the paces of the two, and commending and illustrating the metaphysics of the Historian, with a pretty fanfaronade of Exposition and Applause.

A Pair of Poets.

Two poets.

Were it only to change the current of our talk, I bring now a brace of poets to your notice; not well paired indeed, as you will find: but each one in his own way giving us music that strongly contrasts with *The Deserted Village*, and the {158}
ponderous Satires of Johnson.

Shenstone.

Shenstone[4] is a name not very much known—not very much worth knowing: he was a big, somewhat scholarly, fastidious, indolent, rhyme-haunted man, who had studied at Oxford, and who, when the muses were buzzing about his ears, came into possession of a pretty farm in that bit of Shropshire which (by queer English fashion) is planted within the northern borders of Worcestershire; and it was there that he wrote—what is typical of all that he ever wrote, and what has his current and favorite sing-song in it:—

"Since Phyllis vouchsafed me a look
  I never once dreamt of my vine.
May I lose both my pipe and my crook
  If I knew of a kid that was mine!
I prized every hour that went by
  Beyond all that had pleased me before;
But now they are past, and I sigh;
  And I grieve that I prized them no more."

And again—

"When forced the fair nymph to forego
   What anguish I felt at my heart!

Yet I thought—but it might not be so— {159}
   'Twas with pain that she saw me depart.
She gazed as I slowly withdrew.
   My path I could hardly discern;
So sweetly she bade me Adieu
   I thought that she bade me return!"

What should we think of that if we encountered it fresh in a corner of one of our Sunday newspapers? We should hardly reckon its author among our boasted treasures; yet Burns says "his elegies do honor to our language," and a great deal of the same guileless tintinnabulum did have its admirers all over England a century ago; and some of Shenstone's pretty wares have come drifting down on the wings of albums and anthologies fairly into our day.

Yet I should rather have encountered him in his fields, than in his garret; for he made those fields very beautiful. He was a bad farmer, to be sure; and sacrificed turnips to marigolds; and wheat to primroses and daisies, fast as the season went round; but his home at Leasowes was a place worth visiting for its charming graces of every rural sort; even our staid John Adams, when he was in England in those days, looking after American colonial interests—must needs coach it {160} in company with Jefferson from Cirencester to Leasowes, for a sight of this charming homestead. Goldsmith too gave its beauties the embalmment of his language; and Dr. Johnson sat down upon it, with the weight of his ponderous sentences. One echo more we will have of him, as it comes fresh from his pet paradise of that corner of Shropshire—and certainly carrying a honeyed rhythmic flow:—

"My banks they are furnished with bees,
   Whose murmur invites one to sleep;
My grottoes are shaded with trees,
   And my hills are white over with sheep.
I seldom have met with a loss,
   Such health do my fountains bestow;
My fountains all bordered with moss
   Where the hare-bells and violets grow."

William Collins.

William Collins[5] was a man of a totally different stamp—better worth your knowing—yet maybe with the general public not so well known. There is {161} the chink of true and rare poetic metal in his verse, and it is fused by an imagination capable of intense heat and wonderful flame. He was only a hatter's boy from Chichester, in the South of England; was at Oxford for a while, and left there in a huff—though securing a degree, 1743; afterward went to London; wrote and printed some odes, which he knew were better than most current poetry, but which nobody bought or read. He sulked under that neglect, and his rage ran—sometimes to verse—sometimes to drink; he had known Thomson and Johnson, and both befriended him; but the world did not; indeed he never met the world half way; the poetic phrenzy in him so fined his sensibilities that he could not and would not put out a feeling hand for promiscuous greetings. Poverty, too, came in the wake of his poetic cultures, to aggravate his mental inaptitudes and his moral distractions—all ending at last in a mad-house. He was not, to be sure, continuously under restraint—such terrific restraints as belonged to treatment of the insane in that day; but for a half dozen or more years of the latter part of his life —wandering all awry—saying weak and pointless things, in place of the odes which had {162} coruscated under his fine fancy; lingering about his childhood's home; stealing under the cathedral vaults of Chichester (where his body rests now), and lifting up a vacant and wild treble of sound in dreary sing-song to mingle with the music from the choir.

There are accomplished critics who insist that the odes of Collins carry in them the finest and the loftiest strains which go to marry the music of the nineteenth century poets to the music of the days of Elizabeth. Certain it is, that he loomed far above the ding-dong of such as Shenstone —that he scorned the classic trammels of the empire of Pope—certain that there were fires in him which were lighted by poets who lived before the time of the Stuarts, and which gave foretaste and promise of the freedom and the graces that shine to-day.[6]

I cannot quote better to show his quality than from that "Ode to Evening" which is so often {163} cited:—

"For when thy folding star arising, shows
His paly circlet at his warning lamp,
   The fragrant hours and elves
   Who slept in flowers the day,

"And many a nymph who wreathes her brows with
And sheds the freshning dew, and, lovelier still,

The pensive pleasures sweet,
Prepare thy shadowy car.

"Then lead, calm votress, where some sheety lake
Cheers the lone heath, or some time hallowed pile,
Or upland fallows gray
Reflect its last cool gleam.

"But when chill, blustering winds or driving rain
Forbid my willing feet, be mine the hut
That from the mountain's side,
Views wilds and swelling floods,

"And hamlets brown and dim discovered spires,
And hears their simple bell, and marks o'er all
Thy dewy fingers draw
The gradual dusky veil."

This is poetry that goes without help of rhyme; even its halts are big with invitations to the "upland fallows gray," and to the "pensive pleasures sweet." Swinburne says, with piquancy and truth, "Corot, on canvas, might have signed the 'Ode to Evening.'" {164}

Dr. Johnson, who was a strong friend of Collins, tells us, in his *Lives of the Poets*, that he died in 1756; and that story is repeated by most early biographies; the truth is, however, that after that date he was living—only a sort of death in life, under the care of his sister at Chichester; and it was not until 1759, when—his moral and physical wreck complete—the end came.

Miss Burney.

Miss Burney.

We have next to bring to your notice, a clever, somewhat frisky, *débonnaire* young person of the other sex, whom you should know—whom perhaps you do know; I mean Miss Frances Burney.[7] You will remember that we have encountered her once before pushing her kindly way into old Dr. Johnson's ante-room when he was near to death. {165} The old gentleman had known intimately her father, Dr. Burney, and had always shown for her a strong attachment; so did a great many of Dr. Burney's acquaintances, Garrick among them and Burke; and it was probably from such men and their talk that she caught the literary bee in her bonnet and wrote her famous story of *Evelina*. You should read that story—whatever you may do with *Cecilia* and other later ones—if only to see how good and cleanly a piece of work in the way of a society novel can come out of those broiling times, when *Humphrey Clinker* and *Tom Jones* and the prurient and sentimental languors of Richardson were on the toilette tables of the clever and the honest.

The book of *Evelina* is, all over, Miss Burney; that gives it the rarest and best sort of realism. Through all her work indeed, we have this over-jubilant and gushing, yet timid and diffident young lady, writing her stories—with all her timidities and large, unspoken hopes, tumbling and twittering in the bosoms of her heroines: if my lady has the fidgets, the fidgets come into her books; and you can always chase back the tremors that smite from time to time the fair Evelina, to the kindred tremors that afflict the clever and sensitive daughter of old Dr. Burney. {166}

The book was published anonymously at first, and the secret of authorship tolerably well kept; she says her papa did not know; but young ladies are apt to put too small a limit to the knowledge of their papas! It is very certain that her self-consciousness, and tremulous, affected, simpers of ignorance, were not good to stave away suspicion. It was not long before the world, confounding book and person, came to call her "Evelina."

A pretty picture with this motif comes into her Diary: On a certain morning, our Dr. Franklin —being then in London on colonial business—makes a call upon Dr. Burney:—and in absence of her father, meets the daughter: a big, square-shouldered man, very formal, very stout, but very kindly, approaches her and says—"I think I have the pleasure of speaking with Evelina."

"Oh, no," she replies, "I am Frances Burney," and he—"Ah—indeed! I thought it had been Evelina:" and there it ends, and we lose sight of our broad-shouldered Dr. Franklin, with only this "Ah!" upon his lips.

She had a modesty that was vain by its excess, and was awkward when caught unexpectedly {167} or with strangers; in great trepidation lest her books might be talked of—yet with her books and her authorship always tormentingly uppermost in her thought. Her Diary and letters are full of them. Yet she is attractive—strangely so—by her sympathetic qualities; so responsive to every shade of sorrow or of joy; winning, because so tell-tale of heart; and with a tongue that could prattle gracefully when at ease; Evelina, in short, without Evelina's beauty or expectations.

I have read the book over again after a gap of many years—with a view to this talk of the authoress, and find myself wondering more than ever, how so many of great and commanding intellect should have so heartily admired it. Burke read it with most eager attention and largest praise; old Dr. Johnson delighted in it, and declared it superior in many points to Richardson (which for him was extravagant commendation). Even Mme. de Stael, some few years later, gave it her applause; and the quick and swift-witted Mrs. Thrale was in raptures with it; and Mrs. {168} Thrale knew a dunce, and detested dunces. There must have been a deftness in her touch of things local,—of which, I think, she was but half conscious; there was beside a pretty dramatic art which found play in many pages of her Diary, and in all she did and all she spoke. For her third novel of *Camilla*, which scarce ever comes off the shelf of old libraries now—where it survives in deserved retirement—she received, according to the rumors current in those days, the sum of £3,000; such rumors, very likely exaggerated the amount; they are apt to do so—in all times.

Her Diary[8] is of special interest; particularly the portion which takes one into the domestic life of Royalty. For one of the bitter fruits of her celebrity, was her appointment as Lady of the Robes (or other such title), to the Queen. The service indeed did not last many years, but long enough to give us a good sight of the well-disposed, fussy, indolent, kind-hearted Queen, and of {169} the inquisitive, obstinate, good-natured King.

Trials of the Queen.

She was at the palace, indeed, when one of the earlier attacks of that mental ailment which at last slew George III.—fell upon him. She sees the poor Queen growing wild with dread—disturbed and trembling under those flashes of disorderly talk which smite upon her ear. She watches the King as he goes out to his drive on a certain fatal day;—hears the hushed, muffled steps and the babel of uncertain sounds, as he comes back late at night,—waits hour on hour for her usual summons to the Queen's presence, which does not come. At last, midnight being long past (and she meantime having hint of some great calamity) goes to the Queen's chamber; two other lady attendants were with her, she says; and the Queen, ghostly pale and shuddering—puts her hand kindly upon that of the poor little trembling Miss Burney and says "I am like ice—so cold—so cold!"

"I tried to speak," says Miss Burney in her Diary, "but burst into tears: then the Queen did." And there was cause: for from beyond the chamber—along the corridor,—came the idle jabbering {170} of King George; and the intellectual power (such as there was of it) "thro' words and things went sounding on its dim and perilous way."

I tell this not to test the reader's capability for sympathy, but to fasten poor little Miss Burney, the author of *Evelina* and *Cecilia*, in mind; and to connect her service in the palace of St. James, in the year 1788, with the first threat and the first real attack of the King's insanity. I am afraid we must set down, as one helping cause to the King's affliction, the American obstinacy in maintaining their Independence.

Miss Burney shortly after, with a pension of £100, retired from the royal duties, which had tried her sadly; and some years later encountering and greatly admiring General d'Arblay, who had come over an exile from France, in company with other distinguished emigrants, on the outbreak of the French Revolution, she married him (1793), and gave him a home that grew up out of the moneys received from her *Camilla*—hence called by old Dr. Burney, "Camilla Cottage."

She survived her husband and a son (a clergyman of the Established Church), and lived to so {171} great an age as to find all her conquests in fiction over-run at last by the brilliant successes of Miss Austen, of Miss Edgeworth, and the more splendid triumphs of Walter Scott. She died almost in our day (1840) and was buried in Bath; but her best monument you can see without going there; it is her book of *Evelina* and her Diary.

Hannah More.

Mistress More.

Over-fine literary people will, I suppose, hardly recognize Hannah More—or Mistress Hannah More,[9] as I prefer to call her, in virtue of a good old English, and a good old New Englandish custom, too, which gave this title of dignity to matronly women—married or unmarried, of mature age, and of worthy lives.

We must go into the neighborhood of that picturesque old city of Bristol, in the West of England, to find her. She was one of the five daughters of a respectable schoolmaster in Gloucestershire. Hannah, though among the youngest, proved the clever one, and had written {172} poems, more than passably good, before she was fifteen; and had completed a pastoral drama, when only seventeen. She was, moreover, comely; she was witty and alert of mind, and had so won upon the affections of a neighbor landholder, and wealthy gentleman of culture, that a marriage between the two came after a while to be arranged for; but this affair never went beyond the arrangement,—for reasons which do not clearly appear. It does appear that the parties remained friendly, and that Mistress Hannah More was in receipt of an annual pension of £200—in the way of *amende* perhaps—her life through, from the backsliding but friendly groom. I am sorry to tell this story of her (about the £200). I think so well of her as to wish she had put it in an envelope, and returned it with her compliments—year after year—if need were. However, it went, as did many another hundred pounds and thousand pounds of her earnings, in the line of those great charities which illustrated and adorned her life.

Her elder sisters as early as 1757 established in Bristol a school for young ladies, which

became one of the most popular and favorite schools of the West of England; and when Hannah, {173}
some fifteen years later, went up to London, to look after the publication of her *Search after Happiness*, one or two of the sisters accompanied her; and Miss Hannah, who was "taken off her feet" by the acting of Garrick, was met most kindly by the great tragedian—was taken to his house, indeed, and became thereafter one of the most intimate of the friends of Mrs. Garrick. Dr. Johnson, too, was enchanted by the brisk humor and lively repartee in these clever West-of-England girls; and we have on record a bit of his talk to one of them. He said, in his leviathan way: "I have heard that you are engaged in the useful and honorable employment of teaching young ladies." Whereupon they tell the story of it all, in their bright, full, eager way, and of their successes: and the Doctor, softened and made jolly and companionable, says, "What, five women live happily together in the same house! Bless me! I never was in Bristol—but I will come and see you. I'll come; I love you all five!" One of the sisters wrote home that she thought—"perhaps—the {174}
big Doctor might marry Hannah; for 'twas nothing but—'My love,' and 'My little Kitten,' between them all the evening."

Shortly thereafter Mistress More wrote her tragedy of *Percy*; nobody, I think, reads it now; but Garrick became sponsor for it—writing both prologue and epilogue; and by reason perhaps of his sponsorship it ran some twenty nights successively; the tale of her stage profits running up to £600, which would pay for a good many trips from London to Bristol. When she came to treat for the publication of a poem which she wrote at that period—she being ignorant of rates,—it was arranged with her publisher that she should receive the sum, whatever it might have been, which was paid Goldsmith for *The Deserted Village*!

In those early years she was the lively one, and the gay one, and the worldly one of the family; but with the death of Garrick, which came upon her like a blow, life and all its colors seemed to change. She haunted London and the theatres no more; she went up to weep indeed at her home on the Adelphi Terrace[10] with the disconsolate Mrs. Garrick; but all phases of life {175}
have now, for Miss More, taken on a soberer hue; she teaches; she founds schools for the poor; she founds chapels; she writes tracts; her forward and sturdy evangelical proclivities involve her indeed in difficulties with the local church authorities; for her charities go vaulting over their canons; whereupon she relents and abases herself—and then sins in the same holy and beneficent ways of charity again—canons or no canons.

As a worker she is indefatigable; she drives, rides, and walks over her missionary ground near to Bristol, with the zeal of a gold-hunter. There were those who questioned her wisdom and who questioned the quality of her wit, but never one, I think, anywhere, who questioned her goodness. She wrote a novel called *Coelebs in Search of a Wife*. Do you happen to have read it? I hardly know whether to advise it, or not; there is so much to read! But if you do, you will find most excellent English in it, and a great deal of very good preaching; and many hints about the {176}
social habits of that time—trustworthy even to the dinner hour and the lunch hour; and maxims good enough for a copy book, or a calendar; and you will find—what you will not find in all stories nowadays—a definite beginning and a definite end. I know what you may say, if you do read it. You would say that the sermons are too long, and that the hero is a prig; and that you would never marry him if he were worth twice his fortune, and were to offer himself ten times over. Well—perhaps not; but he had a deal of money. And that book of *Coelebs*—whatever you may choose to say of it, had a tremendous success; it ran over Europe like wildfire; was translated into French, into German, into Dutch, into Polish, and I know not what language besides; and across the Atlantic—in those colonial days, when book-shops were not, as now, at every corner—over thirty thousand copies were sold. Those of us who can remember forty and fifty years back, and who knew anything of the inner side of an old-fashioned New England homestead, must recall the saintship that invested good Mistress Hannah More! What unfailing Sunday books her {177}
books did make! and with what child-like awe we looked upon her good, kind, old, peaked face as it looked out from the frontispiece—with soberly frilled hair all about the forehead, and over this a muslin cap with huge ruffles hemming in the face, and above this circumambient ruffle and in the lee of the great puff of muslin—which gave place, I suppose, to the old lady's comb—a portentous bow, constructed of an awful quantity of ribbon and crowning that saintly, kindly, homely face of Hannah More.

Do you remember—I wonder—that in the early pages of "The Newcomes"—the Colonel tells Olive Newcome, how he used in his boy days to steal the reading of some of Fielding's famous novels; and how *Joseph Andrews*, in that forbidden series, had a very sober binding; so that his mamma, Mrs. Newcome, when she observed the boy reading it, thought—deceived by that grave binding—that the boy might be regaling himself with some work of Mistress Hannah More's; and how, under this belief, she took up the book when he had laid it by; and read and read, and flung it down all on a sudden with such a killing, scornful look at the young Colonel, as he never, never {178}
forgot in all his life.

It was unfair of Thackeray to poke fun in this way at good Mistress Hannah More! We may smile at her quaintness—her primness—her starch; but there is that in her industry, her courage, her mental range, her wide Christian beneficence which we must always venerate.

We have run on so far, that we have no words to-day for the sturdy old King George. We turn him over to another chapter, when we will speak too of Sterne—whom we had almost forgotten—and of Chatterton and of some writing men who sometimes lifted up their voices in the British Parliament.

[1] David Hume, b. 1711; d. 1776. Best edition of his works edited by Green and Grose, 4 vols., 1874. For life, see Burton and Huxley.

[2] Adam Smith, b. 1723; d. 1790. A Fifeshire man, and author of that famous book—*The Wealth of Nations*; a good book to read in these times, or in any times. He may indeed say rash things about "that crafty animal called a Politician," and the mean rapacity of capitalists; but he is full of sympathy for the poor, and for those who labor; and is everywhere large in his thought and healthy and generous. I am glad to pay this tribute, though only in a note.

[3] George Tobias Smollett, b. 1721; d. 1771. A Scottish physician, author of various popular novels, of which *The Expedition of Humphrey Clinker* is, by many, counted the best.

[4] William Shenstone, b. 1714; d. 1763. His works (verse and prose) were published in 1764-69.

[5] William Collins, b. 1731; d. 1759. Interesting memoir by Moy Thomas, published in 1858.

[6] Swinburne says, with something more than his usual exaggeration—"the only man of his time who had in him a note of pure lyric song";—excluding Gray, and both the Wesleys!

[7] Frances Burney, b. 1752; d. 1840. She is perhaps better known as Mme. D'Arblay; though she married somewhat late in life, and after her reputation had been won.

[8] The newest and most faithful copy of her *Diary and Letters* has been published by George Bell & Sons, London, 1889, 2 vols., 8vo.

[9] Hannah More, b. 1745; d. 1833.

[10] Near present London "Embankment"; John Adams was in that day stopping at a tavern near by.

CHAPTER V. {179}

I have spoken within the last few pages of David Hume—philosopher and historian; he was kindly natured, witty, serene, with a capacity for large and enduring friendships; yet with not much beguiling warmth in him; leaving a much accredited history, and philosophical writings eminent for their ingenuity, acuteness, and subtlety. Under our larger and freer range of thinking to-day, it is hard to understand how he became such a bugbear to so many, and was so unwisely set upon with personal scourgings; even if a man's religious conclusions be all awry, we shall make them no better, nor undo them, by tying a noisy kettle of maledictions at his heels, and goading him into a yelping and maddened gallop all down the high ways. He died unmarried in 1776; his elder brother John, for some reasons of property—which he counted larger than the {180} historian's large repute—changed his name to Home; so that there is not now in Scotland any representative of the immediate family of this Scotch metaphysician, who bears his name. I spoke of Shenstone and gave some specimens of his rhythmic and tender graces; but he never struck deeply into the poetic mine, whether of passion or of mystery. William Collins, however, did; he was not among the very foremost poets certainly, but he gave to us tingling and sonorous echoes of the great utterances of olden times, and piquant foretaste of nobler utterances that were to come. We had our little social brush with the lively and chatty "Evelina" Burney; we paid our worship at the shrine of Mistress Hannah More—and I tried hard to fix her quaint, homely, kindly figure in your gallery of literary portraits.

She lived, like Mme. d'Arblay, to a very great age—eighty-eight, I think, and was (with the exception of the last-named lady) the latest survivor of all those whose lives and works we have thus far made subject of comment in the present volume. And the life and works of these people {181} about whom we have latterly spoken, have had steady parallelism—longer or shorter—with the life and reign of George III.

King George III.

George III.

We ought to know something of the personality of this king who came to the head of the British household while all these keen brains were astir in it, and within the limits of whose rule the American Revolution began, and ended in the establishment of a new nationality; while the French Revolution too gathered its seething forces, and shot up its lurid flame and fell away into the fiery mastership of Napoleon.

You will remember that George II. was son of George I., who inherited through his mother, Sophia (of Brunswick), who was granddaughter of old King James I. of Scotland and England. George III. was not the son—but a grandson—of George II. His father, Prince Frederic, who lived to mature years, who wrote some poor poetry—who was generous, wayward, incompetent, always at issue with father and mother both—was a man nobody much respected and nobody {182} greatly mourned for. It was of him that a squib-like epitaph was written, which I suppose expressed pretty justly popular indifference respecting him and others of his family:—

Here lies Fred,
Who was alive and is dead.
Had it been his father
I had much rather;
Had it been his sister,
No one would have missed her.
But since 'tis only Fred
Who was alive and is dead,
There's no more to be said.

George III. was severely brought up by his mother and by old Lord Bute; taught to be every inch a king; and he was royally stiff and obstinate to the last. Two romantic episodes attaching to his young days belong to the royal traditions—in which a pretty Quakeress, and that beautiful Sarah Lennox—whose portrait by Reynolds now hangs in Holland House—both figure; but these episodes are of vague and shadowy outline, almost mythical, with issues only of the Maud Muller sort—they sighing "it might have been," and he—not sighing at all. It is certain that he accepted {183}
complacently and contentedly the bride Charlotte, who came over to him from Germany; and alone of all the quartette of Georges, made a devoted and constant husband as long as he reigned. But if he did not give his queen heart-aches in the usual Georgian fashion, I have no doubt that he gave her many a heart-ache of other sorts; for he was bigoted, unyielding, austere, and, like most men, selfish. He had his notions about meal-times and prayer-time, and getting-up time, and about what meals should be eaten and what not eaten; under this discipline wife and children grew up—until the boys made their escape, which they did actively. Yet this old gentleman of the crown is considerate too—more perhaps outside his palace than within: he purposes no unkindness; he indulges in pleasant chit-chat with his humble neighbors at Windsor; has sometimes half-crowns by him for poor favorites; cherishes homely tastes; knows a good pig when he sees it, and can test the fat upon a bullock with a punch of his staff. He professed a certain art knowledge, too—but always loved the spectacular, melodramatic works of our {184}
Benjamin West (in which, art-heresy of the time he had excellent company), better than the rare sweet faces of Reynolds, or the picturesqueness of Gainsborough.

He was English in his speech (though familiar with French and German); English, too, in his contempt for the mere graces of oratory; loving better point-blank talk, fired with interrogation points and interjections. Mme. d'Arblay, whose acquaintance we made, makes us a party to some of this talk:—"And so you wrote 'Evelina,' eh? and they didn't know; what—what? You didn't tell? eh? And you mean to write another—eh—what?"

Yet withal, Dr. Franklin—whose name is entered in the London Directory of 1770, as "Agent for Pennsylvania," Craven Street, Strand—says of the king: "I can scarcely conceive a man of better disposition, of more exemplary virtues, or more truly desirous of promoting the welfare of his subjects." Ten years later, I think Dr. Franklin would have qualified the speech.

But he never could have gainsaid the exemplary virtues of that quiet household—where king
and queen lived like Darby and Joan—going before light through the chilly corridors to morning {185}
prayers; with early dinners, no suppers, no gambling, no painted women coming between them. Yet the king, as he grew old, loved plays and farces, and used to laugh obstreperously at them, till Charlotte would tap him with her fan and pray his majesty to be "less noisy."

He knew genealogies and geography; he could talk with courtiers about their aunts and cousins, and stepfathers and mothers-in-law—which is a great lift to conversation for some minds. He knew all parts of his establishment—who cleaned the silver and the brass; and what both cost. Like all such meddling, fussy masters of households, he believed himself always right; prayed himself into accessions of that belief: and on that belief went on pounding and pumelling the American branch of his family into a state that proved explosive. In short he was one of those methodic, obstinate, sober, stiffly religious, conventional, straight backed, economic, terrific, excellent men whom we all like to look at, and read about, rather than to live with.

As a school-master he would have set the old lessons in Cocker (if it were Cocker) and {186}
recognized nothing better; and if the sums were not done, you would hear of it. "What, what? not done? sums not done!" and then the old red ruler, and the hand put out, and a spat, and another spat. This was George III. "Those colonists not going to pay taxes, eh? and throwing tea into Boston harbor? What—what? Zounds—punish the rebels. Punish 'em well! I'll teach 'em. Flinging tea overboard—what—eh?"

And so the war crept on; and all through it the great old stiff school-master brandishing his red ruler and making cuts with it over seas. But the time came when he couldn't reach his rebels; and then the long ruler, which was the national power, got broken in half, and it has stayed broken in half ever since.

There is interesting record of the first approaches of that insanity which ultimately beset the king, in Mme. d'Arblay's Diary, which we have already mentioned; but he made what seemed an entire recovery from the early stroke of 1788; and was king, in all his headstrong and kingly ways, once more. It was in 1785 when John Adams was presented to him as Envoy of the United States of America—not a presentation, it would seem, that would have any soothing aspect. {187}

Yet the old king received Mr. Adams courteously; and under the pretty fustian of conventional speech the one covered his regrets and the other covered his exultation. But it was not many years before the distraught brain—after renewed threats—waylaid the monarch again—this time with a surer grip; his speech, his sight, his hearing, all lost their fineness of quality and went down in the general wreck; in 1810, that mad-cap, that posture-master, that over-fine gentleman—so far as dress and carriage and polite accomplishment could make George IV. a gentleman—took rule; but for years thereafter, his lunatic father, in white hair and long white beard, might be seen stalking along the terrace at Windsor, babbling weak drivel, and humming broken tunes, leading no whither.

Two Orators. {188}

Charles James Fox.

Among the younger members of the famous Literary Club, some ten years after its foundation, was a muscular, swarthy young fellow[1]—full of wit and humor, a great friend of Burke's until the bitterness of politics parted them; shy of approaches to Dr. Johnson, with whom he differed on almost all points; a man known now in literary ways only by the fragment of British History which he wrote, but known in his own times as the most brilliant of debaters, most liberal in his politics, and always an ardent friend of America. This was Charles James Fox, who could trace back his descent—if he had chosen—through a Duchess of Gordon, to Charles II., and who was a younger son of a very rich Lord Holland, owner and occupant of that famous Holland House, which with its remnant of {189}
evergreen garden (in whose alleys we found Addison walking) still makes a venerable breakwater against the waves of brick and mortar which are piling around it.

Lord Holland was over-indulgent to this son of his, allowing him, when a boy on his first visit to Bath, five guineas a night to "risk" at cards; and the boy took with great kindness to that order of training, sending home to his father, when he came to travel (after a brief career at Oxford) vouchers, and honest vouchers too, for gaming debts of one hundred thousand dollars from the city of Naples alone. And he matched these losses, and larger ones, at Brooks's in London. Old stagers said that he was so sagacious and brilliant at whist, that he could easily have won his five thousand a year; but he took to hazards at dice that brought him losses—on one occasion at least—of four times as much in a night. It is a wonder he ever became the man in Parliament that he was, after such dandling as befell him in the lap of luxury. Yet he was an accomplished Greek scholar; loving the finesse of the language, and loving more the exquisite tenderness of such {190}
lamentations as that of Alcestis; his sympathies all alive indeed, in youth and manhood, to humane instincts—the pains and pleasures of the race touching his heart-strings, as winds touch an Eolian harp. Study of exact sciences put him to sleep; he loved the game of Probabilities better than the certainties of mathematics—gambling away great estates, and put to keenest endeavor by the tears of a woman; speaking with his heart on his tongue—too much there indeed—carrying the comradery of the clubs into public life; sharp as a knife to those who had done him, or his, injury; but unbosoming himself with reckless freedom to those who had befriended him; never un-ready in debate; warming easily into an eloquence that charmed men. But there must have been much in the voice and eye to explain the force of speeches which now seem almost dull;[2] the best elocutionist cannot read the magnetism into them which electrified the Commons, and which made Burke declare him the "most brilliant debater the world ever saw." {191}

Indeed we can only account for his great successes as an orator, his amazing repute, and his exceptional popularity, when we sum up a half score of contributory causes, which lie outside of the cold print of the Parliamentary record; among these, we count—his Holland wealth and training, his environments of rank and luxury, his picturesque bearing, his *bonhomie*, his scorn of the rank he held, his accessibility to all, his outspoken, democratic sympathies, that warmed him into outbursts of generous passion, his fearlessness, his bearding of the king, his earnestness whenever afoot, his very shortcomings too, and the crowding disabilities that grew out of his trust—his simplicities—his lack of forethought, his want of moneyed prudence, his free-handedness, his little, unfailing, every-day kindnesses—these all backed his speeches and put a tender under-tone, and a glow, and a drawing power in them, which we look for vainly in the rhetoric or the argumentation. He was often in Parliament—sometimes in the Ministry; but his disorderly and reckless life (gaming was not his worst vice) made his fellow-politicians wary, and {192}
put a bar to any easy confidences between himself and the old-fashioned, sober-sided, orderly George III. We must think of him as an accomplished, generous-hearted, impulsive, dissolute wreck of a man.

William Pitt.

If I mention Pitt,[3] it is only because you will find in your historical reading, his name always coupled with that of Fox; but he never went to our Literary Club; had little companionship with literary men; yet he had keen scholarship—within a somewhat limited range—and an insatiate ambition. He was tall, spare, pale-faced, haughty, with a contempt for sentiment, and a contempt for money; and of intellect—all compact. At an age when many are still at college, he had made amazing speeches in Parliament; not profuse, not swollen with words, not rhetorical—but clear, sharp, polished, strenuous, with now and then the glitter of some apt and resonant line from his classics.[4]

His perspicuous and never-failing flow of language was due, not a little, to an early habit of translating at sight, from Greek and Latin orators, under direction of his father the Earl of Chatham—not taught by this great master to give slavish word for word translation; but as apt and polished and vigorous a rendering as he could accomplish, without any surrender, or mal-presentment of the leading thoughts. Nor do I know any class-room exercise, nowadays, which would so test and amplify a young student's vocabulary, or teach him better the easy and forcible use of his own language. But, to have its full disciplinary power, it should be a loud, *ore rotunda* {193}
rendering—not a mere lip-service; a launch, straight out from shores, into whatever waters or wilds the heathen orators may be sailing upon, and a full showing of their changing drift—whether in the eddies of a playful irony, or under the driving sweep of their storms of denunciation. {194}

Singularly apart from literary men, and most literary influences, Macaulay has objected (perhaps with some reason) to Pitt's cruel disregard of Dr. Johnson's needs and longings in his latter years; it would have been a charming thing, for instance, for the son of Chatham to put a Government ship at the service of the invalided philosopher, for a voyage under Italian skies; but with Pitt, the large political ends which were taking shape in his mind, and in process of evolution, blinded him to lesser and personal or kindly interests. A nod of the obstinate old king would have counted for more than a tragedy of *Irene*. All his classicism was but a weapon to smite with, or from which to forge the links of those shining parentheses by which he strangled an opponent. Nothing beyond or below the cool, considerate humanities of the cultured, self-poised gentleman (unless we except some rare outbreak of petulance) belongs to this great {195}
orator, who could thrust one through with a rapier held by the best rules of fence; and who never did or could say a word so warm as to touch a friend or make an enemy forget his courtliness. Guiding the political fate of England through a period of such strain, as demanded more nerve and more discretion than any period of a century before, or of a century thereafter—admired by all, and loved by very few, Pitt died quite alone, in a little cottage on Wimbledon Common[5]—even his servants had left;—died too of old age; an old age that grew out of his tormenting labors and ambitions—before he was fifty.

An Orator and Playwright.

Sheridan.

Sheridan is another name about which you have a better right to hear, since he was a favorite member of the Turk's Head coterie, and is a distinct literary survivor of that epoch.[6] He was son of Thomas Sheridan, author of a {196}
life of Swift and of a now rarely cited English Dictionary. The son Richard, after studying at Harrow, and afterward with his father, made a runaway match with a beautiful Miss Linley; and he continued doing runaway things all his life. A duel which his sharp marriage provoked, gave him material for his early play of *The Rivals*,—a play which has come to renewed popularity in our day, and country, under the pleasant humor of Jefferson. *The School for Scandal* is another of his comedies which makes its appearance from year to year: and Charles Surface and Lady Teazle—no less than Mrs. Malaprop, and Lydia Languish, are people who hang by, very persistently, and with whom we are pretty sure to make acquaintance at some time in our lives.

Mrs. Sheridan proved a much better wife than the conditions of the marriage promised; and I suppose that she was, in a way, contented with the ribbons and fine gowns, and equipages he {197}
provided for her (when he could); and with his unctuous, tender speeches, and his fame, and an occasional tap under the chin,—and with his forgetfulness of her when he went to the clubs, or the green-room, or the tavern—as he did very often, and stayed very late. Indeed "staying late," was the ruin of him. But this language into which I have fallen—not without warrant—should not convey the idea that this man was a commonplace, dissolute spendthrift; far from it. His spendings were sublimated by a crazy splendor of ungovernable and ill-regulated generosities, in which his Irish nature bubbled over; and his dissipation wore always the blazon of high social cheer; his excesses not sordid or grovelling, but they carried a quasi air of distinction, and were illuminated by the glow of his easy talk and the flashes of his wit.

His wildest spendings were always made without shamefacedness; but, on the contrary, with a bold alacrity, that gave assurance of riches as heaped up as those of an Arabian Night's tale. That wife of his, too—with her peachy tint, her faery grace, and her syren voice—seemed {198}
altogether a fit portion and adornment of the oriental profusion he always coveted and always owed for. His longings and ambitions were pitched upon a high key—a key to which his social aptitudes were charmingly attuned; and there was a time early in his career when it was a distinction to have the privilege of entrée at his beautiful home in Orchard Street, Portman Square, to share his sybaritic tastes, and to listen to the siren who warbled there.

At twenty-four this favorite of fortune had written that play which drew all London to see Captain Absolute; at twenty-five he had become half owner of that great theatre of Drury Lane, from whose till the hands of Garrick had drawn out a great fortune, and from which Richard Sheridan was to draw, often—more than was fairly in it. Meantime he had inspired, and, in connection with his father-in-law, had composed, the comic opera of the *Duenna*, whose success was enormous, and whose bouncing bits of lyrical jingle have come quivering through all the *couloirs* of intervening days, to ours: instance,—

"I ne'er could any lustre see {199}

In eyes that would not look on me.
Is her hand so soft and pure?
I must press it to be sure."

Then comes the *School for Scandal*, and—two years later—the *Critic*; and always the steaming suppers and the singing of many sirens, and deeper thrusts into the till of Old Drury; stockholders may wince and creditors too; but who shall gainsay or doubt the imperial genius who is winged with victory? Garrick, whose days of conquest are nearly over—is his friend; so is Burke, won by his wit, and by his rolling Irish r's; Goldsmith acknowledges his sovereignty: Dr. Johnson veils dislike of his radicalism and of his tirades against taxation, as he welcomes him to the Club.

In 1780, while still under thirty, he entered Parliament (for Stafford) and posed there for new conquests. There came frequent occasions for the interjection of his witty collocation of apothegms, lighted by his brilliant elocution; but there was not much in his parliamentary career to attract national attention until the debates opened with reference to the Warren Hastings impeachment. These offered topics which appealed to his emotional nature, and under the {200} indoctrination and the coaching of Burke, he made such appeal for the far-off, down-trodden princesses of India as electrified the nation. "Whatever the acuteness of the bar, the dignity of the Senate, or the morality of the pulpit could furnish [in eloquence] had not been equal to it." This was the verdict of so good a judge as Burke. Yet, reading this speech—or so much of it as the records show—or those others which followed,[7] when the great trial had opened in Westminster Hall, we find it hard to understand the enthusiasm of the old plaudits. There is wit, indeed, in whatever work warms him to a glow; old truisms get a setting in his oratorio reaches which make them gleam like diamonds; but there is none of that logical method which wraps one {201} around with convictions; but in place of it a beautiful mass of rhetorical spray, that delights and refreshes and passes—like a summer cloud.

Meanwhile the suppers abound, and so do the debts: that siren wife, who had kept his accounts, and made extracts and filled his note-books (and his flasks), passes away. It is a shock that does not rally his forces, but rather disperses them. He is *lié* in these times with the Prince of Wales; dines with him; wines with him. Who shall say he does not troll with him some of the piquant snatches of his own verse? As this:

"A bumper of good liquor
Will end a contest quicker
Than justice, judge, or vicar;
So fill a cheerful glass
And let good humor pass.
But if more deep the quarrel,
Why, sooner drain the barrel
Than be the hateful fellow
That's crabbed when he's mellow."

He *did* drain the barrel; he did fall from all his dizzy eminence; he did die a drunkard of the grosser sort; without money, almost without friends.[8] There was a great rally of coronets at his {202} funeral, and a pompous procession of those who went to bury him at Westminster. You will find his name there, in the Poets' Corner of the Abbey, and will give to his memory your wonder and your pity; but not, I think, much veneration.

The Boy Chatterton.

Chatterton.

We shift the scenes now for a new episode in our little story of letters, although we are under the same murky sky of London. George the Third is just finishing the first decade of his long reign; most of the clubmen of whom we have spoken are still alive, and go up, with more or less of regularity, to pay their court to Dr. Johnson; but we have our eye specially upon a pale, handsome-faced, long-haired lad, not beyond the schooling age, who knows nothing of courts or clubs, who has stolen away from the thraldom of a small attorney's office in Bristol, in the West of England, to come up to London and face the {203} world there, and try to conquer it. He does not know the task he has undertaken. His brain, indeed, is full of fine fancies; he has the poetic fervor in full flow upon him. He has left a mother and a sister—whom he loves dearly—his only near relatives; and he writes to that mother under date of May, 1770:

> "I am settled, and in such a settlement as I would desire. I get four guineas a month by one magazine; shall engage to write a History of England, or other pieces, which will more than double that sum. Occasional essays for the daily papers would more than support me. What a glorious prospect!"

And, again, a few weeks later to his sister:

> "I employ my money now in fitting myself fashionably, as my profession (of letters) obliges me to frequent the places of best resort. But I have engaged to live with a gentleman, the brother of a lord, who is going to advance pretty deeply into the bookselling branches. I shall have lodging and boarding, genteel and elegant, gratis. I shall have likewise no inconsiderable premium. I will send you two silks this summer, and expect, in answer to this, what colors you prefer.... Essay writing has this advantage: you are sure of constant pay; and when you have once wrote a piece which makes the author inquired after, you may bring the booksellers to your own terms."

Ah, how young he was! If only those first literary dreams and hopes could be realized, which nestle in the brains of so many—what silks—what houses—what gold—what fame! Yet this stripling not yet eighteen could write. I will give you a taste of his quality—in verses shorn of some of the old words he put in them for sake of disguise:— {204}

"The budding floweret blushes at the light,
 The meads are sprinkled with the yellow hue,
In daisied mantles is the mountain dight,
 The nesh young cowslip bendeth with the dew;
The trees enleafed, into heaven straught,
 When gentle winds do blow, to whistling din are brought.

The evening comes and brings the dew along,
 The ruddy welkin sheeneth to the eyne;
Around the ale stake minstrels sing their song;
 Young ivy round the door-post doth entwine.
I lay me on the grass; yet, to my will
 Albeit all is fair, there lacketh something still."[9]

And again, of a different order, this—from the same long poem:—

"O sing unto my Roundelay,
 O drop the briny tear with me,
Dance no more at Holy day
 Like a running river be.

  My Love is dead, {205}
  Gone to his death bed,
All under the willow tree.

Come with acorn cup and thorn
 Drain my hearte's blood away;
Life and all its good I scorn,
 Dance by night or feast by day.
My love is dead
 Gone to his death-bed
All under the willow tree."

Well, this is the poetry of the marvellous boy Chatterton[10]—fragments of which you will find in all the anthologies. That last tender letter to his sister, which I set before you—so gleeful, with promise of silks and of brilliant essays, was written on the last day of the month of May, 1770; and on the 24th of August—not three months later—after three days of starvation enforced by a poverty of which his pride would not let him tell, he took poison and made an end of his career.

Few knew of this; few knew that there had been any such adventurer in London; fewer yet, knew what poems—brimming, many of them, with fine fancies—he had left behind him. {206}

A few months after, at the first annual dinner of the newly founded Royal Academy of Art, Goldsmith,[11] being present, talked at table of a certain extraordinary lad who had come up the year before from Bristol—and had died the summer past—literally of starvation—leaving behind him certain wonderful poems, which in their phrases, he said, had an air of great antiquity. And Horace Walpole being also present—he never omitted being present at a Royal Society dinner, when it was possible for him to go—overhearing the talk and the name, said (we may fancy), "Bless me, young Chatterton, to be sure!—I had some correspondence with the young man; nice poems—but apocryphal—poor fellow; dead is he—starved, eh? dear me?—shocking—quite so!" and I suppose that he took snuff and dusted his ruffles thereafter, and then toyed with his delicate glass of fine old Sercial Madeira. This was like Walpole—wantonly like him. There had {207}
been a correspondence, as he condescendingly admitted, that I will tell you of.

This Bristol boy, growing up in sight of Durdham downs, and the gorge of the Avon and blue hills of Wales—with poetic visions haunting him—had somehow come upon old parchments—perhaps out of the muniment rooms of St. Mary's Redcliffe church, where his father had been sexton; he had been captivated by the quaint lettering, and awed by the odor of sanctity; and straightway imaged to himself an old mediæval priest, to be clothed upon with his own poetic sensibilities, and in the rusty phrases of the fourteenth century, to unfold to the world the poetic yearnings and aspirations that were seething in the brain of this wonderful boy. The ancient Dictionaries and old copies of Chaucer supplied the language; the antique parchments gave local allusions and the nomenclature; and for inspiration and motive—the winds that blew from over Chepstow and Tintern Abbey, and Caerleon, and whistled round the buttresses of St. Mary's Redcliffe—supplied more than enough. So began the modern antique poems of Thomas Rowley; {208} not a new device in the literary world; for Macpherson, whom we shall encounter presently, only a few years before had launched some of the "Ossian" poems, to the great wonderment and puzzle of the literary world; and Walpole, still earlier, had claimed a false antiquity and Neapolitan origin for his *Castle of Otranto*. To Walpole, therefore, the eager boy sent some fragments of his Rowley poems, which Walpole courteously acknowledged, and asked for a continuance of such favors. Poor Chatterton, presuming on this courtesy wrote again, declaring his dependent condition—apprenticed to a scrivener, and with mother and sister dependent on him—but believing that with God's help, and the encouragement of his distinguished patron, he might find the way to other and better Rowley poems.

Meantime Walpole, through his scholarly friend the poet Gray, had come to doubt the antiquity of Rowley's verse; and the plebeianism of this correspondent has shocked his gentility. He replies coolly, therefore; expresses doubts of the Rowley authorship, and advises poor Chatterton to keep by his apprenticeship at the scriveners. This sets the young poet's blood on {209} fire; he will go to London; he will win his way; he will smite the Philistines hip and thigh. And—as I have told you—he did go; did work; did struggle. But it is a great self-seeking world he has to face, full throughout of thwarting circumstance. Yet courage and pride hold him up—hold him up for months against terrific odds; at least he will tell nothing of his griefs. Thus his last pennies, which should have gone for bread, go to carry little love-tokens to the dear ones he has left. So lost is he in his little Holborn chamber, in that great seething, turbulent whirl of London, that he thinks—even as he mixes his death potion—they will never know; they will never hear: "Gone"—that is all! But they do know: and for them it is to chant broken-hearted the refrain of his own roundelay,

My love is dead,
Gone to his death bed
All under the willow tree.

It is not alone for reason of the romantic aspects of the story that I have given you this glimpse of the boy Chatterton, but because there was really much literary merit and great {210} promise in his work; in some respects, he reminds us of our American Poe—the same disposition to deal with mysteries, the same uncontrolled ardors, the same haughty pride; and although Chatterton's range in all rhythmic art was far below that of Poe, and although he did not carry so bold and venturous a step as the American into the region of *diableries*, he had perhaps more varied fancies and more homely tendernesses. The antique gloss which he put upon his work was unworthy his genius; helping no way save to stimulate curiosity, and done with a crudeness which, under the light of modern philologic study, would have deceived no one. But under this varnish of archæologic fustian and mould, there is show of an imaginative power and of a high poetic instinct, which will hold critical respect[12] and regard as long as English poetry shall be read.

Laurence Sterne. {211}

A sentimentalist.

Just two years before Chatterton died in Holborn, another noted literary character—Laurence Sterne[13]—died in Old Bond Street, at what were fashionable lodgings then, and what is now a fashionable tailor's shop; died there almost alone; for he was not a man who wins such friendships as hold through all weathers. A well known friend of the sick man—Mr. Crawford—was giving a dinner that day a few doors off; and Garrick was a guest at his table; so was David Hume, the historian; half through the dinner, the host told his footman to go over and ask after the sick man; and this is the report the footman gave to outsiders: "I went to the gentleman's lodgings, and the mistress opened the door. Says I—'How is Mr. Sterne to-day?' She told me to go up to the nurse; so I went, and he was just a-dying; I waited a while; but in five minutes he said, 'Now it's come.' Then he put up his hand, as if {212} to stop a blow, and died in a minute. The gentlemen were all very sorry." And all the sorrow anywhere—save in the heart of his poor daughter Lydia—was, I suspect, of the same stamp. His wife certainly would get on very well without him: she had for a good many years already.

Laurence Sterne.

You know the name of Mr. Sterne, I daresay, a great deal better than his works; and it is well enough that you should. A good many fragments drift about in books of miscellany which you are very likely to know and to admire; for some of them are surely of most exquisite quality. Take for instance that talk of Corporal Trim with Uncle Toby about the poor lieutenant, and of his ways and times of saying his prayers:—

> "When the Lieutenant had taken his glass of sack and toast he felt himself a little revived, and sent down into the kitchen to let me know that in about ten minutes he would be glad if I would step upstairs. 'I believe,' said the landlord, 'he is going to say his prayers, for there was a book laid on the chair by the bedside, and as I shut the door I saw him take up a cushion.'
>
> "'I thought,' said the curate, 'that you gentlemen of the army, Mr. Trim, never said your prayers at all."
>
> "'A soldier, an' please your Reverence,' said I, 'prays as often as a parson; and when {213} he is fighting for his king and for his own life, and for his honor too, he has the most reason to pray to God of any one in the whole world.'
>
> "''Twas *well* said of thee, Trim!' said my Uncle Toby.
>
> "'But when a soldier,' said I, 'an' please your Reverence, has been standing for twelve hours together in the trenches, up to his knees in cold water, or engaged for months together in long and dangerous marches—detached here—countermanded there; benumbed in his joints;—perhaps without straw in his tent to kneel on, he must say his prayers how and when he can.' 'I believe', said I, for I was piqued, quoth the Corporal, 'for the reputation of the army—I believe, an't please your Reverence—that when a soldier gets time to pray he prays as heartily as a Parson—though not with all his fuss and hypocrisy."
>
> "'Thou should'st not have said *that*, Trim,' said my uncle Toby; 'for God only knows who is a hypocrite and who is not. At the great and general review of us all, Corporal, at the day of judgment (and not till then) it will be seen who have done their duties in this world and who have not, and we shall be advanced, Trim, accordingly.'
>
> "'I hope we shall,' said Trim.
>
> "'It is the Scripture,' said my uncle Toby, 'and I will show it thee in the morning.'"

Now this beautiful naturalness, this delightful, artistic abstention from all rant or extravagance, makes us wish overmuch that the whole guileless character of my uncle Toby had been as charmingly and as decently set in the text; but unfortunately, there is a continuous {214} embroidery of it all with ribald blotches, and far-fetched foulness of speech; nor is his coarseness—like that of Fielding—half excused by the coarseness of the age; it is inherent and vital: Fielding, indeed, is vulgar and coarse, and obstreperous—with the scent of bad spirits and bad company on him;[14] but this other, though a parson, and perfumed, and wearing may-be, satin small-clothes, has vile and grovelling tastes that overflow in double-meanings of lewdness: even Goldsmith, who was not squeamish, calls him "the blackguard parson." It is not probable that Goldsmith ever encountered him; nor did Dr. Johnson. Beauclerk, Garrick, and Walpole would have been more in his line; for he loved the glint, and the capital letters, and the showy tag-rags of fashion. And on the strength of his literary reputation, which had sudden and brilliant burst, and of his good family—since a not far-off ancestor had been Archbishop of York—he conquered {215} and enjoyed, for his little day, all that London fashion had to offer. I suspect he took a solid comfort in dying in so respectable a quarter as Old Bond Street. He was buried over Bayswater way, not far from the Marble Arch, in the graveyard then pertaining to St. George's (Hanover Square) church. And there was a story, supported by a good deal of circumstantial evidence, that his body was spirited away and recognized a few days afterward by a medical student among the spoils of a dissecting-room. This story would horrify more than it did, had it attached to an author whose humor had kindled love;—as if this man did somehow deserve a more effective "cutting-up" after death than he ever received before it.

The Rev. Laurence Sterne had—I should have told you—a church-living down in Yorkshire, to which was afterward added, by adroit diplomacy of his friends, an official position in connection with York Cathedral. I do not think the people of his parish missed him much when he was away; and I am very sure they missed him a good deal, whenever he was—nominally—there: painting, {216} fiddling, shooting, and dining-out, took very much of his parochial time; and *Tristram Shandy* and its success, literary and pecuniary, introduced him to a career in London, and in Paris afterward—for he was always an immense favorite with the French (instance Tony Johannot's illustrations)—to which he yielded himself with a graceful acquiescence that, I am afraid, put his parishioners more out of mind than the fiddling and the shooting had done.

I believe that he loved his daughter Lydia with an honest love; with respect to his wife, one cannot be so sure; some of the most tender letters he left, are addressed to a Mrs. Draper, who was his "dear Eliza"—through a great many quires of paper. He was a Cambridge man and well taught;—of abundant reading, which he made to serve his turn in various ways, and conspicuously by his stealings; he stole from Rabelais; he stole from Shakespeare; he stole from Fuller;[15] he stole from Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy*; not a stealing of ideas only, but of {217} words and sentences and half-pages together, without a sign of obligation; and yet he did so wrap about these thefts with the strings and lappets of his own abounding humor and drollery, as to give to the whole—thieving and Shandyism combined—a stamp of individuality. Ten to one that these old authors who had suffered the pilfering, would have lost cognizance of their expressions, in the new surroundings of the Yorkshire parson; and joined in the common grin of applause with which the world welcomed and forgave them.

But I linger longer on this name than the man deserves. Pathos there is in his stories, to be sure, that makes you wilt in spite of yourself; but a mile away from those Bond Street chambers where this pale, thin, silk-stockinged clergyman lives, and has his dinner invitations ten deep, is that old scar-faced Dr. Johnson about whom the beggars crowd; who can put no such pathos into his cumbrous sentences indeed; but the presence of that old, blind, petulant woman in his house {218}
—who had waited on his lost wife—is itself a bit of pathos that I think will outlast the story of *Maria*—and that should do so forty times over. I wish I could blot out the silk stockings, the rustling cassock, the simper, the pestilent love letters, the pretences, the artificialities of the man; they are oppressive; they rob his words of weight. Wit—to be sure, and humor—truculent, sparkling—more than enough; for the rest, there is hypocrisy, pretension—beastliness—untruth—all pinned under a satinquilted cloak of vague and unreal piety.

[1] Charles James Fox, b. 1749; d. 1806. Elected to club membership in 1774. His great great-grandmother was the Duchess of Portsmouth; and the Lord Holland so well known for his entertainments at Holland House, early in this century, was a nephew of Charles James Fox. Life by George Otto Trevelyan.

[2] Instance, speech on French affairs and the question of making peace with Napoleon—just then elected First Consul. Date of February, 1800.

[3] William Pitt, b. 1759; d. 1806. Younger son of the Earl of Chatham. He entered Pembroke Hall, Cambridge, 1773.

[4] Wraxall in his Memoirs (p. 344) cites special instance in the speech, where he deprecates new alliance between North and Fox—alluding to personal results to himself:—

"Fortuna sævo læta negotio et——"

(leaving out the *mea virtute*) then pounding on the table, and adding with oratorical vim

"——probamque
Pauperiem sine dole quæro."

Here (says Wraxall, who was an auditor) he cast his eyes down—passing his handkerchief across his lips—to recover breath only. Certainly he was grandly clear of anything like avarice; no great statesman of England (unless Gladstone) ever thought so little of money.

[5] See Francis Horner article in *Edinburgh Review*, October, 1843.

[6] Richard Brinsley Sheridan, b. 1751; d. 1816. Moore's Biography, interesting but not authoritative. Mrs. Oliphant's sketch in the Morley *Lives*, is one of that lady's most charming books.

[7] It was on February 7, 1787, that Sheridan made his first notable speech on the Begum charge in the House of Commons; the second, in the impeachment trial in Westminster Hall, in June, 1788. Others followed of less interest toward the close of the trial in 1794. The best reports are of the speeches made in 1788, published at the instigation of Sir Cornewall Lewis, in 1859. See *Wilkes, Sheridan, and Fox*, by W. Fraser Rae. 1874.

[8] A fearful account of Sheridan's condition in his last days is to be found in the *Croker Papers* (1884), chap. x. It is embodied in what purports to be a literal transcript of a conversational narrative by George IV., J. Wilson Croker being interlocutor and listener.

[9] Œlia (Humphry Ward's version).

[10] Thomas Chatterton, b. 1752; d. 1770. Tyrwhitt's edition, "Poems supposed to have been written by Thomas Rowley," etc., dates from 1777.

[11] Foster's Goldsmith, vol. ii., p. 248.

[12] Dr. Skeat—as a philologist—is naturally severe upon a thief of archaisms, whose robberies and arrogance did puzzle for a while even the archæologists.

Per contra—there is a disposition among many recent critics to rank him high among the pioneers of the "New Romantic" movement in England; *Vid.* Rodin Noel—*Essays on the Poets*; also, *Athenæum*, No. 3073.

[13] Sterne: b. 1713; d. 1768. *Life*, by H. D. Traill; a fuller one by Percy Fitzgerald.

[14] Notwithstanding there was almost always evidence of gentlemanly instincts at bottom; and under the scoriæ of a dissipated life and habits the sparkling of a soul of honor.

[15] In a sermon read by Corporal Trim (p. 209, *Tristram Shandy*, vol. i., London, 1790) are a good many strong points taken, without acknowledgment, from one of Richard Bentley's sermons, preached at Cambridge against Popery, on November 5th—shortly after the first attempt of "the Pretender." This strange similitude is not noticed in Dr. Ferrier's summing up of Sterne's sinning in this line.

CHAPTER VI. {219}

We had sight of George III. in our last chapter, and we shall catch sight of him again from time to time; for he was a persistent lingerer, and a most obstinate liver. We had glimpses, too, of that cheery, sunny-faced, eloquent, ill-balanced man, Charles James Fox, whom we ought to remember as a true friend to America, in those critical days when taxation was swelling into tyranny. William Pitt, whom we also saw, and to whom we would have been delighted to listen, would never have won greatly upon American sympathies; too cold, too austere, too classic, too fine. Sheridan, on the other hand, would, and did, conquer hearts everywhere; but unfortunately spending his forces in great paroxysms of effort; one while the greatest comedist, and again the greatest orator, always the greatest spendthrift; and anon the greatest debtor, who only pays his {220} debts by dying.

Sterne covered better his deficiencies of money and of soul. Who could have put more or truer feeling into the story of the poor ill lieutenant of the inn, whom Corporal Trim (at Uncle Toby's instance) had gone to see, and of whom he makes report? And uncle Toby says he will fetch him home and set him afoot in his regiment.

"Never," says Trim, "can he march."

"But he *shall* march," says uncle Toby.

"He will die in his tracks," says Trim.

"He shall *not* die," says Toby, with an oath—which oath, says Sterne, the recording angel washed away, so soon as it was uttered. The Rev. Laurence Sterne, it is to be feared, counted too largely upon the swash of such tender recording angels. Only a host of them, with best lachrymal equipment, could float away poor Sterne's misdeeds!

We touched upon the sad life and fate of the marvellous boy, Chatterton—not a great poet, but with an exuberant poetic glow within him which gave new brightness to old Romanticism, and which kindled in after days many a fancy into flame—up and down the pages of later and {221} bolder poets. Were his forgeries perhaps instigated by the Ossianic mystification?

Macpherson and other Scots.

James Macpherson.

I do not know if you have ever encountered the poems of Ossian. They are out of fashion now; I doubt if fragments even get into the school-books; but some of my readers may remember in a corner of the art-gallery of Yale University a painting, with two life-size figures in it, by Colonel John Trumbull —a limp and bleeding, and somewhat dainty warrior, leaning upon the shoulder of a flax-haired maiden; with a little strain from Ossian's Fingal, in the placard below, to tell the story. The mighty Lamderg (who is the warrior) died: and Gelchossa (the flax-haired young woman) "mourned three days beside her love. The hunters found her dead." The picture is, I suspect, almost the only permanent mark in America of the amazing popularity which once belonged to the strange, weird, monotonous, gloomy, thin poems of Ossian. There are descriptions of {222} mountain crags in them, and of splintered pines, of thunder blasts and of ocean hoar; and there are crags again, and bleeding warriors, and flax-haired women; harps, moonlight, broken clouds, and crags again: I cite a few fragments:

> "The oaks of the mountains fall; the ocean shrinks and grows again; the moon herself is lost in heaven; but thou art forever the same, rejoicing in the brightness of thy course. When the world is dark with tempests, when thunder rolls and lightning flies, thou lookest in thy beauty from the clouds and laughest at the storm.
>
> ... "Rise, moon, from behind thy clouds! Stars of the night arise, lead me, some light, to the place where my love rests from the chase alone—his bow near him unstrung; his dogs panting around him. The stream and the wind roar aloud, I hear not the voice of my love."

Poems of Ossian.

And yet these poetic flights, which, it would seem might be made up from collective but injudicious use of the Songs of Solomon and the mental exaltations which come from over-indulgence in tea drinking, or other strong waters, were borne, on a swift gale of plaudits in the latter half of the last century all over Europe. Professors of Literature (such as Dr. Hugh Blair) wrote treatises upon their fire and {223} grace; such men as Goethe and Schiller were fast admirers; Napoleon was said to be bewildered by their beauty. Of course they had French translation; and there were versions in German, Greek, Dutch, Spanish, and Latin. The Abbé Cesarotti, besides writing a dissertation in favor of the authenticity of the Gaelic poems, gave an Italian version (the favorite one of Napoleon) which in parts has a rounded play of vocables that makes one forget all poverty of invention. Thus when Ossian says,

"Thy side that is white as the foam of the troubled sea, when dark winds pour it on rocky Cuthon——" it is rounded by the Italian into this pretty bit of mellifluence:—

> "Il tuo fianco ch' è candido come la spuma del turbato mare,
> Quando gli oscuri venti lo spingono contro la mormorante
> Roccia di Cutone——"[1]

And who, pray, was this Macpherson[2] of the Ossian poems, and what was his claim? He was a Scotch school-master; born somewhere in the upper valley of the Spey, beyond the Grampians and in the heart of the Highlands. He had been at Aberdeen University awhile, and again at Edinboro'; but took no degree at either. He wrote and printed some poor verse when twenty; followed it up with some fragments of old Gaelic song, which commanded wide attention; and in 1762 published that poem of Fingal—professedly by Ossian, an old Gaelic bard; and this made him famous. The measure and range were new, and there was a torrent of flame and thunder and love and fury running through it which captivated: he went up to London—was appointed to go with Governor Johnston to Florida,[3] in America; remained there at Pensacola, a year or more; but quarrelled with his chief (he had rare aptitude for quarrelling) and came back in 1766. Some English historical work followed; but with little success or profit. Yet he was a canny Scotchman, and so laid his plans that he became agent for some rich nabob of India (from those pickings winning a great fortune eventually); entered Parliament in 1780; had a country house at Putney, where he entertained lavishly; and at last built a great show place in the Highlands, near to his birth-place—which one may see to-day—with an obelisk to his memory, looking down on the valley of the Spey; and not so far away from the old coach-road, that passes through Killiecrankie, from Blair Athol to Inverness, but the coachman can show it—as he did to me—with his whip. {224} {225}

There were those who questioned from the beginning whether the Ossianic poems did really come from the Gaelic;—Dr. Johnson among them, whose contemptuous doubts infuriated the Macpherson to such a degree that he challenged the doughty Doctor. Johnson replied in what may be called forcible speech:—

> "Mr. James Macpherson, I received your foolish and impudent letter. I hope I shall never be deterred from detecting what I think a cheat, by the menaces of a ruffian. What would you have me retract? I thought your book an imposture; I think it an imposture still. Your rage I defy. Your abilities, since your Homer,[4] are not so formidable: and what I hear of your morals inclines me to pay regard—not to what you shall *say*, but to what you shall *prove*. You may print this if you will." {226}

Dr. Johnson carried a big oaken cudgel with him, when he travelled in Scotland. Hume, on the other hand, was, with Scotch patriotism, inclined to accept at first, Macpherson's story of authenticity:[5] but even he says of this author, with whom he came into altercation—"I have scarce ever known a man more perverse and unamiable." The Highland Society investigated the matter, and reported that while there was no trace of a complete poem in Gaelic corresponding to Macpherson's verse, there were snatches of Highland song and ballads which supported his allegations. The question is not even yet fully settled, and is hardly worth the settlement. Macpherson's own obstinacies and petulancies put unnumbered difficulties in the way; he resented any denial of Gaelic origin for his verse; he resented any denial of his capacity to sing better than the Gael; he promised to show Highland originals, and always made occasions for delay; withal he was as touchy as a bad child, and as virulent as a fish-woman. Nothing satisfied him; one of those men whose steak is always too much done—or too little;—the sermon always too short or too long. He might have been the "Stout Gentleman" of *Bracebridge Hall*: for he was a big man, and always wore wax-topped boots. Old Mrs. Grant too—who must have been a neighbor of his, when she lived at Laggan—says that he had habits (with theories about social proprieties) which "excluded him from decent society." Mrs. Grant was, however "verra" correct, and a stickler for the minor, as well as the major virtues. {227}

Macpherson left inheritors of his name, and of his estates in that upper valley of the Spey; and a daughter of his became the wife of Sir David Brewster, the eminent scientist. He was buried "by special request" in Westminster Abbey; he had been always covetous of such public testimonials to his consequence. Yet if his book of Ossianic poems was ten-fold better than it is, it would hardly give an enduring, or a brilliant gloss to the memory of James Macpherson. {228}

But whatever may be said for the Gaelic, it is certain that Scotticisms were in those days winning their place in song and in tale. Since the day, in the first quarter of the century (1725), when Allan Ramsay had sent out from his book shop in Edinboro', his rustic eclogue of the *Gentle Shepherd*, a love had been ripening and growing for those Scottish strains which were to find their last and unsurpassable expression by and by, in the glow and passion of Burns.

Meantime there were hundreds along the Teviot, and the Esk, and by Ettrickdale, who rolled under their tongues delightedly the Scottish bubbles of song, which broke—now from a bookseller, now from a schoolmaster, now from a Jacobite, and now from a "stickit" minister.[6] I will give you one taste of this Scotticism of the borders, were it only to clear your thought of the gloom and crags of Ossian. It is usually attributed to Halket, a Jacobite school-master, not so well known as Ramsay or Robert Ferguson:— {229}

Logie O'Buchan.

"O Logie o' Buchan, O Logie the laird,
They ha'e ta'en awa' Jamie, that delved in the yard,
Wha played on the pipe, and the viol sae sma',
They ha'e ta'en awa' Jamie, the flower o' them a'.

"Tho' Sandy has ousen, has gear and has kye,
A house and a hadden, and siller forbye;
Yet I'd tak' my ain lad, wi' his staff in his hand,
Before I'd ha'e him, wi' the houses and land.

"My Daddie looks sulky, my Minnie looks sour,
They frown upon Jamie because he is poor;
Tho' I lo'e them as weel as a daughter should do
They're nae half sa dear to me, Jamie, as you.

"I sit on my creepie, I spin at my wheel
And think on the laddie that lo'ed me sae weel,
He had but ae saxpence, he brak it in twa
And gied me the hauf o't, when he ga'd awa'."

Yet the poet, from whom we quote, died only three years before Burns was born; but I think we can see from the graces of this modest schoolmaster singer, that taste and accomplishment were both ripening in those north latitudes for the times and the man, in which and in whom, such poetry as that of Burns should be possible. {230}

There was, too, another growth in those days in that northern capital of Great Britain; Dr. Robertson had written his History of America and his History of Charles V. Adam Smith (the friend of Hume) was busy on his *Wealth of Nations* (published during the year in which Hume died). Hugh Blair, the eloquent doctor, was delivering his lectures on rhetoric. Henry Mackenzie, the amiable Dean of the Edinboro' literati, was writing his *Man of Feeling* and his *Julia de Roubigné*,—books of great reputation in the early part of this century, but with graces in them that were only imitative, and sentiment that was dismally affected and over-wrought; and there was Lord Kames, the *Gentleman Farmer*, with a fine great house in the Canongate, who wrote on criticism, with acuteness and taste. You will not read any of the books of these last-named people; {231} 't were unfair to ask you to do so; but they were preparing the way for that literary development which will find expression before many years in the columns of the *Edinburgh Review* (established at the beginning of this century), and in the border minstrelsy of Scott.

George Crabbe.

Crabbe.

We step back into England now, to find two poets whose principal work belonged to the closing years of the last century; and with echoes, fresh and strong, trailing over into the beginning of this. Neither their work nor their lives belonged to the noises or to the atmosphere of London. City sounds do not press into their verse; but instead are the sounds of sea-waves or of winds on woods, or of church bells, or of the clink and murmur of the lives of cottagers. The first I name to you of these two is George Crabbe[7]—a name that may sound strangely, being almost unknown and unconsidered now; yet {232} fifty years ago there was not a reading-book in any of the schools, nor an album full of elegant selections, which was not open for the story of Phœbe Dawson, or a glimpse of the noble peasant, Isaac Ashford. But all that is gone:[8]

"I see no more those white locks thinly spread
Round the bald polish of that honored head;
No more that awful glance on playful wight
Compelled to knee and tremble at the sight,
To fold his fingers all in dread the while
Till Mister Ashford softened to a smile."

This gives the manner and strain of Crabbe; it is Pope, but it is Pope muddied and rusticated; {233} Pope in cow-skin shoes, instead of Pope in prunella.

Crabbe was born in the little shore town of Aldborough—looking straight out upon the North Sea; and the rhythmic beat of those waves so stamped itself on his boyish brain, that it came out afterward—when he could manage language, in which he had great gift—very clear and very real; there's nothing better, all up and down his rural tales, than his fashion of putting waves into his rhythmic measures—as you shall see:—

"Upon the billows rising—all the deep
Is restless change: the waves so swelled and steep,
Breaking and sinking, and the sunken swells
Nor one, one moment, in its station dwells.
* * * * *
Curled as they come, they strike with furious force,
And then, renewing, take their grating course,
Raking the rounded flints, which ages past
Rolled by their rage, and shall to ages last.
* * * * *
In shore, their passage tribes of sea-gulls urge,
And drop for prey within the sweeping surge,
Oft in the rough opposing blast they fly
Far back, then turn and all their force apply,
While to the storm they give their weak complaining cry,
Or clap the sleek white pinion on the breast,
And in the restless ocean dip for rest."

Fashions of poets and of poetry may go by, but such scenes on those North Sea shores will {234} never go by. Crabbe was son of a customs' man, of small, turbulent character, and the boy had starveling education; he picked up so much as qualified him at length for surgeon (or doctor, as we say) in that small shore town, but gained little: so, threw all behind him—a girl he loved, and a town he did not love—and with three guineas in his pocket, and a few manuscript poems, set off for London. He was there, indeed, in the very times we have talked of; when wits met at the Turk's Head, when Fox thundered in Parliament, when Sterne was just dead; but who should care for this stout young fellow from the shore? One man—one only, does care; it is the warm Irish-hearted Edmund Burke, who being appealed to and having read the verses which the adventurer brought to his notice, befriends him, takes him to his house, makes him know old Dr. Johnson; and his first book is launched and talked of under their patronage. Then this great friend Burke conspires religiously with the Bishop of Norwich to plant the poet in the Church. Why not? He has some Latin; he means well, and can write a sermon. So we find him returned to that wild {235} North Sea shore with a little church to feed, and the church people, in their turn, to feed him. But the arrangement does not run smoothly; those verses of his, unlike most rural verse, have shown all the darker colors of peasant life; if full of sympathy, they were full of bitter, homely truth. The muck, the mire, the griefs, the crimes, the unthrift, the desolation, have given sombre tint to his village pictures; perhaps those shore people resent it; perhaps he is incapable of the cheeriness which should brighten charity; at any rate he goes away under private preferment to a private chaplaincy at Belvoir Castle, the seat of the Duke of Rutland.

There is not a more princely house among the baronial homes of England. It sits among wooded hills—which to the eye of a Suffolk man would be mountains—where Lincolnshire and Leicestershire join: the towers of Lincoln Cathedral are in sight at the north, and Nottingham Castle in the west: and there is a glitter in some near valley of an affluent of the Trent, shining amid billows of foliage; while within the stately home,[9] the Suffolk doctor could have regaled {236} himself with examples of Rubens and of Murillo, of Teniers, Poussin, and Vandyke.

The Duke of Rutland was a kindly man, a sentimental lover of literature, enjoying the verse of Crabbe, and proud of patronizing him, but lacking the supreme art of putting him at ease among his titled visitors; perhaps enjoying from his high poise, the disturbing embarrassments with which the good-natured poet was beset under the bewildering attentions of some butler, who outshone the host in his trappings, and in his lordly condescension to the level of an apothecary's apprentice.

It was not altogether pleasant for Crabbe; and when afterward he had married his old flame of Aldborough, and by invitation of the Duke (who was absent in Ireland) was allowed to partake of the hospitalities of the castle, the ironical obsequience of the flunkeys all, drove him away from the baronial roof. Through the influence of friends he secures livings,—first in Dorset, and afterward in Leicestershire (1789), almost within sight of Belvoir towers. Hereabout, or in near {237} counties, where he has parochial duties, he vegetates slumberously, for twenty years or more. He preaches, practises his old apothecary craft, drives (his wife holding the reins), idles, writes books and burns them, grows old, has children, loves flowers, and on one occasion, mounts his horse and gallops sixty miles for a scent of the salt air which he had snuffed as a boy. Meanwhile the old haunts in London, which he knew for so brief a day, know him no more; his old friends are dead, his hair is snowy, his purposes wavering.

But his children are of an age now to spur him to further literary effort; with the opening of the present century he rallies his power for new songs; and thereafter the slowly succeeding issues of the *Parish Register*, *The Borough*, and the *Tales of the Hall*, pave a new way for him into the courts of Fame. He secures another and more valuable living in the South of England (Wiltshire), where the incense of London praises can reach him more directly. One day in 1819 he goes away from his publishers with bills for £3,000[10] in his pocket; must take them home to {238} show them to his boy, John; he loves that boy and other children over much—more, it is to be feared, than he had ever done that mother, the old flame of Aldborough, in respect of whom there had been intimations of incompatibility; hence, perhaps, the interjection of that sixty-mile ride for a snuff of the freedom of the waves. He died at last down in Trowbridge (his new living), a little way southward of Bradford in Wiltshire; and his remains lie in the chancel of the pretty church there.

We must think of him, I believe, as a good, honest-minded, well-meaning man; dull, I dare say as a preacher; diffuse, meandering, homely and lumbering as a poet; yet touching with raw and lively colors the griefs of England's country-poor; and with a realism that is hard to match, painting the flight of petrels and of the curlew, and the great sea waves that gather and roll and {239} break along his lines.

William Cowper.

Cowper.

The other poet, to whom allusion has been made, living beside him, in that country of England, yet not near him nor known to him, was William Cowper. You know him better: you ought to know him better. Yet he would have managed a church—if a parish had been his—worse than Crabbe did. I fear he would not have managed children so prudently; and if he had ever married, I feel quite sure that his wife would have managed him.

Cowper was of an excellent family, being the son[11] of a church rector, and was born at the rectory (now destroyed), which once stood under the wing of the pretty church that, with its new decorations, still dominates the picturesque valley town of Great-Berkhamsted, on the line of the {240} London and Birmingham Railway. He studied at Westminster—being school-fellow with Churchill, the poet, and with Warren Hastings—of whose Trial we have had somewhat to say: afterward he entered a solicitor's office at the Temple, where Thurlow (later, Lord Chancellor) chanced to be clerk at the same time. He had fair amount of money, good prospect of a place under Government—his uncle, Ashley Cowper, being a man of position and influence.

This uncle had two daughters, to one of whom this young gentleman said tender things;—too tender to be altogether cousinly—in which regard she proved as over-cousinly as he. But the Papa stamped out that little fire of love before it had grown into great flame. There is reason, however, to believe that the smouldering of it had its influences upon Miss Theodora all through her life; and who shall say that it did not touch the great melancholy of the future poet with a sting of tenderness? There was, however, no outspoken lamentation; the feminine nature of the man accepted the decision of the uncle as a decree of fate; there was never any great capacity in {241} him for struggle or for controversy, either with men, or with untoward circumstance.

Meantime, the expected preferment came to young Cowper—a place, or places of value and of permanence, which he had need only to take with a bold hand and purpose; but the bold hand was lacking; and his hesitancy multiplied difficulties which could only be met by examination for fitness before the Lords; that examination stares him awfully in the face; he wilts under the bare prospect; is hedged by doubts; palters with his weakness; falls into a wretched state of melancholy, and—buys laudanum to make an end of it all;—then, he has flashes of light, and waves of a redeeming firmness chase over his mind; but finally, on the very day on which the examination was to take place, he makes a miserable effort at self-destruction. Was ever a man, before or since, who would commit suicide to avoid lucrative office? William Cowper, with only an ordinary share of average common sense, and unhampered by the trappings of genius that belonged to him, would have "gone on" for this place; secured it; made his easy fortune; lived a {242} good humdrum life; died lamented, and never heard of. The poet's fine brain, however—which had been exercised already in musical verse—built up mountains of difficulty; he told in after years, with a curious sincerity, all the details of his struggle—how he held the phial of laudanum to his lips and how he flung it away; how he held a knife at his heart; and finally, how he threw his garter, which served for a gallows-rope, over the chamber door, and hung "till the bitterness of temporal death was past." Righteously enough, after all these weakly resolves, which a man of energy would have made strong, he falls into utter distraction; religious doubts and fears racking him, and lunacy throttling him; and so this young Templar of the bright prospects goes away to the care of a mad-doctor. But long curative processes are needful; and he emerges at last—the blush of his youth all gone, and he lighted up and a-flame with tempestuous religious exhilaration. He would go into orders, but he can never face a congregation; so he plants himself, by the advice of friends, who prop up his waning income, in the flats of Huntingdon, where the {243} river Ouse winds round and round amid the low lands, and sighs among its sedges. He seems like a castaway; what he has written has been little—a boy's pastime; what he has purposed has been weak; and I daresay that his uncle Ashley Cowper, and his cousin Theodora, and his fellow-clerk Thurlow, thought they would never hear of him more, until, on some far-off day, a funeral invitation might come.

But Cowper was presently domesticated in the home of a Rev. Mr. Unwin—an old gentleman, who has a youngish wife (though eight or ten years Cowper's senior) and a son, who is also a preacher. These take kindly to the invalid; they relish his religious exuberance; they pity his frailties; and then and there begins an intimate friendship between Mrs. Unwin and our poet, which for its purity, its strength, its constancy, is without a parallel, I think, in English literary annals. It was about the year 1765 that he first fell in with Mrs. Unwin, and he was never thereafter separated from her—for any considerable time, counting by days—up to the year of her death in 1796.

For the first sixteen years of this exile upon the flats along the Ouse—whether at Huntingdon {244} or at Olney (where they removed after the death of the elder Unwin) there must have been, what most men—whether poets or not—would count a weary and monotonous succession of weeks and days and months. There were few neighbors of culture; no village growth or stir; lands all tamely level; streams all sluggish; industries of the smallest; no shooting—no fishing—no cards—no visitors—no driving; sermon reading in the morning; sermon reading in the evening; walks in the garden; digging in the garden (mild insanity intervening); petting the tame hares; feeding the doves; reading Mistress More; singing hymns; drinking tea; listening for the larks; listening to Mrs. Unwin; drowsing—sleeping—dreaming! Only contrast that dreary trail of days with those passed by Goldsmith, or by Johnson, or by Hume!

But good Mrs. Unwin, who is not only kindly, but has some dormant literary tastes, does rouse him to some poetic labors; she does have faith in his talent; and it was in 1782, I think, that his book containing *Table-talk* and other verse, first appeared, and by its quiet graces and {245} naturalness provoked inquiry in London, and amongst cultured readers everywhere—as to who this "William Cowper of the Inner Temple" might possibly be? The Rev. John Newton of Olney knew, for the poet had assisted him in the preparation of a certain *Olney Hymn Book*, published not long before: and then and thereafter this John Newton—-a good-hearted, well-meaning divine of an old-fashioned stamp, was pounding, as occasion served, with the hard hammer of his unblinking Calvinism upon the quivering sensibilities of the distraught poet.

But on the breezes of this new reputation which Cowper had wrought came in these times (1782) a fresh bird, in fine feathers, floating into the domestic aviary of Olney. This was Lady Austen, the widow of a baronet—who planted herself there—not without due graces of previous introduction (1781)—between the Unwin and the Cowper for three years, giving a new stir to the poet's brain. Out of that quickening came, after a night of travail, that ever-fresh ballad of *John Gilpin's Ride*; it was popular from the first; and some two years later—it was publicly recited by {246} Henderson—a famous Falstaffian actor of that epoch, it ran like wild-fire through the journals of the day, while the shops along Fleet Street showed in their windows a great jolly picture of Gilpin and his intractable nag cantering past the Bell at Edmonton.

The shy poet, however, did not go to London to reap any honors which might have accrued; he stayed at Olney, working at a new *Task*, toward the conception and accomplishment of which he was led by the witty sallies and engaging devices of the new favorite—Lady Austen. This piquant woman, with her charming vivacities, her alluring airs, her dazzling chat, had wrapped the quiet, melancholy poet all around with a witchery to which he was unused and which tempted him to his best powers of song. He was proud of his fresh successes, and grateful to that new and fascinating member of their little household who had provoked and prompted them. What should disturb this cheery party of three—save the ever-lasting unfitness of the odd number? Perhaps the thought of this came first through some tender reproachful look of good Mrs. Unwin; perhaps {247} the poet, stirred to some new wrestle with his withered heart, found out its emptiness; perhaps the gay, enchanting new-comer grew weary of the song she had provoked—or weary of a welcome that stayed so calm. At any rate she took wing;[12] there was a little flurry of correspondence to mark the parting, which, I dare say, both may have wished should be forgotten.

Meanwhile the new, and much-loved poem which had grown out of this intimacy did worthily, and very largely, extend Cowper's fame. Miss Hannah More was enchanted by it; "such an original and philosophic thinker," she says; "such genuine Christianity, and such a divine simplicity!" Even Corsica Boswell calls him "a genius;" and Lord Thurlow (whose favors to the poet never went beyond words) says of his old chum, "If there is a good man on earth, it is William Cowper!"

But the waves of applause break only with a low dolorous murmur upon the threshold of that {248} Olney home. A cruel sense of his own undeservings weighs upon his spirits; he cannot ask a blessing at his meals, for who would listen? he cannot pray, for it would be mockery; and he consoles himself with the poor satisfaction of not being a mocker. He discusses village and public affairs with his barber, Wilson (who had conscientiously refused to dress Lady Austen's hair upon a Sunday). Alluding to American affairs, in that crisis when a treaty of peace was discussed at Versailles (1783) between France and America, he speaks of the "thirteen pitiful colonies which the king of England chose to keep and the king of France to obtain—if he could." A little later, at the same crisis, he says:

> "I may be prejudiced against these [Americans], but I do not think them equal to the task of establishing an empire.... You will suppose me a politician; but, in truth, I am nothing less. These are the thoughts that occur to me while I read the newspaper; and when I have laid it down, I feel myself more interested in the success of my 'early

cucumbers' than in any part of this important subject."[13]

His Later Life. {249}

It was only in the latter part of his career that the poet made the acquaintance of William Hayley,[14] his future biographer, who had been drawn toward Cowper by the charms of his verse and who came to visit him: this friend, through his wide familiarity with the outer world, had suborned bishops and clergy and public men to write to this melancholy exile of Olney and cheer him with their praises—all which praises fell like hail upon Cowper's window pane. And there had been a little trip devised, to divert that weakened and fatigued mind, down to Eartham in Sussex, where his friend Hayley has a beautiful place, and where he brings the artist Romney, to paint the well-known portrait; but there is no long stay away from the old covert on the flats of Buckinghamshire; indeed this covert had taken new life within a few years by the advent of a cousin, the Lady Hesketh, the widowed sister of his old lost Theodora; she had come with her {250} carriage and trappings, and taken a fine house, and sought to revive pleasantly all the mundane influences of Lady Austen.

From Olney there had come about in those times—at the wise suggestion of Lady Hesketh—a move over to the near village of Weston, which thereafter became the poet's home. [On an April day many years ago—moved by an old New England cleaving to the poems and the poet—I strolled down from Newport Pagnell—to which place I had taken coach from Northampton—following all the windings of the sluggish Ouse, to Weston; stopping at the "Cowper's Oak" inn, I found next door his old home—its front overgrown with roses—and strolled into his old garden; and thence, by a door the gardener unlocked, into the "Wilderness;" the usher regaling me with stories of the crazy poet whom he had seen in his boyhood, and who loved the birds, and who wore a white tasselled night-cap as he wandered in the garden alleys at noon.]

It was at Weston, I think, that the translation of Homer was—if not undertaken—most largely {251} wrought upon. The regular occupation involved counted largely in the dispersion of those despondent mists that were gathering round him. He brought scholarly tastes and a quick conscience to the work; a boy would be helped more to the thieving of the proper English by Cowper's Homer, than by Pope's; but there was not "gallop" enough in his nature for a live rendering; and he was too far in-shore for the rhythmic beat of the multitudinous waves and too far from the "hollow" ships.

In the intervals of this important labor—which was only fairly successful, and gave him no such clutch upon the publisher's guineas as Crabbe gained at a later day—only chance things were written. But some of these chances were brimful of suggestion and of most beautiful issues. That relating to his mother's picture—sent to him by some cousinly hand—a flashing from the embers of his life, as it were, the reader must know; who knows it too well?

"Oh that those lips had language! Life has passed
With me but roughly since I heard thee last.
Those lips are thine—thy own sweet smile I see,

The same that oft in childhood solaced me. {252}
Voice only fails, else how distinct they say,
Grieve not, my child, chase all thy fears away!"

But it is a poem from which quotation will no way serve. After the death of Warton, poet Laureate (1790), Lady Hesketh, and other friends were anxious that the Olney poet should succeed to that honor; Southey says, he might have secured it; but Cowper can never, never go up to court for a kissing of the king's hand.

And now there are coming fast drearier days and months to these good people of the Weston home. The poet's mind, staggered perhaps by those later Homeric labors, but more likely by the grievous religious doubts which overhang him, loses from time to time its poise; and he goes maundering, or silent, and with no smile for days, into the deserts of melancholy.

Death of Cowper.

Mrs. Unwin, worn down by long fatigues, is at last smitten by paralysis; and she whose life has been spent in serving must herself be served; the poor poet bringing to that service all the instincts of affection, and the wavering purpose of a shattered mind. Yet out of this new gloom and these terrors of the home comes that {253} faultless little poem inscribed to "My Mary."

"Thy silver locks, once auburn bright,
Are still more lovely in my sight
Than golden beams of Orient light,
My Mary.

"For could I view—nor them—nor thee
What sight worth seeing could I see?
The sun would rise in vain for me,

My Mary.

"Partakers of thy sad decline
Thy hands their little force resign,
Yet gently prest, press gently mine,
My Mary."

But here, as before, quotation counts for nothing; it cannot bring to mind the mellowness and the tenderness which lurk in so many of the lines and in all the flowing measure of the little poem. Mrs. Unwin has embalmment in it that will keep her memory alive, longer than would any tomb in Westminster.

Well, Mrs. Unwin dies at last in the town of East Dereham, Norfolk, where they had taken her for "diversion"; and the poor poet died there three years later and was buried beside her. They {254}
were three dreary years—which followed upon her death—for him and for those about him. From time to time he touched a little bit of old work, but put no joy in it; distraught—weary—smileless—only waiting.

Cowper's poetry.

Critics are agreed that we shall not rank him among the great poets; but he comes nearer to their rank than anybody in his day believed possible. He is so true; he is so tender; he is so natural. If in his longer poems there is sometimes a lack of last finish, and an overplus of language—there is a frankness of utterance and a billowy undulation of movement that have compensating charms. He loves Nature as a boy loves his play; his humanities are wakened by all her voices. He not only seizes upon exterior effects with a painter's eye and hand, but he has a touch which steals deeper meanings and influences and transfers them into verse that flows softly and quietly as summer brooks. He cannot speak or rhyme but the odors of the country cling to his words. There is no crazy whirl of expletives which would apply to a hundred scenes, but clear, forceful epithet, full of singleness of story:—

Far spires lifting over stretches of yellow grass-grown plain; marsh birds trailing their flight {255}
by sluggish rivers; boats dragged slumberously at noon-tide with seething bubbles in their wake; great banks of woodland, wading through snows, or throwing shadows by morning, and counter-shadows at evening, over the flanks of low hills on which they stand in leafy platoons. And for sounds—far off church-bells waking solitudes with their tremulous beat and jangle; birds chasing the echoes of their own songs; bees murmurous over banks of thyme; cattle lowing in the meadows; or the bay of some hound—breaking full and clear, and lost again—as he follows, far off, some cold trail amongst the hills.

Above all—he is English; the household has for him the sanctity of an altar; firesides are lighted and glow with a sacred warmth; home interests are always golden. Prone to idleness he is perhaps—mental and physical; much femininity in him; his thought wavering and riding on his rhyme. But he is good, kind; crudest to himself—sticking the John Newton darts of Calvinism into his conscience, and loving the pain of them.

I think we must always respect the name and the work of William Cowper. In our next {256}
chapter we shall listen to the music of a different singer, and to the story of a jollier, and yet of a far sadder life.

[1] As a matter of curiosity I give what appears to be the corresponding Gaelic in a couplet of lines, from the version in Rev. Archibald Clerk's Ossian:—

"A's gile na 'n cobhar,' tha sgavilte
Air muir o ghaillinn nan sian."
l. 75, Duan 1, Fionnghal.

[2] James Macpherson: b. 1736; d. 1796.

[3] Mr. Mackenzie (*Diss. lxxxvii., Edit. Highland Soc.*, London, 1807) says that he (Macpherson) took some of his Gaelic MSS. to Florida with him and many were lost there.

[4] Macpherson had translated and published the Iliad in 1773. It will interest my readers to know that a copy of this letter in Johnson's hand-writing, was sold in 1875 for £50—five times the sum which he received for the tale of Rasselas!

[5] Sir John Sinclair, a voluminous agricultural writer of Scotland, was strenuous supporter of Macpherson's claims—respecting Ossianic origin, etc. The best exhibit, however, of the Gaelic side of the question may be found in the prefatory *Dissertation* by Rev. Archibald Clerk, to the beautiful edition of Ossian published by Blackwood & Sons in 1870.

[6] George Halket, a Jacobite schoolmaster, d. 1756; Alexander Ross, minister, b. 1699; d. 1784; John Skinner, Episcopal clergyman, b. 1721; d. 1807.

[7] George Crabbe: b. 1754; d. 1832. *The Village*, *The Borough*, and *Tales of the Hall*, are his best-known works. *Life*, by his son (1834), is a very full and filially devout book of interesting reading.

[8] So late as 1808, the Edinburgh Review, after speaking of Wordsworth, Coleridge, Southey, etc., continues in language which I suppose is Jeffery's own:—

"From these childish and absurd affectations we turn with pleasure to the manly sense and correct picturing of Mr. Crabbe; and after being dazzled and made giddy with the elaborate raptures and obscure originalities of these new artists, it is refreshing to meet again with the spirit and nature of our old masters in the nervous pages of the author [Crabbe] now before us." Vol. xii., p. 131, Edinboro' Edition.

[9] The old castle was burned in 1816, but has been rebuilt with more than its old splendor.

[10] Smiles, in his *Memoirs of John Murray*—the publisher in question—intimates, however, that the sum was far too large, and Murray a loser by the bargain. Chap. xxii., p. 72, vol. ii. See also Murray's own statement to that effect, p. 385, vol. ii.

[11] William Cowper, b. 1731; d. 1800. Life by Hayley, 1804; another, by Southey (regarded as standard), published with edition of his works in 1833-37. A recent life by Thomas Wright, chiefly valuable for its local details.

[12] Lady Austen married some years later a French gentleman, M. de Tardif, and died in Paris in 1802. She may be counted almost joint-author (with Cowper) of *The Task*.

[13] P. 325, Life, etc., by Thomas Wright, London, 1892.

[14] William Hayley, b. 1745; d. 1820. Life of Cowper, 1803.

CHAPTER VII

{257}

Beyond Dunkeld—which is the southern gateway of the Scottish Highlands—there stretches a great wood, within the domain of the Duke of Athole, where one can wander for miles; the path sometimes mossy, always inviting; now threading dark glens, and again winding under hoary forest trees that grow on uplands; now giving glimpses of brook or pool, and now of grassy glade on which some group of century-old larches slant their shadows; one may hear noises of chattering squirrels, of whirring pheasants, of roaring wood-streams, of pines soughing in the wind; and at last, going up a side-path, the visitor will come to the door of a Hermitage, bedded in densest mass of foliage. Fifty years ago—to a month—the guide opened that door for me, entered with me, and closed it behind us. I then observed that the whole inner surface of the door {258} was one great mirror, and that there were other mirrors around; while directly opposite was a life-size painting of Ossian fingering his harp; and as I was scanning the details of this picture, the guide touched some hidden spring; Ossian straightway disappeared, sliding into the wall, and through the chasm one looked out upon clouds of spray, behind which an Alpine water-fall with roar and foam plunged down sheer forty feet into a seething pool below. The water-fall through an artful collocation of mirrors seemed to pour down behind you as well; and from the ceiling to pour down above you, and to gird you all about with its din and splash and spray. With the cliffs and the pine boughs it made a pretty grouping of Ossianic charms; and I am sorry to hear that since 1869 or thereabout, the Hermitage, by reason of some vandal outrage, has wholly disappeared.

The only memorial the traveller will find now in that region of the Ossianic harping, of which we spoke in the last chapter, is the Macpherson Stone, which some twenty-five miles farther northward, on the Highland trail, peers out from green copses in the upper valley of the Spey. {259}

I spoke also in our last talk of the literary ferment that had declared itself, and was in active progress along the Scottish border, and in Edinboro'. We had somewhat to say of the poet Crabbe, and of his long and successful poems—now little read; and of those other poems by Cowper, some of which will be always read, and which, when their art shall grow old-fashioned and out of date, will show a tender humanity and a kindly purpose, which I trust will never go out of date.

Parson White.

White of Selborne.

You will remember that we found both of the last-named poets in the country; and that their work concerned itself largely with country life and with country scenes. And now we sidle into the country again, for our first studies to-day;—into the county of Hampshire, where lived, toward the close of the last century, two personages—not far apart in that pleasant region of rolling downs; unknown to each other; their ages, indeed, differing by more than a score of years; but both leaving books you ought to know {260} something about.

The first of these personages was a quiet clergyman[1] of very simple tastes and simple habits, who lived in a beautiful parsonage—still standing, and still overgrown with ivies and banked about with great waving heaps of foliage—where he wrote *The Natural History of*

Selborne. It is not a formal book or an ambitious book; it is simply a bundle of short letters extending over dates that cover twenty years in their stretch; and yet the book is so small you could carry it in your pocket. Its title describes the book; it tells what this quiet old gentleman saw and learned through twenty odd years of observation, about the birds, the beasts, the fishes, the trees, the flowers, the storms, the sunshine and the clouds of that little country parish of Selborne. And yet that simple story is told with such easy frankness, such delicacy, such simplicity, such truthfulness, such tender feeling for all God's creatures, whether beast or bird, that the little book has become almost as much a classic as *Walton's Complete Angler*; and the {261} name of Gilbert White, which scarce a hundred Londoners knew when he died, is now known to every well-equipped English library everywhere. I have compared it with *Walton's Complete Angler*, though it has not the old fisherman's dalliance with the muses; nor has it much literary suggestiveness. There are no milkmaids courtesying to its periods, nor any songs, except those of the birds. Good old Parson White is simpler (if maybe); he is more homely; he is more direct; and by his tender particularity of detail he has given to the winged and creeping creatures of his pleasant Hampshire downs the freedom of all lands.

It is true, indeed—as I have said in another connection—that we Americans do not altogether recognize his chaffinches and his titlarks; his daws and his fern-owl are strange to us; and his robin red-breast—though undoubtedly the same which in our nursery days flitted around the dead "Children in the Wood" (while tears stood in our eyes) and

"Painfully
Did cover them with leaves,"

is by no means our American red-breast. For one, I wish it were otherwise; I wish with all my {262} heart that I could identify the old pitying, feathered mourners in the British wood, with the rollicking, joyous singer who perches every sunrise, through all the spring, upon some near tree, within stone's throw of my window, and stirs the dewy air with his loud *bravura*.

Another noticeable thing about this old country parson is his freedom from all the artifices and buckram and abbreviations of learning, so that he is delightfully comprehensible by everybody. If only we could have an edition of Gray's Botany—for instance—with some ten lines of Parson White's homely descriptive English about the height and bigness, and color and habit of the flowers, instead of symbols and Latin genealogies and scholastic reticence—what a God-send it would be to the average country gentleman or country woman!

I want specially to call the attention of those young people in whose interest I am supposed to talk—to that homely truthfulness, and unabating care of this old gentleman, as giving value to a {263} book or to any literary work whatever. They are not qualities, to be sure, which of themselves carry performance to a high poetic level; but they are qualities which give to it practical and picturesque values, and which—well laid in—will make work survive.

If I were to undertake on any occasion the direction of the composition-writing of young people, I should surely counsel painstaking and minute description of homely natural objects. Nature is better than millinery. Yet out of ten young ladies of average culture you shall be able to pick nine who shall tell a listener flowingly of the last new dress she has seen, and the stuff, and the train, and the lace, and the sleeves, and the trimmings, and all the mysteries of its fit—to one who shall give a simple, clear-drawn, and intelligible account of a new flower, or new tree, or a strange bird. Thus you will perceive that I have made of this old gentleman—whom I greatly respect—a stalking horse, to fire a sermon at my readers; and I am strongly of opinion that there are a great many country clergymen of our time and day, who, if they would bring old Parson White's zeal to the encouragement of a love and a study of natural objects, would do as much {264} thereby to humanize and Christianize the younger members of their flocks as they can possibly do by Vanity Fairs or parochial oyster suppers.

The modest house of Gilbert White[2] was occupied very many years by the venerable Professor Bell, late president of the Linnean Society, who died in 1880. The study of the old naturalist remained long as the master left it; his oaken book-case was still there; so was the thermometer attached to the shelves by which he made his observations; his dial by which he counted the hours stands at the foot of the garden; and in the churchyard near by is his grave; while within the quaint old church, to the right of the altar, is a tablet in his honor; and in his honor, too, all the birds of Selborne will sing night and morning year after year.

A Hampshire Novelist. {265}

Jane Austen.

And now for that other Hampshire personage, of whom I gave you a hint, as being also guiltless of London life and almost of London acquaintances; it is a lady now of whom I have to speak,[3] and one who deserves to be well known. She lived, when her books were published, only three or more miles away from Selborne, across the hills northward—at the village of Chawton, which lies upon the old coach road from Farnham to Winchester. Miss Austen was much younger—as I have said—than our old friend the parson; indeed she was only beginning to try her pen when Gilbert White was ready to lay his down. She had all his simplicities of treatment and all his acuteness of observation—to which she added a charming humor and large dramatic power; but her subjects were men and women, and not birds. She wrote many good old-fashioned novels which people read now for their light and {266} delicate touches, their happy characterizations, their charming play of humor, and their lack of exaggeration. She makes you slip into easy acquaintance with the people of her books as if they lived next door, and would be pulling at your bell to-morrow, or to-night. And you never confound them; by the mere sound of their voices you know which is Ellinor, and which is Marianne; and as for the disagreeable people in her stories, they are just as honestly and naturally disagreeable as any neighbor you could name—whether by talking too much, or making puns, or prying into your private affairs.

Walter Scott, who read her books over and over, says, "That young lady had a talent for describing the involvements and feelings and characters of ordinary life, which is to me the most wonderful I ever met with." Macaulay, too, admired her intensely; ventured even to speak of her amazing, effective naturalness—in the same paragraph with Shakespeare. Miss Mitford confided to a young niece of the authoress, that "she would give her hand," if she could write a story like {267} Miss Austen. We may not and must not doubt her quality and her genius, whatever old-time stiffness we may find in her conversations. One book of hers at least you should read, if only to learn her manner; and as you read it remember that it was written by a young woman who had passed nearly her whole life in Hampshire—who knew scarce any of the literary people of the day; who had only made chance visits to London, and a stay of some four years in the lively city of Bath. She was very winning and beautiful—if her portrait[4] is to be relied upon—with a piquant, mischievous expression—looking very capable of making a great many hearts ache, beside those which ache in her books.

It would be impossible to cite fragments from her stories that would give any adequate notion of her manner and accomplishment; it would be very like showing the feather of a bird, to give an idea of its swoop of wing. Perhaps *Pride and Prejudice*, though her first written work, is the one {268} most characteristic. You do not get lost in its sentimental strains; you do not find surfeit of immaculate conduct. There are fine woods and walks; but there is plenty of mud, and bad-going. The very heroines you often want to clutch away from their uncomely surroundings; and as for the elderly Mrs. Bennett, whose tongue is forever at its "click-clack," you cannot help wishing that she might—innocently—get choked off the scene, and appear no more. But that is not the deft Miss Austen's way; that gossiping, silly, irritating *mater familias*, goes on to the very end—as such people do in life—making your bile rise; and when the rainbows of felicity come at last to arch over the scenes of *Pride and Prejudice*, Mrs. Bennett's clacking tongue is still strident, and still reminds you in the strongest possible way, that Miss Austen has been busy with the veriest actualities of life, and not with its pretty, shimmering vapors.

Persuasion is a less interesting book, and less complete than *Pride and Prejudice*; its heroine, Anne Eliot, is not possessed of very salient qualities; hardly gaining or holding very earnest {269} attention; yet with a quiet sense of duty, and such every-day fulfilment of it, as makes her righteously draw toward her all the triumphs of the little drama; a lost love is reclaimed by these quiet forces, and victory comes to crown her easy gentleness. *Northanger Abbey* is weaker, but with bold, striking naturalism in it; all the littlenesses and plottings and vain speech of the Bath Pump-Room seem to come to life in its pages; to just such life as we may find about our Cape Mays, and Pequod, and Ocean houses, every blessed summer's day! Miss Austen's earlier novels, which made her reputation, were written before she was twenty-five, and published later, and under many difficulties—anonymously; so she had none of that public incense regaling her, which was set ablaze for the less capable Miss Burney; and it was almost as an unknown, strange, quiet gentlewoman that she went down, in the later years of her life, to the shores of the beautiful Southampton Waters—seeking health there; and again, on the same search to the higher lands of the Hampshire downs—where she died, only forty-two, and lies buried under a black marble slab, {270} which you may find under the vaults of the interesting old Cathedral of Winchester.

The recognition of her high qualities was not so extended in her life-time, as it is now; and thirty years after her death, a visitor to the great Hampshire Cathedral was asked by the respectable verger: "What there was *particular* about Miss Austen, that so many people should want to see her grave?" Even the most wooden of vergers would hardly ask the question now; her extraordinary quickness and justness of observation astonish every intelligent reader. All the more, since her life was lived within narrow lines; but what she saw, she saw true, and she remembered. That wonderful masterly Shakespearian alertness of mind in seizing upon traits and retaining their relations and colors, is what distinguishes her, as it distinguishes every kindred genius. I can understand how many people cannot overmuch relish the stories of Miss Austen—because they do not relish the people to whom she introduces us; but I cannot understand how any reader can fail to be impressed and electrified by her marvellous photographic reproduction {271} of social shades of conduct. How delightful is that indignation of Sir John Middleton, when he learns of the villainy and falsity of Willoughby. "To think of it! and he had offered the scoundrel one of Follies' puppies!" And then—reflectively—"A pretty man he was too, and owner of one of the finest pointer bitches in England! The devil take him!" What a synopsis of the man's qualities, and of Sir John's measurement of them!

Old Juvenilia.

Sandford &

I cannot pass from this epoch, without saying somewhat concerning that tide of literature for young people which set in strongly about those times.

Merton.

There was *Sandford and Merton*, for instance; can it be that the moderns are growing up to maturity without a knowledge of the wise inculcations of that eminently respectable work? Sixty years ago it was a stunning book for all good boys, and for the good sisters of good boys. Whoever was at the head of his class was pretty apt to get *Sandford and Merton*; whoever had a birthday present was very likely to get *Sandford and Merton*; if a good aunt was in search of a proper New Year's gift for a lad the bookseller was almost sure to recommend *Sandford and Merton*; and when a boy went away to school, some considerate friend was very certain to pop a copy of *Sandford and Merton* into his satchel. {272}

It is in the guise of a great lumbering narrative—supposed to be true—into which are whipped a score or more of little stories, each one capped with a bouncing moral. Thus, there is an ill-natured boy going out for a day's scrimmage, and playing his tricks—on a poor girl, and a blind beggar, and a lame beggar, and a farmer, and a donkey. This goes on very well for awhile; but at last the tables are turned, and he gets bitten by the blind beggar, and beaten by the lame beggar, and thrashed by the farmer, and is thrown by the donkey, and a large dog seizes him by the leg; this latter is printed in capitals, and there is a picture of it. At last, in bed, and with watery eyes, the boy reflects—that "no one can long hurt others with impunity;" so he determined to "behave better for the future." Is it any wonder that those who had access to such instructive tales a half a century ago should have grown up to be excellent men! {273}

This book of *Sandford and Merton* was written by Thomas Day,[5] an eccentric rich man (the world of to-day would have called him a crank), who had a fine place near to Putney on the Thames, who sympathized strongly with Americans in Revolutionary times; who was also a disciple of Rousseau, and undertook to educate a young girl—two of them in fact, one being a foundling—so that he might have a wife of his own training, after the Rousseau standard; but the young persons did not train as he wished; so he found his mate otherwheres.

Another comfit of a book for young people, but with fewer plums of romance in it, was *Evenings at Home* by Dr. Aikin and Mrs. Barbauld. I am sure the very name must bring up tender memories to a great many; for it was a current book down to a time when respectable, and even mirth-loving people, *did* pass their evenings at home, and enjoyed doing so. The book commands even now, in some old-fashioned households, about the same sort of consecration which is given to an antique blue and white china tea-pot—not nearly so fine as the newer French ones—but which by the aid of a little imagination can be put to very pretty simmer of old times and tunes. {274}

Mrs. Barbauld.

Mrs. Barbauld[6] was worthier than this book; she was a sister of Dr. Aikin—had distinction for great beauty in her youth; married a French clergyman of small parts and weak mind, whose intellect, in his later years, went wholly awry and made her home a martyrdom for her, against which she struggled bravely. That home was for a time out at Hampstead, only a half hour's drive from London, and she knew people worth knowing there; Fox and Johnson among the rest—though Johnson did give her a big slap for marrying as she did and for teaching an infant school.[7] She wrote poetry too, one verse at least which Wordsworth greatly admired, and with condescension declared that he would have liked to be the author of such a verse himself. I cite the verse (with some of the context), which is from an apostrophe to *Life*; doubtless suggested by the {275}

"Animula, vagula, blandula"

of Adrian, to which allusion has been made in a previous chapter; but the good woman's evolution of the thought is curiously different from that of Pope:—

"Life! I know not what thou art.
But know that thou and I must part;
And when, or how, or where we met,
I own to me's a secret yet.
But this I know, when thou art fled
Where'er they lay these limbs, this head,
No clod so valueless shall be
As all that then remains of me.
O whither, whither dost thou fly,
Where bend unseen thy trackless course,

And in this strange divorce, {276}
Ah, tell where I must seek this compound I?
* * * * *
Life! we've been long together,
Through pleasant and through cloudy weather;
'Tis hard to part when friends are dear;
Perhaps 'twill cost a sigh, a tear;
Then—steal away, give little warning,
Choose thine own time;
Say not—Good night; but in some brighter clime
Bid me—Good morning."

I cannot part from this excellent old friend of British boys, without calling to mind her ardent Whiggism, and her very pronounced advocacy of the American cause, in her last poem of *Eighteen hundred and eleven*; the republican sympathies alienated a good many of her Tory friends, and brought to her temporary disrepute. Wherefor, I think, patriotic American boys may, on some coming fourth of July, fling their caps into the air for the kindly, brave-speaking Mrs. Barbauld, and for her *Evenings at Home*!

Miss Edgeworth.

{277}

An Irish story-teller.

You may be sure that I have not forgotten Miss Edgeworth, who was a good friend of Mrs. Barbauld, and who scored Dr. Johnson and Boswell too, for the printing of their slurs upon Miss Aikin.[8]

I suspect it would not be an easy task to bring young people, nowadays, to much enthusiasm about Miss Edgeworth[9] and her books; and yet if I were to tell all that "we fellows" used to think about her when her *Popular Tales*, and her delightful *Parent's Assistant*, with its stories exactly of the right length—about Lazy Lawrence, and Simple Susan, and the False Key, and Tarlton—were in vogue, I am afraid you would give me very little credit for critical sagacity. A most proper and interesting old lady we reckoned her, and do still. I for one never counted on her being young; it seemed to me that she must have been born straight into the severities of middle {278} age and of story-telling. I could never imagine her at a game of romps, or buying candies on the sly. Though I had never seen her portrait—and no one else, for that matter—yet I knew the face—as well as that of my own grandmother; and what a good, kind, serene, motherly face it was! There was dignity in it, however; no boy would have thought of approaching her without a study of his deportment; he would see to it that his shoe-lacings were tied and his waistcoat buttons all in place—else, a shake of the head that would have made the cap-strings, and the frisette, and the starched ruffles shiver. But we must not speak lightly of the authoress, to whom thousands of elderly people owe so much of instruction and of entertainment.

Miss Edgeworth.

She was the daughter of an Irish gentleman who made a runaway match at Gretna Green, Maria Edgeworth being a child of that irregular marriage; and her father being widowed shortly after, married three other wives[10] successively, whose children filled the great house at Edgeworthtown in Ireland, where the {279} authoress grew up (though born in England), and where she came to that knowledge of Irish character and habit which gives distinction and the greatest charm to her books.

Scott read them gleefully and admiringly, and as he himself confesses, took a hint from them, to put Scottish character into story, as this English-Irish lady had put Irish character into hers; and he says in his first outspoken preface to the *Waverley* series—that Miss Edgeworth in "making the English familiar with the character of their gay and kind-hearted neighbors may truly be said to have done more toward completing the union than perhaps all the legislative enactments by which it has been followed up." Such laurels were enough for her fame—did not braver ones grow out of the thumb-worn edges of her books. I think it would be safe to distrust the honor and directness of purpose of any boy or man who, after reading—has either scorn or dread of Maria Edgeworth.

One will not find startling things in her writing; nor will you find great brilliancy of execution {280} —nor the pretty banter and delicate English humor, and finer touches which belong to Miss Austen: but you will find orderly progress and a good orderly story—illuminated by flashes of Irish wit, and glowing through and through with the kindness of a heart which never saw suffering without sympathy, and never any joys of even the most vulgar, without a tender satisfaction. Add to this a shrewd common sense—which never lost its way in romantic pitfalls, and an unblinking honesty, and charity of purpose—always making itself felt, and always driving a nail—and you have an array of qualities which will, I think, keep good Miss Edgeworth's name alive for a long period to come. Few people will have the courage to invest in the whole of her score of volumes octavo. It is hardly to be advised; but you may wisely choose a sprinkling of them; her *Frank*, for instance—her *Rackrent*—her *Ormond*, and a volume or two of her shorter tales, which will bravely hold their own amongst all the goody books of a later generation.

Two specimens of that Irish humor, which she is so apt at reporting, and which shine by their {281} pretty flicker of unconsciousness, I must cite: the first is that of the politician—a charming type of our municipal Milesians—who resented highly his non-appointment to some fat place, after unwearied support of the government, "against his conscience, in a most honorable manner." The second is that of the hopeful old Irish dame, who trusted she might die upon a fête day, when the gates of Heaven were opened wide, and a poor "body might slip in unbeknownst."

For our good friend, Miss Edgeworth, we believe that those gates were wide open, on every day of the year.

Some Early Romanticism.

Early

While that clever and attractive Miss Jane Austen was engaged upon her

Romanticism.

stories in her quiet study in Steventon, Hampshire, there was opened upon England, by certain other ladies, a new sluice of literature—from which some phosphorescent sparkles are still distinguishable in our time—in brilliant red and yellow covers. I {282} allude to the *Children of the Abbey*, by Miss Roche[11] (an Irish-French lady, who lived in Waterford, Ireland), to *Thaddeus of Warsaw* and the *Scottish Chiefs* by Miss Jane Porter, and the *Mysteries of Udolpho* by Mrs. Radcliffe, of London.[12]

Very few middle-aged readers have passed their lives without hearing of these books; the chances are strong that most of such readers have dipped into them; and if people dipped at all, before the age of fourteen, they were pretty apt to undergo complete submergence.

From ten to twelve was—as nearly as I now recollect—about the susceptible age for the *Children of the Abbey*; and if the book came into the hands of one of a bevy of boys or girls, in {283} such tender years, it was pretty apt to run through them all, eruptively—like measles.

It was a book that even young people had an inclination to put under cover, if detected or liable to be detected in the reading of it; and elderly people so caught were understood to be only "glancing at it;" the sentiment is so very profuse and gushing. None of us like to make a show of our allegiance to Master Cupid. Miss Roche wrote other books—but none beside the *Children of the Abbey* have come down to us in the yellow and red of sixpenny form; for which we ought to be thankful.

Thaddeus of Warsaw had more excuse in the expression of tender sympathies for Poland and all Polish people, at a crisis in the history of that unfortunate kingdom. The success of the book was immense. Kosciusko sent his portrait and a medal to the author; she was made member of foreign societies, received gold crosses of honor; and oddly enough, even from America there came, under the guiding providence of Mr. John Harper,[13] then I believe Mayor of the City of {284} New York, an elegant carved armchair, trimmed with crimson plush, to testify "the admiring gratitude of the American people" to the author of *Thaddeus of Warsaw*. The book, by its amazing popularity, and by the entertaining way in which it marshals its romantic effulgencies in favor of a great cause, may very naturally suggest that other, later and larger enlistment of all the forces of good story-telling, which—fifty years thereafter—in the hands of an American lady (Mrs. Stowe) contributed to a larger cause, and with more abiding results.

The Scottish Chiefs has less of gusto than the Polish novel—and as I took occasion to say when we were at that date of Scottish history—is full of bad anachronisms, and of historical untruths. Yet there is a good bracing air of the Highlands in parts of it, and an ebullient martial din of broadswords and of gathering clans which go far to redeem its maudlin sentiment. Mrs. Radcliffe's *Mysteries of Udolpho* had more of the conventionally artistic qualities than either of {285} those last named, though never so infectiously popular. There are gloomy Italian chieftains in it, splendid dark fellows with swords and pistols and plumes to match; and there are purple sunsets and massive castles with secret passages and stairs; and marks of bloody fingers, and papers that are to be signed—or not signed; and one ineffable young lady—Emily, I think, is her name—who by her spiritual presence and lovely features serves to light up all the gloom and the mystery and makes the castle, and the dark woods, and the reeking vaults, and the secret paths all blossom like a rose. I cannot advise the reading of the book.

Vathek.

Wm. Beckford.

When poor Chatterton—of whom we had speech not far back—was near to starving in London, he made one desperate effort to secure the favor and patronage of the Lord Mayor of the city, who was a very rich West India merchant, by the name of Beckford. Chatterton did gain an interview; did get promise of aid, and win strongly upon the good will of the Lord Mayor; but unfortunately his honor died only a few {286} days thereafter. Had he lived, the young poet might have had a totally different career; and had he lived, the only son and heir of this benevolent Mayor,—William Beckford,[14] then a boy of ten,—would have had a different bringing up. At twenty, this youth printed—though he did not publish—some journals of continental travel which he had conducted in the spirit and with the large accompaniments of a young man who loves the splendor of life, and who had at command an annual revenue of six hundred thousand dollars, at that day said to be the largest moneyed income in England. What a little fragment of this sum which was squandered upon that splendid trail of travel through Europe would have made poor Chatterton happy! But young Beckford was by no means a brainless spendthrift; he had strong intellectual aptitudes; was a scholar in a certain limited yet true sense; and when twenty-two only, had written (in French) that strange, {287} weird romance of *Vathek*; well worth your reading on a spare day, and which in its English version has made his fame, and keeps his name alive, now that his great houses and moneys are known and reverenced no more.

It is an Eastern story, with all the glow, color, and splendors of the days of the good *Haroun al Raschid* in it. There are crime and love in it too; and phantoms and beautiful women, and terrific punishment of the wicked. Vathek, the hero, who might be Beckford himself, wanders through a world of delights, where evil phantoms and genii assail him, and fascinating maidens allure him; and after adventures full of escapes and dangers and feastings, in which he listens to the melody of lutes and quaffs the delicious wine of Schiraz, he reaches at last, in company with the lovely Mironihar, the great hall of Eblis; here we come to something horrific and Dantesque—something which I am sure had its abiding influence upon the work of Edgar Poe.

> "The place, though roofed with a vaulted ceiling, was so spacious and lofty that at first they took it for an immeasurable plain. But their eyes at length growing familiar with the grandeur of surrounding objects, they extended their view to those at a distance, and discovered rows of columns and arcades which gradually diminished till they terminated in a point radiant as the sun when he darts his last beams athwart the ocean.... The pavement, which was strewed over with gold-dust and saffron, exhaled so subtle an odor as almost overpowered them.... In the midst of this immense hall a vast multitude was incessantly passing, who severally kept their right hands on their hearts, without once regarding anything around them. They had all the livid paleness of death. Their eyes deep sunk in their sockets, resembled those phosphoric meteors that glimmer by night in places of interment." {288}

And afterward, when a royal sufferer, who from livid lips had made warning exhortation to these wanderers, lifts his right hand in supplication, Vathek sees—through his bosom which was "transparent as crystal"—his heart enveloped in flames. Perhaps Hawthorne, in certain passages of the *Scarlet Letter*, may have had these red, burning hearts of this famous Hall of Eblis in mind.

Beckford wrote also a very interesting account of certain religious houses in Portugal which were the wonder of old days and are a wonder now. At Cintra, the picturesque suburb of Lisbon, he established a great Moorish country house within sight of the sea. Byron gives a glimpse of this in *Childe Harold*:— {289}

> "Here didst thou dwell, here schemes of pleasure plan,
> Beneath yon mountain's ever beauteous brow;
> But now, as if a thing unblest by man,
> Thy fairy dwelling is as lone as thou!
> Here giant weeds a passage scarce allow
> To halls deserted, portals gaping wide.
> Fresh lessons to the thinking bosom, how
> Vain are the pleasaunces on earth supplied,
> Swept into wrecks anon by Time's ungentle tide."

Byron would now have to mend his description, since the estate is at present owned by a London merchant, who has bought a title from the weak king-folk of Portugal, and keeps the great house in Pimlico order. It is one of the show places of Cintra; and if Moorish domes, and marble halls, and sculpture delicate as that of the Alhambra, and fountains, and palms, and oranges, and bowers of roses, and century-old oaks, and cliffs, and wooded dells, and far-off sight of sails from the Bay of Biscay are deserving of show, surely this old palace of the rich Englishman is.

Another palace—for Beckford had an architectural mania—was built at Fonthill, the place of his birth, not far east of Salisbury. Here was a great ancestral estate, around which he caused to be erected a huge wall of masonry, some ten or twelve miles in length, to secure privacy and protect his birds. Within he built courts, towers, and halls—some six hundred men often working together night and day on these constructions—which he equipped with the rare and munificent spoils brought back from his travel. To this Fairy land, however, Byron's lament would better apply; the walls are down and the towers have fallen; the property is divided; only here and there and blended with new structures and new offices can you see traces of the old architectural extravagance. The spoiled plantations of Jamaica—whence the Vathek revenue mostly came—brought the change; enough, however, remained for the erection of a costly home in Bath, portions of which may still be seen. {290}

A daughter of Beckford's became Duchess of Hamilton; another daughter, who declined Ducal overtures which the father favored, was treated therefor with severities that would have become an Eastern caliph—for which, maybe, he now, like the poor creatures of Eblis Hall, is holding his right hand over "a burning heart." {291}

Robert Burns.

Burns.

We go now out of England, northward of the Solway, to find that peasant poet[15] at whose career I hinted in the last chapter, and whose burst of Scotch song was a new wakening for that kingdom of the highlands and the moors. I dare not, and will not speak critically of his verses; there they are—in their little budget of gilt-bound, or paper-bound leaves; rhythmic, tender, coarse, glowing, burning, with a grip in many of them at our heart-strings which we may not and cannot shake off. To tell you about these poems and of their special melodies would be like taking you to the sea and telling you how the waves gather and roll—with murmurs that you know—along all the shore.

Nor can I hope to tell any more of what will be new to you about his life and fate. We all know {292} that white-washed, low, roadside cottage—a little drive out from the old Scotch town of Ayr—where he was born; we have been there perhaps; we have seen other Scottish peasants boozing there over their ale; and have noted the names scribbled over tables and cupboards and walls to testify to the world's yearnings and to its pilgrimages thither. We know, too, that other low cottage of Mossgiel, where his poor father—a gospel abiding man—made his last struggle against the fates—and who of a Saturday night—

"Collects his spades, his mattocks, and his hoes,
Hoping the morn in ease and rest to spend,
And weary, o'er the moor, his course does homeward bend."

We all know what a brave fight the two Burns boys, Gilbert and Rob, made of it when Death, "the poor man's dearest friend," took off the father; Gilbert the elder; but Robert the brighter and keener—making verselets in the fields which the elder brother approves, and says would "bear to {293} be printed;" and so presently after, the first poor, thin, dingy volume finds it way to the light, and gives to far-away Edinboro' people their earliest hint of this strange, fine, new, human plant which has begun to blossom under the damps of Mossgiel. But the farm life is hard; the poet is wayward; his jolly friends near by who chant his songs are not helpful; his love affairs, of which he has overstock in his young wildness, run to confusion; quarrels threaten; so he books himself with what moneys the thin, dingy volume of poems have brought him, for America.

What if he had come!

But no; one low, wee encouraging voice—the piping answer to those poems—reaches him from Edinboro', and the poet goes thither in his best gear; Dugald Stewart, and Dr. Blacklock the blind poet, and Mackenzie, of whom I have already made mention, all befriend him. The gentlewomen of Edinboro' entertain him, and admire him, and flatter him; and he, in best blue and buff, with his dark, rolling eyes, and lips that command all shapes of language, holds his dignity with these fine ladies of the Northern capital; gives compliments that make them tremble; {294} prints other and fuller edition of his poems; goes northward amongst the highlands—dropping jewels of verse as he goes—to beautiful women, to waterfalls, to noble patrons. The next season in Edinboro', however, is no longer the same; that brilliant series of fêtes and of conquests has gone by; the new lion is too audacious; he shakes his fetters with a bold rage that intimidates. So we find him with some three hundred pounds only, saved out of the new book and the junketings of the Capital, going off to lease quietly the farm of Ellisland, near to Dumfries, and turn ploughman once more.

It is a poor place, but very beautiful; it is in Nithsdale, and the murmur of the river through its wooded banks makes the poet forget the crop of pebbles which every ploughing turns to the top. He is presently in the Excise too (1789): so gets some added pence by the gauging of beer-barrels and looking after frauds upon the revenue; married too—having out of all the loose love-strings, which held him more or less weakly, at last knotted one, which ties the quiet, pretty, womanly, much injured Jean Armour to his hearth and home, forever. And he begins that {295} Ellisland life bravely well; has prayers at night; teaches the "toddlin' wee things" their catechism; has hope and faith, and sings—and sings; and this, amongst other things, was what he sang—

"O, Willie brewed a peck o' maut,
And Bob and Allen cam to see;
Three blither hearts that lee-lang night
Ye wad na find in Christendie.
We are na fou, we're na that fou,
But just a drappie in our e'e;
The cock may craw, the day may daw,
And ay we'll taste the barley bree.
It is the moon, I ken her horn,
That's blinkin in the lift sae hie;
She shines sae bright, to wyle us hame;
But, by my sooth, she'll wait a wee.
The cock may craw, the day may daw,
And aye we'll taste the barley bree."

No wonder the pebbles began to show more and more in the plough-land; no wonder the jolly fellows of Dumfries came oftener and oftener; the long bouts too amongst the hills chilled him; the crops grew smaller and smaller; the "barley bree" better and better; he has no tact at bargaining; a stanza of Tam O'Shanter is worth more than ten plough-days, yet he makes gifts of {296} his best songs. Household affairs go all awry, let poor Jeanie Armour struggle as she may; the cottage palings are down; debts accumulate; and so do those rollicking nights at the Globe, or in a shieling amongst the hills. Yet from out all the impending want, and the gloom, and the desperation, come such sweet notes as these, reaching the ear of humanity everywhere:—

"John Anderson, my jo, John,

We clamb the hill thegither;
And mony a canty day, John,
W've had wi' ane anither:
Now we maun totter down, John,
But hand in hand we'll go,
And sleep thegither at the foot,
John Anderson, my jo."

At last Ellisland must be given up—crops, beasties and all; and never more the wooded banks of Nithsdale shall feel his tread, or hear his chant mingling with the river murmurs. He, and they all—five souls now—just of an age to relish most the woods, the range, the fields, the daisies of Ellisland, must go to one of the foulest and least attractive streets of Dumfries, and to a home as {297} little attractive as the street. Fifty years thereafter I went over that house and found it small, pinched, and pitifully meagre in all its appointments; twenty years later, Hawthorne speaks of both house and street as *filthy*. What could or should supply the place now—to the peasant poet—of the fields, the open sky, the gentle fret and murmurs of the streams of Nithsdale?

The foul fiends who taunted him in the woods now lay hold upon him in earnest; every day his fame is flying over straits and seas; every day his poems, old and new, are planting themselves in fresh hearts and brains; every day his wild passions are dealing him back-handed blows. Old neighbors have to pass him by; modest women look away; he has forfeited social position; and I suspect, welcomed in those days of July, 1796, the approaches of the disease which he knew was sapping his life:—

"Oh, Martinmas wind! when wilt thou blaw
And shake the dead leaves frae the tree?
Oh gentle death! when wilt thou come
And tak a life that wearies me?"

And it comes, in that dismal, miserable upper chamber that you can see when you go there;— {298}
his wife ill; his little children wandering aimlessly about; it comes sharply; he is on his back —"uneasy" the nurse said, and "chafing"; when suddenly by a great effort—as if at last he would shake off all the beleaguerments of sense, and the haunting phantoms swarming about him—he rallied all his powers—rose to his full height from the bed—tottered for a moment, then fell prone forward a dead man.

This was in the month of July, 1796; Burns being then only thirty-seven. Walter Scott, a young fellow of twenty-five, living in Edinboro', had just printed his translation of *Leonora*. Wordsworth —unknown save for a thin booklet of indifferent verse—was living down in Dorsetshire, enjoying the "winding wood-walks green," with that sister Dorothy, who "added sunshine to his daylight." These two had not as yet made the acquaintance of that coming man, S. T. Coleridge, who is living at Clevedon, over by Bristol Channel, with that newly married wife, who has decoyed him from his schemes of American migration; and the poet of the Ancient Mariner (as yet unwritten) {299}
has published his little booklet with Mr. Cottle, of Bristol, in which are some modest verses signed C. L. And Charles Lamb (for whom those initials stand) is just now in his twenty-first year, and is living in humble lodgings in Little Queen Street, London, from which he writes to Coleridge, saying that "Burns was a God of my idolatry." And in that very year (1796) the dismalest of tragedies is to overshadow those humble lodgings of Little Queen Street. Of this and of Coleridge and of Wordsworth, we shall have somewhat to say in the chapter we open upon next.

[1] Gilbert White, b. 1720; d. 1793. Oxford man; Fellow in 1744; curate of Faringdon 1758; after 1784, at Selborne.

[2] A charmingly illustrated edition of *The Natural History of Selborne*—showing his ivy-covered home and other objects of interest, was published by Macmillan & Co. in 1875 (edited by Frank Buckland). I am indebted for a copy to my friend, Wm. Robinson, of the London *Garden*.

[3] Jane Austen, b. 1775; d. 1817. *Sense and Sensibility*, published 1811. Life was written by her nephew J. Austen-Leigh. Her *Letters*, edited by Lord Brabourne, 1884.

[4] Not the dreadful, seamy, photographic reproduction of an old oil painting that Lord Brabourne gives, which must be wholly unfair to her; but the earlier engravings.

[5] Thomas Day, b. 1748; d. 1789. Oxford man; married, 1778; *Sandford and Merton* published 1783.

[6] Mrs. Barbauld (Anna Letitia Aikin), b. 1743; d. 1825. There is a pleasant sketch of Mrs. Barbauld and (for a wonder) an approving and commendatory notice of her in Miss Martineau's *Autobiography*, vol. i., pp. 228-39.

Miss Martineau's father, it appears, had been a pupil of Mrs. Barbauld.

[7] Boswell's Johnson, vol. vi., p. 28.

[8] The circumstances are given in *Crabb Robinson's Diary*.

[9] Maria Edgeworth, b. 1767; d. 1849. First volume of *Parent's Assistant* was published, 1796; *Castle Rackrent*, 1800; *Popular Tales*, 1804.

[10] Miss Honora Sneyd among them, in 1773.

[11] Maria Regina Roche, b. 1766; d. 1845. The *Grand Dict. Universal du XIX. Siècle* enumerates no less than thirteen other romances by her—in forty odd volumes, all translated, and now utterly forgotten!

[12] Mrs. Radcliffe (Ann Ward), b. 1764; d. 1823; *Romance of the Forest*, 1791; *Mysteries of Udolpho*, 1794.

Miss Jane Porter, b. 1776; d. 1850; *Thaddeus of Warsaw*, published 1803; *Scottish Chiefs*, 1810; *Sir Edward Seaward's Narrative* (in concert with her sister Anna Maria Porter), published in 1826.

[13] Senior member of the old firm of J. & J. Harper, 82 Cliff Street.

[14] William Beckford, b. 1759; d. 1844. *Vathek*, published (in French), 1787; better known by an unauthentic English translation, published 1784.

[15] Robert Burns, b. 1759; d. 1796. Poems published 1786. First collected edition, 1800; Cunningham edition, with life, in 1834, 4 vols.

CHAPTER VIII {300}

We have still in our mind's eye, and very pleasantly, that quaint old clergyman of Hampshire, who wrote about the daws, and the swallows, and the fern-owl, in a way that has kept the name of Gilbert White alive, for a great many years. And who that has read them can ever forget the stories of that winning Hampshire lady, whose fame takes on new greenness with every spring-time? Following upon our talk of this charming authoress, we had a little discursive mention, in our last chapter, of certain books which at the close of the last century, or early in this, were written for boys and girls; chiefest among these we noted those written by that excellent woman, Miss Edgeworth. We spoke of Miss Roche, who gushed over in the loves of Amanda and Mortimer —those fond and sentimental *Children of the Abbey*; and of Miss Porter, with her gorgeous {301} heroics about Poland and Scotland, and of Mrs. Radcliffe's stunning *Mysteries of Udolpho*. We had a glimpse of the strange work and life of William Beckford—son of the rich Lord Mayor Beckford; and we closed our chapter over the grave of that brilliant poet and wrecked man Robert Burns.

That grewsome death of the great Scotch singer occurred in a miserable house of a disorderly street in Dumfries, within four years of the close of the last century; his children—without any mastership to control, and the love that should have guided dumb—wandering in and out; no home comforts about them; the very necessities of life uncertain and precarious; all hopes narrowed for them, and all memories of theirs full of wildest alternations of joyousness and fright.

A Banker Poet.

Samuel Rogers.

You have perhaps read and enjoyed a poem called *The Pleasures of Memory*. It has tender passages in it; it has an easy, melodious swing:—

"Twilight's soft dews steal o'er the village green, {302}
With magic tints to harmonize the scene;
Stilled is the hum that thro' the hamlet broke,
When round the ruins of their ancient oak
The peasants flocked to hear the minstrel play
And games and carols closed the busy day.
*   *   *   *   *
Up springs, at every step—to claim a tear,
Some little friendship formed and cherished here;
And not the lightest leaf, but trembling teems
With golden visions and romantic dreams.

This poem, with echoes of Goldsmith in it, with echoes of Dryden, with echoes of Cowper—all caught together by a hand that was most deft, and by a taste that was most fastidious—was written and published in London, four years before Burns died, by the poet-banker Samuel Rogers.[1] It is not a name that I feel inclined to glorify very much, or that should be honored with any large reverence; but it is brought specially to the reader's notice here, because the life, career, and accomplishment of the man offers so striking a contrast to that of the Scottish poet who was his contemporary. They were born within four years of each other. One under the bare {303} roof of an Ayrshire cottage, the other amid the luxuries of a banker's home in London; one caught inspiration amongst the hills and the woods; the other was taught melody in the drawing-rooms and libraries of London; one wrested his conquests in the kingdom of song, single-handed; and the other, his lesser and feebler ones, bolstered with all the appliances that wealth could give, or long culture suggest. The poetry of the one is rich, individual, and spirited, with sources in nature and in the passions of the man; the poetry of the other has only those congruous and tamer harmonies, whose sources lie in the utterance of deeper and stronger singers before him. Yet the life of that Ayrshire poet was a miserable failure; and the life of this other, Samuel Rogers, was—as the world counts things—a complete success. No half-starved children pulled at his skirts for bread. All luxuries were about him, and from the beginning life flowed with him as calmly as a river.

Of his early history there is not much to be said. We know that he was born at Newington Green—an old suburb lying directly north of the city, toward Stamford Hill—and now engulfed by {304} the tide of London houses; we know he studied at good schools there, and under careful teachers at home; we know that he used to read and love Dr. Beattie's minstrel; we know that once, in boyhood (he tells the story himself), craving a sight of the great Dr. Johnson, he went to his door, but scared by the first tap of the knocker, sidled away, and so never saw that literary magnate. It was a timidity that did not cling to Mr. Rogers; in all his later years no man in London was less afraid of the pounding of a knocker.

His first volume was printed in the very year on which the poor thin book of Burns's first poems saw the light at Kilmarnock. This, however, did not make his reputation; *that* came six years later with the *Pleasures of Memory*, of which I cited a fragment; and thereafter, all down through the earlier half of the present century, there was hardly a better known man in London than Samuel Rogers, banker and poet. He voyaged widely and brought back many spoils of travel; he had luxurious tastes and fed them with the utmost discretion. He had social ambition, and rare sagacity in selecting his companions, and in timing his courtesies; he flattered critics, {305} and was obsequious to men with titles.

His house in St. James's—with its broad upper double window, looking out upon the Green Park—was known of all men. Before yet the days of bric-à-brac had come, it was filled with beautiful things and with trophies of art. It was not large nor pretentious; but on its walls were paintings, or sketches by Raphael, by Rubens, by Titian, by Gainsborough, by Rembrandt, and by Reynolds; and in its ante-rooms, marbles by Thorwaldsen and Canova. There were no children of the house, nor was there ever a wife there to aid, or to lord the master. Yet many a lady, ranking by title, or by cleverness, has enjoyed the dinners and the breakfasts for which the house was famous. The cooking was always of the best; the wines the rarest; the meats and fruits the choicest, and the porcelain superb. Like most who have richly equipped houses, he loved to have his fine things admired; and he loved to have his fine words echoed. Few foreigners of any literary distinction visited London from 1815 to 1850, without coming to a taste of the poet's {306} hospitality, and to a taste too, very likely, of his pretty satire. His wit flashed more sharply in his talk than in his verse; and his dinner stories were fabulous in number, in piquancy, and in sting. Like all accomplished *raconteurs*, he must needs tell his good stories over and over, so that Rogers's butler, it was wittily said, was next best to Rogers.

He could hardly have been called a good-natured man, and was always, I think, keener for a good thing to say, than for a good thing to do. He gave, it is true, largely in charities; but in orderly, business-like ways and with none of the unction and kindly indirectness[2] which doubles the warmth of the best giving. All London knew him as a diner out, as a connoisseur, as an opera-goer, {307} as a patron of clever people, as a friend to those in place, as a *flâneur* along Piccadilly. He was cool, unimpassioned, blasé in look, never doing openly discreditable things; and he carried his reputation for unmitigated respectability, for wealth, for sharp speeches, for cleverness, for sagacious charities, down to extreme age; dying as late as 1855, ninety-three years old.

Rogers' poems.

Though the poem entitled *The Pleasures of Memory* made his fame, a later descriptive poem, embodying the gleanings from a trip in Italy, is perhaps better known; and it enjoys the distinction of having been illustrated and printed at a cost of $70,000 of the banker's money. Fragments of that poem you must know; the story of Ginevra, perhaps, best of all; so daintily told that it is likely to live and be cherished as long as any of the bric-à-brac which the banker poet gathered in his travels. 'Tis a story of a picture that he saw—a "lady in her earliest youth."

"She sits inclining forward as to speak, {308}
Her lips half open, and her finger up
As though she said—Beware! Her vest of gold
Broidered with flowers, and clasped from head to foot,
An emerald stone in every golden clasp,
And on her brow, fairer than alabaster,
A coronet of pearls.... Alone it hangs
Over a mouldering heirloom, its companion,
An oaken chest, half eaten by the worms.
*   *   *   *   *

Just as she looks there in her bridal dress
She was all gentleness and gaiety.
* * * * *
And in the lustre of her youth, she gave
Her hand with her heart in it, to Francesco.
Great was the joy; but at the bridal feast
When all sat down, the bride was wanting there,
Nor was she to be found! Her father cried
"'Tis but to make a trial of our love!"
And filled his glass to all; *but his hand shook*,
And soon from guest to guest the panic spread.
'Twas but that instant she had left Francesco
Laughing, and looking back and flying still,
Her ivory tooth imprinted on his finger.
But now, alas, she was not to be found;
Nor from that hour could anything be guessed
But that she was not! Weary of his life
Francesco flew to Venice, and forthwith
Flung it away in battle with the Turk.
Orsini lived; and long mightest thou have seen
An old man wandering as in quest of something—
Something he could not find—he knew not what

When he was gone, the house remained awhile {309}
Silent and tenantless; then, went to strangers.

Full fifty years were past, and all forgot,
When on an idle day—a day of search
Mid the old lumber in the gallery—
That mouldering chest was noticed; and 'twas said
By one as young, as thoughtless, as Ginevra,
Why not remove it from its lurking-place?
'Twas done, as soon as said; but on the way
It burst—it fell; and lo, a skeleton,
With here and there a pearl, an emerald stone,
A golden clasp—clasping a shred of gold.
All else had perished, save a nuptial ring
And a small seal—her mother's legacy,
Engraven with a name—the name of both—
"Ginevra."

A pretty delicacy certainly goes to the telling of that story; but in the tale of Christabel and of the Ancient Mariner there is something more than delicacy—more of brain and passion and far-reaching poetic insight in the poet Coleridge, than in ten such men as Samuel Rogers.

Coleridge.

Coleridge.

Yet what a sad life we have to tell you of now! A life without any repose in it;—a life haunted and goaded by its own ambitions—a life put to wreck by lack of resolute governance—a life going out at last under the shadows of great clouds. {310}

Coleridge[3] was the son of a humble, quiet, self-forgetting, earnest clergyman in the West of England; and the boy, having no other opportunity, came to be billeted upon that famous Christ Hospital school in London—whose boys in their ancient uniform of yellow stockings and blue coats, and bare heads, still provoke the curiosity of those western travellers who wander down Newgate Street, and gaze through the iron grill upon the paved approach-way.

He knew Lamb there—Charles Lamb, who in the Essays of Elia addresses to him that famous apostrophe: "Come back into memory, like as thou wert in the dayspring of thy fancies, with hope like a fiery column before thee—the dark pillar not yet turned—Samuel Taylor Coleridge—Logician, Metaphysician, Bard!" Yet this pale-faced metaphysician and friend of Lamb gets severe {311} beatings at the hands of the Greek master, though his sweet intonations make the corridors resound with the verse of Homer. At Cambridge, where he goes afterward for a time, he is cheated and bullied; his far-off and dreamy look upon the symphonies of a poetic world not qualifying him for the every-day contests of the cloisters; in the haze in which he lives, he loses scent of the honors he had hoped to win; there is no prospective fellowship and no establishment for him there. Disappointed and despairing he goes up to London and enlists as private in the dragoons under a feigned name; but friends detect and prevent the military sacrifice.

A little later, we find him in his own West of England again, at Bristol—whither we have wandered so often in search of poets—and he encounters Southey thereabout, whom he had met for the first time on a visit to Oxford in 1794; this brother poet being as hazy, and dreamy, and theosophic, and hopeful in those days as Coleridge himself. The two form a sort of garret partnership—lecture to the savages of surrounding towns—are inoculated both with the {312} "fraternity and equality" fever which had grown out of the French Revolution—they believing that this French car of Juggernaut is to be dragged with its bloody wheels over the whole brotherhood of nations. In this faith they plot a settlement, in the new region—of which they know nothing, but the sweetly sounding name of Wyoming—upon the banks of the Susquehanna. There they would dig, and build cottages, and philosophize, and found Arcadia. With kindred poetic foresight, Coleridge marries in these days a bride as inexperienced and as poor as himself; and for a little time there is a one-volumed Arcadia on the banks of the Bristol Channel, with a lovely and pensive Sara for its presiding nymph. Only for those few early years does this nymph enter for much into the career of Coleridge. Domesticity[4] was never a shining virtue in him; and wife, {313} and cottage, and Arcadia somehow fade out from the story of his life—as pointless, unsaving, and ineffective for him, all these, as the blurred lines with which we begin a story, and cross them out. Southey, with a practical old aunt to look sharply after his youngness, is quickly driven from his Arcadian feeding ground and for the present disappears.

But Coleridge is still in the wallow of his wild vain hopes and wild discourse, when he encounters another poet—his elder by a few years and of a cooler temperament—William Wordsworth; who about that time had established himself, with his sister Dorothy, upon the borders of Somersetshire. These two men, so unlike, cleave together from the beginning; there is a flagging now in the Unitarian discourses of Coleridge in country chapels; and instead, wanderings with the brother poets over the fair country ways that border upon the Bristol straits —looking off upon the green flats of Somerset, the tufted banks of the Avon, the shining of the sea, with trafficking ships, to the west. Out of these, and of their meditations grow the first book —a joint one—of *Lyrical Ballads*; its issue not making a ripple on the tide where Crabbe and {314} Cowper were then afloat; and yet creating an epoch in the history of British verse. For in it was the story of the Ancient Mariner, and words therein that will never grow old:

"Farewell, farewell! but this I tell
   To thee, thou wedding guest!
He prayeth well, who loveth well
   Both man and bird and beast;
He prayeth best, who loveth best
   All things both great and small;
For the dear God who loveth us
   He made and loveth all!"

Yet the poet does still—from time to time wandering into country chapels—hammer at strange, irregular sermons, with a mixed metaphysics and poetry; and theologies of a dim vague sort which beat on ear and hearts, like sleet on slated roofs, and bring never a beam of that warming sunshine which lies in the lines I have quoted from the Mariner.

One wonders how he lived in those times; with no moneys coming from books; only driblets from his preachments; and with not enough of commercial aptitude in him to audit a grocer's bill. {315} The Wedgewoods—so well known by their pottery—who have a quick eye for fine wares of all sorts—recognize his rare brain, and send him over to Germany, bestowing upon him an annuity, which enables him to forego his travelling priesthood, and gives him the means of visiting various cities of the continent.

The Wordsworths make the trip with him; and after a stay of a twelve-month—mostly in Gottingen—Coleridge returns, with his translation of Wallenstein; but this counts for little. A year later, he finds his way to Keswick—to a beautiful, wooded bay, where Southey ultimately established his anchorage for life;[5] the Wordsworths were not far off, at Grasmere; and Coleridge plans that weekly paper—*The Friend* (finding issue some years later) with wonderful things in it, which few people read then; and so fine-drawn, that few read them now. The damps of Keswick give him rheumatic pains, for which he uses protective stimulants; good Dorothy {316} Wordsworth has fears thereanent, and regards hopefully his appointment to some civil station at Malta. But his impracticabilities lose him the place after a very short incumbency; he crosses to Italy; sees Naples, Amain, and Vesuvius; sees, and knows well at Rome, our American painter, Washington Allston. There are bonds of sympathy we might have looked for between the author of *Monaldi* and the author of *Christabel*.

In England again, the fogs bring back old rheumatic pains; the alienation from his wife is declaring itself in more unmistakable ways; and then, or thereabout,[6] begins that terrible slavery to opium, whose chains he wore thenceforth, some twenty years, and was not entirely free until death broke his bonds. There is a dreary, yet touching pathos in this confession of his —"Alas, it is with a bitter smile, a laugh of gall and bitterness, that I recall that period of unsuspecting delusion, and how I first became aware of the maelstrom, the fatal whirlpool to {317} which I was drawing, just when the current was already beyond my strength to stem."

But against the circling terrors of that maelstrom he does make now and then gallant struggle—goes to the house of that kindly surgeon, Gillman, at Highgate, who is charged to guard him—does guard him with exceeding kindness; the servants have orders to watch him—to

follow him in the street on his lecture days. But the cunning of a man crazed by his insatiate appetite outwits them; and over and over the turbid roll of his speech—with flashing splendors in it, that give no light—betrays him. And yet it was in those very days of alternate heroic struggle and of devilish yielding that he re-vamps and extends and retouches that sweet, serene poem of Christabel, with the pure, innocent, loving, trustful, winning, blue-eyed daughter of Sir Leoline praying under the oaks, and contrasted with her that graceful, mocking, radiant Geraldine—with smiles that enchant, and alabaster front, and undying graces, and wiles of the serpent, and the damps of the pit in her breath—as if the demon that pursued and pushed him to the wall had {318}
foreshadowed himself in that mocking and most beautiful Geraldine.

In those days, too, it was that the young Carlyle used to come to Highgate and watch those bulging eyes—pressed out with excess of brain substance behind them—and listen to his poetic convolutions of speech. "The eyes," he says, "were as full of sorrow as of inspiration. I have heard him talk with eager, musical energy two stricken hours, his face radiant and moist, and communicate no meaning whatsoever to any individual of his hearers, certain of whom—I for one —still kept eagerly listening in hope."

The very children of the neighborhood stood in awe of this wildish man—who seemed talking to the trees at times; and yet their awe was broken by fits of mocking courage, and they made faces at him across the high road. He died there at last—1834 was the year; within sight of the smoke of London and the dome of St. Paul's, toward which from Highgate there stretched in that day a long line of suburban houses, with scattered open fields, hedges, trees, flowers, and the hum of bees.

Charles Lamb. {319}

Essays of Elia.

Among those who used to come somewhiles to follow that fine, confused stream of poetic talk which poured from Coleridge's lips, was Charles Lamb, [7] his old school-fellow and friend in the blue-coat days of Christ's Hospital. And what a strange, odd friendship it seems when we contrast the tender and delicious quietude of the Essays of Elia with the portentous flow of Coleridge's speech! A quiet little stream, purling with gentle bendings and doublings along its own meadows—mated against a river that whirls in mad career, flinging foam high into trees that border it, and only losing its turbidness when it is tided away into the sea, where both brook and river end.

Charles Lamb.

I love Charles Lamb and his writings so much, that I think everybody else ought to love them. There is not great weight in those essays of his; you cannot learn from them what the capital of Hindostan is, or what Buddhism is, nor the date of the capture of Constantinople. Measured by the Dry-as-Dust standard, and there {320}
is scarce more in them than in a field of daisies, over which the sunshine and the summer breezes are at play. But what delicacy there is! what a tender humor; what gentle and regaling lapses of quaint thought that beguiles and invites and is soothing and never wearies.

Lamb's poems are not of the best; they have a haltingness—like that in his speech,—with none of Rogers's glibness and currency, and none of his shallowness either. Constraint of rhyme sat on Elia no easier than a dress-coat. But in prose he was all at home; it purled from his pen like a river. It was quaint, kindly, utterly true—with little yaws of humor in it, filling his sails of a sudden, and stirring you to smiling outbreak—then falling away and leaving him to a gently undulating forward movement which charms by its quietude, serenities, and cheerfulness.

There was not much in his life to tell you of; no cannon firing, no drum beats, no moving splendors. A thin, kindly face he had, and thin figure too; in dark or grayish clothes ordinarily, that a clerk might wear; threadbare perhaps at the elbows; not a presentable man amongst swell {321}
people; never aspiring to be;—as distinct indeed as a brown hermit-thrush amongst chattering parrots. He has a stammer, too, as I have hinted, in his voice, which may annoy but never makes this quiet man ashamed; in fact, he deploys that stammering habit so as to allow of coy advance, and opportunity for pouncing with tremulous iteration upon his little jokelets, in a way to double their execution; he put it to service, too, in some of his tenderer stories, so as to make, by his very hesitancies, an added and most touching pathos.

He was of humble origin, his father a servitor about Temple Courts—only long gunshot away from Newgate Street; and when the son—through with his Christ Hospital schooling—came to have a small stipend (first, from the South Sea House and later from the East India Company), he had his little family—the only one that ever belonged to Charles Lamb—all about him in his lodgings in Little Queen Street. There was Mary, his sister, ten years older; his poor, bedridden mother, and his father, lapsing into dotage and only happy with cribbage-board at his elbow, and {322}
Charles or other good friend to make count. It was this quiet household on which a thunderbolt fell one day. This is Lamb's mention of it in a letter to Coleridge:—

> "My poor dear, dearest sister, in a fit of insanity, has been the death of her own mother. I was at hand only time enough to snatch the knife out of her grasp. She is at present in a mad-house, from whence I fear she must be moved to a hospital. My poor father was slightly wounded. God has preserved to me my senses. Write as religious a

letter as possible, but no mention of what is gone and done with."

And only a day after this, the weak old father, with his plastered head, is playing cribbage; and again, on another day, friends having come in—very many for those small rooms—and the last ceremonies not yet over, and they all sitting down at some special repast—Lamb bethinks himself of all that has happened, of what lies in the next room (he tells this in a letter to Coleridge), and rushes thither to kiss once more the cold face and to pray forgiveness that he has forgotten her so soon.

Poor Mary recovers; she lives for years with her brother; the horror of the past staying like a {323} black dream in their thought—of which they dare not speak. And when new visitations of estrangement threaten, they two, brother and sister, walk away out from the streets—on to Edmonton, through green fields, by hedges, under trees which they much enjoy, to the doctor's strong guardianship and ward, until repose comes again and a return. Lamb at last goes to live at Enfield, which is close by Edmonton, north of London, that he may be near her prison-house at all times and seasons.

Yet in all these days when the pains and fears of that distracting life are resting on him, he is putting those tender and playful touches into the pleasant essays we know so well; conjuring for himself and for thousands everywhere a world of sunshine that shall overlap the dreary one in which he lives, and spend its graces and cheeriness upon the mind of the poor forlorn one, who with sisterly affection cleaves there and journeys meekly and obediently and sadly beside him.

I do not know how to trust myself to make a citation from those essays which shall carry to those not over-familiar some good hint of their qualities; but I venture upon a bit from his *Dream-Children*:— {324}

> "Then I told how for seven long years, in hope sometimes, sometimes in despair, yet persisting ever, I courted the fair Alice W——; and as much as children could understand, I explained to them what coyness, and difficulty, and denial, meant in maidens—when suddenly, turning to little Alice, the soul of the first Alice looked out at her eyes with such a reality of re-presentment that I became in doubt which of them stood there before me, or whose that bright hair was; and while I stood gazing, both the children gradually grew fainter to my view, receding, and still receding, till nothing at last but two mournful features were seen in the uttermost distance, which—without speech—strangely impressed upon me the effects of speech:—We are not of Alice, not of thee, nor are we children at all. The children of Alice call Bartram father, we are nothing—less than nothing and dreams. We are only what might have been, and must wait upon the tedious shores of Lethe, millions of ages, before we have existence and a name; and immediately awaking, I found myself quietly seated in my arm-chair—where I had fallen asleep, with the faithful Bridget unchanged by my side."

Lamb was not deep-thoughted; he would have lost the trail in those meditations and searchings to which Coleridge in his cooler and clearer moments invited and led the way; but there was about him an individuality, a delicacy of thought, a quaint play of airy fancies, a {325} beguiling inconsequence, that have made his path in letters a delightful one for thousands to follow.

I cannot leave his name without calling attention to the charming little stories of Mrs. Leicester's School—written by Charles Lamb and his sister jointly. They are—or profess to be—the tales told by school children themselves of their memories—whether sorrows or joys; and are so artless in their narrative, so pathetic often, that you cannot help but follow the trend of their simple language as you would follow a story which an older sister might tell you about your own homes and your own father and mother.

Those essays of Lamb may sometimes show a liking for things we cannot like; in his dealings with the old dramatists he may pour chirrupy praises where we cannot follow with ours. We may not be won over, though we see Marston through those pitiful eyes and the lens of that always tender heart. And why should we? That criticism is not the best which serves to put us in agreeing herds, and to leash us in a bundled cohesion of opinion; but it is better worth if it {326} stimulate us by putting beside our individuality of outlook the warming or the chafing or the contesting individuality of another mind. There is never a time when Lamb's generous, kindly, witty opinions—whether about men or books, or every-day topics—will not find a great company of delighted readers, if not of ardent sponsors. Then, for style—what is to be said, except that it is so gracious, so winning, we are delighted with its flow, its cadences, its surprises, its charming lapses—like waves on summer beaches—or like an August brook, prattling, babbling, and finding spread and pause in some pellucid, overshadowed pool—where we rest in fulness of summery content.

He was never a strong man physically, and his poor thin form vanished from the sight of men in 1834, six months after Coleridge died; and the poor sister—unaware what helplessness and loneliness had fallen on her, lingered for years in blessed ignorance; she then died; and so we turn over that page of English letters on which are scored *Elia* and the *Tales of Shakespeare* and pass to others.

Wordsworth. {327}

A lake poet.

On the 29th day of June, just half a century ago, upon a beautiful sunny afternoon—most rare in the Lake Counties of England—I had one of the outside places upon an English coach, which was making its daily trip from Kendal, along the borders of Lake Windermere, and on by Grasmere and under the flank of Helvellyn, to Derwent-Water and Keswick. I stopped halfway at the good inn of the "Salutation" in Ambleside, with the blue of Windermere stretching before me; and in the twilight took a row upon the lake—the surface being scarce ruffled, and the shores, with their copses of wood, and their slopes of green lawn, as beautiful as a dream.

> "I dipped my oars into the silent lake,
> And as I rose upon the stroke, my boat
> Went heaving thro' the water like a swan."

Wordsworth.

The words were Wordsworth's[8] own; and this was his country; and he who was counted the King-poet in those College Days which were not then {328} long behind me, was living only a little way off. From different points in the embowered roads I could catch a glimpse of the light in his window, at Rydal Mount. Stratford had been seen indeed, but there were only memories there; and Abbotsford, but Scott and the last of his family were gone; and Olney, but Cowper had been silent a matter of forty years; and here, at last, I was to come into near presence of one of the living magicians of English verse—in his own lair, with his mountains and his lakes around him. But I did not interview him: no thought of such audacity came nigh me: there was more modesty in those days than now. Yet it has occurred to me since—with some relentings—that I might have won a look of benediction from the old man of seventy-five, if I had sought his door, and told him—as I might truthfully have done {329} —that within a twelvemonth of their issue his beautiful sextette of "Moxon" volumes were lying, thumb-worn, on my desk, in a far-off New England college-room; and that within the month I had wandered up the Valley of the Wye, with his *Tintern Abbey* pulsing in my thought more stirringly than the ivy-leaves that wrapped the ruin; and that only the week before I had followed lovingly his White Doe of Rylstone along the picturesque borders of Wharfdale, and across the grassy glades of Bolton Priory and among the splintered ledges

> "Where Rylstone Brook with Wharf is blended."

Poets love to know that they have laid such trail for even the youngest of followers; and though the personal benedictions were missed, I did go around next morning—being Sunday—to the little chapel on the heights of Rydal, where he was to worship; and from my seat saw him enter; knowing him on the instant; tall (to my seeming), erect, yet with step somewhat shaky; his coat closely buttoned; his air serious, and self-possessed; his features large, mouth almost coarse; hair {330} white as the driven snow, fringing a dome of baldness; an eye with a dreamy expression in it, and seeming to look—beyond, and still beyond. He carried, too, his serious air into his share of the service, and made his successive responses of "Good Lord deliver us!" and "Amen!" with an emphasis that rung throughout the little chapel.

I trust the reader will excuse these personal reminiscences, which I write down to fix in mind more distinctly the poet, whose work and life we have only space to glance at now, and whose name will close the roll of poets for the present volume.

His Poems.

There is, and always has been, on the part of too many admirers of Wordsworth a disposition to resent any depreciation or expression of dissent from fullest praise, which has counted against his reputation. We do not like—any of us—to be forced into our admiration of this or that poet, and will not be, for long whiles together. There is no bolstering of bad work that will make it {331} permanently sound; so, too, what good things are done—whatever opposing sneers or silence may do—will surely, some day or other, be found out. A book or a poem that needs careful and insistent pilotage by critics, into the harbor of a great Fame, will not be so sure of safe anchorage and good holding-ground as one that drifts thither under stress of the unbroken, quiet, resistless tide of a cultivated popular judgment. Wordsworth's place is a very high one; some things he has done are incomparable; some altitudes of thought he has reached range among the Miltonic heights. But he has printed—as so many people have—too much. His vanities—which were excellently well developed—seem to have made him insensible to any demerits in his own work and incapable of believing that hand or brain of his could do aught that was not so far above common level as to warrant its acceptance by the world. I think he was conscientious in this; I do not believe that, like many an author, he put before us what he knew or suspected to be inferior, simply because he knew it would be devoured. There was none of that dishonesty in Wordsworth. {332}

He religiously believed that even "Peter Bell" and the dreariest lines of the "Idiot Boy" had a mission.

If Wordsworth had possessed Browning's sense of humor, he would have withdrawn an eighth of his published works; if he had possessed Hood's sense of humor, I think he would have withdrawn a third. Humor is a great and good shortener. Humor seeks to provoke mirth and ripples of cheery satisfaction, so it shuns length and prosiness. Humor is a charming quality in either preacher or poet; and brevity is one of the best parts of humor; indeed brevity and humor always lock hands. Unfortunately, Wordsworth had no humor. Again, that too free and lax play of language in Wordsworth—that told nothing vital, but only served to tie together, by loose and swaying looplets, the flashing jewels wherein his real genius coruscated and crystallized—not only fatigued us who followed and wanted to follow, but it filled the master's time and books and thought to the neglect of that large entertainment of some systematized purpose—some great, balanced, and concreted scheme of poetic story, which he always hinted at, but never made good. {333}
Take that budget of verse which went toward the making of the "Recluse"—how incomplete; how unfinished even in detail; yet splashed up and down with brilliancies of thought and fancy; with here and there noble, statuesque, single figures; like a great antechamber, detaining us with its diverting objects, with interposed, wearisome, official talk—we all the while hoping to fare through to some point where we shall see the grandeur of the house and take in reverently its great proportions, and pay homage to the master. But we never come to those Arcana; we end in waiting; great, fine bursts of song, and of glowing narrative—sun, mountains, and clouds giving us august attendance—but no mapping of a whole, whose scheme is fitly balanced, and whose foundations bear up a completed body and dome, with cross and crown. But though his languors of language, his prosiness, his self-satisfaction do madden one to damnatory speech, yet when his song breaks out at its best—seeming to tie the upper mysterious world to this mundane level—to make steps of melody and of heavenly lift to invite and charm as toward the Infinite, we are {334}
ashamed of our too easy discomfiture:—

"Not in entire forgetfulness,
And not in utter nakedness,
But trailing clouds of glory do we come
From God, who is our home:

"O joy! that in our embers
Is something that doth live,
That Nature yet remembers
What was so fugitive!
The thought of our past years in me doth breed
Perpetual benediction: nor indeed
For that which is most worthy to be blest;

"But for those first affections,
Those shadowy recollections,
Which be they what they may,
Are yet a fountain light of all our day,
Are yet a master light of all our seeing;
Uphold us, cherish, and have power to make
Our noisy years seem moments in the being
Of the Eternal silence: truths that wake,
To perish never;
Which neither listlessness, nor mad endeavor,
Nor man, nor boy,
Nor all that is at enmity with joy.
Can utterly abolish or destroy!
Hence in a season of calm weather
Though inland far we be,
Our souls have sight of that immortal sea

Which brought us hither, {335}
Can, in a moment travel thither,
And see the children sport upon the shore,
And hear the mighty waters rolling evermore."

These verses belong to an ode that should never be forgotten when we reckon up the higher reaches of the poetic tides of this generation.

I am disposed to think that all of us, as we grow older, come into larger and fuller appreciation of the wonderful intuitions of this poet and of his marvellous grasp of all the subtler meanings in Nature's aspects. Certainly those lines composed above *Tintern Abbey*, do not offer food for babes. Only older ones know that—

"Nature never did betray
The heart that loves her; 'tis her privilege,
Through all the years of this our life, to lead

From joy to joy; for she can so inform
The mind that is within us, so impress
With quietness and beauty, and so feed
With lofty thoughts, that neither evil tongues,
Rash judgments, nor the sneers of selfish men,
Nor greetings where no kindness is, nor all
The dreary intercourse of daily life,
Shall e'er prevail against us, or disturb
Our cheerful faith, that all which we behold
Is full of blessings."

So, too, in the Excursion, whose mention we perhaps dwelt upon too lightly—that grand {336} Wordsworthian mating of man with Nature is always shining through the poet's purpose, and gleaming along his lines: a deep and radical purpose it is; all else sways to it; all else is dwarfed and made small in the comparison. Hence, poor Mary Lamb is half-justified in her outcry—that under its dominance a poor dweller in town has hardly "a soul to be saved."[9] Grand, surely, are many of his utterances, morally and intellectually, and carrying richest adornments of poesy to their livery; immortal—yes; yet not favorites for these many generations: too encumbered; sheathed about with tamer things, that will not let the sword of his intent gleam with a vital keenness and poignancy. Always the great lesson which the stars and the mountains and rolling rivers sing—sing in his lines; but buttressed with over-much building up of supporting and flanking words. Always the grand appeal to man's moral nature and instincts is imminent; always the verse radiant with the beguiling lights which he has set to burn upon the hills and in the {337} skies; but, too often, even the sunset glories pall, and weary with their over-painting and golden suffusions of language.

If one is tempted to go back to the contemporary criticism of the *Excursion*, he should temper the matter-of-fact admeasurement and antipathies of Jeffrey in the *Edinburgh*, with the kindlier and more feeling discourse of Charles Lamb in the *Quarterly* (1814). And of this latter, it is to be remembered that its warm unction and earnestness were very much abated by editorial jugglery. Lamb never forgave Gifford for putting "his d——d shoemaker phraseology instead of mine;" and in an explanatory letter to Wordsworth he tells him that many passages are cut out altogether, and "what is left is of course the worse for their having been there," and in a wonderful figure continues,—"the eyes are pulled out, and the bleeding sockets are left."

Personal History.

Wordsworth was a Cumberland man by birth, and from the very first opened his young eyes {338} upon such scenes as lay along the Derwent. His father was an attorney-at-law and agent for the Lonsdale estates; nor does the poet fail to assure us in his autobiographic notes—with a pride that is only half veiled—of the gentle blood that flowed in his mother's veins. But the family purse was not plethoric; and—his father dying, when Wordsworth was only fourteen—it was through the kindness of his uncles that he had his "innings" at Trinity College, Cambridge, and felt his poetic pulses stirred by the memory of such old Cambridge men as Milton, and Waller, and Gray. The flat meadows bordering the Cam were doubtless tame to his Cumberland eyes, nor do University memories count for much in irradiating his future work; perhaps the brightest gleam that comes from those cloistered sources upon his verse is that which is reflected from the wondrous vaulted ceiling of King's College Chapel:—

"That branching roof
Self-poised, and scooped into ten thousand cells
Where light and shade repose, where music dwells,
Lingering and wandering on as loth to die."

A vacation passed in the mountains of Switzerland sharpened an appetite for travel upon the {339} Continent; and thither he went shortly after taking his degree (1791); was in Orleans and in Paris the succeeding year; caught the fever of those revolutionary times, and for a while seriously entertained the purpose of throwing himself into the swirl of that tide of Girondism which was to fall away so shortly after, leaving tracks of blood.

There was a short stay in London on his return—counting for very little in the story of his life. *Westminster Bridge* and *A Farmer of Tilsbury Vale* are all that bring a glimmer of remembrance to the lover of his books, out of the tumult and roar of "Lothbury" and Cheapside. Thereafter came the quiet life in Dorsetshire with his good sister Dora—where his poetic moods first came to print—and where Coleridge found him (1796) and cemented that friendship which drew him next year into Somersetshire—a friendship, which, with one brief interruption, that promised a bitter quarrel—lasted throughout their lives. There—at Alfoxden, in Somersetshire—was forged that little book of *Lyrical Ballads*, containing the *Ancient Mariner* and *Tintern Abbey*—the best {340} possible types of the respective powers of the two poets.

In 1799 Wordsworth established himself at Grasmere, in Westmoreland, his sister remaining —as she always did—a beloved inmate of his home. In 1802 he married, most fortunately, a woman who was always sympathetic and kindly, as well as an excellent and devoted mother of the children born to them;[10] moreover, she was exceptionally endowed to stimulate and give range to his poetic ambitions. Between Grasmere or its neighborhood, and the better-known home of Rydal Mount, the poet passed the remainder of his life. There were, indeed, frequent interludes of travel—to Scotland, to Leicestershire, to Southern England, to Ireland, and the Continent—from all which places he came back with an unabated love for the lakes and mountains which bounded his home. Never did there live a more exalted lover of Nature; and {341} specially for those scenes of Nature which cradled him in infancy and which cheered his manhood. Without being largely experienced in the devices of gardening craft, he yet gave frequent and profitable advice to those among his friends who were building up homes in the surrounding lake district; and the Beaumont family of Leicestershire show with pride a winter garden at Coleorton, which is an evergreen remembrancer of the poet's skill and taste. He resented all undue interference with natural surfaces; his art was the larger art of winning one to the reasonableness and beauty of nature's own purposes.

Not a resident in the neighborhood of Ambleside but knew his gaunt figure stalking up and down the hills; yet not counted over-affable; the villagers report him—"distant, vera distant. As for his habits he had none—niver knew him wi' a pot i' his hand or a pipe i' his mouth." And another says—"As for fishing, he hadn't a bit of fish in him, hadn't Wordsworth—not a bit o' fish in him!"[11] This sounds strangely to one familiar with *Lines to gold and silver fish in a glass* {342} *globe*.

Certainly he did not love babble nor little persiflage; he had neither the art to coin it nor the humor to redeem it. But he was capable of sensible, heavily-charged talk, even upon practical themes, showing a capacity for, and a habit of, consecutive and logical thinking. Often reading and discoursing on poets and their work, but chary of any exuberance of praise; if ever cynical, tending that way under such provocation. Not indisposed—for small cause—to recite from Wordsworth (as Emerson tells us in the story of his first visit to Rydal Mount); but reciting well, and putting large, dashing movement into the verse—as of faraway rebounding water-falls. His egotism, though not easily kept under, was not riotously exacting or audacious; one could see at the bottom of it—not the little vanities of a flibbertigibbet, but respect and reverence for his inborn seership and for his long priesthood at the altar of the Muses.

He had no musical ear, no power of distinguishing tunes, yet was rapt into ecstatic fervor by the near and sweet warbling of a bird. Books he loved only for their uses; he favored no finical {343} "keeping" of them, but plunged into an uncut volume with a smeared fruit-knife—if need were. Southey dreaded his visits to his Keswick library, saying he was "like a bear in a tulip garden." He was parsimonious too; generosity in praise, or in purse, was unknown to him; and he had stiff school-mastery ways with youngish men—craving oblation and large tokens of respect. De Quincey said he never offered to carry a lady's shawl; hardly offered a hand to help her over a stile. He was not mobile, not adaptive, not gossipy; last of men for a picnic or a tea-party. His shaking of hands was "feckless;" which to a Scottish ear means a hand-shake not to be run after and with no heartiness in its grip. That home of Rydal Mount was a modest and charming one; within—severely simple; in abstemiousness the poet was almost an anchorite: without—a terrace walk, a velvety stretch of turf, mossy vases, a dial, a few patches of flowers, grayish house-walls on which the clambering vines took hold, quaint stone chimney-tops on which the lichens clung {344} and around which the swallows played, views of Rydal Water, glimpses of Windermere, of Nab-scar, and of nearer heights crowned with foliage.

Wordsworth was never a man of large means; his poems gave only small moneyed returns; nor did he care overmuch for expensive indulgences; travelling was his greatest and most coveted luxury. All new scenes in nature came to his eye as so many new phases of his oldest and tenderest friend.

For a considerable period he was in receipt of a small revenue from a local Commissionership of Stamps, and during the last eight years of his life received a pension of £300 from the Government. A year after the grant, upon the death of Dr. Southey, he was, through the urgence of friends, and at the solicitation of Sir Robert Peel, induced to accept the post of Poet Laureate—going up to London, at the age of seventy-three, to kiss the hand of the young Queen, in recognition of that honor. This young Queen, then in her twenty-fourth year, was her present gracious lady, Victoria, who had succeeded to her bluff sailor-uncle, William IV., in 1837, and to {345} her sorrier uncle, George IV., who had died in 1830.

Wordsworth was among those stately country gentlemen who believed that with the passage of the great Reform Bill of 1832, England was about to enter upon her decadence. Like many another poet, he had faith in established privileges, and faith in grand traditions. He bestirred himself, too, in the latter years of his life, to defeat—if it might be—the scheme for pushing railways across his quiet and beautiful region among the lakes of Westmoreland and Cumberland. Happily he did not live to see the desecration of his charming solitudes; it would have made him wroth to watch the wreaths of vapor from the engines floating around the chimney-tops of Rydal Mount.[12] The lines he wrote fifty years before his death, he lived by to the last:—

> "To her fair works did Nature link
> The human soul that thro' me ran;
>
> And much it grieved my heart to think {346}

What man has made of man.
The budding twigs spread out their fan
To catch the breezy air;
And I must think, do all I can,
That there was pleasure there."

He had not only a poet's, but a Briton's love for that old England—of mossy roofs, and park lands, and smoking chimneys, and great old houses, and gnarled oaks, and way-side cottages. He cherished all Raskin's antipathy to huge manufacturing centres, and the din of machinery and trip-hammers; he would have no pounding to fright the cuckoos, and no reservoirs among the hills to choke the rills; but everywhere the brooks purling their own murmurous ways through leafy solitudes and sweet, open valleys.

Well, those are the sights that win most, I think, toward the celestial visions which the good poet always cherished, and which symbolized best the "dear Jerusalem,"—

"Along whose streets, with pleasing sound,
   The living waters flow,
And on the banks, on either side.
   The trees of life do grow."

Only the name—William Wordsworth—is graven upon the simple stone which marks the poet's grave, in a corner of the church-yard at Grasmere; and the bodies of wife and children lie grouped there beside him. {347}

[1] Samuel Rogers, b. 1768; d. 1855. His *Pleasures of Memory*, published 1792; *Italy*, 1822-28.

[2] Crabb Robinson, chap. ix., 1881, p. 165, vol. ii., says he "was noted for his generosity toward poor artists." The story he tells in confirmation is, that Sir Thomas Lawrence appeared at his door and begged him to save the president of the Royal Academy from disgrace, which must follow except a few thousands were raised next day; he (Sir Thomas) offering his paintings, drawings, etc., in guarantee. Crabb Robinson continues that "Rogers saw Lord Ward [a nobleman of great wealth] next day and arranged for the advance by him;" an advance that never brought loss to either Ward or Rogers. The latter's "generosities" were a good many of them of this color; *i.e.*, securing advances which were pretty sure to be repaid.

[3] S. T. Coleridge, b. 1772; d. 1834. Many of his works edited by H. N. Coleridge, husband of his only daughter Sara. Special mention should be made of the Coleridgean labors of that indefatigable worker, the late J. Dykes Campbell.

[4] He had a son Hartley, whom Crabb Robinson describes in 1816 as "one of the strangest boys I ever saw. He has the features of a foreign Jew, with starched and affected manners." He also speaks of the other son, Derwent, as a "hearty boy, with a good-natured expression." The daughter—afterward Mrs. Henry Nelson Coleridge, editress of many of her father's works (continues Robinson), "has a face of great sweetness."

[5] Southey did not go to Keswick to reside until 1803-4. Coleridge, however, was there as an occupant of a portion of the future Southey home in 1800. Southey paid him a visit in the summer of 1801. See Traill, chap. v. See also *Memorials of Coleorton*, passim.

[6] Probably some time between 1803 and 1806.

[7] Charles Lamb, b. 1775; d. 1834.

[8] William Wordsworth, b. 1770; d. 1850. *Evening Walk* published 1793; *Lyrical Ballads* (in conjunction with Coleridge), 1798; *Excursion*, 1814; *White Doe of Rylstone*, 1815; first collected edition of poems, 1836-37; *Life* by W. H. Myers; a much fuller, but somewhat muddled one, by William Knight, 3 vols,, 8vo, 1889. Dowden's edition of Wordsworth's poems (Aldine Series) is latest and best.

[9] See Lamb's Letters, cited in Knight, vol. ii., p. 235.

[10] His wife was Mary Hutchinson, of Penrith. Their children were John, b. 1803; Dorothy, b. 1804 (became Mrs. Quinlan and died before her father); Thomas, b. 1806; Catharine, b. 1808; and William, b. 1810—the last being the only one who survived the poet.

[11] This based on "Mr. Rawnsley's Gleanings amongst the Villagers." See *Athenæum*, February 23, 1889.

[12] There is a very interesting account of Wordsworth's home life, etc., in Miss Martineau's *Autobiography*, vol. i., p. 504 *et seq.*—but very much colored, as all her pictures are, by her own megrims and disposition to sneer at all the world—except Miss Martineau.

[Transcriber's note: the source book's odd-numbered pages had varying headers. In this etext, they have been converted to sidenotes and placed where appropriate.]

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