

English literary criticism

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ENGLISH LITERARY CRITICISM

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C. E. VAUGHAN

Edited by C H. HERFORD, Litt. D

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY C. E. VAUGHAN

PREFACE.

In the following pages my aim has been to sketch the development of criticism, and particularly of critical method, in England; and to illustrate each phase of its growth by one or two samples taken from the most typical writers. I have in no way attempted to make a full collection of what might be thought the most striking pieces of criticism to be found in our literature.

Owing to the great wealth of such writing produced during the last sixty years, it is clearly impossible to give so complete a picture of what has been done in this period as in others. I am obliged to content myself with one specimen of one writer. But that is the writer who, in the opinion of many, is the most remarkable of all English critics. For the permission, so kindly granted, to include the Essay on Sandro Botticelli I desire to offer my sincerest thanks to Messrs. Macmillan and to the other representatives of the late Mr. Pater.

It may seem strange to close a volume of literary criticism with a study on the work and temperament of a painter. I have been led to do so for more than one reason. A noticeable tendency of modern criticism, from the time of Burke and Lessing, has been to break down the barrier between poetry and the kindred arts; and it is perhaps well that this tendency should find expression in the following selection. But a further reason is that Mr. Pater was never so much himself, was never so entirely master of his craft, as when interpreting the secrets of form and colour. Most of all was this the case when he had chosen for his theme one who, like Botticelli, "is before all things a poetical painter".

C. E. VAUGHAN.

CONTENTS.

INTRODUCTION

SIR PHILIP SIDNEY--

I. An Apology for Poetry

JOHN DRYDEN--

II. Preface to the Fables

SAMUEL JOHNSON--

III. On the Metaphysical Poets

SAMUEL TAYLOR COLERIDGE--

IV. On Poetic Genius and Poetic Diction

WILLIAM HAZLITT--

V. On Poetry in General

CHARLES LAMB--

VI. On the Artificial Comedy of the Last Century VII. On Webster's
Duchess of Malfi VIII. On Ford's _Broken Heart_

PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY--

IX. A Defence of Poetry

THOMAS CARLYLE--

X. Goethe

WALTER PATER--

XI. Sandro Botticelli

INTRODUCTION.

In England, as elsewhere, criticism was a late birth of the literary spirit. English poets had sung and literary prose been written for centuries before it struck men to ask themselves, What is the secret of the power that these things have on our mind, and by what principles are they to be judged? And it could hardly have been otherwise. Criticism is a self-conscious art, and could not have arisen in an age of intellectual childhood. It is a derivative art, and could scarcely have come into being without a large body of literature to suggest canons of judgment, and to furnish instances of their application.

The age of Chaucer might have been expected to bring with it a new departure. It was an age of self-scrutiny and of bold experiment. A new world of thought and imagination had dawned upon it; and a new literature, that of Italy, was spread before it. Yet who shall say that the facts answer to these expectations? In the writings of Chaucer himself a keen eye, it is true, may discern the faint beginnings of the critical spirit. No poet has written with more nicely calculated art; none has passed a cooler judgment upon the popular taste of his generation. We know that Chaucer despised the "false gallop" of chivalrous verse; we know that he had small respect for the marvels of Arthurian romance. And his admiration is at least as frank as his

contempt. What poet has felt and avowed a deeper reverence for the great Latins? What poet has been so alert to recognize the master-spirits of his own time and his father's? De Meung and Granson among the French--Dante, Petrarch and Boccaccio of the Italians--each comes in for his share of praise from Chaucer, or of the princely borrowings which are still more eloquent than praise.

Yet, for all this, Chaucer is far indeed from founding the art of criticism. His business was to create, and not to criticise. And, had he set himself to do so, there is no warrant that his success would have been great. In many ways he was still in bondage to the mediaval, and wholly uncritical, tradition. One classic, we may almost say, was as good to him as another. He seems to have placed Ovid on a line with Virgil; and the company in his House of Fame is undeniably mixed. His judgments have the healthy instinct of the consummate artist. They do not show, as those of his master, Petrarch, unquestionably do, the discrimination and the tact of the born critic.

For this, or for any approach to it, English literature had to wait for yet two centuries more. In the strict sense, criticism did not begin till the age of Elizabeth; and, like much else in our literature, it was largely due to the passion for classical study, so strongly marked in the poets and dramatists of Shakespeare's youth, and inaugurated by Surrey and others in the previous generation. These conditions are in themselves significant. They serve to explain much both of the strength and the weakness of criticism, as it has grown up on English soil. From the Elizabethans to Milton, from Milton to Johnson, English criticism was dominated by constant reference to classical models. In the latter half of this period the influence of these models, on the whole, was harmful. It acted as a curb rather than as a spur to the imagination of poets; it tended to cripple rather than give energy to the judgment of critics. But in earlier days it was not so. For nearly a century the influence of classical masterpieces was altogether for good. It was not the regularity but the richness, not the self-restraint but the freedom, of the ancients that came home to poets such as Marlowe, or even to critics such as Meres. And if adventurous spirits, like Spenser and Sidney, were for a time misled into the vain attempt to graft exotic forms upon the homely growths of native poetry, they soon saw their mistake and revolted in silence against the ridiculous pedant who preferred the limping hexameters of the *Arcadia* to Sidney's sonnets, and the spavined iambics of Spenser to the *Faerie Queene*.

In the main, the worship of the classics seems to have counted at this time rather for freedom than restraint. And it is well that it was so. Yet restraint too was necessary; and, like freedom, it was found--though in less ample measure--through devotion to the classics. There can be little doubt that, consciously or no, the Elizabethans, with their quick eye for beauty of every kind, were swayed, as men in all ages have been swayed, by the finely chiselled forms of classical art. The besetting sin of their imagination was the tendency to run riot; and it may well be that, save for the restraining influence of ancient poetry, they would have sinned in this matter still more boldly than they did. Yet the chastening power of classical models may be easily overrated. And we cannot but notice that it was precisely where the classical influence was strongest that the force of imagination was the least under control. Jonson apart, there were no more ardent disciples of the ancients than Marlowe and Chapman. And no poets of that age are so open to the charge of extravagance as they. It is

with Milton that the chastening influence of the ancients first makes itself definitely felt. But Milton was no less alive to the fervour than to the self-mastery of his classical models. And it was not till the Restoration that "correctness" was recognized as the highest, if not the only, quality of the ancients, or accepted as the one worthy object of poetic effort. For more than a century correctness remained the idol both of poetry and of criticism in England; and nothing less than the furious onslaught of the Lyrical Ballads was needed to overthrow it. Then the floodgates were opened. A new era both of poetic and critical energy had dawned.

Thus the history of English criticism, like that of English literature, divides itself roughly into three periods. The first is the period of the Elizabethans and of Milton; the second is from the Restoration to the French Revolution; the third from the Revolution to the present day. The typical critic of the first period is Sidney; Dryden opens and Johnson closes the second; the third, a period of far more varied tendencies than either of the others, is perhaps most fitly represented by Lamb, Hazlitt, and Carlyle. It will be the aim of the following pages to sketch the broader outlines of the course that critical inquiry has taken in each.

I. The first thing that strikes us in the early attempts of criticism is that its problems are to a large extent remote from those which have engrossed critics of more recent times. There is little attempt to appraise accurately the worth of individual authors; still less, to find out the secret of their power, or to lay bare the hidden lines of thought on which their imagination had set itself to work. The first aim both of Puttenham and of Webbe, the pioneers of Elizabethan criticism, was either to classify writers according to the subjects they treated and the literary form that each had made his own, or to analyse the metre and other more technical elements of their poetry.

But this, after all, was the natural course in the infancy of the study. All science begins with classification; and all classification with the external and the obvious. The Greek critics could take no step forward until they had classified all poems as either lyric, epic, or dramatic. And how necessary that division was may be seen from the length at which Plato discusses the nature of the distinction in the second book of the Republic. Even Aristotle, in this as in other things the 'master of those who know', devotes no inconsiderable space of the Poetics to technical matters such as the analysis of vocal sounds, and the aptness of different metres to different forms of poetic thought.

There is another matter in which the methods of Elizabethan critics run side by side with those of the early Greeks. In Plato and Aristotle we are not seldom startled by the sudden transition from questions of form to the deepest problems suggested by imaginative art. The same is true of the Elizabethan critics. It is doubtless true that the latter give a proportionally larger space to the more technical sides of the subject than their Greek forerunners. They could not reasonably be expected to write with the width of view that all the world has admired in Aristotle and Plato. Moreover, they were from the first confronted with a practical difficulty from which the Greek critics were so fortunate as to be free. Was rhyme a "brutish" form of verse? and, if so, was its place to be taken by the alliterative rhythm, so dear to the older poets, or by an importation of classical metres, such as was attempted by Sidney and Spenser, and enforced by the unwearied lectures of Harvey and of Webbe? This, however technical,

was a fundamental question; and, until it was settled, there was but little use in debating the weightier matters of the law.

The discussion, which might have raged for ever among the critics, was happily cut short by the healthy instinct of the poets. Against alliteration the question had already been given by default. Revived, after long disuse, by Langland and other poets of the West Midlands in the fourteenth century, it had soon again been swept out of fashion by the irresistible charm of the genius of Chaucer. The *Tale of Gamelyn*, dating apparently from the first quarter of the fifteenth century, is probably the last poem of note in which the once universal metre is even partially employed. And what could prove more clearly that the old metrical form was dead? The rough rhythm of early English poetry, it is true, is kept; but alliteration is dropped, and its place is taken by rhyme.

Nor were the efforts to impose classical measures on English poetry more blest in their results. The very men on whom the literary Romanizers had fixed their hopes were the first to abandon the enterprise in despair. If any genius was equal to the task of naturalizing hexameters in a language where strict quantity is unknown, it was the genius of Spenser. But Spenser soon ranged himself heart and soul with the champions of rhyme; his very name has passed down to us as a synonym for the most elaborate of all rhyming stanzas that have taken root in our verse. For the moment, rhyme had fairly driven all rivals from the field. Over the lyric its sway was undisputed. In narrative poetry, where its fitness was far more disputable, it maintained its hold till the closing years of Milton. In the drama itself, where its triumph would have been fatal, it disputed the ground inch by inch against the magnificent instrument devised by Surrey and perfected by Marlowe.

It was during the ten years preceding the publication of Webbe's *Discourse* (1586) that this controversy seems to have been hottest. From the first, perhaps, it bulked more largely with the critics than with the poets themselves. Certainly it allowed both poets and critics sufficient leisure for the far more important controversy which has left an enduring monument in Sidney's *Apologie for Poetrie*. [Footnote: The most important pieces of Elizabethan criticism are:--

Gosson's *School of Abuse*, 1579.
Lodge's *Defence of Poetry, Musick, and Stage Plays*, 1579(?).
Sidney's *Apologie for Poetrie*, 1580(?).
Webbe's *Discourse of English Poetrie*, 1586.
Puttenham's *Arte of English Poesie*, 1589.
Harington's *Apologie of Poetrie*, 1591.
Meres' *Palladis Tamia*, 1598.
Campion's *Observations in the Arte of English Poesie*, 1602.
Daniel's *Defence of Ryme*, 1603.]

The historical bearing of Sidney's treatise has been too commonly overlooked. It forms, in truth, one move in the long struggle which ended only with the restoration of Charles II.; or, to speak more accurately, which has lasted, in a milder form, to the present day. In its immediate object it was a reply to the Puritan assaults upon the theatre; in its ultimate scope, a defence of imaginative art against the suspicions with which men of high but narrow purpose have always, consciously or unconsciously, tended to regard it. It is a noble plea for liberty, directed no less against the unwilling scruples of

idealists, such as Plato or Rousseau, than against the ruthless bigotry of practical moralists and religious partisans.

From the first dawn of the Elizabethan drama, the stricter Protestants had declared war upon the stage. Intrenched within the city they were at once able to drive the theatres beyond the walls (1575); just as seventy years later, when it had seized the reins of central government, the same party, embittered by a thousand insults and brutalities, hastened to close the theatres altogether. It would be an evident mistake to suppose that this was merely a municipal prejudice, or to forget that the city council was backed by a large body of serious opinion throughout the country. A proof of this, if proof were needed, is to be found in the circumstances that gave rise to the *_Apologie_* of Sidney.

The attack on the stage had been opened by the corporation and the clergy. It was soon joined by the men of letters. And the essay of Sidney was an answer neither to a town councillor, nor to a preacher, but to a former dramatist and actor. This was Stephen Gosson, author of the *_School of Abuse_*. The style of Gosson's pamphlet is nothing if not literary. It is full of the glittering conceits and the fluent rhetoric which the ready talent of Lyly had just brought into currency. It is euphuism of the purest water, with all the merits and all the drawbacks of the euphuistic manner. For that very reason the blow was felt the more keenly. It was violently resented as treason by the playwrights and journalists who still professed to reckon Gosson among their ranks. [Footnote: Lodge writes, "I should blush from a Player to become an envious Preacher".--*_Ancient Critical Essays_*, ed. Haslewood, ii. 7.]

A war of pamphlets followed, conducted with the usual fury of literary men. Gosson on the one side, Lodge, the dramatist, upon the other, exchanged compliments with an energy which showed that one at least of them had not in vain graduated in "the school of abuse". "Raw devises", "hudder mudder", "guts and garbage", such are the phrases hurled by Gosson at the arguments and style of his opponents; "bawdy charms", "the very butchery of Christian souls", are samples of the names fastened by him upon the cause which they defended. [Footnote: Lodge, in his *_Defence of Poetry, Musick, and Stage Plays_* (1579 or 1580), is hardly less scurrilous. "There came into my hand lately a little (would God a witty) pamphlet... Being by me advisedly wayed, I find it the oftscome of imperfections, the writer fuller of words than judgement, the matter certainly as ridiculus as serius."--In *_Ancient Critical Essays_*, ii. 5.]

From this war of words Sidney turned loftily aside. Pointedly challenged at the outset--for the first and second pamphlets of Gosson had, without permission, been dedicated to "the right noble gentleman, Maister Philip Sidney"--he seldom alludes to the arguments, and never once mentions the name of Gosson. He wrote to satisfy his own mind, and not to win glory in the world of letters. And thus his *_Apologie_*, though it seems to have been composed while the controversy was still fresh in men's memory, was not published until nearly ten years after his death (1595). It was not written for controversy, but for truth. From the first page it rises into the atmosphere of calm, in which alone great questions can be profitably discussed.

The *_Apologie_* of Sidney is, in truth, what would now be called a Philosophy of Poetry. It is philosophy taken from the side of the

moralist; for that was the side to which the disputants had confined themselves, and in which--altogether apart from the example of others--the interest of Sidney, as man of action, inevitably lay. It is philosophy as conceived by the mind of a poet. But, none the less, it pierces to the eternal problems which underlie the workings of all creative art, and presents them with a force, for the like of which we must go back to Plato and Aristotle, or look forward to the philosophers and inspired critics of a time nearer our own. It recalls the *Phaedrus* and the *Ion*; it anticipates the utterance of a still more kindred spirit, the *Defence of Poetry* by Shelley.

Philosopher as he was, Sidney arranges his thoughts in the loose order of the poet or the orator. It may be well, therefore, to give a brief sketch of his argument; and to do so without much regard to the arrangement of the *Apologie* itself.

The main argument of the *Apologie* may indeed be called a commentary on the saying of Aristotle, cited by Sidney himself, that "Poetry is more philosophical and more studiously serious than History"--that is, as Sidney interprets it, than the scientific fact of any kind; or again, on that yet more pregnant saying of Shelley, that "poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world". Gossion had denounced poetry as "the vizard of vanity, wantonness, and folly"; or, in Sidney's paraphrase, as "the mother of lies and the nurse of abuse". Sidney replies by urging that of all arts poetry is the most true and the most necessary to men.

All learning, he pleads, and all culture begin with poetry. Philosophy, religion, and history herself, speak through the lips of poetry. There is indeed a sense in which poetry stands on higher ground than any science. There is no science, not even metaphysics, the queen of all sciences, that does not "build upon nature", and that is not, so far, limited by the facts of nature. The poet alone is "not tied to any such subjection"; he alone "freely ranges within the zodiac of his own wit".

This, no doubt, is dangerous ground, and it is enforced by still more dangerous illustrations. But Sidney at once guards himself by insisting, as Plato had done before him, that the poet too is bound by laws which he finds but does not make; they are, however, laws not of fact but of thought, the laws of the idea--that is, of the inmost truth of things, and of God. Hence it is that the works of the poet seem to come from God, rather than from man. They stand rather on a level with nature, the material of all sciences, than with the sciences themselves, which are nothing more than man's interpretation of nature. In some sense, indeed, they are above nature; they stand midway between nature and him who created nature. They are a first nature, "beyond and over the works of that second nature". For they are the self-revelation of that which is the noblest work of God, and which in them finds utterance at its best and brightest.

Thus, so far from being the "mother of lies", poetry is the highest form of truth. Avowedly so, in what men have always recognized to be the noblest poetry, the psalms and parables and other writings that "do imitate the inconceivable excellences of God". To a less degree, but still avowedly, in that poetry whose theme is philosophy or history. And so essentially, however men may overlook it, in that poetry which, professedly dealing with human life as we know it, does not content itself with reproducing the character of this man or that, but "reined

only with learned discretion, ranges into the divine consideration of what may be and should be"--of the universal and complete rather than the individual and imperfect.

But, if truth be the essence of the poet's work, "the right describing note to know a poet by", it would seem that the outward form of it, the metre and the ornament, are of little moment. "There have been many most excellent poets that never versified." And verse is nothing more than a means, and not the only means, of securing a "fitting raiment" for their matter and suiting their manner "according to the dignity of their subject". In this suggestion--that harmonious prose may, for certain forms of poetic thought, be hardly less suitable than verse--Sidney is at one with Shelley. And neither critic must be taken to disparage verse, or to mean more than that the matter, the conception, is the soul of poetry, and that the form is only of moment so far as it aids--as undoubtedly it does aid--to "reveal the soul within". It is rather as a witness to the whole scope of their argument than as a particular doctrine, to be left or taken, that the suggestion is most profitably regarded.

Having settled the speculative base of poetry, Sidney turns to a yet more cherished theme, its influence upon character and action. The "highest end" of all knowledge, he urges, is "the knowledge of a man's self, with the end of well doing and not of well knowing only". Now by no artist is this end served so perfectly as by the poet. His only serious rivals are the moral philosopher and the historian. But neither of these flies so straight to his mark as the poet. The one gives precepts that fire no heart to action; the other gives examples without the precepts that should interpret and control them. The one lives in the world of ideas, the other in the world of hard and literal fact. Neither, therefore, has power to bridge the gulf that parts thought from action; neither can hope to take hold of beings in whose life, by its very nature, thought and action are indissolubly interwoven. "Now doth the peerless poet perform both. For whatsoever the philosopher saith should be done, he giveth a perfect picture of it in some one, by whom he presupposeth it was done. So as he coupleth the general notion with the particular example Therein of all sciences is our poet the monarch."

Once more we feel that Sidney is treading upon dangerous ground. But once more he saves himself by giving a wider definition both to thought and action, both to "well knowing and to well doing", than is common with moralists. By the former most moralists are apt to understand the bare "precept", thought as crystallized in its immediate bearing upon action. By the latter they commonly mean the passive rather than the active virtues, temperance and self-restraint rather than energy and resolve. From both these limitations Sidney, on the whole, is nobly free.

To him the "delight which is all the good fellow poet seemeth to promise", "the words set in delightful proportion and prepared for the well enchanting skill of music", "the tale which holdeth children from play and old men from the chimney corner"--all these, its indefinable and purely artistic elements, are an inseparable part of the "wisdom" which poetry has to offer. In other words, it is the frame of mind produced by poetry, the "thought hardly to be packed into the narrow act", no less than the prompting to this action or to that, which Sidney values in the work of the poet. And if this be true, none but the most fanatical champion of "art for art's sake" will dispute the

justice of his demands on poetry. None but such will deny that, whether by attuning the mind to beauty and nobleness, or by means yet more direct and obvious, art must have some bearing upon the life of man and on the habitual temper of his soul. No doubt, we might have wished that, in widening the scope of poetry as a moral influence, Sidney had been yet more explicit than in fact he is. We cannot but regret that, however unjustly, he should have laid himself open to the charge of desiring to turn poetry into sermons. But it is bare justice to point out that such a charge cannot fairly be brought against him; or that it can only be brought with such qualifications as rob it of its sting.

On the other matter the record of Sidney is yet clearer. By "well doing" he does not mean, as is too often meant, mere abstinence from evil, but the active pursuit of whatsoever things are manly, noble, and of good report. It is not only the "temperance of Diomedes"--though temperance too may be conceived as an active virtue--but the wisdom of Ulysses, the patriotism of Aeneas, "the soon repenting pride of Agamemnon", the valour of Achilles--it is courage, above all courage, that stirs his soul in the great works of ancient poetry. It is the same quality that moves him in the ballads and romances of the moderns. "Certainly I must confess my own barbarousness; I never heard the old song of Percy and Douglas that I found not my heart moved more than with a trumpet." And again: "Truly I have known men that, even with reading *_Amadis de Gaule_* (which, God knoweth, wanteth much of a perfect poesy), have found their hearts moved to the exercise of courtesy, liberality, and especially courage." The man who wrote these words had no starved conception of what poetry should be.

Once again. Sidney has small patience with those who would limit art by the banishment of all that recalls the baser side of life. "Now, as in geometry, the oblique must be known as well as the right. So in the actions of our life, who seeth not the filthiness of evil, wanteth a great foil to perceive the beauty of virtue. This doth the comedy handle so ... as with hearing it we get, as it were, an experience.... So that the right use of comedy will, I think, by no body be blamed." No doubt, the moral aspect of comedy is here marked with what must be called immoderate stress. Here, too, as when he deals with the kindred side of tragedy, Sidney demands that the poet shall, in his villains, "show you nothing that is not to be shunned"; in other words, that, so far as it paints evil, comedy shall take the form of satire.

But, even with this restriction, it must be allowed that Sidney takes a wider view than might appear at a hasty reading; wider, it is probable, than was at all common among the men of his generation. No Shakespeare had yet arisen to touch the baser qualities of men with a gleam of heroism or to humanize the most stoical endurance with a strain of weakness. And even Shakespeare, in turning from the practice to the theory of his art, could find no words very different from those of Sidney. To him, as to Sidney, the aim of the drama is "to show virtue her own image and scorn her own feature"; though by a saving clause, which Sidney perhaps would hardly have accepted, it is further defined as being to show "the very age and body of the time his form and pressure". Yet it must be remembered that Sidney is loud in praise of so unflinching a portraiture of life, base and noble, as Chaucer's *_Troilus and Cressida_*. And on the whole it remains true that the limitations of Sidney are the limitations of his age, while his generosity is his own.

The remainder of the *_Apologie_* is necessarily of slighter texture.

Apart from the examination of Plato's banishment of the poets--a theme on which Harington also discourses, though with less weight than Sidney--it is concerned mainly with two subjects: an assertion that each form of poetry has its peculiar moral import, and a lament over the decay into which English poetry had fallen in the sixteenth century.

Such a lament sounds strangely to us, accustomed as we are to regard the age of Elizabeth, already half ended when Sidney wrote, as the most fruitful period of our literature. But, when the *Apologie* was composed, no one of the authors by whose fame the Elizabethan age is now commonly known--Sidney himself and Spenser alone excepted--had begun to write. English poetry was about to wake from the long night that lies between the age of Chaucer and the age of Shakespeare. But it was not yet fully awakened. And the want of a full and free life in creative art goes far to account for the shortcomings of Elizabethan criticism.

Vague the Elizabethan critics undeniably are; they tend to lose themselves either in far-fetched analogies or in generalities that have but a slight bearing upon the distinctive problems of literary appreciation. When not vague, they are apt to fritter their strength on technical details which, important to them, have long lost their significance for the student of literature. But both technicalities and vagueness may be largely traced to the uncertain practice of the poets upon whom, in the first instance, their criticism was based. The work of Surrey and of Sackville was tentative; that of Webbe and Puttenham was necessarily the same. It is the more honour to Sidney that, shackled as he was by conditions from which no man could escape altogether, he should have struck a note at once so deep and so strong as is sounded in the *Apologie*.

II. In turning from Sidney to Dryden we pass into a different world. The philosophy, the moral fervour, the prophetic strain of the Elizabethan critic have vanished. Their place is taken by qualities less stirring in themselves, but more akin to those that modern times have been apt to associate with criticism. In fact, whatever qualities we now demand from a critic may be found at least foreshadowed, and commonly much more than foreshadowed, in Dryden. Dryden is master of comparative criticism: he has something of the historical method; he is unrivalled in the art of seizing the distinctive qualities of his author and of setting them before us with the lightest touch. His very style, so pointed yet so easy, is enough in itself to mark the gulf that lies between the age of Elizabeth and the age of the Restoration. All the Elizabethan critics, Sidney himself hardly excepted, bore some trace of the schoolmaster. Dryden was the first to meet his readers entirely as an equal, and talk to them as a friend with friends. It is Dryden, and not Sainte-Beuve, who is the true father of the literary *causerie*; and he still remains its unequalled master. There may be other methods of striking the right note in literary criticism. Lamb showed that there may be; so did Mr. Pater. But few indeed are the critics who have known how to attune the mind of the reader to a subject, which beyond all others cries out for harmonious treatment, so skilfully as Dryden.

That the first great critic should come with the Restoration, was only to be expected. The age of Elizabeth was essentially a creative age. The imagination of men was too busy to leave room for self-scrutiny. Their thoughts took shape so rapidly that there was no time to think about the manner of their coming. Not indeed that there is, as has

sometimes been urged, any inherent strife between the creative and the critical spirit. A great poet, we can learn from Goethe and Coleridge, may also be a great critic. More than that: without some touch of poetry in himself, no man can hope to do more than hack-work as a critic of others. Yet it may safely be said that, if no critical tradition exists in a nation, it is not an age of passionate creation, such as was that of Marlowe and Shakespeare, that will found it. With all their alertness, with all their wide outlook, with all their zeal for classical models, the men of that time were too much of children, too much beneath the spell of their own genius, to be critics. Compare them with the great writers of other ages; and we feel instinctively that, in spite of their surroundings, they have far more of vital kindred with Homer or the creators of the mediaval epic, than with the Greek dramatists--Aschylus excepted--or with Dante or with Goethe. The "freshness of the early world" is still upon them; neither they nor their contemporaries were born to the task of weighing and pondering, which is the birthright of the critic.

It was far otherwise with the men of the Restoration. The creative impulse of a century had at length spent its force. For the first time since Wyatt and Surrey, England deserted the great themes of literature, the heroic passions of Tamburlaine and Faustus, of Lear and Othello, for the trivial round of social portraiture and didactic discourse; for *Essays on Satire* and *on Translated Verse*, for the Tea-Table of the *Spectator*, for dreary exercises on the *Pleasures of the Imagination* and the *Art of Preserving Health*. A new era had opened. It was the day of small things.

Yet it would be wrong to regard the new movement as merely negative. Had that been all, it would be impossible to account for the passionate enthusiasm it aroused in those who came beneath its spell; an enthusiasm which lived long after the movement itself was spent, and which--except in so far as it led to absurd comparisons with the Elizabethans--was abundantly justified by the genius of Butler and Dryden, of Congreve and Swift and Pope. Negative, on one side, the ideal of Restoration and Augustan poetry undoubtedly was. It was a reaction against the "unchartered freedom", the real or fancied extravagances, of the Elizabethan poets. But, on the higher side, it was no less positive, though doubtless far less noble, than the ideal it displaced.

The great writers of the eighty years following the Restoration were consumed by a passion for observation--observation of the men and things that lay immediately around them. They may have seen but little; but what they did see, they grasped with surprising force and clearness. They may not have gone far beneath the surface; but, so far as they went, their work was a model of acuteness and precision. This was the secret of their power. To this may be traced their victory in the various tasks that they undertook.

Hence, on the one hand, their success in painting the manners of their own day--a task from which, with some notable exceptions, the greatest of the Elizabethans had been apt to shrink, as from something alien to their genius; and, on the other hand, the range and keenness of their satire. Hence, finally, the originality of their work in criticism, and their new departure in philosophy. The energies of these men were diverse: but all sprang from the same root--from their invincible resolve to see and understand their world; to probe life, as they knew it, to the bottom.

Thus the new turn given to criticism by Dryden was part of a far-reaching intellectual movement; a movement no less positive and self-contained than, in another aspect, it was negative and reactionary. And it is only when taken as part of that movement, as side by side with the philosophy of Locke and the satire of Swift or Pope, that its true meaning can be understood. Nor is it the least important or the least attractive of Dryden's qualities, as a critic, that both the positive and the negative elements of the prevailing tendency--both the determination to understand and the wish to bring all things under rule--should make themselves felt so strongly and, on the whole, so harmoniously in his Essays. No man could have felt more keenly the shortcomings of the Elizabethan writers. No man could have set greater store by that "art of writing easily" which was the chief pride of the Restoration poets. Yet no man has ever felt a juster admiration for the great writers of the opposite school; and no man has expressed his reverence for them in more glowing words. The highest eulogy that has yet been passed on Milton, the most discriminating but at the same time the most generous tribute that has ever been offered to Shakespeare--both these are to be found in Dryden. And they are to be found in company with a perception, at once reasoned and instinctive, of what criticism means, that was altogether new to English literature.

The finest and most characteristic of Dryden's critical writings--but it is unfortunately also the longest--is without doubt the *Essay of Dramatic Poesy*. The subject was one peculiarly well suited to Dryden's genius. It touched a burning question of the day, and it opened the door for a discussion of the deeper principles of the drama. The *Essay* itself forms part of a long controversy between Dryden and his brother-in-law, Sir Robert Howard. The dispute was opened by Dryden's preface to his tragi-comedy, *The Rival Ladies*, published probably, as it was certainly first acted, in 1664; and in the beginning Dryden, then first rising [Footnote: "To a play at the King's house, *The Rival Ladies*, a very innocent and most pretty witty play"--is Pepys' entry for August 4, 1664: *Diary*, ii. 155. Contrast his contemptuous description of Dryden's first comedy, *The Wild Gallant*, in the preceding year (Feb. 23)--"So poor a thing as I never saw in my life almost".--*Ib.*, i. 390.] into fame as a dramatist, confines himself to pleading the cause of rhyme against blank verse in dramatic writing. [Footnote: Tragedy alone is mentioned by name [*English Garner*, in. 490, 491]. But, from the general drift of the argument, it seems probable that Dryden was speaking of the drama in general. At a later stage of the dispute, however, he distinguishes between tragedy and comedy, and allows that the arguments in favour of rhyme apply only to the former--a curious inversion of the truth, as it would appear to the modern mind.--*Ib.*, pp. 561, 566.] Howard--who, it may reasonably be guessed, had had some brushes with Dryden over their joint tragedy, *The Indian Queen*--at once took up the cudgels. He had written rhymed plays himself, it is true; the four plays, to which his attack on rhyme was prefixed, were such; but he saw a chance of paying off old scores against his brother-in-law, and he could not resist it. Dryden began his reply at once; but three years passed before it was published. And the world has no reason to regret his tardiness. There are few writings of which we can say with greater certainty, as Dryden himself said of a more questionable achievement,

'T is not the hasty product of a day,
But the well-ripened fruit of wise delay.

The very form of the *Essay* bears witness to the spirit in which it

is written. It is cast as a dialogue, "related"--as Dryden truly says--"without passion or interest, and leaving the reader to decide in favour of which part he shall judge most reasonable". The balance between opposing views is held as evenly as may be. It is a search for truth, carried out in the "rude and undigested manner" of a friendly conversation. Roughly speaking, the subjects of the *Essay* are two. The first, and the more slightly treated, is the quarrel of rhyme against blank verse. The second is the far more important question, How far is the dramatist bound by conventional restrictions? The former--a revival under a new form of a dispute already waged by the Elizabethans--leads Dryden to sift the claims of the "heroic drama"; and his treatment of it has the special charm belonging to an author's defence of his artistic hearth and home. The latter is a theme which, under some shape or other, will be with us wherever the stage itself has a place in our life.

This is not the place to discuss at length the origin or the historical justification of the Heroic Drama. There is perhaps no form of art that so clearly marks the transition from the Elizabethan age to that of the Restoration. Transitional it must certainly be called; for, in all vital points, it stands curiously apart from the other forms of Restoration literature. It has nothing either of the negative or the positive qualities, nothing of the close observation and nothing of the measure and self-restraint, that all feel to be the distinctive marks of the Restoration temper. On the other hand the heroic drama, of which Dryden's *Conquest of Granada* and *Tyrannic Love* may be taken as fair samples, has obvious affinities with the more questionable side of the Elizabethan stage. It may be defined as wanting in all the virtues and as exaggerating all the vices of the Elizabethan dramatists. Whatever was most wild in the wildest of the Elizabethan plays--the involved plots, the extravagant incidents, the swelling metaphors and similes--all this reappears in the heroic drama. And it reappears without any of the dramatic force or of the splendid poetry which are seldom entirely absent from the work of the Elizabethan and Jacobean dramatists. The term "heroic drama" is, in fact, a fraud. The plays of Dryden and his school are at best but mock-heroic; and they are essentially undramatic. The truth is that these plays take something of the same place in the history of the English drama that is held by the verse of Donne and Cowley in the history of the English lyric. The extravagant incidents correspond to the far-fetched conceits which, unjustly enough, made the name of Donne a by-word with the critics of the last century. The metaphors and similes are as abundant and overcharged, though assuredly not so rich in imagination, as those of the "metaphysical" poets. And Dryden, if we may accept the admission of Bayes, "loved argument in verse"; a confession that Donne and Cowley would heartily have echoed. The exaggerations of the heroic drama are the exaggerations of the metaphysical poets transferred from the study to the stage; with the extravagance deepened, as was natural, by the glare of their new surroundings. And, just as the extravagance of the "metaphysicians" led to the reaction that for a hundred years stifled the lyric note in English song, so the extravagance of the heroic drama gave the death-blow to English tragedy.

Against this parallel the objection may be raised that it takes no reckoning of the enormous gulf that, when all is said, separates even the weakest of the Elizabethan plays from the rant and fustian of Dryden: a gulf wider, it must be admitted, than that which parts the metaphysical poets from the "singing birds" of the Elizabethan era. And, so far as we have yet gone, the objection undoubtedly has force.

It is only to be met if we can find some connecting link; if we can point to some author who, on the one hand, retains something of the dramatic instinct, the grace and flexibility of the Elizabethans; and, on the other hand, anticipates the metallic ring, the declamation and the theatrical conventions of Dryden. Such an author is to be found in Shirley; in Shirley, as he became in his later years; at the time, for instance, when he wrote *The Cardinal* (1641). *The Cardinal* is, in many respects, a powerful play. It is unmistakably written under the influence of Webster; and of Webster at his most sombre and his best--the Webster of the *Duchess of Malfi*. But it is no less unmistakably wanting in the subtle strength, the dramatic grip and profound poetry, of its model. The villainy of the Cardinal is mere mechanism beside the satanic, yet horribly human, iniquity of Ferdinand and Bosolo. And, at least in one scene, Shirley sinks--it is true, in the person of a subordinate character--to a foul-mouthed vulgarity which recalls the shameless bombast of the heroes and heroines of Dryden. [Footnote:

I would this soldier had the Cardinal
Upon a promontory; with what a spring
The churchman would leap down! It were a spectacle
Most rare to see him topple from the precipice,
And souse in the salt water with a noise
To stun the fishes. And if he fell into
A net, what wonder would the simple sea-gulls
Have to draw up the o'ergrown lobster,
So ready boiled! He shall have my good wishes.
--*The Cardinal*, act v. sc, 2.]

Yet, with all his shortcomings, Shirley preserves in the main the great tradition of the Elizabethans. A further step downwards, a more deadly stage in the history of decadence, is marked by Sir William Davenant. That arch-impostor, as is well known, had the effrontery to call himself the "son of Shakespeare": a phrase which the unwary have taken in the physical sense, but which was undoubtedly intended to mark his literary kinship with the Elizabethans in general and with the greatest of Elizabethan dramatists in particular.

So far as dates go, indeed, the work of Davenant may be admitted to fall within what we loosely call the Elizabethan period; or, more strictly, within the last stage of the period that began with Elizabeth and continued throughout the reigns of her two successors. His first tragedy, *Albovine, King of the Lombards*, was brought out in 1629; and his earlier work was therefore contemporary with that of Massinger and Ford. But much beyond this his relation to the Elizabethans can hardly claim to go. Charity may allow him some faint and occasional traces of the dramatic power which is their peculiar glory; and this is perhaps more strongly marked in his earliest play than in any of its successors. What strikes us most forcibly, however--and that, even in his more youthful work--is the obvious anticipation of much that we associate only with the Restoration period. The historical plot, the metallic ring of the verse,

[Footnote: I take two instances from *Albovine*--

- (1) Let all glad hymns in one mix'd concord sound,
And make the echoing heavens your mirth rebound.--Act i.
- (2) I am the broom of heaven; when the world grows foul,

I'll sweep the nations into the sea, like dust.--Act ii.

It is noticeable that both passages are spoken by Albovine himself, a very creditable elder brother of Dryden's Maximin and Almanzor. One more passage may be quoted, from the *_Just Italian_* (1630):--

The sacred noise attend that, whilst we hear,
Our souls may dance into each others' ear.--Act v.

It will be observed that two out of the above passages, coming at the end of scenes, are actually in rhyme, and rhyme which is hardly distinguishable from that of Dryden.] the fustian and the bombast-- we have here every mark, save one, of what afterwards came to be known as the heroic drama. The rhymed couplet alone is wanting. And that was added by Davenant himself at a later stage of his career. It was in *_The Siege of Rhodes_*, of which the first part was published in 1656, that the heroic couplet, after an interval of about sixty years, made its first reappearance on the English stage. It was garnished, no doubt, with much of what then passed for Pindaric lyric; it was eked out with music. But the fashion was set; and within ten years the heroic couplet and the heroic drama had swept everything before them. [Footnote: A few lines may be quoted to make good the above description of *_The Siege of Rhodes_*:--

What various voices do mine ears invade
And have a concert of confusion made?
The shriller trumpet and tempestuous drum,
The deafening clamour from the cannon's womb.
--Part i. First *_Entry_*.

The following lines from part ii. (published in 1662) might have been signed by Dryden:--

No arguments by forms of senate made
Can magisterial jealousy persuade;
It takes no counsel, nor will be in awe
Of reason's force, necessity, or law.

Or, again,

Honour's the soul which nought but guilt can wound,
Fame is the trumpet which the people sound.]

The above dates are enough to disprove the common belief that the heroic drama, rhymed couplet and all, was imported from France. *_Albovine_*, as we have seen, has every mark of the heroic drama, except the couplet; and *_Albovine_* was written seven years before the first masterpiece of Corneille, one year before his first attempt at tragedy. A superficial likeness to the drama of Corneille and, subsequently, of Racine may doubtless have given wings to the popularity of the new style both with Davenant and his admirers. But the heroic drama is, in truth, a native growth: for good or for evil, to England alone must be given the credit of its birth. Dryden, no doubt, more than once claims French descent for the literary form with which his fame was then bound up. [Footnote: He is, however, as explicit as could be wished in tracing the descent *_through_* Davenant. "For Heroick Plays ... the first light we had of them on the English theatre was from the late Sir W. Davenant. He heightened his characters, as I may probably imagine, from the example of Corneille and some French Poets."--*_Of*

Heroic Plays_, printed as preface to *The Conquest of Granada*, Dramatic Works_ (fol.), i. 381. It was for this reason that Davenant was taken as the original hero of that burlesque masterpiece, *The Rehearsal* (1671); and even when the part of Bayes was transferred to Dryden, the make-up still remained largely that of Davenant.] In a well-known prologue he describes his tragic-comedy, *The Maiden Queen*_, as

a mingled chime
Of Jonson's humour and
Corneille's rhyme.

[Footnote: The greater part of *The Maiden Queen*_, however, is written either in prose or in blank verse.]

But the fact is that of Corneille there is no more trace in Dryden's tragedy than there is of Jonson in his comedy; that is, just none at all. The heroic temper, which was at once the essence of Corneille's plays and true to the very soul of the man, was mere affectation and *mise-en-scene* with Dryden. The heroes of Corneille reflect that nobility of spirit which never entirely forsook France till the days of the Regency; those of Dryden give utterance to nothing better than the insolent swagger of the Restoration.

To the peculiar spirit of the heroic drama--to its strength as well as to its weakness--no metrical form could have been more closely adapted than the heroic couplet. It was neither flexible nor delicate; but in the hands of Dryden, even more than in those of Davenant, it became an incomparably vigorous and effective weapon of declamation. As the most unmistakable and the most glaring mark of the new method it was naturally placed in the forefront of the battle waged by Dryden in defence of the heroic drama. It seems, indeed, to have struck him as the strongest advantage possessed by the Restoration drama over the Elizabethan, and as that which alone was wanting to place the Elizabethan drama far ahead both of the Greek and of the French.

The claims of rhyme to Dryden's regard would seem to have been twofold. On the one hand, he thought that it served to "bound and circumscribe" the luxuriance of the poet's fancy. [Footnote: Dedication to *The Rival Ladies*_: *English Garner*_, iii. 492.] On the other hand, it went to "heighten" the purely dramatic element and to "move that admiration which is the delight of serious plays" and to which "a bare imitation" will not suffice. [Footnote: *Essay of Dramatic Poesy*_: ib. 582] Both grounds of defence will seem to the modern reader questionable enough. Howard at once laid his finger upon the weak spot of the first. "It is", he said, "no argument for the matter in hand. For the dispute is

not what way a man may write best in; but which is most proper for the subject he writes upon. And, if this were let pass, the argument is yet unsolved in itself; for he that wants judgment in the liberty of his fancy may as well shew the want of it in its confinement."

[Footnote: *Preface to Four New Plays*_: ib. 498.] Besides, he adds in effect on the next page, so far from "confining the fancy" rhyme is apt to lead to turgid and stilted writing.

The second argument stands on higher ground. It amounts to a plea for the need of idealization; and, so far, may serve to remind us that the extravagances of the heroic drama had their stronger, as well as their weaker, side. No one, however, will now be willing to admit that the cause of dramatic idealization is indeed bound up with the heroic couplet; and a moment's thought will show the fallacy of Dryden's

assumption that it is. In the first place, he takes for granted that, the further the language of the drama is removed from that of actual life, the nearer the spirit of it will approach to the ideal. An unwarrantable assumption, if there ever was one; and an assumption, as will be seen, that contains the seeds of the whole eighteenth-century theory of poetic diction. In the second place--but this is, in truth, only the deeper aspect of the former plea--Dryden comes perilously near to an acceptance of the doctrine that idealization in a work of art depends purely on the outward form and has little or nothing to do with the conception or the spirit. The bond between form and matter would, according to this view, be purely arbitrary. By a mere turn of the hand, by the substitution of rhyme for prose--or for blank verse, which is on more than "measured" or harmonious prose--the baldest presentment of life could be converted into a dramatic poem. From the grosser forms of this fallacy Dryden's fine sense was enough to save him. Indeed, in the remarks on Jonson's comedies that immediately follow, he expressly rejects them; and seldom does he show a more nicely balanced judgment than in what he there says on the limits of imitation in the field of art. But in the passage before us--in his assertion that "the converse must be heightened with all the arts and ornaments of poetry"--it is hard to resist a vision of the dramatist first writing his dialogue in bald and skimble-skamble prose, and then wringing his brains to adorn it "with all the arts" of the dramatic gradus. Here again we have the seeds of the fatal theory which dominated the criticism and perverted the art of the eighteenth century; the theory which, finding in outward form the only distinction between prose and poetry, was logically led to look for the special themes of poetic art in the dissecting-room or the pulpit, and was driven to mark the difference by an outrageous diction that could only be called poetry on the principle that it certainly was not prose; the theory which at length received its death-blow from the joint attack of Wordsworth and Coleridge.

It remains only to note the practical issue of the battle of the metres. In the drama the triumph of the heroic couplet was for the moment complete; but it was short-lived. By 1675, the date of Aurungzebe, Dryden proclaimed himself already about to "weary of his long-loved mistress, Rhyme"; and his subsequent plays were all written in blank verse or prose. But the desertion of "his mistress" brought him little luck; and the rest of his tragedies show a marked falling off in that splendid vigour which went far to redeem even the grossest absurdities of his heroic plays. A more sensitive, though a weaker, genius joined him in the rejection of rhyme; and the example of Otway--whose two crucial plays belong to 1680 and 1682--did perhaps more than that of Dryden himself, more even than the assaults of The Rehearsal, to discredit the heroic drama. With the appearance of Venice Preserved, rhyme ceased to play any part in English tragedy. But at the same time, it must be noted, tragedy itself began to drop from the place which for the last century it had held in English life. From that day to this no acting tragedy, worth serious attention, has been written for the English stage.

The reaction against rhyme was not confined to the drama. The epic, indeed--or what in those days passed for such--can hardly be said to have come within its scope. In the Essay of Dramatic Poesy Dryden--and this is one of the few judgments in which Howard heartily agrees with him--had denounced rhyme as "too low for a poem"; [Footnote: English Garner, iii. p. 567.] by which, as the context shows, is meant an epic. This was written the very year in which Paradise Lost, with

its laconic sneer at rhyme as a device "to set off wretched matter and lame metre", was given to the world. That, however, did not prevent Dryden from asking, and obtaining, leave to "tag its verses" into an opera; [Footnote: The following will serve as a sample of Dryden's improvements on his model:--

Seraph and Cherub, careless of their charge
And wanton in full ease, now live at large,
Unguarded leave the passes of the sky,
And all dissolved in Hallelujahs lie.
--_Dramatic Works_, i. p. 596.]

nor did it deter Blackmore--and, at a much later time, Wilkie [Footnote: Blackmore's *King Arthur* was published in 1695; Wilkie's *Epigoniad*--the subject of a patriotic puff from Hume--in 1757.]--from reverting to the metre that Milton had scorned to touch. It is not till the present century that blank verse can be said to have fairly taken seisin of the epic; one of the many services that English poetry owes to the genius of Keats.

In the more nondescript kinds of poetry, however, the revolt against rhyme spread faster than in the epic. In descriptive and didactic poetry, if anywhere, rhyme might reasonably claim to hold its place. There is much to be said for the opinion that, in such subjects, rhyme is necessary to fix the wandering attention of the reader. Yet, for all that, the great efforts of the reflective muse during the next century were, with hardly an exception, in blank verse. It is enough to recall the *Seasons* of Thomson, the discourses of Akenside and Armstrong, and the *Night Thoughts* of the arch-moralist Young. [Footnote: It may be noted that Young's blank verse has constantly the run of the heroic couplet.] In the case of Young--as later in that of Cowper--this is the more remarkable, because his Satires show him to have had complete command of the mechanism of the heroic couplet. That he should have deliberately chosen the rival metre is proof--a proof which even the exquisite work of Goldsmith is not sufficient to gainsay--that, by the middle of the eighteenth century the heroic couplet had been virtually driven from every field of poetry, save that of satire.

We may now turn to the second of the two themes with which Dryden is mainly occupied in the *Essay of Dramatic Poesy*. What are the conventional restrictions that surround the dramatist, and how far are they of binding force?

That the drama is by nature a convention--more than this, a convention accepted largely with a view to the need of idealization--the men of Dryden's day were in no danger of forgetting. The peril with them was all the other way. The fashion of that age was to treat the arbitrary usages of the classical theatre as though they were binding for all time. Thus, of the four men who take part in the dialogue of the *Essay*, three are emphatically agreed in bowing down before the three unities as laws of nature. Dryden himself (Neander) is alone in questioning their divinity: a memorable proof of his critical independence; but one in which, as he maliciously points out, he was supported by the greatest of living dramatists. Corneille could not be suspected of any personal motive for undertaking the defence of dramatic license. Yet he closed his *Discourse of the Three Unities* with the admission that he had "learnt by experience how much the French stage was constrained and bound up by the observance of these

rules, and how many beauties it had sacrificed". [Footnote: Il est facile aux speculatifs d'etre severes; mais, s'ils voulaient donner dix ou douze poemes de cette nature au public, ils elargiraient peut-etre les regles encore plus que je ne sais, si tot qu'ils auraient reconnu par l'experience quelle contrainte apporte leur exactitude et combien de belles choses elle bannit de notre theatre--_Troisieme Discours Euvres_, xii. 326. See Dryden's Essay _English Garner_, iii 546. On the next page is a happy hit at the shifts to which dramatists were driven in their efforts to keep up the appearance of obedience to the Unity of Place: "The street, the window, the two houses and the closet are made to walk about, and the persons to stand still."] When the two leading masters of the 'Classical Drama', the French and the English, joined hands to cast doubt upon the sacred unities, its opponents might well feel easy as to the ultimate issue of the dispute.

Dryden was not the man to bound his argument by any technical question, even when it touched a point so fundamental as the unities. Nothing is more remarkable in the _Essay_, as indeed in all his critical work, than the wide range which he gives to the discussion. And never has the case against--we can hardly add, for--the French drama been stated more pointedly than by him. His main charge, as was to be expected, is against its monotony, and, in close connection with that, against its neglect of action and its preference for declamation.

Having defined the drama as "a just and lively image of human nature, in its actions, passions and traverses of fortune", [Footnote: _English Garner_, iii 513, ib. 567] he proceeds to test the claims of the French stage by that standard. Its characters, he finds, are wanting in variety and nature. Its range of passion and humour is lamentably narrow. [Footnote: lb. 542-4.] Its declamations "tire us with their length; so that, instead of grieving for their imaginary heroes, we are concerned for our own trouble, as we are in the tedious visits of bad company; we are in pain till they are gone". [Footnote: English Garner, iii 542.] The best tragedies of the French--_Cinna and Pompey_--"are not so properly to be called Plays as long discourses of Reason of State". [Footnote: lb. 543.] Upon their avoidance of action he is hardly less severe. "If we are to be blamed for showing too much of the action"--one is involuntarily reminded of the closing scene of _Tyrannic Love_ and of the gibes in _The Rehearsal_--"the French are as faulty for discovering too little of it". [Footnote: lb. 545.] Finally, on a comparison between the French dramatists and the Elizabethans, Dryden concludes that "in most of the irregular Plays of Shakespeare or Fletcher ... there is a more masculine fancy, and greater spirit in all the writing, than there is in any of the French". [Footnote: lb. 548.]

Given the definition with which he starts--but it is a definition that no Frenchman of the seventeenth or eighteenth century would have admitted--it is hard to see how Dryden could have reached a substantially different result. Nor, if comparisons of this sort are to be made at all, is there much--so far, at least, as Shakespeare is concerned--to find fault with in the verdict with which he closes. Yet it is impossible not to regret that Dryden should have failed to recognize the finer spirit and essence of French tragedy, as conceived by Corneille: the strong-tempered heroism of soul, the keen sense of honour, the consuming fire of religion, to which it gives utterance.

The truth is that Dryden stood at once too near, and too far from, the ideals of Corneille to appreciate them altogether at their just value.

Too near because he instinctively associated them with the heroic drama, which at the bottom of his heart he knew to be no better than an organized trick, done daily with a view to "elevate and surprise". Too far, because, in spite of his own candid and generous temper, it was well-nigh impossible for the Laureate of the Restoration to comprehend the highly strung nature of a man like Corneille, and his intense realization of the ideal.

But, if Dryden is blind to the essential qualities of Corneille, he is at least keenly alive to those of Shakespeare. It is a memorable thing that the most splendid tribute ever offered to the prince of Elizabethans should have come from the leading spirit of the Restoration. It has often been quoted, but it will bear quoting once again.

"Shakespeare was the man who, of all modern and perhaps ancient poets, had the largest and most comprehensive soul. All the images of nature were still present to him; and he drew them not laboriously, but luckily. When he describes anything, you more than see it, you feel it too. Those who accuse him to have wanted learning give him the great commendation. He was naturally learned. He needed not the spectacles of books to read nature; he looked inwards and found her there. I cannot say he is everywhere alike. Were he so, I should do him injury to compare him with the greatest of mankind. He is many times flat, insipid; his comic wit degenerating into clenches, his serious swelling into bombast. But he is always great when some great occasion is presented to him. No man can say, he ever had a fit subject for his wit, and did not then raise himself as high above the rest of poets,

Quantum lenta solent inter viburna cupressi."

[Footnote: *Essay of Dramatic Poesy*. *English Garner*, iii. 549.]

The same keenness of appreciation is found in Dryden's estimate of other writers who might have seemed to lie beyond the field of his immediate vision. Of Milton he is recorded to have said: "He cuts us all out, and the ancients too". [Footnote: The anecdote is recorded by Richardson, who says the above words were written on the copy of *Paradise Lost* sent by Dorset to Milton. Dryden, *Poetic Works*, p. 161. Comp. *Dramatic Works*, i. 590; *Discourse on Satire*, p. 386.] On Chaucer he is yet more explicit. "As he is the father of English poetry, so I hold him in the same degree of veneration as the Grecians held Homer, or the Romans Virgil. He is a perpetual fountain of good sense; learned in all sciences, and therefore speaks properly on all subjects. As he knew what to say, so he knows also when to leave off, a continence which is practised by few writers, and scarcely by any of the ancients, excepting Virgil and Horace ... Chaucer followed nature everywhere, but was never so bold to go beyond her." [Footnote: See *Preface to Fables*, below.]

This points to what was undoubtedly the most shining quality of Dryden, as a critic: his absolute freedom from preconceived notions, his readiness to "follow nature" and to welcome nature in whatever form she might appear. That was the more remarkable because it ran directly counter both to the general spirit of the period to which he belonged and to the prevailing practice of the critics who surrounded him. The spirit of the Restoration age was critical in the invidious, no less than in the nobler, sense of the word. It was an age of narrow ideals and of little ability to look beyond them. In particular, it was an age of carping and of fault-finding; an age within measurable distance

of the pedantic system perfected in France by Boileau, [Footnote: Boileau's *Art Poétique* was published in 1674. A translation made by Soame, with the aid of Dryden, was published in 1683.] and warmly adopted by a long line of English critics from Roscoromon and Buckinghamshire to the Monthly Reviewers and to Johnson. Such writers might always have "nature" on their lips; but it was nature seen through the windows of the lecture room or down the vista of a street.

With Dryden it was not so. With him we never fail to get an unbiassed judgment; the judgment of one who did not crave for nature "to advantage dressed", but trusted to the instinctive freshness of a mind, one of the most alert and open that ever gave themselves to literature. It is this that puts an impassable barrier between Dryden and the men of his own day, or for a century to come. It is this that gives him a place among the great critics of modern literature, and makes the passage from him to the schoolmen of the next century so dreary a descent.

Dryden's openness of mind was his own secret. The comparative method was, in some measure, the common property of his generation. This, in fact, was the chief conquest of the Restoration and Augustan critics. It is the mark that serves to distinguish them most clearly from those of the Elizabethan age. Not that the Elizabethans are without comparisons; but that the parallels they saw were commonly of the simplest, not to say of the most childish, cast. Every sentence of Meres' critical effort--or, to be rigorously exact, every sentence but one--is built on "as" and "so"; but it reads like a parody--a schoolmaster's parody--of Touchstone's improvement on Orlando's verses in praise of Rosalind. Shakespeare is brought into line with Ovid, Elizabeth with Achilles, and Homer with William Warner. This, no doubt, is an extreme instance; but it is typical of the artless methods dear to the infancy of criticism. In Jonson's *Discoveries*, such comparisons as there are have indisputable point; but they are few, and, for the most part, they are limited to the minuter matters of style.

It is with the Restoration that the comparative method first made its way into English criticism; and that both in its lawful and less lawful use. The distinction must be jealously made; for there are few matters that lend themselves so readily to confusion and misapprehension as this. Between two men, or two forms of art, a comparison may be run either for the sake of placing the one above the head of the other, or for the sake of drawing out the essential differences between the one and the other. The latter method is indispensable to the work of the critic. Without reference, express or implied, to other types of genius or to other ways of treatment it is impossible for criticism to take a single step in definition either of an author, or a movement, or a form of art. In a vague and haphazard fashion, even the Elizabethans were comparative. Meres was so in his endless stream of classical parallels; Sidney, after a loftier strain, in his defence of harmonious prose as a form of poetry. And it is the highest achievement of modern criticism to have brought science and order into the comparative method, and largely to have widened its scope. In this sense, comparison is criticism; and to compare with increased intelligence, with a clearer consciousness of the end in view, is to reform criticism itself, to make it a keener weapon and more effective for its purpose.

A comparison of qualities, however, is one thing, and a comparison between different degrees of merit is quite another. The former is the

essence of criticism; the latter, one of the most futile pastimes that can readily be imagined. That each man should have his own preferences is right enough. It would be a nerveless and unprofitable mind to which such preferences were unknown. More than that, some rough classification, some understanding with oneself as to what authors are to be reckoned supreme masters of their craft, is hardly to be avoided. The mere fact that the critic lays stress on certain writers and dismisses others with scant notice or none at all, implies that in some sense he has formed an estimate of their relative merits. But to drag this process from the background--if we ought not rather to say, from behind the scenes--to the very foot-lights, to publish it, to insist upon it, is as irrelevant as it would be for the historian--and he, too, must make his own perspective--to explain why he has recorded some events and left others altogether unnoticed. All this is work for the dark room; it should leave no trace, or as little as may be, upon the finished picture. Criticism has suffered from few things so much as from its incurable habit of granting degrees in poetry with honours. "The highest art", it has been well said, "is the region of equals."

It must be admitted that the Restoration critics had an immoderate passion for classing authors according to their supposed rank in the scale of literary desert. A glance at *The Battle of the Books*--a faint reflection of the quarrel between the ancients and the moderns--is enough to place this beyond dispute. Dryden himself is probably as guilty as any in this matter. His parallel between Juvenal and Horace, his comparison of Homer with Virgil, are largely of the nature of an attempt to show each poet to his proper place, to determine their due order of precedence in the House of Fame. In the early days of criticism this was perhaps to be expected. Men were feeling their way to the principles; and the shortest road might naturally seem to lie through a comparative table of the men. They were right in thinking that the first step was to ascertain what qualities, and what modes of treatment, give lasting pleasure in poetry; and, to do this, they could not but turn to compare the works of individual poets. But they were wrong in supposing that they could learn anything by striking the balance between the merits of one poet, as a sum total, and the merits of another.

The fault was, no doubt, largely in the Restoration critics themselves; and it is a fault which, so long as the competitive instinct holds sway with men, will never be entirely unknown. But its hold on the men of Dryden's day was in great measure due to the influence of the French critics, and to the narrow lines which criticism had taken in France. No one can read Boileau's *Art Poétique*, no one can compare it with the corresponding *Essay* of Pope, without feeling that the purely personal element had eaten into the heart of French criticism to a degree which could never have been natural in England, and which, even in the darkest days of English literature, has seldom been approached. But at the same time it will be felt that never has England come nearer to a merely personal treatment of artistic questions than in the century between Dryden and Johnson; and that it was here, rather than in the adoption of any specific form of literature--rather, for instance, than in the growth of the heroic drama--that the influence of France is to be traced.

Side by side, however, with the baser sort of comparisons, we find in the Restoration critics no small use of the kind that profits and delights. Rymer's *Remarks on the Tragedies of the Former Age* are an instance of the comparative method, in its just sense, as employed by

a man of talent. The essays of Dryden abound in passages of this nature, that could only have been written by a man of genius. They may have a touch of the desire to set one form of art, or one particular poet, in array against another. But, when all abatements have been made, they remain unrivalled samples of the manner in which the comparative vein can be worked by a master spirit. To the student of English literature they have a further interest--notably, perhaps, the comparison between Juvenal and Horace and the eulogy of Shakespeare--as being among the most striking examples of that change from the Latinized style of the early Stuart writers to the short, pointed sentence commonly associated with French; the change that was inaugurated by Hobbes, but only brought to completion by Dryden.

Once again. As Dryden was among the earliest to give the comparative method its due place in English criticism, so he was the first to make systematic use of the historical method. Daniel, indeed, in a remarkable essay belonging to the early years of the century, had employed that method in a vague and partial manner. [Footnote: *A Defence of Ryme* (1603). It was written in answer to a pamphlet by Campion (1602), of which the second chapter "declares the unaptness of Rime in Poesie".--*Ancient Critical Essays*, ii. 164, &c.] He had defended rhyme on the score of its popularity with all ages and all nations. Celts, Slavs, and Huns--Parthians and Medes and Elamites--are all pressed into the service. [Footnote: "The Turks, Slavonians, Arabians, Muscovites, Polacks, Hungarians ... use no other harmony of words. The Irish, Britons, Scots, Danes, Saxons, English, and all the inhabitants of this island either have hither brought, or here found the same in use."--*ib.* p. 198.] That is, perhaps, the first instance in which English criticism can be said to have attempted tracing a literary form through the various stages of its growth. But Daniel wrote without system and without accuracy. It was reserved for Dryden--avowedly following in the steps of the French critic Dacier--to introduce the order and the fulness of knowledge--in Dryden's case, it must be admitted, a knowledge at second hand--which are indispensable to a fruitful use of the historical method. In this sense, too--as in his use of the comparative method, as in the singular grace and aptness of his style--Dryden was a pioneer in the field of English criticism.

III. Over the century that parts Dryden from Johnson it is not well to linger. During that time criticism must be said, on the whole, to have gone back rather than to have advanced. With some reservations to be noticed later, the critics of the eighteenth century are a depressing study. Their conception of the art they professed was barren; their judgments of men and things were lamentably narrow. The more valuable elements traceable in the work of Dryden--the comparative and the historical treatment--disappear or fall into the background. We are left with little but the futile exaltation of one poet at the expense of his rivals, or the still more futile insistence upon faults, shortcomings, and absurdities. The *Dunciad*, the most marked critical work of the period, may be defended on the ground that it *is* the *Dunciad*; a war waged by genius upon the fool, the pedant, and the fribble. But, none the less, it had a disastrous influence upon English criticism and English taste. It gave sanction to the habit of indiscriminate abuse; it encouraged the purely personal treatment of critical discussions. Its effects may be traced on writers even of such force as Smollett; of such genius and natural kindliness as Goldsmith. But it was on Johnson that Pope's influence made itself most keenly felt. And *The Lives of the Poets*, though not written till the movement that gave it birth had spent its force, is the most

complete and the most typical record of the tendencies that shaped English literature and gave the law to English taste from the Restoration to the French Revolution: a notable instance of the fact so often observed, and by some raised to the dignity of a general law, that both in philosophy and in art, the work of the critic does not commonly begin till the creative impulse of a given period is exhausted.

What, then, was Johnson's method? and what its practical application? The method is nothing if not magisterial. It takes for granted certain fixed laws--whether the laws formulated by Aristotle, or by Horace, or the French critics, is for the moment beside the question--and passes sentence on every work of art according as it conforms to the critical decalogue or transgresses it. The fault of this method is not, as is sometimes supposed, that it assumes principles in a subject where none are to be sought; but that its principles are built on a miserably narrow and perverted basis. That there are principles of criticism, that the artist's search for beauty must be guided by some idea, is obvious enough. It can be questioned only by those who are prepared to deny the very possibility of criticism; who would reduce the task both of critic and of artist to a mere record of individual impressions. It need hardly be said that the very men who are most ready to profess such a doctrine with their lips, persistently, and rightly, give the lie to it in their deeds. No creative work, no critical judgment, either is or can be put forward as a mere impression; it is the impression of a trained mind--that is, of a mind which, instinctively or as a conscious process, is guided by principles or ideas.

So far, then, as he may be held to have borne witness to the need of ideas, Johnson was clearly in the right. It was when he came to ask, What is the nature of those ideas, and how does the artist or the critic arrive at them? that he began to go astray. Throughout he assumes that the principles of art--and that, not only in their general bearing (proportion, harmony, and the like), but in their minuter details--are fixed and invariable. To him they form a kind of case-law, which is to be extracted by the learned from the works of a certain number of "correct writers", ancient and modern; and which, once established, is binding for all time both on the critic and on those he summons to his bar. In effect, this was to declare that beauty can be conceived in no other way than as it presented itself, say, to Virgil or to Pope. It was to lay the dead hand of the past upon the present and the future.

More than this. The models that lent themselves to be models, after the kind desired by Johnson, were inevitably just those it was most cramping and least inspiring to follow. They were the men who themselves wrote, to some degree, by rule; in whom "correctness" was stronger than inspiration; who, however admirable in their own achievement, were lacking in the nobler and subtler qualities of the poet. They were not the Greeks; not even, at first hand, the Latins; though the names both of Greek and Latin were often on Johnson's lips. They were rather the Latins as filtered through the English poets of the preceding century; the Latins in so far as they had appealed to the writers of the "Augustan age", but no further; the Latins, as masters of satire, of declamation, and of the lighter kinds of verse. It was Latin poetry without Lucretius and Catullus, without the odes of Horace, without the higher strain of the genius of Virgil. In other words, it was poetry as conceived by Boileau or Addison--or Mr. Smith. [Footnote: See Johnson's extravagant eulogy of this obscure writer in the Lives of the Poets. Works, x. i.]

Yet again. In the hands of Johnson--and it was a necessary consequence of his critical method--poetry becomes more and more a mere matter of mechanism. Once admit that the greatness of a poet depends upon his success in following certain models, and it is but a short step--if indeed it be a step--further to say that he must attempt no task that has not been set him by the example of his forerunners. It is doubtless true that Johnson did not, in so many words, commit himself to this absurdity. But it is equally true that any poet, who overstepped the bounds laid down by previous writers, was likely to meet with but little mercy at his hands. Milton, Cowley, Gray--for all had the audacity to take an untrodden path in poetry--one after another are dragged up for execution. It is clear that by example, if not by precept, Johnson was prepared to "make poetry a mere mechanic art"; and Cowper was right in saying that it had become so with Pope's successors. Indeed Johnson himself, in closing his estimate of Pope, seems half regretfully to anticipate Cowper's verdict. "By perusing the works of Dryden, he discovered the most perfect fabrick of English verse, and habituated himself to that only which he found the best. ... New sentiments and new images others may produce; but to attempt any further improvement of versification will be dangerous. Art and diligence have now done their best, and what shall be added will be the effort of tedious toil and needless curiosity". [Footnote: *Life of Pope*. Johnson's Works, xi. pp 194, 195.] But Johnson failed to see that his own view of poetry led inevitably to this lame and impotent conclusion.

To adopt Johnson's method is, in truth, to misconceive the whole nature of poetry and of poetic imagination. The ideas that have shaped the work of one poet may act as guide and spur, but can never be a rule--far less a law--to the imagination of another. The idea, as it comes to an artist, is not a law imposing itself from without; it is a seed of life and energy springing from within. This, however, was a truth entirely hidden from the eyes of Johnson and the Augustan critics. To assert it both by word and deed, both as critics and as poets, was the task of Coleridge, and of those who joined hands with Coleridge, in the succeeding generation. Apart from the undying beauty of their work as artists, this was the memorable service they rendered to poetry in England.

It remains to illustrate the method of Johnson by its practical application. As has already been said, Johnson is nothing if not a hanging judge; and it is just where originality is most striking that his sentences are the most severe. If there was one writer who might have been expected to win his favour, it was Pope; and if there is any work that bears witness to the originality of Pope's genius, it is the imitations of Horace. These are dismissed in a disparaging sentence. There is no adequate recognition of Congreve's brilliance as a dramatist; none of Swift's amazing powers as a satirist. Yet all these were men who lived more or less within the range of ideas and tendencies by which Johnson's own mind was moulded and inspired.

The case is still worse when we turn to writers of a different school. Take the poets from the Restoration to the closing years of the American war; and it is not too much to say that, with the exception of Thomson--saved perhaps by his "glossy, unfeeling diction"--there is not one of them who overstepped the bounds marked out for literary effort by the prevailing taste of the Augustan age, in its narrowest sense, without paying the price for his temerity in the sneers or

reprobation of Johnson. Collins, it is true, escapes more lightly than the rest; but that is probably due to the affection and pity of his critic. Yet even Collins, perhaps the most truly poetic spirit of the century between Milton and Burns, is blamed for a "diction often harsh, unskillfully laboured, and injudiciously selected"; for "lines commonly of slow motion"; for "poetry that may sometimes extort praise, when it gives little pleasure". [Footnote: Johnson's Works, xi. 270.] The poems of Gray--an exception must be made, to Johnson's honour, in favour of the *Elegy* [Footnote: In the bosom of "the Club" the exception dwindled to two stanzas (Boswell's Life, ii. 300).] are slaughtered in detail; [Footnote: Johnson's Works, xi. 372-378. Johnson is peculiarly sarcastic on the *Bard* and the *Progress of Poetry*.] the man himself is given dog's burial with the compendious epitaph: "A dull fellow, sir; dull in company, dull in his closet, dull everywhere". [Footnote: Boswell's *Life*, ii. 300. Comp. in. 435.]

But most astonishing of all, as is well known, is the treatment bestowed on Milton. Of all Milton's works, *Paradise Lost* seems to have been the only one that Johnson genuinely admired. That he praises with as little of reservation as was in the nature of so stern a critic. On *Paradise Regained* he is more guarded; on *Samson*, more guarded yet. [Footnote: The two papers devoted to *Samson* in the *Rambler* are "not entitled even to this slender commendation". "This is the tragedy that ignorance has admired and bigotry applauded" (Johnson's Works, v. 436).] But it is in speaking of the earlier poems that Johnson shows his hand most plainly. *Comus* "is a drama in the epic style, inelegantly splendid and tediously instructive". [Footnote: Johnson's Works, ix. 153.] Of *Lycidas* "the diction is harsh, the rhymes uncertain, and the numbers un-pleasing" [Footnote: *Ib.* 159.] As for the sonnets, "they deserve not any particular criticism. For of the best it can only be said that they are not bad; and perhaps only the eighth and twenty-first are truly entitled to this slender commendation.... These little pieces may be dismissed without much anxiety". [Footnote: *Ib.* 160. The two sonnets are those written *When the assault was intended to the City*, and *On his Blindness*.]

It would be hardly worth while to record these ill-tempered judgments if they were not the natural outcome of a method which held unquestioned sway over English taste for a full century--in France for nearly two--and which, during that time, if we except Gray and his friends, was not seriously disputed by a single man of mark. The one author in whose favour the rules of "correct writing" were commonly set aside was Shakespeare; and perhaps there is no testimony to his greatness so convincing as the unwilling homage it extorted from the contemporaries of Pope, of Johnson, and of Hume. Johnson's own notes and introductions to the separate plays are at times trifling enough; [Footnote: Compare the assault on the "mean expressions" of Shakespeare (*Rambler*, No. 168).] but his general preface is a solid and manly piece of work. It contrasts strangely not only with the verdicts given above, but with his jeers at *Chevy Chase* [Footnote: *Ib.* x. 139.]--a "dull and lifeless imbecility"--at the *Nonne Prestes Tale*, and at the *Knightes Tale* [Footnote: *Ib.* ix. 432.]

One more instance, and we may leave this depressing study in critical perversity. Among the great writers of Johnson's day there was none who showed a truer originality than Fielding; no man who broke more markedly with the literary superstitions of the time; none who took his own road with more sturdiness and self-reliance. This was enough for Johnson, who persistently depreciated both the man and his work.

Something of this should doubtless be set down to disapproval of the free speech and readiness to allow for human frailty, which could not but give offence to a moralist so unbending as Johnson. But that will hardly account for the assertion that "Harry Fielding knew nothing but the outer shell of life"; still less for the petulant ruling that he "was a barren rascal". [Footnote: Boswell's *_Life_*, ii. 169. *Diary and Letters of Madame D'Arblay*, i. 91] The truth is--and Johnson felt it instinctively--that the novel, as conceived by Fielding--the novel that gloried in painting all sides of life, and above all in drawing out the humour of its "lower spheres"--dealt a fatal blow not only at the pompous canons which the *_Rambler_* was pleased to call "the indispensable laws of Aristotelian criticism", [Footnote: Johnson's *Works*, v. 431.] but also at the view which found "human life to be a state where much is to be endured and little to be enjoyed". It would be hard to say whether Johnson found more in Fielding to affront him, as pessimist or as critic. And it would be equally hard to say in which of the two characters lay the greater barrier to literary insight. Even Richardson--no less revolutionary, though in a different way, than Fielding--was only saved so as by fire; by the undying hatred which he shared with Johnson for his terrible rival. It was rather as moralist than as artist, rather for "the sentiment" than for the tragic force of his work, that Richardson seems to have won his way to Johnson's heart. [Footnote: See the passage referred to in the preceding note.]

Is not the evidence conclusive? Is it a harsh judgment to say that no critic so narrow, so mechanical, so hostile to originality as Johnson has ever achieved the dictatorship of English letters?

The supremacy of Johnson would have been impossible, had not the way been smoothed for it by a long succession of critics like-minded with himself. Such a succession may be traced from Swift to Addison, from Addison to Pope, and--with marked reservations--from Pope to Goldsmith. It would be unjust to charge all, or indeed any, of these with the narrowness of view betrayed in Johnson's verdicts on individual writers. To arrive at this perfection of sourness was a work of time; and the nature of Addison and Goldsmith at least was too genial to allow of any approach to it. But, with all their difference of temperament, the method of the earlier critics is hardly to be distinguished from that of Johnson. There is the same orderliness of treatment--first the fable, then the characters, lastly the sentiment and the diction; the same persistency in applying general rules to a matter which, above all others, is a law to itself; the same invincible faith in "the indispensable laws of Aristotelian criticism". It is this that, in spite of its readiness to admire, makes Addison's criticism of *_Paradise Lost_* so dreary a study; and this that, in an evil hour, prompted Goldsmith to treat the soliloquy of Hamlet as though it were a schoolboy's exercise in rhetoric and logic. [Footnote: Goldsmith, *Essay* xvi. The next essay contains a like attack on Mercutio's description of Queen Mab.]

And yet it is with Goldsmith that we come to the first dawn of better things. The carping strain and the stiffness of method, that we cannot overlook in him, were the note of his generation. The openness to new ideas, the sense of nature, the fruitful use of the historical method, are entirely his own. There had been nothing like them in our literature since Dryden. In criticism, as in creative work, Goldsmith marks the transition from the old order to the new.

Perhaps the clearest indication of this is to be found in his constant appeal to nature. In itself, as we have seen, this may mean much or little. "Nature" is a vague word; it was the battle-cry of Wordsworth, but it was also the battle-cry of Boileau. And, at first sight, it might seem to be used by Goldsmith in the narrower rather than in the wider sense. "It is the business of art", he writes, "to imitate nature, but not with a servile pencil; and to choose those attitudes and dispositions only which are beautiful and engaging." [Footnote: Goldsmith, Essay xiii.] But a glance at the context will show that what Goldsmith had in mind was not "nature to advantage dressed", not nature with any adornments added by man; but nature stripped of all that to man has degrading associations; nature, to adopt the words used by Wordsworth on a kindred subject, "purified from all lasting or rational causes of dislike or disgust". It may well be that Goldsmith gave undue weight to this reservation. It may well be that he did not throw himself on nature with the unwavering constancy of Wordsworth. But, none the less, we have here--and we have it worked out in detail [Footnote: As to oratory, poetry, the drama, and acting, *Ib.*, Essays iv., xii., xiii.; *The Bee*, no. ii.]--the germ of the principle which, in bolder hands, gave England the Lyrical Ballads and the Essays of Lamb.

In an essay not commonly reprinted, Goldsmith, laying his finger on the one weak spot in the genius of Gray, gives the poet the memorable advice--to "study the people". And throughout his own critical work, as in his novel, his comedies, and his poems, there is an abiding sense that, without this, there is no salvation for poetry. That in itself is enough to fix an impassable barrier between Goldsmith and the official criticism of his day.

The other main service rendered by Goldsmith was his return to the historical method. It is true that his knowledge is no more at first hand, and is set out with still less system than that of Dryden a century before. But it is also true that he has a far keener sense of the strength which art may draw from history than his great forerunner. Dryden confines himself to the history of certain forms of art; Goldsmith includes the history of nations also in his view. With Dryden the past is little more than an antiquarian study; with Goldsmith it is a living fountain of inspiration for the present. The art of the past--the poetry, say, of Teutonic or Celtic antiquity--is to him an undying record of the days when man still walked hand in hand with nature. The history of the past is at once a storehouse of stirring themes ready to the hand of the artist, and the surest safeguard against both flatness and exaggeration in his work. [Footnote: See Essays xiii., xiv., xx.; *Present State of Polite Learning*, in particular, chap. xi.] It offers, moreover, the truest schooling of the heart, and insensibly "enlists the passions on the side of humanity". "Poetry", Byron said, "is the feeling of a former world, and future"; [Footnote: Moore's *Life*, p. 483] and to the first half of the statement Goldsmith would have heartily subscribed. For the historical method in his hands is but another aspect of the counsel he gave to Gray: "Study the people". It is an anticipation--vague, no doubt, but still unmistakable--of the spirit which, both in France and England, gave birth to the romantic movement a generation or two later.

That zeal for the literature of the past was in the air when Goldsmith wrote is proved by works so different as those of Gray and Percy, of Chatterton and MacPherson, of Mallet and Warton. [Footnote: Percy's *Reliques* were published in 1765; Chatterton's *Rowley Poems* written

in 1769; MacPherson's *Ossian* (first instalment) in 1760; Mallet's *Northern Antiquities* in 1755; and Warton's *History of English Poetry*--a book to the learning and importance of which scant justice has been done--from 1772 to 1778. To these should be added a work, whose fine scholarship and profound learning is now universally admitted, Tyrwhitt's *Chaucer* (1775-78). It will be noticed that all these works fall within the space of twenty years, 1755-1775] But it may be doubted whether any one of them, Gray excepted, saw the true bearing of the movement more clearly than Goldsmith, or did more to open fresh springs of thought and beauty for the poetry of the next age, if not of his own. It would be unpardonable to turn from the writers of the eighteenth century with no notice of a book which, seldom now read, is nevertheless perhaps the most solid piece of work that modern Europe had as yet to show in any branch of literary criticism. This is Burke's treatise *On the Sublime and the Beautiful*. Few will now be prepared to accept the material basis which Burke finds for the ideas of the imagination. [Footnote: Burke traces our ideas of the sublime to the sense of physical pain; our ideas of the beautiful to that of physical pleasure; identifying the former with a contraction or tension, and the latter with a relaxation of the muscles. Against this theory two main objections may be urged: (1) As, on Burke's own showing, the objects of the imagination, at least as far as poetry is concerned, are, and must be, presented first to the *mind*, it is (in the strictest sense of the term) preposterous to attribute their power over us to a purely muscular operation (2) The argument, taken by itself, is barely relevant to the matter in hand. Even where a physical basis can be proved--as it can in the case of music, painting, and sculpture (and of poetry, so far as rhythm and harmony are an essential element of it) it is extravagant to maintain that the physiologist or the "psycho physicist" can explain the whole, or even the greater part, of what has to be explained Beyond the fraction of information that purely physical facts can give us, a vast field must be left to intellectual and imaginative association. And that is the province not of physiology but of psychology, and of what the Germans call *Aesthetik*. This province, however, is but seldom entered by Burke.

What, then, was it that drove Burke to a position so markedly at variance with the idealism of his later years? In all probability it was his rooted suspicion of reasoning as a deliberate and conscious process. Other writers of the century--Addison, for instance--had spoken as if men reasoned from certain abstract ideas (proportion, fitness, and the like) to individual instances of beauty, deciding a thing to have beauty or no, according as it squared or failed to square with the general notion This, as Burke points out, is more than questionable in itself, and it was certain to affront a man who, even thus early, had shown an almost morbid hatred of abstractions. In his later years, as is well known, he sought refuge from them in instinct, in "prejudice", in the unconscious working of the "permanent reason of man". In earlier days--he was still well under thirty--he found escape by the grosser aid of a materialist explanation (Burke's treatise was published in 1756 The *Laocoon* of Lessing, a work which may be compared with that of Burke and which was very probably suggested by it, appeared in 1766.)] But none can deny the skill with which he works out his theory, nor the easy mastery with which each part is fitted into its place. The speculative power of the book and the light it throws on the deeper springs of the imagination are alike memorable. The first is not unworthy of the *Reflections* or the *Appeal from the New to the Old Whigs*; the second shows that fruitful study of the Bible and the poets, English and classical, to which his later writings

and speeches bear witness on every page.

If the originality and depth of Burke's treatise is to be justly measured, it should be set side by side with those papers of Addison which Akenside expanded in his dismal *“Pleasures of the Imagination”*. The performance of Addison, grateful though one must be to him for attempting it, is thin and lifeless. That of Burke is massive and full of suggestion. At every turn it betrays the hand of the craftsman who works with his eye upon his tools. The speculative side of criticism has never been a popular study with Englishmen, and it is no accident that one of the few attempts to deal seriously with it should have been made at the only time when philosophy was a living power among us, and when the desire to get behind the outward shows of things was keener than it has ever been before or since. But for Burke's treatise, a wide gap would have been left both in the philosophy and the criticism of the eighteenth century; and it is to be wished that later times had done more to work the vein which he so skilfully explored. As it is, the writers both of France and Germany--above all, Hegel in his *“Aesthetik”*--have laboured with incomparably more effect than his own countrymen, Mr. Ruskin excepted, upon the foundations that he laid.

IV. Johnson's *“Lives of the Poets”* was the last word of the school which the Restoration had enthroned; the final verdict of the supreme court which gave the law to English letters from the accession of Anne to the French Revolution. Save in the splenetic outbursts of Byron--and they are not to be taken too seriously--the indispensable laws of Aristotelian criticism fell silent at Johnson's death. A time of anarchy followed; anarchy plus the policeman's truncheon of the *“Edinburgh”* and the *“Quarterly”*. [Footnote: The first number of the *“Edinburgh”* appeared in 1802; the *“Quarterly”* was started in a counterblast in 1809.]

The ill-fame of these Reviews, as they were in their pride of youth, is now so great that doubts may sometimes suggest themselves whether it can possibly be deserved. No one who feels such doubts can do better than turn to the earlier numbers; he will be forced to the conclusion that, whatever their services as the journeymen of letters and of party politics, few critics could have been so incompetent to judge of genius as the men who enlisted under the standard of Jeffrey or of Gifford. There is not, doubtless, in either Review the same iron wall of reasoned prejudice that has been noted in Johnson, but there is a plentiful lack of the clear vision and the openness to new impressions which are the first necessity of the critic. What Carlyle says of Jeffrey and the *“Edinburgh”* may be taken as the substantial truth also about Gifford and the *“Quarterly”*, and it is the most pregnant judgment that has yet been passed upon them.

"Jeffrey may be said to have begun the rash, reckless style of criticising everything in heaven and earth by appeal to Moliere's maid: 'Do you like it?' 'Don't you like it?' a style which, in hands more and more inferior to that sound-hearted old lady and him, has since grown gradually to such immeasurable length among us; and he himself is one of the first that suffers by it. If praise and blame are to be perfected, not in the mouth of Moliere's maid only but in that of mischievous, precocious babes and sucklings, you will arrive at singular judgments by degrees." [Footnote: Carlyle, *“Reminiscences”* n 63, 64]

Carlyle has much here to say of Jeffrey's "recklessness", his defiance

of all rules, his appeal to the chance taste of the man in the crowd. He has much also to say of his acuteness, and the unrivalled authority of his decrees. [Footnote: "Jeffrey was by no means the supreme in criticism or in anything else, but it is certain there has no critic appeared among us since who was worth naming beside him and his influence for good and for evil in literature and otherwise has been very great. Nothing in my time has so forwarded all this--the 'gradual uprising and rule in all things of roaring, million headed &c Demos'--"as Jeffrey and his once famous Edinburgh Review'--lb] But he is discreetly silent on their severity and short-sightedness. [Footnote: "You know", Byron wrote in 1808 "the system of the Edinburgh gentlemen is universal attack. They praise none, and neither the public nor the author expects praise from them."--Moore's Life, p 67.]

Yet this is the unpardonable sin of both Reviews: that mediocrity was applauded, but that, whenever a man of genius came before them, the chances were ten to one that he would be held up to ridicule and contempt. The very first number of the Edinburgh lays this down as an article of faith. Taking post on the recent appearance of Thalaba, the reviewer opens fire by a laboured parallel between poetry and religion. [Footnote: Edinburgh Review, No. 1, pp 63, &c] With an alteration of names it might have been written by a member of the English Church Union, or of the Holy Inquisition.

"The standards of poetry have been fixed long ago by certain inspired writers, whose authority it is no longer lawful to call in question. Many profess to be entirely devoted to poetry, who have no good works to produce in support of their pretensions. The Catholic poetical Church too . . . has given birth to an infinite variety of heresies and errors, the followers of which have hated and persecuted each other as heartily as other bigots."

Then, turning to business, the writer proceeds to apply his creed to Southey and all his works, not forgetting the works also of his friends. "The author belongs to a sect of poets that has established itself in this country within these ten or twelve years"--it would be hard to say for whose benefit in particular this date was taken--"and is looked upon as one of its chief champions and apostles". "The doctrines of this sect"--the Reviewer continues, with an eye upon the Alien Act--"are of German origin, or borrowed from the great apostle of Geneva". Rousseau is then "named" for expulsion, together with a miscellaneous selection of his following: Schiller and Kotzebue (the next number includes Kant under the anathema), Quarles and Donne, Ambrose Phillips and Cowper--perhaps the most motley crew that was ever brought together for excommunication. It is not, however, till the end of the essay that the true root of bitterness between the critic and his victims is suffered fully to appear. "A splenetic and idle discontent with the existing institutions of society seems to be at the bottom of all their serious and peculiar sentiments." In other words, the Edinburgh takes up the work of the Anti-Jacobin; with no very good grace Jeffrey affects to sit in the seat of Canning and of Frere.

So much for the "principles" of the new venture; principles, it will be seen, which appear to rest rather upon a hatred of innovation in general than upon any reasoned code, such as that of Johnson or the "Aristotelian laws", in particular. On that point, it must be clearly realized, Carlyle was in the right. It is that which marks the essential difference of the Reviewers--we can hardly say their advance--as against Johnson.

We may now turn to watch the Reviewers, knife in hand, at the dissecting-table. For the twenty-five years that followed the foundation of the Edinburgh, England was more full of literary genius than it had been at any time since the age of Elizabeth. And it is not too much to say that during that period there was not one of the men, now accepted as among the chief glories of English literature, who did not fall under the lash of one, or both, of the Reviews. The leading cases will suffice.

And first, the famous attack--not altogether undeserved, it must be allowed--of the Edinburgh upon Byron. "The poetry of this young lord belongs to the class which neither gods nor men are said to permit", and so on for two or three pages of rather vulgar and heartless merriment at the young lord's expense. [Footnote: Edinburgh Review, xi. 285. It is uncommonly hard to find any trace of poetic power, even of the imitative kind, in the Hours of Idleness. It is significant that the best pieces are those in the heroic couplet; an indication--to be confirmed by English Bards--of Byron's leaning towards the past.] The answer to the sneer, as all the world knows, was English Bards and Scotch Reviewers. The author of the article had reason to be proud of his feat. Never before did pertness succeed in striking such unexpected fire from genius. And it is only fair to say that the Review took its beating like a gentleman. A few years later, and the Edinburgh was among the warmest champions of the "English Bard". [Footnote: See the article on The Corsair and Bride of Abydos, lb. xxiii. 198. After speaking of the "beauty of his diction and versification, and the splendour of his description", the reviewer continues: "But it is to his pictures of the stronger passions that he is indebted for the fulness of his fame. He has delineated with unequalled force and fidelity the workings of those deep and powerful emotions.... We would humbly suggest to him to do away with the reproach of the age by producing a tragic drama of the old English school of poetry and pathos." The amende honorable with a vengeance. The review of The Giaour, Byron thought, was "so very mild and sentimental that it must be written by Jeffrey in love".--Moore's Life, p. 191.] It was reserved for Southey, a pillar of the Quarterly, to rank him as the "Goliath" of the "Satanic school".

Let us now turn to the Quarterly upon Keats. Endymion, in spite of the noble self-criticism of its preface, is denounced as "Cockney poetry" [Footnote: The phrase was also employed by Blackwood, vol. iii. 519-524.]--a stupid and pointless vulgarism--and is branded as clothing "the most incongruous ideas in the most uncouth language". The author is dismissed with the following amenities: "Being bitten by Leigh Hunt's insane criticism, he more than rivals the insanity of his poetry"; and we are half-surprised not to find him told, as he was by Blackwood, to "go back to the shop, Mr. John; back to the plasters, pills, and ointment-boxes". [Footnote: Quarterly Review, xix. 204. See Blackwood, vol. iii. 524; where the Reviewer sneers at "the calm, settled, imperturbable, drivelling idiocy of Endymion".]

With this insolence it is satisfactory to contrast the verdict of the Edinburgh: "We have been exceedingly struck with the genius these poems--Endymion, Lamia, Isabella, The Eve of St. Agnes, &c.--display, and the spirit of poetry which breathes through all their extravagance. . . . They are at least as full of genius as absurdity." Of Hyperion the Reviewer says: "An original character and distinct individuality is bestowed upon the poet's mythological persons. . . .

We cannot advise its completion. For, though there are passages of some force and grandeur, it is sufficiently obvious that the subject is too far removed from all the sources of human interest to be successfully treated by any modern author". [Footnote: *Edinburgh Review*, xxxiv. 203.] A blundering criticism, which, however, may be pardoned in virtue of the discernment, not to say the generosity, of the foregoing estimate.

It would have been well had the *Edinburgh* always written in this vein. But Wordsworth was a sure stumbling-block to the sagacity of his critics, and he certainly never failed to call forth the insolence and flippancy of Jeffrey. Two articles upon him remain as monuments to the incompetence of the *Edinburgh*; the first prompted by the *Poems of 1807*, the second by the *Excursion*.

The former pronounces sentence roundly at the very start: "Mr. Wordsworth's diction has nowhere any pretence to elegance or dignity, and he has scarcely ever condescended to give the grace of correctness or dignity to his versification". From this sweeping condemnation four poems--*Brougham Castle*, and the sonnets on Venice, Milton, and Bonaparte--are generously excepted. But, as though astonished at his own moderation, the reviewer quickly proceeds to deal slaughter among the rest. Of the closing lines of *Resolution and Independence* he writes: "We defy Mr. Wordsworth's bitterest enemy to produce anything at all parallel to this from any collection of English poetry, or even from the specimens of his friend, Mr. Southey". Of the stanzas to the sons of Burns, "never was anything more miserable". *Alice Fell* is "trash"; *Yarrow Unvisited*, "tedious and affected". The lines from the *Ode to Duty*.

"Thou dost preserve the stars from wrong,
And the most ancient heavens through thee are fresh and strong,"

are "utterly without meaning". The poem on the *Cuckoo* is "absurd". The *Ode on Immortality* is "the most illegible and unintelligible part of the whole publication". "We venture to hope that there is now an end of this folly." [Footnote: *Edinburgh Review*, xi. 217, &c.]

But the hope is doomed to disappointment. The publication of the *Excursion* a few years later finds the reviewer still equal to his task. "This will never do", he begins in a fury; "the case of Mr. Wordsworth is now manifestly hopeless. We give him up as altogether incurable and beyond the power of criticism." The story of Margaret, indeed, though "it abounds, of course, with mawkish sentiment and details of preposterous minuteness, has considerable pathos". But the other passage which one would have thought must have gone home to every heart--that which describes the communing of the wanderer with nature [Footnote: *Excursion*, book i.]--is singled out for ridicule; while the whole poem is judged to display "a puerile ambition of singularity, grafted on an unlucky predilection for truisms". [Footnote: *Edinburgh Review*, xxiv. i, &c. It is but just to add that in the remainder of the essay the Reviewer takes back--so far as such things can ever be taken back--a considerable part of his abuse.]

It would be idle to maintain that in some of these slashing verdicts--criticisms they cannot be called--the reviewer does not fairly hit the mark. But these are chance strokes; and they are dealt, as the whole attack is conceived, in the worst style of the professional swash-buckler. Yet, low as is the deep they sound, a lower deep is opened

by the Quarterly in its article on Shelley; an article which bears unmistakable marks of having been written under the inspiration, if not by the hand, of Southey.

It is impossible to know anything about Southey without feeling that, both in character and in intellect, he had many of the qualities that go to make an enlightened critic. But his fine nature was warped by a strain of bigotry; and he had what, even in a man who otherwise gave conclusive proof of sincerity and whole-heartedness, must be set down as a strong touch of the Pharisee. After every allowance has been made, no feeling other than indignation is possible at the tone which he thought fit to adopt towards Shelley.

He opens the assault, and it is well that he does so, by an acknowledgment that the versification of the Revolt of Islam, the corpus delicti at that moment under the scalpel, is "smooth and harmonious", and that the poem is "not without beautiful passages, free from errors of taste". But the "voice of warning", as he himself would too generously have called it, is not long in making itself heard. "Mr. Shelley, with perfect deliberation and the steadiest perseverance, perverts all the gifts of his nature, and does all the injury, both public and private, which his faculties enable him to perpetrate. . . .He draws largely on the rich stores of another mountain poet, to whose religious mind it must be matter of perpetual sorrow to see the philosophy, which comes pure and holy from his pen, degraded and perverted by this miserable crew of atheists and pantheists."

So far, perhaps, the writer may claim not to have outstepped the traditional limits of theological hatred. For what follows there is not even that poor excuse. "If we might withdraw the veil of his private life and tell what we now know about him, it would be indeed a disgusting picture that we should exhibit, but it would be an unanswerable comment on our text. . . .Mr. Shelley is too young, too ignorant, too inexperienced, and too vicious to undertake the task of reforming any world but the little world within his own breast." [Footnote: Quarterly Review, xxi. 460, &c.] For the credit of both Reviews it must be said that it would be difficult to find another instance of so foul a blow as this: [Footnote: Except in the infamous insinuations, also a crime of the Quarterly.]

Non ragioniam di lui, ma guarda e passa.

[Footnote: against the character of Currer Bell. See also the scurrilous attack on the character of Leigh Hunt in Blackwood, vol III 453]

Apart from their truculence, the early numbers of the Edinburgh and Quarterly are memorable for two reasons in the history of English literature. They mark the downfall of the absolute standard assumed by Johnson and others to hold good in criticism. And they led the way, slowly indeed but surely, to the formation of a general interest in literature, which, sooner or later, could not but be fatal to their own haphazard dogmatism. By their very nature they were an appeal to the people; and, like other appeals of the kind, they ended in a revolution.

Of the men who fixed the lines on which this revolution was to run, four stand out taller from the shoulders upwards than their fellows. These are Coleridge, Lamb, Hazlitt, and Carlyle. The critical work of all four belongs to the first thirty years or so of the present century;

[Footnote: Some of the dates are as follows Lamb's *Specimens of English Dramatic Poets* was published in 1808, his *Essays of Elia* began to appear in the *London Magazine*, 1820, Coleridge's first Course of Lectures (on English poets) was delivered in 1808, his second Course, in 1811-12, his *Biographia Literaria* in 1817 Hazlitt's *Characters of Shakespeare's Plays* was published in 1817, his *Lectures on the English Poets* in 1818, and on *The English Comic Writers* in 1819 Carlyle's Essays began to appear (in the *Edinburgh* and other Reviews) in 1827, that on Diderot--the last notable essay of a literary cast--in 1833 Hazlitt died in 1830, Coleridge and Lamb in 1834 By that time Carlyle had turned to history and kindred subjects] and of the four it is probable that Carlyle, by nature certainly the least critical, had the greatest influence in changing the current of critical ideas. Space forbids any attempt to treat their work in detail. All that can be done is to indicate what were the shortcomings of English criticism as it came into their hands, and how far and in what manner they modified its methods and its aims.

Till the beginning of the present century, criticism in England had remained a very simple thing. When judgment had once been passed, for good or evil, on an individual work or an individual writer, the critic was apt to suppose that nothing further could reasonably be expected of him. The comparative method, foreshadowed but only foreshadowed by Dryden, had not been carried perceptibly further by Dryden's successors. The historical method was still more clearly in its infancy. The connection between the two, the unity of purpose which alone gives significance to either, was hardly as yet suspected.

It may be said--an English critic of the eighteenth century would undoubtedly have said--that these, after all, are but methods; better, possibly, than other methods; but still no more than means to an end--the eternal end of criticism, which is to appraise and to classify. The view is disputable enough. It leaves out of sight all that criticism--the criticism of literature and art--has done to throw light upon the dark places of human thought and history, upon the growth and subtle transformations of spiritual belief, upon the power of reason and imagination to mould the shape of outward institutions. All these things are included in the scope of the historical and comparative methods; and all of them stand entirely apart from the need to judge or classify the works of individual poets.

But, for the moment, such wider considerations may be put aside, and the objection weighed on its own merits. It must then be answered that, without comparison and without the appeal to history, even to judge and classify reasonably would be impossible; and hence that, however much we narrow the scope of criticism, these two methods--or rather, two aspects of the same method--must still find place within its range. For, failing them, the critic in search of a standard--and without some standard or criterion there can be no such thing as criticism--is left with but two possible alternatives. He must either appeal to some absolute standard--the rules drawn from the "classical writers", in a sense wider or narrower, as the case may be; or he must decide everything by his own impression of the moment, eked out by the "appeal to Moliere's maid". The latter is the negation of all criticism. The former, spite of itself, is the historical method, but the historical method applied in an utterly arbitrary and irrational way. The former was the method of Johnson; the latter, of the *Edinburgh* and the *Quarterly*. Each in turn, as we have seen, had ludicrously broken down.

In the light of recent inventions, it might have been expected that some attempt would be made to limit the task of the critic to a mere record of his individual impressions. This, in fact, would only have been to avow, and to give the theory of what the *Edinburgh* and the *Quarterly* had already reduced to practice. But the truth is that the men of that day were not strong in such fine-spun speculations. It was a refinement from which even Lamb, who loved a paradox as well as any man, would have shrunk with playful indignation.

It was in another direction that Coleridge and his contemporaries sought escape from the discredit with which criticism was threatened. This was by changing the issue on which the discussion was to be fought. In its most general form, the problem of criticism amounts to this: What is the nature of the standard to be employed in literary judgments? Hitherto--at least to the Reviewers--the question may be said to have presented itself in the following shape: Is the standard to be sought within or without the mind of the critic? Is it by his own impression, or by the code handed down from previous critics, that in the last resort the critic should be guided? In the hands of Coleridge and others, this was replaced by the question: Is the touchstone of excellence to be found within the work of the poet, or outside of it? Are we to judge of a given work merely by asking: Is it clearly conceived and consistently carried out? Or are we bound to consider the further question: Is the original conception just, and capable of artistic treatment; and is the workmanship true to the vital principles of poetry? The change is significant. It makes the poet, not the critic, master of the situation. It implies that the critic is no longer to give the law to the poet; but that, in some sense more or less complete, he must begin, if not by putting himself in the place of the individual writer as he was when at work on the individual poem, at least by taking upon himself--by making his own, as far as may be--what he may conceive to be the essential temperament of the poet.

This, indeed, is one of the first things to strike us in passing from the old criticism to the new. The *Edinburgh* and *Quarterly* plunge straight into the business of the moment. From the first instant--with "This will never do"--the Reviewer poses as the critic, or rather as the accuser. Not so Coleridge and Hazlitt. Like the *Edinburgh* and *Quarterly*, they undertake to discourse on individual poets. Unlike them, each opens his enquiry with the previous question--a question that seems to have found no lodgment in the mind of the Reviewers--What is poetry? Further than this. Hazlitt, in a passage of incomparably greater force than any recorded utterance of Coleridge, makes it his task to trace poetry to the deepest and most universal springs of human nature; asserts boldly that it is poetry which, in the strictest sense, is "the life of all of us"; and calls on each one of us to assert his birthright by enjoying it. It is in virtue of the poet latent in him, that the plain man has the power to become a critic.

Starting then from the question as just stated: Is it within the mind of the individual poet, or without it, that the standard of judgment should be sought?--neither Coleridge nor Hazlitt could have any doubt as to the answer. It is not, they would tell us, in the individual work but in the nature of poetry--of poetry as written large in the common instincts of all men no less than in the particular achievement of exceptional artists--that the test of poetic beauty must be discovered. The opposite view, doubtless, finds some countenance in the precepts, if not the example, of Goethe. But, when pressed to

extremes, it is neither more nor less than the impressionist conception of criticism transferred to the creative faculty; and, like its counterpart, is liable to the objection that the impression of one poet, so long as it is sincerely rendered, is as good as the impression of another. It is the abdication of art, as the other is the abdication of criticism.

Yet Hazlitt also--for, leaving Coleridge, we may now confine ourselves to him--is open to attack. His fine critical powers were marred by the strain of bitterness in his nature. And the result is that his judgment on many poets, and notably the poets of his own day, too often sounds like an intelligent version of the *Edinburgh* or the *Quarterly*. Or, to speak more accurately, he betrays some tendency to return to principles which, though assuredly applied in a more generous spirit, are at bottom hardly to be distinguished from the principles of Johnson. He too has his "indispensable laws", or something very like them. He too has his bills of exclusion and his list of proscriptions. The poetry of earth, he more than suspects, is for ever dead; after Milton, no claimant is admitted to anything more substantial than a courtesy title. This, no doubt, was in part due to his morose temper; but it was partly also the result of the imperfect method with which he started.

The fault of his conception--and it was that which determined his method--is to be too absolute. It allows too much room to poetry in the abstract; too little to the ever-varying temperament of the individual poet. And even that is perhaps too favourable a statement of the case. His idea of poetry may in part be drawn--and its strength is to have been partly drawn--direct from life and nature. But it is also taken, as from the nature of the case it must be with all of us, from the works of particular poets. And, in spite of his appeal to Dante and the Bible, it is clear that, in framing it, he was guided too exclusively by his loving study of the earlier English writers, from Chaucer to Milton. The model, so framed, is laid with heavy hand upon all other writers, who naturally fare ill in the comparison. Is it possible to account otherwise for his disparagement of Moliere, or his grudging praise of Wordsworth and of Coleridge?

It was here that Carlyle came in to redress the balance. From interests, in their origin perhaps less purely literary than have moved any man who has exercised a profound influence on literature, Carlyle was led to quicken the sense of poetic beauty, and by consequence to widen the scope of criticism, more than any writer of his day. He may have sought German literature more for its matter than for its artistic beauty--here, too, he brought a new, if in some ways a dangerous, element into criticism--but neither he nor his readers could study it, least of all could they study the work of Goethe, without awakening to a whole world of imagination and beauty, to which England had hitherto been dead. With all its shortcomings, the discovery of German literature was a greater revelation than any made to Europe since the classical Renaissance.

The shock--for it was nothing less--came at a singularly happy moment. The blow, given by Carlyle as critic, was closely followed up by the French *Romantiques*, as creative artists. Nothing could well have been more alien to English taste, as understood by the *Edinburgh* and *Quarterly*, than the early works, or indeed any works, of Hugo and those who owned him for chief--if it were not the works of Goethe and the countrymen of Goethe. Different as these were from each other,

they held common ground in uniting the most opposite prejudices of Englishmen against them. The sarcasms of Thackeray on the French writers speak to this no less eloquently than the fluent flippancies of De Quincey upon the Germans. [Footnote: See Thackeray's *Paris Sketch Book*, especially the chapters on *Madame Sand and the New Apocalypse* and *French Dramas and Melodramas*. See also De Quincey's *Review of Carlyle's translation of Wilhelm Meister*. Works, vol. xii.] Yet, in the one case as in the other--thanks, in no small measure, to Matthew Arnold and Mr. Swinburne--genius, in the long run, carried the day. And the same history has been repeated, as the literatures of Russia and of Scandinavia have each in turn been brought within our ken.

These discoveries have all fallen within little more than half a century since Carlyle, by the irony of fate, reviewed Richter and the *State of German Literature* in the pages of the *Edinburgh*. And their result has been to modify the standards of taste and criticism in a thousand ways. They have opened our eyes to aspects of poetry that we should never otherwise have suspected, and unveiled to us fields of thought, as well as methods of artistic treatment which, save by our own fault, must both have widened and deepened our conception of poetry. That is the true meaning of the historical method. The more we broaden our vision, the less is our danger of confounding poetry, which is the divine genius of the whole world, with the imperfect, if not misshapen idols of the tribe, the market-place and the cave.

Of this conquest Carlyle must in justice be reckoned as the pioneer. For many years he stood almost single-handed as the champion of German thought and German art against the scorn or neglect of his countrymen. But he knew that he was right, and was fully conscious whither the path he had chosen was to lead. Aware that much in the work of Goethe would seem "faulty" to many, he forestalls the objection at the outset.

"To see rightly into this matter, to determine with any infallibility whether what we call a fault *is* in very deed a fault, we must previously have settled two points, neither of which may be so readily settled. First, we must have made plain to ourselves what the poet's aim really and truly was, how the task he had to do stood before his own eye, and how far, with such means as it afforded him, he has fulfilled it. Secondly, we must have decided whether and how far this aim, this task of his accorded--not with *us* and our individual crotchets, and the crotchets of our little senate where we give or take the law--but with human nature and the nature of things at large; with the universal principles of poetic beauty, not as they stand written in our text-books, but in the hearts and imaginations of all men. Does the answer in either case come out unfavourable; was there an inconsistency between the means and the end, a discordance between the end and the truth, there is a fault; was there not, there is no fault." [Footnote: Carlyle on Goethe: *Miscellanies*, i. 295]

Nothing could ring clearer than this. No man could draw the line more accurately between the tendency to dispense with principles and the tendency to stereotype them, which are the twin dangers of the critic. But it is specially important to note Carlyle's relation, in this matter, to Hazlitt. He insists with as much force as Hazlitt upon the need of basing all poetry on "human nature and the nature of things at large"; upon the fact that its principles are written "in the hearts and imaginations of all men". But, unlike Hazlitt, he bids us also consider what the aim of the individual poet was, and how far he has taken the most fitting means to reach it. In other words, he allows,

as Hazlitt did not allow, for the many-sidedness of poetry, and the infinite variety of poetic genius. And, just because he does so, he is able to give a deeper meaning to "nature" and the universal principles of imagination than Hazlitt, with all his critical and reflective brilliance, was in a position to do. Hazlitt is too apt to confine "nature" to the nature of Englishmen in general and, in his weaker moments, of Hazlitt in particular. Carlyle makes an honest attempt to bound it only by the universal instincts of man, and the "everlasting reason" of the world. Thus, in Carlyle's conception, "it is the essence of the poet to be new"; it is his mission "to wrench us from our old fixtures"; [Footnote: Carlyle on Goethe: *Miscellanies*, i. 291.] for it is only by so doing that he can show us some aspect of nature or of man's heart that was hidden from us before. The originality of the poet, the impossibility of binding him by the example of his forerunners, is the necessary consequence of the infinity of truth.

That Carlyle saw this, and saw it so clearly, is no doubt partly due to a cause, of which more must be said directly; to his craving for ideas. [Footnote: See p. xciv.] But it was in part owing to his hearty acceptance of the historical method. Both as critic and as historian, he knew--at that time, no man so well--that each nation has its own genius; and justly pronounced the conduct of that nation which "isolates itself from foreign influence, regards its own modes as so many laws of nature, and rejects all that is different as unworthy even of examination", to be "pedantry". [Footnote: *Miscellanies*, i. 37, 38.] This was the first, and perhaps the most fruitful consequence that he drew from the application of historical ideas to literature. They enlarged his field of comparison; and, by so doing, they gave both width and precision to his definition of criticism.

But there is another--and a more usual, if a narrower--sense of the historical method; and here, too, Carlyle was a pioneer. He was among the first in our country to grasp the importance of studying the literature of a nation, as a whole, and from its earliest monuments, its mythological and heroic legends, downwards to the present. The year 1831--a turning-point in the mental history of Carlyle, for it was also the year in which *Sartor Resartus* took shape "among the mountain solitudes"--was largely devoted to *Essays on the history of German literature*, of which one, that on the *Nibelungenlied*, is specially memorable. And some ten years later (1840) he again took up the theme in the first of his lectures on *Heroes*, which still remains the most enlightening, because the most poetic, account of the primitive Norse faith, or rather successive layers of faith, in our language. [Footnote: See *Lectures on Heroes*, p. 20; compare *Corpus Poeticum Borealt*, i. p. ci.] But what mainly concerns us here is that Carlyle, in this matter as in others, had clearly realized and as clearly defines the goal which the student, in this case the student of literary history, should set before his eyes.

"A History ... of any national Poetry would form, taken in its complete sense, one of the most arduous enterprises any writer could engage in. Poetry, were it the rudest, so it be sincere, is the attempt which man makes to render his existence harmonious, the utmost he can do for that end; it springs, therefore, from his whole feelings, opinions, activity, and takes its character from these. It may be called the music of his whole manner of being; and, historically considered, is the test how far Music, or Freedom, existed therein; how the feeling of Love, of Beauty, and Dignity, could be elicited from that peculiar

situation of his, and from the views he there had of Life and Nature, of the Universe, internal and external. Hence, in any measure to understand the Poetry, to estimate its worth and historical meaning, we ask, as a quite fundamental inquiry: What that situation was? Thus the History of a nation's Poetry is the essence of its History, political, economic, scientific, religious. With all these the complete Historian of a national Poetry will be familiar; the national physiognomy, in its finest traits and through its successive stages of growth, will be dear to him: he will discern the grand spiritual Tendency of each period, what was the highest Aim and Enthusiasm of mankind in each, and how one epoch naturally evolved itself from the other. He has to record the highest Aim of a nation, in its successive directions and developments; for by this the Poetry of the nation modulates itself; this is the Poetry of the nation." [Footnote: Carlyle, Miscellanies, iii. 292, 293.]

Never has the task of the literary historian been more accurately defined than in this passage; and never do we feel so bitterly the gulf between the ideal and the actual performance, at which more than one man of talent has since tried his hand, as when we read it. It strikes perhaps the first note of Carlyle's lifelong war against "Dryasdust". But it contains at least two other points on which it is well for us to pause.

The first is the inseparable bond which Carlyle saw to exist between the poetry of a nation and its history; the connection which inevitably follows from the fact that both one and the other are the expression of its character. This is a vein of thought that was first struck by Vico and by Montesquieu; but it was left for the German philosophers, in particular Fichte and Hegel, to see its full significance; and Carlyle was the earliest writer in this country to make it his own. It is manifest that the connection between the literature and the history of a nation may be taken from either side. We may illustrate its literature from its history, or its history from its literature. It is on the necessity of the former study that Carlyle dwells in the above. And in the light of later exaggerations, notably those of Taine, it is well to remember, what Carlyle himself would have been the last man to forget, that no man of genius is the creature of his time or his surroundings; and, consequently, that when we have mastered all the circumstances, in Carlyle's phrase the whole "situation", of the poet, we are still only at the beginning of our task. We have still to learn what his genius made out of its surroundings, and what the eye of the poet discovered in the world of traditional belief; in other words, what it was that made him a poet, what it was that he saw and to which all the rest were blind. We have studied the soil; we have yet to study the tree that grew from it and overshadows it. [Footnote: Perhaps the most striking instances of this kind of criticism, both on its strong and its weak side, are to be found in the writings of Mazzini. See Opere, ii. and iv.]

In reversing the relation, in reading history by the light of literature, the danger is not so great. The man of genius may, and does, see deeper than his contemporaries; but, for that very reason, he is a surer guide to the tendencies of his time than they. He is above and beyond his time; but, just in so far as he is so, he sees over it and through it. As Shakespeare defined it, his "end, both at the first and now, was and is... to show the very age and body of the time his form and pressure". Some allowance must doubtless be made for the individuality of the poet; for the qualities in which he stands

aloof from his time, and in which, therefore, he must not be taken to reflect it. But to make such allowance is a task not beyond the skill of the practised critic; and many instances suggest themselves in which it has, more or less successfully, been done. Witness not a few passages in Michelet's *Histoire de France*, and some to be found in the various works of Ranke. [Footnote: As instances may be cited, Michelet's remarks on Rabelais (tome viii. 428-440) and on Moliere (tome xiii. 51-85): or again Ranke's *Papste*, i. 486-503 (on Tasso and the artistic tendencies of the middle of the sixteenth century): *Französische Geschichte*, iii. 345-368 (the age of Louis XIV.).] Witness, again, Hegel's illustration of the Greek conception of the family from the *Antigone* and the *Oedipus* of Sophocles; or, if we may pass to a somewhat different field, his "construction" of the French Revolution from the religious and metaphysical ideas of Rousseau. [Footnote: Hegel, *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, pp. 323-348, and pp. 426-436.]

So far as it employs literature to give the key to the outward history of a nation or to the growth of its spiritual faith, it is clear that the historical method ceases to be, in the strict sense of the word, a literary instrument. It implies certainly that a literary judgment has been passed; but, once passed, that judgment is used for ends that lie altogether apart from the interests of literature. But it is idle to consider that literature loses caste by lending itself to such a purpose. It would be wiser to say that it gains by anything that may add to its fruitfulness and instructiveness. In any case, and whether it pleases us or no, this is one of the things that the historical method has done for literature; and neither Carlyle, nor any other thinker of the century, would have been minded to disavow it.

This brings us to the second point that calls for remark in the foregoing quotation from Carlyle. Throughout he assumes that the matter of the poet is no less important than his manner. And here again he dwells on an aspect of literature that previous, and later, critics have tended to throw into the shade. That Carlyle should have been led to assert, and even at times to exaggerate, the claims of thought in imaginative work was inevitable; and that, not only from his temperament, but from those principles of his teaching that we have already noticed. If the poetry of a nation be indeed the expression of its spiritual aims, then it is clear that among those aims must be numbered its craving to make the world intelligible to itself, and to comprehend the working of God both within man and around him. Not that Carlyle shows any disposition to limit "thought" to its more abstract forms; on the contrary, it is on the sense of "music, love, and beauty" that he specially insists. What he does demand is that these shall be not merely outward adornments, but the instinctive utterance of a deeper harmony within; that they shall be such as not merely to "furnish a languid mind with fantastic shows and indolent emotions, but to incorporate the everlasting reason of man in forms visible to his sense, and suitable to it". [Footnote: *Miscellanies*, i. 297.] The "reason" is no less necessary to poetry than its sensible form; and whether its utterance be direct or indirect, that is a matter for the genius of the individual poet to decide. *Gott und Welt*, we may be sure Carlyle would have said, is poetry as legitimate as *Der Erlkönig* or the songs of Mignon.

In this connection he more than once appeals to the doctrine of Fichte, one of the few writers whom he was willing to recognize as his teachers. "According to Fichte, there is a 'divine idea' pervading the visible universe; which visible universe is indeed but its symbol and sensible

manifestation, having in itself no meaning, or even true existence independent of it. To the mass of men this divine idea of the world lies hidden; yet to discern it, to seize it, and live wholly in it, is the condition of all genuine virtue, knowledge, freedom; and the end, therefore, of all spiritual effort in every age. Literary men are the appointed interpreters of this divine idea; a perpetual priesthood, we might say, standing forth, generation after generation, as the dispensers and living types of God's everlasting wisdom, to show it in their writings and actions, in such particular form as their own particular times require it in. For each age, by the law of its nature, is different from every other age, and demands a different representation of the divine idea, the essence of which is the same in all; so that the literary man of one century is only by mediation and reinterpretation applicable to the wants of another." [Footnote: *Ib.*, p. 69. There is a similar passage in the *Lectures on Heroes* (Lec. v.), p. 145. In each case the reference is to Fichte's *Lectures Ueber das Wesen des Gelehrten* (1805), especially to lectures i., ii., and x.; Fichte's *Werke*, vi. 350-371, 439-447.]

The particular form of Fichte's teaching may still sound unfamiliar enough. But in substance it has had the deepest influence on the aims and methods of criticism; and, so far as England is concerned, this is mainly due to the genius of Carlyle. Compare the criticism of the last century with that of the present, and we at once see the change that has come over the temper and instincts of Englishmen in this matter.

When Johnson, or the reviewers of the next generation, quitted--as they seldom did quit--the ground of external form and regularity and logical coherence, it was only to ask: Is this work, this poem or this novel, in conformity with the traditional conventions of respectability, is it such as can be put into the hands of boys and girls? To them this was the one ground on which the matter of literature, as apart from the beggarly elements of its form, could come under the cognizance of the critic. And this narrowness, a narrowness which belonged at least in equal measure to the official criticism of the French, naturally begot a reaction almost as narrow as itself. The cry of "art for art's sake", a cry raised in France at the moment when Carlyle was beginning his work in England, must be regarded as a protest against the moralizing bigotry of the classical school no less than against its antiquated formalities. The men who raised it were themselves not free from the charge of formalism; but the forms they worshipped were at least those inspired by the spontaneous genius of the artist, not the mechanical rules inherited from the traditions of the past. Nor, whatever may be the case with those who have taken it up in our own day, must the cry be pressed too rigorously against the men of 1830. The very man, on whom it was commonly fathered, was known to disavow it; and certainly in his own works, in their burning humanit

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