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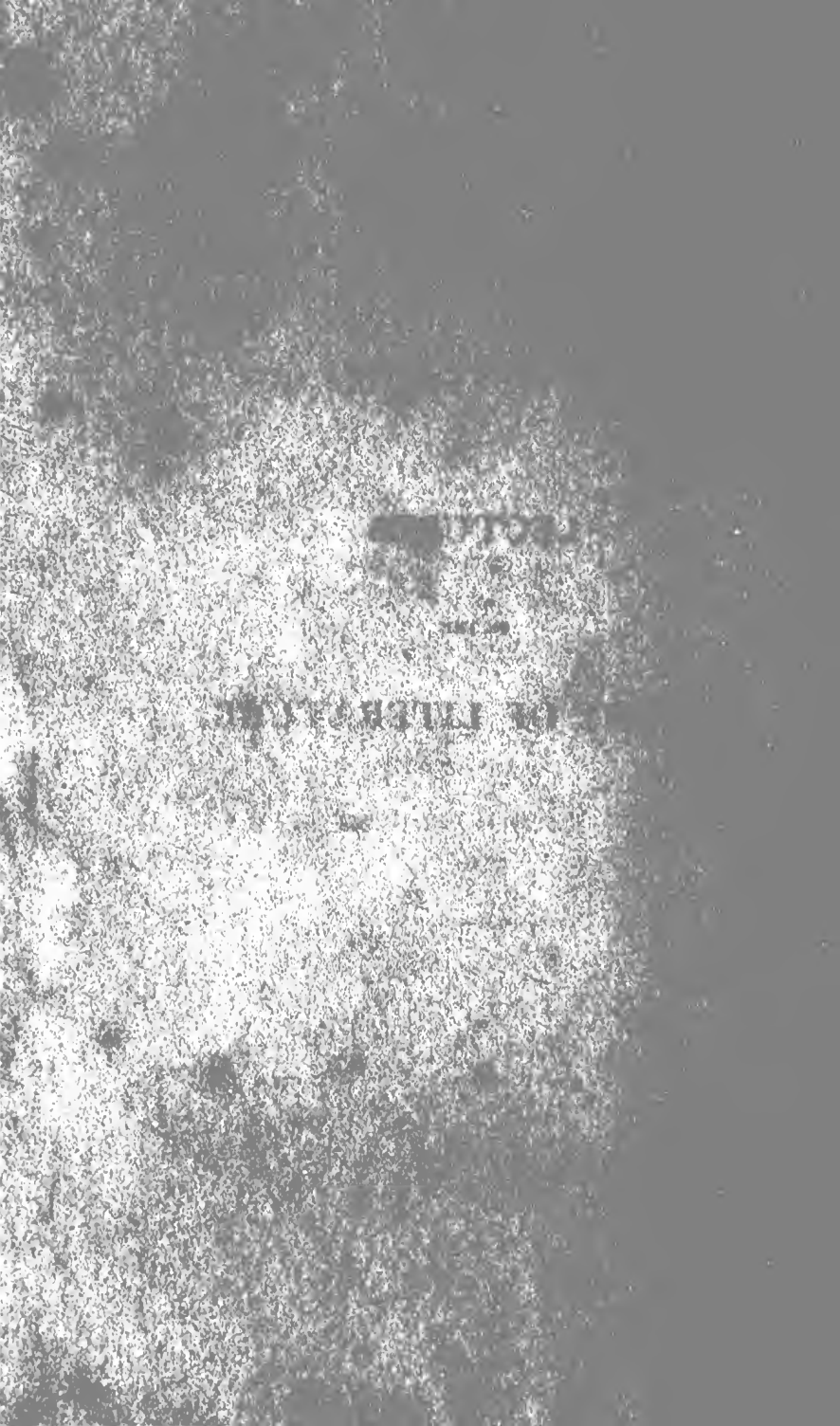
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**LECTURES**

**ON THE**

**HISTORY OF LITERATURE.**





LECTURES

ON THE

HISTORY OF LITERATURE,

ANCIENT AND MODERN.

FROM THE GERMAN OF  
FREDERICK SCHLEGEL.

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*IN TWO VOLUMES.*

VOL. II.

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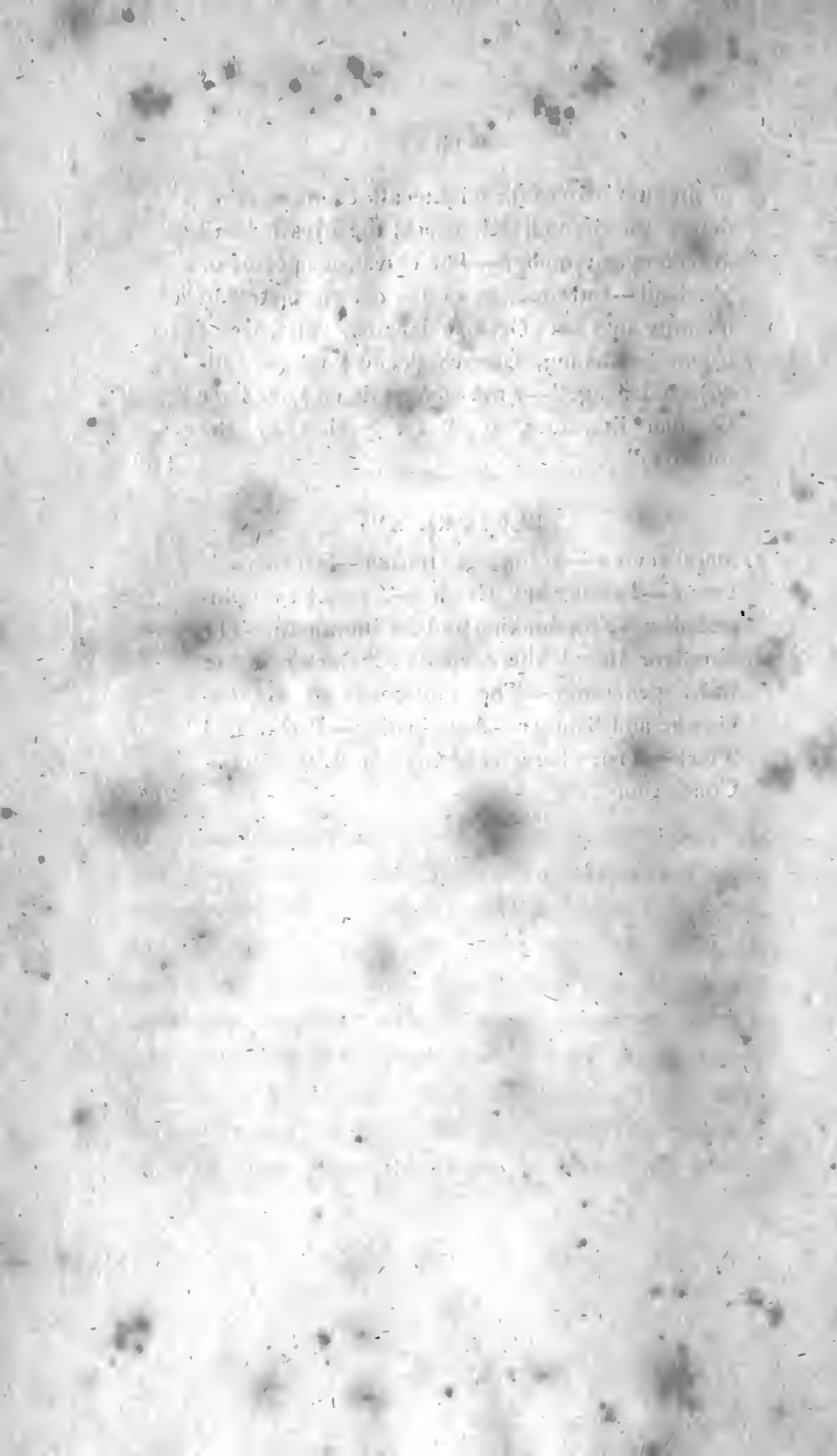
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LECTURES  
ON THE  
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LECTURE IX.

ITALIAN LITERATURE—ALLEGORIZING SPIRIT OF THE MIDDLE AGE—RELATION OF CHRISTIANITY TO POETRY—DANTE, PETRARCHA, AND BOCCACCIO—CHARACTER OF THE ITALIAN ART OF POETRY IN GENERAL—MODERN LATIN POETS, AND THE EVIL CONSEQUENCES OF THEIR WRITINGS—MACHIAVELLI—GREAT INVENTIONS AND DISCOVERIES OF THE FIFTEENTH CENTURY.

IN the preceding lectures I have endeavoured to present you with successive pictures of the different European nations, the Germans, the French, the English, and the Spaniards, more particularly in regard to their poetry and their intellectual cultivation, down to the sixteenth century. The literature of the Italians has alone been omitted, and that I have purposely left for this place, because I consider it as forming the link of connection between the poetry of the middle age, and the new

literature of these later times; since the sciences, and through them the arts, were, in the course of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, so remarkably enriched and revived.

The elder poetry of the Italians divides itself into two distinct classes; one founded entirely on the philosophy of the middle ages, of which the greatest example is the allegorical *Comedia* of Dante; the other more nearly approaching to the models of antiquity, and standing in a very intimate relation with the study of the ancient languages. The two great poets, Petrarch, and Boccaccio, were themselves men of learning, who took no inconsiderable share in reviving the sciences and arts of the Greeks and Romans. The spirit of chivalry and chivalric poetry seems at no time to have attained the same sway and influence in Italy, which it exerted in France, Germany, and England. Even Dante at first intended to compose his great poem in Latin;—Petrarch talks of the knightly poems and romances with contempt and aversion; and, although he has embalmed the very spirit of the middle age in his rich love songs, he seems, at the same time, to have rather followed involuntarily the ruling feelings of his contemporaries, than to have written from any serious apprehension of the true nature and excellence of the modern poetry. He founded, in his own mind, his expectations of poeti-



cal fame, not upon those sonnets and canzonets which have immortalized him, but upon the Latin epic of Scipio,\* which is now only known and read on account of the reputation of its author. The same wavering between the old Latin and the new Italian methods of thinking, speaking, and composing poetry, is equally evident in the third great writer of the first Italian period—Boccaccio. He endeavoured to embody the hairsplitting fancifulness of the Provencial love-queries and love-cases of conscience, and the amusing fictions of the Norman story-tellers, in a style of composition far too serious, too elaborate, and too ornate for his purpose. He has written novels upon the model of Livy and Cicero. Many of his works consist of unsuccessful attempts to interweave the mythology of the ancients into Christian histories, or to express Christian ideas in the language and mythology of the ancients; as, for example, in a chivalric romance, where such affectation appears remarkably out of place, he introduces, at all times, God the Father, by the name of Jupiter; our Saviour, by that of Apollo; and the Devil, by that of Pluto. In some of his chivalric poems he has chosen the subject, after the fashion of the middle age, out of the ancient mythology, with which indeed, there is

\* Known also by the name of *Africa*.

no question, he was far better acquainted than any of the German or French poets who had preceded him in the same field. In this unfortunate choice he still manifests the same passionate predilection for the antique, and indulges in the same fruitless endeavours to reconcile it with those poetical feelings which are peculiar to the modern world.

The most rich, dignified, and inventive of all the three great old Italian poets was unquestionably Dante; whose work, comprehending within itself the whole science and knowledge of the time, the whole life of the later middle age, the whole personages and events in which the poet personally had interest; and not only all this, but also a complete description of heaven, hell, and purgatory, such as these were then conceived to be, is a production entirely unique, and can be ranked under no class of compositions. It is true, indeed, that many such allegorical poems were composed during the middle age, more particularly in the language of the Provincials; but these have all perished or been forgotten. Dante has towered so high above all his predecessors in this sort of writing, that both they and their works have been completely overshadowed. If we are willing to study the poetry of the middle age without being biassed in favour of any particular theory, and without attending to the rhetorical divisions of the ancient

critics, which are mostly altogether inapplicable to it—if we are willing to consider it in a point of view entirely historical, and to judge of it according to no standard but that of its own spirit—we shall find that it naturally divides itself into three species, the chivalric, the amatory, and the allegorical. By this last species, I mean, of course, that in which the object and purpose of the whole composition, no less than its external form, is allegorical, as is the case in Dante. The spirit of allegory has here its most peculiar triumph, but its influence is wide-spread and predominant over all the poetry of the middle ages. How often an allegorical spirit and sense was inclosed, even in the form of a romance of chivalry, I have already hinted, in treating of the German mode of handling the fables of the Round Table and the Graal. The difference consists in this, that in these allegorical romances the hidden sense is wrapped up in a representation of human life and transactions, while in Dante, on the contrary, the representations of human life are only inserted here and there as adventitious pieces of furniture in the artfully divided saloons and galleries of his world-embracing allegory. It appears that this universal tendency to allegory, which was so predominant in all the middle age; and which, in considering all the works of that period, we cannot too much keep in

our remembrance, had been in a very great measure encouraged and extended by the influence of the Christian religion.

Whether we consider the Bible in regard to the powerful influence which it has in reality exerted upon the whole literature and poetry of the middle age and of modern times, or view merely the impression which, as a book, and in relation to its exterior form, it was and is calculated to produce upon the language, art, and spirit of composition, we shall find two peculiarities which are above all worthy of our attention. The first is simplicity of expression—the total want of all artifice. Although the sacred writings are principally or almost exclusively occupied with God and the internal being of man, their mode of treating these topics is every where lively and distinct; they contain little of what we are accustomed to call metaphysics; they are free from all those distinctions and antitheses, those dead ideas, and empty abstractions, with which the philosophy of every nation, from the Greeks and Indians, down to the modern Europeans, has at all times been disfigured, whenever she has attempted to comprehend and explain, by her own unassisted powers, those highest objects of all reflection, God and man. The hereditary evils of endless bewildering, and of inconsistent and artificial reasoning, have adhered to her even when

disclaiming all interference with those high questions and topics, she has either retreated into the world of sense, or exerted all her powers in the mere confession of her ignorance. The same simplicity and absence of artifice distinguish even the poetical parts of the Scriptures, much as those abound in specimens of the beautiful, and above all of the sublime. If we look indeed to the elaborate developement and forms of writing, the simplicity of the sacred poesy prevents it from sustaining any sort of comparison with the richness of the Grecian compositions. But, on the other hand, in those great works, the utmost perfection of blossom is almost every where followed by the symptoms of decay, and to the highest polish of art there succeeds, not unfrequently, an ambitious and luxuriant taste which delights in superfluous ornament and overloaded artifice. There exist many causes in the imagination of man, in the whole complexion of his perceptions, in the propensities and feelings of his nature, which may abundantly explain this universal appearance in the history of art; many influences which may poison and corrode the bloom of beauty, before yet it is perfectly unfolded, or which may reduce the noble simplicity of expression, after that has been perfectly displayed, to the false artifices of corruption. It is for this reason that even those Christian poets of modern

times, who have taken either their subjects or their models from the Scriptures, Dante, Tasso, Milton, and Klopstock, resemble their originals rather by individual traits of sublimity, than by any sustained imitation of the faultless simplicity of the Bible.

A second peculiarity in the outward form and composition of the Scriptures which has had a very powerful effect upon our language and poetry, is that prevailing spirit of types and symbols so conspicuous not only in the poetical books, but in those also whose texture is entirely didactic or historical. In one point of view the holy book may be considered as a national possession of the Hebrews, common, in some measure, to several other Oriental peoples, such as the Arabs and other tribes originally descended from the same stock with the inhabitants of Judea. The prohibition of sensible images of the Deity might contribute in no inconsiderable degree to foster this propensity among the Hebrews, for the power of imagination, being confined in one direction, naturally seeks an outlet in some other. A similar prohibition has produced a similar effect among the modern Mahometans. But even in those parts of the Scriptures, where little or no room is afforded for the introduction of this old Oriental species of typical poetry; as, for example, in the Christian books of the Bible, the

prevalence of a symbolizing spirit is still abundantly apparent. This spirit has deeply implanted, and widely extended, its influence over the whole thoughts and imagination of the Christian peoples. By means of this symbolical spirit and the consequent propensity to allegory, the Bible has come to exert the same influence upon the poetry and all the imitative arts of the middle age, and very nearly the same upon those of our own more cultivated times, which Homer did among the ancients; it has become the fountain, the rule, and the model of all our images and figures. It is true that in cases where the deeper sense of its symbolical mysteries was mistaken, or where the purpose which the figure had been intended to serve was of a nature less serious and sacred, this spirit has not unfrequently displayed itself in the corrupted form of idle and phantastical allegory; for loaded ornament is at all times of easier attainment than native grace, and the most brilliant display of art is a thing more common-place than the deep gravity of truth.

In regard to both of the last mentioned peculiarities, had these only been every where felt and understood, the Scriptures might have afforded to Christians a high model of imitation, far more beautiful in itself, and far more universal in its application, than any thing which they could have borrowed from the Greeks. Had the spirit of

Christianity thoroughly penetrated us with its enlivening influence, we could not have failed to derive from it, both in our language and in our composition, both in our science and in our art, a noble and sustained beauty which is the same thing with truth, and whose influence must have in all respects been alike predominant and enduring. But in and by itself Christianity is, according to my opinion, no proper subject of poetry; I except lyrical compositions which are to be considered as direct emanations of feeling. Christianity itself cannot be either philosophy or poetry. It is rather what ought to be the groundwork of all philosophy; for they who philosophize without taking Christianity for their guide, terminate either in doubt and inextricable perplexities, or in the cold and despairing void of unbelief. On the other hand, Christianity is removed far above all poetry; the influence of our sublime faith should indeed be every where around us, but here its ministrations should be felt, not seen, and we should beware of debasing, by familiarity, that which is most worthy of our reverence.

The relation of Christianity to poetry and all the literature of imagination, is one which must be considered with the deepest attention, whenever we would inquire into the comparative relations of the literature of the ancients and that of the moderns, and examine



in how far the latter of these is capable of contending with the former, and manifesting in its productions an equal degree of perfection. What should that poetry and that art have been, which had been exclusively occupied, down to the present hour, in representing the faded forms and shadows of that antiquity whose spirit and life are fled, or which should have pretended indeed to employ themselves upon our modern life, but at all times confined themselves to its surface and exterior, without daring to search into that deep point of interest and thought, from whence our meditations and our feelings have derived their peculiarity and their power!

It is no wonder that so many whole ages and nations, and so many illustrious geniuses of Christendom, have striven to honour their religion, and embody its revelations, by consecrating to its exclusive service the poetry of which they were possessed.

The truth of the matter is, as I have already hinted, that the indirect expression of Christian feelings, the indirect influence of the spirit of Christianity upon our poetry, if not the only just and true influence, has, as yet at least, been the surest and the most successful. In this sense it is that we may call the chivalric poetry of the middle age (which, like the Gothic architecture, never attained complete

perfection,) a truly Christian heroic poetry, for the characteristics which distinguish it from the heroic poetry of all other nations, and of the more remote antiquity, are in their essence and origin unquestionably Christian. The spirit indeed is that of Gothic antiquity, the fictions and the personages are derived from the pagan legends of the North, but all these are changed and purified by the predominant feeling and the faith of love, which have lent new beauty and sublimity even to the wildest play of the imagination. But so soon as the poet attempts to reveal directly the mysteries of our religion, we perceive that he has made election of a subject which is above the standard of his powers. This much is certain, that no attempt of this kind, however masterly the talents with which it has been conducted, has attained a degree of perfection sufficient altogether to remove this impression. We remark the defect in Dante, the first and oldest of all great Christian poets, and it is no less frequently to be observed in the works of his later followers Tasso, Milton, and Klopstock. By Dante himself, there is no doubt that heavenly appearances and holy ecstasies are described in far more vivid colours, and with more true power of imagination than by any other Christian poet. But his most zealous admirers must admit, that even in him the poetry and the Christianity are not always perfectly

in harmony with each other, and that his work, if it aspire to the name of a manual of doctrine and theology, must found its pretensions not upon its general scope, but upon some particular passages with which it is enriched. Although his genius was thoroughly poetical, and indulged itself with the greatest partiality in the boldest visions of imagination, it is evident that the prevailing scholastics of the day had exerted a very great power over this remarkable spirit. His singular poem is rich beyond all other example in its representations of human life. By his plan of describing the three great regions of darkness, of purification, and of light, he has found an opportunity of introducing every variety of human character, incident, and fortune; he has depicted, with equally strong and masterly touches of horror, tenderness, and enthusiasm, every situation in which the human spirit can be placed, beginning with the deepest gloom of hell and despair, and then shading away this blackness into softer sorrows, and illuminating these again with gradually brightening tints of hope, till on the summit of his picture he pours the warmest radiance of serenity and joy. Those who are able thoroughly to comprehend his spirit, and to enter into all his views and purposes, cannot fail to discover in his apparently most miscellaneous poem, the strongest unity and connection of design. It

is difficult to know which are most worthy of admiration, the daring imagination which could first venture to form such a plan, or that phalanx of unparalleled powers which could accompany him steadily through its execution. The chief misfortune is, that neither this harmony of plan, nor this vigour of execution, are very easy to be comprehended; for he that comes properly prepared to the study of Dante, must bring with him stores of science and knowledge of the most various kinds, far beyond what is required from the reader of any other poet. To his own contemporaries, and the immediately following generation, his geography and astronomy must have been far less foreign than they are to us; his perpetual allusions to the Florentine history must also have been far less obscure, and even the philosophy of the poet was that of the age in which he lived. Yet even then it appears that his work stood in great need of a commentary; and the truth is, that at no time has the greatest and the most national of all Italian poets ever been much the favourite of his countrymen. After the lapse of several centuries his works, like those of a second Homer, have had the honour of being explained and illustrated by a whole academy of literati at the public expense; yet it is certain that he is very far from having become the Homer of Italy. The power which he possesses, (and this is

of course, in spite of all obstacles, far from inconsiderable,) is founded not upon any general knowledge or comprehension of his works, but upon the exquisite force of a few single episodes and pictures. There are among the poets of his own nation none who can sustain the most remote comparison with him either in boldness and sublimity of imagination, or in the delineation of character: None have penetrated so deeply into the Italian spirit, or depicted its mysterious workings with so forcible a pencil. The only reproach which we can find against him in regard to these things, is his perpetual Ghibellinism. This term may appear unintelligible, but not to those who are well acquainted with the age of Dante. In those later periods of the middle age, the Ghibelline party were animated by designs, which aimed at nothing but the establishment of merely worldly dominion, and conducted every enterprise in which they were engaged with a spirit of pride, haughtiness, and harshness, of which if we would form an idea we must study the histories and monuments of the time. Even in the most modern times we have had no want of Ghibellines, men who expect the whole salvation of mankind from dominion founded entirely upon worldly principles, and who are willing altogether to deny the power of that unseen influence, which is however sure to make its existence to be felt

upon every proper occasion. But these Ghibellines of a more modern and an over-refined age, are chiefly characterised by the docility and submissiveness with which they render themselves up as weak masses, ready to assume any shape which it may please that despotism to impress, whose dignity is increased in their eyes by every new infliction of its oppressiveness. The old Ghibellines of Dante's day were equally ambitious, but in their time pride and heroic strength were more common things, and the numbers of rival combatants, and the collisions of great characters, were sufficient to prevent consequences similar to those with which we are now acquainted. Then there existed a terrible anarchy, an universal struggle and ferment of mighty characters and powers, but these had not been followed by that sleep of uniformity and lethargy which is not only the consequence and the curse, but the ministering opportunity also, and the deadliest instrument of despotism. The Ghibelline harshness appears in Dante in a form noble and dignified; but although it may perhaps do no injury to the outward beauty, it certainly mars in a very considerable degree the internal charm of his poetry. His chief defect is, in a word, a want of gentle feelings.—But these are mere spots upon the sun, and must not diminish our admiration for this greatest of all Italian and of all Christian poets.

I have in one of my former lectures indicated the proper situation in which we should view the character of Petrarch, when I took notice of the rich finishing which it was his fortune to bestow upon that love-poetry of several different nations which has already passed under our review. His elegant productions belong in truth altogether to that class, and we must compare his writings with the amatory productions of the old Spanish and German poets, before we can judge rightly of his merits, or even discover what was the leading characteristic of his genius. Petrarch is distinguished from the other love-poets of the middle age, by greater skill in composition, and by a more intellectual and platonic turn of sentiment. There have not indeed been wanting some among his admirers, who have gone so far as to maintain, that his Laura was no real mistress, but merely a fanciful personification of loveliness. Unfortunately for this hypothesis there still exist abundant proofs in the church-records, not only that Laura was a real woman, but that she was a wife and the mother of a very large family. It is true, however, that over and above the praises of this lady, Petrarch has introduced a great deal of matter which cannot be any thing else than allegorical; this is often too evident to admit of any sort of doubt, and is moreover, as I have before observed, perfectly in

character with the spirit of all the poetry of the middle ages.—As a versifier and as an improver of language, Petrarch is entitled to be considered as one of the very first artists who have ever made use of any Romanic dialect.

Boccaccio was of as much use in polishing the prose as Petrarch in polishing the poetry of his country: the only fault in his composition is a love of long and intricate periods; from which indeed with the single exception of Machiavelli no great Italian writer is free.

Each of these three Florentine poets, Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio, was the discoverer of a new path, the former of a new style of composition. The first was master of Allegorical, the second of Lyrical poetry; the third was the founder of the Novel and the Romance, and composed for the most part in prose, though many of his best fictions are occasionally adorned by poetry. Each of the three had a host of followers in his own department. But the genius of Dante was one of so very peculiar a cast that he was far from being well fitted to be a model of imitation; and the crowds of sonneteers and novellists who followed in the tracks of Petrarch and Boccaccio, were such, that both of these kinds of writing, associated with the ideas of repetition and satiety, soon became wearisome in the extreme. The fifteenth century was already



well advanced before the Italians, convinced that by persisting in these species of writing, no farther laurels were to be gained, resolved to create for themselves a proper chivalrous poetry; and to desert for ever the Greek mythology and Trojan fable, which Boccaccio had introduced into the only productions of this sort with which they had as yet been acquainted. The first predecessor of Ariosto, whose name has become celebrated, was the Florentine Pulci. Of a poet so well acquainted with the ancient writers, and living with and admired by the Medici and their polished courtiers, not a little might have been expected. But I fear his work itself is not fitted to fulfil these hopes. It is one of those in which sportiveness and wit are introduced for the purpose of enabling the poet to ridicule himself, and thereby induce his readers to overlook the more lightly his want of poetical power, or the want of probability and connection in the incidents of his fable. In the narrative it is not easy to discover what parts are serious, and what written in the spirit of parody; besides the wit itself is so purely local and Florentine, that we can make very little of it, so that the work is chiefly valuable as a proof how very little the genius of Italians was imbued by nature with the true feelings of the romantic.

A far more successful attempt was that of

Boiardo, the immediate predecessor of Ariosto, whose imperfect poem that masterly genius at first intended only to complete, but which he has since become the chief instrument of throwing into utter oblivion. Ariosto does not receive among those acquainted with the sources from which he drew, any credit for that invention and extravagant fulness of fancy, which we hear very commonly ascribed to him. The whole body of his tales and fictions is to be found in his predecessors, and that too set forth with a power of painting not at all inferior to his. The superiority of Ariosto consists in the inimitable polish, lightness, and grace of his language and versification, and he has besides derived no small advantage from the skilful use which he has made of Homer, Ovid, and some other poets of antiquity.

It is worthy of remark, that the chivalrous poetry of the Italians attained its full perfection not in Florence, but in Lombardy, where the Gothic style of architecture had also been introduced, and where the style of painting bore considerable resemblance to that of the Germans, or, at least, was less remote from it than the painting of Florence or of Rome. We need only run over the names of the chief old states of Italy, in order to see how infinitely less prevalent the spirit of chivalry, and its moral, intellectual, and poetical influences were in

that country, than among the other polished nations of the west. In Florence the spirit of the people became at a very early period entirely democratic. In Venice the ruling principle was that of commerce, and both manners and tastes had more in common with the Orientals and the Greeks than with the Gothic west. In Naples the spirit of chivalry was never, after the Norman period, altogether extinct; but a succession of unfortunate events, the rule of foreign dynasties, frequent changes of government and various other causes, combined to prevent that state from taking such a part as it should have done in the intellectual cultivation of the north of Italy. In Rome, the centre of ecclesiastical affairs, more attention was bestowed upon those splendid arts of imitation subservient to the ornament of the church, than upon chivalrous poetry. If any national feelings were ever excited among the Romans, they commonly took quite a contrary direction, and evaporated in empty dreams about the re-establishment of the Republic, and the restoration of the city to her ancient glory; a specimen of which we may find in those mad schemes of Rienzi, of which Petrarch himself was both an admirer and a partaker.

These seem to have been the causes which prevented the spirit of chivalry from obtaining any power over the more early poetry of the Italians; a

poetry which has attained the greatest perfection of developement, and which has become, as it were, a common possession of the whole of cultivated Europe. And such seem to have been of the circumstances which may account for that leaning to the antique and to philosophy, which can be discerned in the national poetry of no contemporary people.

The fifteenth century was in Italy adorned by painting much more than by poetry. The prosperity of this art commenced in this century, and it continued to flourish down till the middle of the next. Next to the revival of ancient learning, the age of the Medici or of Leo X. has been principally indebted to art for its glory. At a period considerably earlier than this, it is true, certain painters of Italy began to make some use of those fragments of ancient art which were continually before their eyes. They learned some notions of accurate drawing, and something of human anatomy, and they could not avoid inhaling along with these some ideas of the beauty of form and the sublimity of expression. But an intimate acquaintance with the antique was very rare, and many of the first and greatest masters were entirely deficient in it. And even among those who understood it the most scientifically, no attempts were ever made at strict imitation of the antique. When that came once to be in fashion, it is singular but true, that paint-

ing was already on the decline. In the early stage of its progress this art had acquired among the Italians a new and distinct character of its own, founded upon the predominance of Christian ideas on the one hand, and that of national partialities on the other. Under the influence of both of these species of inspiration, this art acquired a glory which was at that time unrivalled by the sister art of poetry. What poet of those times can we for a moment compare with Raphael? The poetry was less original than the painting. The restoration of classical learning, and the wide circulation of so many illustrious works heretofore little known, produced their natural effects in giving rise to a strong spirit of imitation. The appearances of this manifested themselves very speedily in a manner by no means happy, among all the European nations, but first of all in Italy. Even the greatest geniuses could not remain entirely free from the unfortunate influence; Camoens and Tasso, the two first of modern Epic poets would, I have no doubt, have unfolded their talents in a manner much more powerful, free, and beautiful, had they been utterly ignorant of Virgil, and written without having before their eyes the necessity of adhering to a precedent. The revival of ancient letters was injurious, in yet another manner, to poetry and to language itself. The fashion of writing, and of writing poetry too, in

Latin became so universal that it gave rise to great neglect of the vernacular dialects. Next to Italy, Germany, in which classical studies were immediately embraced with unrivalled ardour, was the greatest sufferer; not a few true and excellent poets were, in consequence of their taste for Latin, lost to their own language and nation. For it was not till long after this time that men became satisfied that the only poetry which has any power over a people, is that composed in its own tongue. Under the Emperor Maximilian, himself a lover of German poetry and himself a German poet, a crown was publicly bestowed on a poet who wrote in Latin, but no similar distinction fell to the share of those who made use of their mother tongue. Even the plays represented before the Court were commonly written in Latin. The evident decline and corruption of our German language, so different from what its early flourishing condition might have led us to expect, have been in general ascribed to the convulsions and civil tumults of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. There is little doubt that these must have greatly increased the evil; but the corruption of our language is quite apparent in writers who composed previous to the Reformation, and who must indeed have received their education at a time when those alarming events of which I have above spoken, had not even

been dreamed of. The truth is, that the primary cause of the evil is to be sought for in that ever increasing rage for Latinity, which induced all those writers who were capable of improving the living language, to consider it as below them to make use of any other than the dead. In Germany, where no great works had as yet been produced, the effects of this fashion were of course far more injurious than in Italy, where there existed the writings of those three great Florentines, and where the language had in consequence of their labours required a form and standard from which no succeeding authors could ever very widely depart.

The fault of all this lies by no means on the literature of antiquity, but on the use, or rather on the misuse, to which men applied its treasures. The prodigious extension of historical science, and through it, of every other species of knowledge,—an introduction to so many fountains of information and so many glorious monuments of art and refinement,—these things constituted in themselves a great and an invaluable good. But we shall be greatly mistaken if we believe that this abundant harvest was unmingled with tares—and our expectations must have been far too sanguine if we had hoped that such a hidden treasure could be discovered, and those that found it be guilty of no absur-

dities in their first methods of applying it. The spirit of the modern Europeans is much more the same throughout the different centuries of our period, than might at first sight be imagined. Every where I observe the same misdirected passion which leads them to fasten upon every new and great addition to their inheritance of knowledge, as if that alone were worthy of more attention than the whole of their previous possessions, to pursue it with restless avidity, and forget in their admiration of it every thing besides, to apply the new ideas to subjects the most foreign from them, and in short to become blind to all but one point—till after this ferment of extravagance has subsided, things at last find their natural level, and the new takes its place among the old without attempting any longer to exclude it. Like the revolutions of the political world, those of the world of letters are attended by violent convulsions and the shattering of venerable institutions, and followed by periods of lethargy, which often go far to destroy the good to which they might otherwise have given birth. In the age of the Crusades, when the Western Europeans were introduced to an acquaintance with the science of the Arabians, and the philosophy of Aristotle, when the different nations of the world were brought into contact with each other after a separation of many centuries, it might have seemed n



great excess of enthusiasm to expect that a mighty regeneration of intellect should have been the result of such an era. But it is sufficiently evident, that the effects of all these circumstances upon the spirit of the thirteenth century were insignificant indeed when compared with what the most rational might have looked for. Their immediate and most general consequence was a pervading spirit of sectarianism, which at first confined its influence to the barbarous schools of the day, but soon insinuated itself into the church, and through her into the state, and into private life. Among all the suddenly enriched, and intellectually fruitful periods of European history, the most brilliant is perhaps the fifteenth century. It was then that the systematic use of the compass was adopted: it was then that a long series of painful voyages and unsuccessful attempts was at last crowned with a full discovery of the way to India and America; and it was then that the at once astonished and matured mind of man became acquainted with the true extent and shape of earth his habitation; it was at the same period that the hidden stores of ancient literature were laid open, and that, in the art of printing, the most powerful of all instruments, both for preserving and enlarging human knowledge, was invented. Such accumulation of unexampled advantages might well be contemplated with the pro-

foundest feelings of astonishment and admiration. But as I have already hinted, and as I mean yet more fully to illustrate, the old cause of misapplication attached itself to this sudden revelation of wealth, with a pertinacity no less striking than it had on former occasions exhibited. The third universal revolution in the history of science, and the spirit of modern Europe, lies nearer our own times. The prodigious improvements in the mathematics, and, through them, in all branches of natural philosophy, which took place in the seventeenth, and which have been carried on still farther in the eighteenth century, the extension of all mechanical knowledge, and the improvements in technical expedients, have been such as to give the direction of human life an almost entirely different appearance. Who can deny that this knowledge is in itself dignified and admirable, and that nothing can be more elevating to the human mind than a consciousness of superiority over the corporeal and sensible world, so well harmonizing with the original destination of our species? Had but this dominion over the external world been united with a correspondent dominion over ourselves—had but those physical and mathematical modes of thinking which now began to exert so powerful an influence not only over intellect, but also over manners, been kept in their proper sphere and station, we

should have had no reason to complain. The consequences of these modes of thinking and of the philosophy to which they have given rise, in regard to religion, morality, political and individual life, have been such, that the common opinion is, I believe, already very much against them, and that in a few years no farther difference of opinion respecting their tendency can be expected to exist.

I return to the fifteenth century. I have already mentioned the injury which the exclusive predilection for the literature and language of antiquity did, by checking the progress of improvement both in the vernacular languages of modern Europe, and in the poetry therein embodied. The errors and absurdities of this period should astonish us the less, when we reflect that in truth the whole history of modern intellect consists of little more than a narrative of one continuous contest between the old and foreign—invaluable, in so far as form and knowledge are concerned—and the new, the peculiar, and the national, from which the whole life and spirit of our active and effectual literature and poetry must ever be derived.

I think it extremely probable that several of the modern Latinists of the fifteenth century, in Italy, were actuated by a real desire of banishing the vulgar dialect, and re-establishing the old language of Rome in its life and activity. The mythology and

language of antiquity were not merely applied with great want of taste to new and Christian subjects; the abuse went so far as to deserve the name of impiety itself, for it is certain that many writers conceived it to be vulgar to talk of the Deity in the language of the Bible, and revived the plural "Gods" of the classics. The manners and modes of life of antiquity found most zealous imitators among the ecclesiastics of the Christian metropolis, nor were there wanting some who extended their partiality not only to the politics but to the religion of the old republics. But these errors never led to any serious consequences, and therefore it is no wonder their existence has well nigh been forgotten. The intimate knowledge of antiquity and decidedly Roman prejudices of one great writer of this age, Machiavelli, have produced effects much more lasting than the dreams of those more idle enthusiasts. He is the only writer not merely of Italy but of modern Europe, who can sustain a comparison in style and skill with the first historians of antiquity. Powerful, simple, and straight-forward like Cæsar, he combines the depth and rich reflection of Tacitus with a clearness and precision to which that great master was a stranger. He has followed no one writer as his model, but rather seems to be thoroughly penetrated with the spirit of antiquity, and to write as if under the influence of a second

nature with that strength, propriety, and life, which are the peculiar characteristics of the ancients. The art of his composition seems to be quite involuntary; his concern appears to extend no farther than the thought. But how are we to judge or to explain the political system of this great genius, which has attained in modern times so unfortunate a predominance? The portrait which he has given of an unprincipled tyrant, set forth as the example and manual of all princes and governments, is justified by some, on the ground that Machiavelli meant only to place before the eyes of the world a representation of the corrupted condition of the age and country in which he lived—leaving such a picture to produce its own natural effects upon the minds of those who might contemplate it. Perhaps it may be better explained by considering that though Machiavelli was both a politician and a moralist, his true and most essential character was that of a patriot. I believe that his object was to inspire the great Princes of Italy with the ambition of giving liberty to his country; and that in his opinion this was an object which ought to be pursued, even although it should be absolutely necessary to make use of those doubtful or even immoral means by which others had effected its degradation and subjection. He thought that the enemies of Italy should be fought with their own arms,

and that nothing was unfair which might be of advantage to his country. The shrewdness of his judgment is well exemplified in the short parallel between the French and the Germans, which he has left behind him. With a truly admirable acuteness he shows that the power of the empire was in his day vastly over-rated, and demonstrates, on the other hand, that the power of the French king was most formidably on the increase. However profound and striking Machiavelli's characteristic of the two nations may be, he cannot be accused of having expressed it with any appearance of flattery. The one nation, on the contrary, are satirized in the most unequivocal terms for faithlessness, vanity, and treachery, which he seems to consider as inseparable from them; while he reproaches the other with equal bitterness for that perverse love of freedom which, manifesting itself in nothing but disunion and distrust, had already, in his time, sapped the foundations of their empire, and whose baneful effects have been more openly displayed in the sequel.

His opinions concerning the other nations of Europe were such as the fortunes of Italy, Florence, and himself might well excuse. But the main principle which he has defended, namely, that it is proper to make use of immoral means in order to attain a good end, admits of no complete justifica-

tion. In truth the danger to Italy and to the world consisted far less in the iniquitous schemes of a few petty tyrants, than in the wide extension of those pernicious principles upon which these indeed acted, but to which the misdirected intellect of this refined Florentine gave a system and consistency which they had never before possessed.

The chief fault of Machiavelli consists, however, not in his defence of the principle that the end sanctifies the means, but in this, that he was the first who introduced into modern and Christian Europe the fashion of reasoning and deciding on politics exactly as if Christianity had had no existence, or rather as if there had been no such thing as a Deity or moral justice in the world. Before his day the common faith of Christianity had formed a bond of connection, and been considered as the fundamental principle of all government among the nations of Europe, and the peoples of Christendom regarded themselves as forming in some sort one family. The common opinion among mankind was, that as they themselves ought to serve their God, so it was their duty also to love and obey the princes appointed by heaven to rule over them; and that in this sense the right of kings was divine. All the doctrines of legislature, law, and government, still reposed upon the invi-

sible foundation of the church. Of all these things, of the whole domestic and political arrangements of European life, Machiavelli takes no notice; he is not contented with merely writing like an ancient; his thoughts are all fashioned upon the same model; he is an ancient politician of the most decisive and unhesitating order; he believes that power is the sole measure of right, with a faith that might have been worthy of Rome herself in her most violent days of conquest and usurpation. Justice and truth he considers as mere superfluous ornaments; and has no real respect excepting for intellectual strength and ability. That moral right should make no appearance in his writings is not to be wondered at, since it is his plan to regard men as if they owed no submission to any thing beyond themselves, as if they had no connection with their Maker. As there can be no such thing as individual worth and virtue, so it is quite evident there can be no political justice among those who disbelieve the existence of a Deity. Without that belief the utmost that can be hoped for is deceitfulness, hypocrisy, and hollowness of heart. When we are impressed with a sense of the existence of God, the whole of our thoughts and principles have acquired a dignity to which we could not otherwise aspire. The visible is every where dependent upon the unseen; and as the body is mov-



ed and regulated by the soul, so are men, nations, and states, held together by the belief and the reverence of the Godhead. The moment we take away this soul, this internal and universal principle of life, the whole composition is loosened and destroyed; if we obscure its light, and obstruct its influence upon the whole, the individual members of the organic, or of the political body, may still preserve some power of life with them, but this life will be narrow, separate, insignificant, misdirected, and destructive, rather than beneficial. It will form a principle of disunion, not a bond of harmony. When that chain of morality and religion, by which states and nations are connected together, has once fairly been broken, the destructive poisons of darkness, anarchy, and despotism, begin immediately to operate, and vice is ever ready to occupy the deserted station of virtue.

The political disunion and corruptions of Europe, whose influence, in spite of the steady resistance of many excellent and truly Christian princes, has been ever on the increase, cannot indeed be accounted for by the abilities, however great and however misapplied, of any one individual; the seeds of these evils lay much deeper than this. Still, however, he who devotes his talents to give principle, clearness, and form, to any existing engine of wickedness, he who renders its operations systematic,

and its effects consequently more pernicious, is an enemy to mankind; and in so far, it is impossible to deny that the indignation of posterity has been in some degree at least, the merited fate of Machiavelli.

The two great discoveries of the fifteenth century, printing and the compass, were attended by several others which have had no inconsiderable influence; such were the use of gunpowder and the manufacture of paper. As inventions both of these belong to a much earlier period, but their influence began now with their first application to purposes of practical use. The discoveries of this period, taken collectively, have been sufficient to give a totally new appearance to human society. The distance by which those nations of antiquity which were acquainted with the use of iron, and possessed, along with this, more or less knowledge of writing and of the finer metals, were separated from those barbarians who had no acquaintance with these means of connection between man and the earth, between nation and nation, between antiquity and posterity—these first instruments of the refinement and developement of our species;—this immeasurable distance is scarcely greater than that which separates the periods prior to the invention of printing and the compass, from those which have succeeded.

Even in the history of these inventions we find sufficient proof that the use to which men apply their discoveries is of far greater importance than the discoveries themselves. The compass had long before this time been known to other nations, and yet neither had the old continent been circumnavigated, nor the new discovered. Printing and paper had long before this period been used in China, for the purpose of multiplying gazettes, notices, and visiting-cards, without imparting any principle of activity to the benumbed spirit of the Chinese.

The invention of gunpowder was regarded, even after its use had been universally adopted, as altogether injurious and corrupting. Not only did poets, such as Ariosto, condemn it as an unhallowed invention, the enemy of personal bravery, and the future extirpator of all chivalry; the same outcry was repeated by the gravest generals and statesmen of the times. Yet nothing could be more silly than these complaints: true valour and virtue are always sure to find sufficient room to display themselves. With different manners, and in a new form of war, the modern—even the very latest times—have witnessed examples of devoted heroism well worthy of a place by the side of the most brilliant achievements of antiquity, or of the chivalric age. Yet upon the whole a discovery, which

has increased the certainty and rapidity of the destructive influences of war, and withal rendered these more systematic, cannot be reckoned among the most fortunate. In the very first age of its use, gunpowder did more harm than has since been in its power. But for it those robberies of the European nations which followed the first discovery of America, could scarcely have been polluted with so much blood and outrage. In this point of view it would almost seem as if some envious demon had attached to the glorious invention of the compass, an engine of evil, by way of turning even the best gifts of humanity to our destruction.

Even in regard to the use of paper, it may be doubted whether the operations of printing, as by its means extended, have really promoted the cause of science and intellect, or conduced to effects of a very opposite description. By means of this cheap material, the art of printing, in itself one of the most glorious and useful, has become prostituted in times of anarchy and revolution to the speedy and universal circulation of poisonous tracts and libels—things more destructive to the minds of the uneducated, than ever gunpowder was to the bodies of the undisciplined. Perhaps in making use of a somewhat rarer and more costly material, the press might have remained more true to its proper and original purpose—the preservation of the great

monuments of history, art, and science. Instead of this, the cheapness of the materials of printing has introduced a dangerous neglect of the old and genuine monuments of human intellect, and a still more dangerous influx of paltry and superficial compositions alike hostile to soundness of judgment, and purity of taste—a sea of frothy conceits, and noisy dullness, upon which the spirit of the age is tossed hither and thither, not without great and frequent danger of entirely losing sight of the compass of meditation, and the polar star of truth.

## LECTURE X.

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A FEW WORDS UPON THE LITERATURE OF THE NORTH AND EAST OF EUROPE—UPON THE SCHOLASTIC LEARNING AND GERMAN MYSTICKS OF THE MIDDLE AGE.

AS yet we have been almost entirely occupied with the literature of those of the modern nations which are settled in the Southern and Western districts of Europe,—the peoples whose dialects are either Teutonic or Romanic, or made up of a mixture of both, the Italians, the French, the Spaniards, and the English. The literature of these nations is beyond all doubt, both from its own nature, and from the wide-spread influence which it has exerted, by far the most remarkable and important. At the same time it would have greatly gratified myself, and very much tended to complete what it was my ambition to lay before you—I mean a full and national view of literature,—had I been able to speak at length concerning those other great nations which inhabit the Eastern and Northern

parts of our continent. Every separate and independent nation has the right, if I may so express it, of possessing a literature peculiar to itself; and no barbarism is in my opinion so hurtful as that which would oppress the language of a people and a country, or do any thing which tends to exclude them from reaching the higher orders of intellectual cultivation. It is mere prejudice, unworthy of rational and thinking men, which leads us to consider languages that have been neglected, or that are unknown to ourselves, as incapable of being brought to perfection. Some languages, no doubt, there are, which are in a certain degree unfavourable for poetry; a few which may perhaps be almost incompatible with any high exertions of that art: But I believe that there is no language which does not contain within itself the elements of perfect adaptation to all the really useful purposes of life, and to every important object of scientific writing in prose. Even although the literature of a particular nation may have exerted little influence over neighbouring peoples, the history of that nation's intellectual development, as this stands connected with its public weal—its fortunes—and its history, is, nevertheless, on its own account alone, a very interesting and a very instructive object of contemplation. Yet all I can do in regard to this matter amounts to little more than the expression of my sincere wish that it

had been within my power to carry my researches so far, as might have enabled me to lay before you a complete view of European literature. For I am now too old to have any remaining doubt upon my mind, that in the history of literature, exactly as in most other things, very little dependence is to be placed upon the testimonies and the opinions of others respecting matters, wherein the ignorance of languages prevents ourselves from being able to verify their statements. I must therefore be satisfied with a few very general reflections on these points, at this time when, in considering the epoch of a new literature and a resurrection of science, it might have seemed most necessary for me to complete my survey by a full examination of every nation and language into which Europe is divided.

The most favourable point of view from which such a general survey could be taken is certainly the sixteenth century—a period which forms as it were an isthmus of connection between the middle ages and modern times. So far as respects language itself, and the very great influence which that exerts over other peoples, the nations speaking Romanic dialects, had at this period a peculiar and very manifest advantage. These dialects are so closely connected with each other, and the mother idiom from which they are all derived, the Latin, at that time the common language of the west, that the acquisition of any



one of them is to those acquainted with another prodigiously more easy than that of any language radically different. It was on this account that even in the middle age itself, and long before the effects of extended commerce began to be felt, the knowledge of these dialects became far more widely diffused than that of the other Northern and Eastern languages of Europe. It must, however, be remarked, that Spain remained at all times cut off in some measure from the other districts of Europe, not more by geographical position, politics, constitution, and manners, than by her peculiarity both of language and of intellectual cultivation. That the peculiar language and cultivation of the Spaniards have attained within their own limits a very great degree of perfection, has been recognized of late years with more justice than formerly. The only relic of the old prejudice is the notion so prevalent among our critics, that the excellence of the Spanish language and literature has been almost entirely confined to poetry; whereas, as all well acquainted with the subject must know, one great advantage of the Spanish language, and I might add of the Spanish national character, consisted in this, that the prose of that language was much more early and had been much more excellently developed than in any other of the Romanic dialects. The Italian language, with the single exception of Ma-

chiavelli, was never applied with much happiness of effect to the purpose<sup>s</sup> of practical and political writing. The attempts at prose composition in the other Romanic dialects were all extremely unsuccessful. The French and English languages first received a formation adapted for practical utility and political eloquence in the seventeenth century; and perhaps the advantage of so applying them has always been confined to the capitals and the higher orders more than was the case with the Spanish. At a very early period indeed, the vernacular tongue of Spain was applied, and with the greatest success, to legislation and the most important concerns of social arrangement. Perhaps the very separation of the nation from the rest of Europe may have very much contributed to the early development of its language, which can boast of a very great number of well-written histories, and in which a manly vein of eloquence has continued even down to our own day, full of the most fiery spirit, clear, sharp, and intermingled on proper occasions with an abundance of exquisite wit and irony. In philosophy alone, Spain cannot boast of any names such as those which have appeared in Italy, Germany, England, and some other countries. In that department it must be admitted that she has produced no truly great writer.

The German language has at all times been of

more difficult acquisition than any one of the Romanic dialects, and on that account the knowledge of it has always been much more limited. This ignorance of our language among the other nations, has been the origin of not a little contempt for our literature and philosophy. Yet I have no sort of doubt that the place I have assigned to the German nation in this history of literature is one of which a careful examination of facts will sufficiently manifest the propriety. Although our language is less known than most others, yet all those who inquire with any profoundness of research, either into the history or the language of the Southern and Western nations, must at all times be compelled to cultivate an acquaintance with the German sources of knowledge; and these will all confess that along with German political institutions and German customs of domestic life, a very great portion of the spirit of German thought has also passed into all the other nations of Europe. A thorough knowledge of the middle ages and of their history is entirely unattainable without a knowledge of the language and literature of the Germans; for the superiority of France and England during the last two hundred years has not been more decided than was both the literary and political pre-eminence of Italy and Germany during the whole period of the middle ages. These were without any doubt at

that time the two first countries in the world. So far as our own country is concerned, it might be sufficient to mention the simple fact, that the art of printing—which was the greatest and the most important instrument of the revival of learning in the fifteenth century—and that mighty revolution in religion which gave a new form to the whole mind of man in the sixteenth century—were both German in their origin. But, without going so far back, the truth is, that if the German language be less happily developed for the purposes of business and political eloquence, than the English and the French, this defect is shared by the Italian language, and like it atones for the defect in those respects by its peculiar power in poetry. With regard to the higher uses of science, I believe it will be acknowledged by any foreigner acquainted with our books, that our superiority is clear and decisive over every language since the Greek. In the imitative arts wherein the other polished nations of Europe have very little distinguished themselves, the Germans occupy a place next and near to the Italians. In the modern literature which has sprung up among the different nations of Europe subsequent to the intellectual convulsions of the sixteenth and the first part of the seventeenth centuries, the language and mental cultivation of Germany have indeed been late to

distinguish themselves. But, at least so far as science, history, and philosophy, are concerned, the probability is that the latest literature will be the richest and the best. The praise of fertility at least will not be refused to us during the last half of the eighteenth century—a period with the literature and intellectual refinement of many other nations either of pause, of retrogression, or of complete corruption and decay. How defective we still are in many particular departments we are ourselves extremely well aware; but in my apprehension the time is not now at any great distance when an acquaintance with the language and literature of Germany will be looked upon as indispensably necessary to every man of polite education in Europe.

Of all the Northern and Eastern nations of Europe, the Scandinavian exerted, during the middle ages, the greatest and the most immediate influence over the poetry and thinking of the West. The influence which they had in the character of wandering Normans upon Europe, and its poetry, has already been noticed. They took a great share in the Crusades; and partook in every thing interesting, either in regard to reason or imagination, which was introduced or created in consequence of those memorable expeditions. The Icelanders traversed every part of Europe as scientific navigators, and collected in every quarter both facts and fic-

tions. The oldest pure fountain of the poets of the German nations, and the whole middle age had been preserved in their Edda; and now they brought back with them, into their Northern climate, the Christian and chivalrous poems of the Southern Europeans. In many of these—particularly in the heroic poems of the Germans—the resemblance to their own Northern sagas and personifications was very remarkable. These acquisitions they now transferred into their own language with peculiar delight and success. Some parts of what they borrowed—every thing which was in its origin heathenish and Northern, many particular creations of fancy, and in general all of the wonderful which had been derived from the old theology,—they appropriated to themselves with new force, effect, and feeling, on account of their own more intimate knowledge of the Edda. That marvellous which in the poetry of the Southern peoples had been a fleeting and trivial exercise of fancy, a mere idle ornament—acquired in the hands of Northern poets a deeper sense, a more affecting truth, and a more important signification. It was thus that the Northern versions of the Niebelungen came to possess, in some respects, the advantage even over the German heroic. The Icelanders, in this manner, and the Scandinavians in general, during the middle age, possessed a peculiar chi-

valrous poetry of their own—destined to experience the same fortune with that of the other nations of Europe; first to be diluted into prose romances, and then to be split into ballads. This last effect was produced in Denmark exactly as in England and Germany, and proceeded in a great measure from the same causes—I mean, from that interruption which occurred in the national traditions and recollections in consequence of the great changes that occurred both in the church and the state. The national poetry was left to be maintained by the common people alone, and was, in their hands, mutilated, corrupted, and degraded. I do not say this with any intention of stigmatising ballads as entirely useless; on the contrary, these compositions, in England, Scotland, Germany, and Denmark, although every where affording but a faint echo of the nobler poetry which preceded them, are still worthy of great attention both in a historical and in a poetical point of view. The old literature of the Scandinavians was one common to the whole of the North. A great change in its appearance seems to have resulted from the reformation; the vernacular historians, both of Denmark and Sweden, are full of complaints concerning the baneful effects produced upon their native languages by that immense influx of High Dutch books which was followed by the general adoption

of the tenets of the Saxon Luther. The later literature of Sweden in particular, is often alleged by the critics of that country as furnishing a melancholy proof, that even a nation the most full of character and feeling is incapable of creating a rich and independent literature, if it continues to show an unceasing predilection for foreign idioms and models. The Danish literature, on the other hand, of these latest years, has been rapidly developing itself at the same time with our own,—in a manner quite independent, but yet, as might naturally have been expected, with a greater leaning to the Germans and the English than to the French.

In looking back one can scarcely help observing a certain resemblance between the old situation of Scandinavia before the reformation and that of Spain. Each of these countries possessed a high degree of political and intellectual refinement, and each remaining apart as it were from the rest of Europe, formed within itself a complete and distinct whole. The Normans, like the Spaniards, had their share in the universally chivalrous spirit of the middle age, which was indeed by no means foreign to their own particular antiquities. They were also acquainted with the South of Europe by means of travelling. But neither the inhabitants of the Scandinavian, nor those of the Spanish peninsula,



were ever engaged in any commerce with any of the other European nations, of so intimate and multifarious a nature as that which connected France with England from the eleventh till the fifteenth, or Italy with Germany from the ninth till the sixteenth century. The literature of the Scandinavians was also entirely directed to subjects of national interest, such as poetry, history, or the like. Like the Spaniards they paid little attention to higher departments of philosophy; at least no remarkable work of a purely scientific nature was ever produced by them. It is quite evident that four countries alone in the centre of Europe, Italy, Germany, France, and England, as they have occupied the first place in the political history of modern Europe, so in the history of literature also have they distinguished themselves to such a degree, that from the time of the first awakening of the European intellect under Charlemagne, down to the present day, it is scarcely possible to point out a single great incident in the annals of philosophy, a single remarkable discovery, extension, retrogression, or error—or in short to fix upon a single great name in the history of philosophy which does not belong to one of them. The great and distinct differences between the philosophy of one of these nations and that of another, and between that of the same nation in different ages of

its history, together with both the causes and the effects of the differences, I shall endeavour to lay before you in due time.

Among the Slavonic nations Russia possessed very early in the middle age a national historian in her vernacular tongue; an invaluable advantage and a sure token of the commencement of national cultivation. That this cultivation had been more universal and extensive in Russia previous to the time of the Mogul devastations, is sufficiently proved by her flourishing commerce, her close connection with Constantinople, and many other historical circumstances. But to say nothing of other causes, her subjection to the Greek church was alone sufficient during the middle age, and is in some measure sufficient, even in our own time, to keep Russia politically and intellectually at a distance from the rest of the Western world. Of those Slavonic nations which belonged altogether to this part of Europe, the Bohemians already possessed under their Charles IV. a full and rich literature, a more near acquaintance with which, above all for historical purposes, might be very desirable. From all that we know of it, this literature appears to have followed the paths of history and science much more than that of poetry. That the Polish language, whose fitness for the purposes of poetry has been much celebrated of late years, did, even

in the early part of the middle age, possess a treasure of national poems—is hinted by several writers, and is extremely probable from the character of the nation. But I myself am not in possession of the means either to verify or to disprove it. Should it, however, turn out that such is not the fact, and that the Slavonic languages and nations of the middle age were entirely destitute of any such rich and peculiar poetry as that with which the nations making use of Germanic and Romanic dialects were endowed,—even if this should be so, it may perhaps be no difficult matter to give a very rational account of the phenomenon. The Slavonics, in the *first* place, took either no part at all, or at least a very slight part indeed, in the adventures of the Crusades. *Secondly*, The spirit of chivalry, although not perhaps originally foreign and unknown, attained at no period the same penetrating and commanding power over them as over the other nations of Europe. And *lastly*, it may be that the peculiar theology possessed by the Slavonics before the adoption of Christianity, was less rich and picturesque than the old Gothic system of superstitions, or at least that their heathenish ideas were more speedily and entirely eradicated by the prevalence of the true faith.

There is no doubt that the Hungarians possessed, even in times of very remote antiquity, a peculiar

heroic poetry, in their national language. One great and favourite subject of this poetry was the migration and the conquest of the country under The Seven Leaders. It is evident from many passages in the Hungarian chronicles that even after the introduction of Christianity these legends of the heathenish time were not entirely forgotten. There is at least every reason to think that those writers have actually copied from ancient poems of that sort. One such poem, indeed, a Hungarian scholar, by name Revaj, has rescued from oblivion; its subject is the arrival of the Madyari in Hungary. But the existence of many such poems might easily be gathered from the perusal of the chronicle of the Royal Secretary, as he is called, Bela—the same person who fills so considerable a place both in the history and jurisprudence of his country. The materials upon which this chronicler wrought were, I have no doubt, historical heroic ballads, which he has translated very diligently into prose, and interspersed with abundance of opinions, and would-be explanations from the cooler coinage of his own brain. But I am far from approving of the severity with which critics in history are accustomed to treat the good secretary. We should value the book for the relics which it embodies, sorely mutilated as they no doubt are, of the heroic legends and poetry of the Madyari; and not

look in it for what it would be absurd enough to expect we should find in any such place, philosophical inquiries into political affairs or skilful elucidations of historical difficulties. Another theme of the Hungarian poets was Attila, whom they uniformly represented as a king and hero of their own nation. In these chronicles we find abundant proof that Attila and the Gothic heroes associated with his name in the *Nibelungen-lied* and the *Heldenbuch*, were equally celebrated in the language of Hungary, and that poems upon these subjects were in existence down to a period comparatively near ourselves. It is probable that the destruction of the whole of this ancient poetry may be referred to the period of Mathias Corvin, who attempted at once to change his Hungarians into Latins and Italians, the natural consequence of which was to bring into comparative neglect the old legends and poems of the country. The fate which befel Hungary in the fifteenth century would have befallen Germany in the eighteenth, had a certain illustrious monarch of that period, who, like Mathias, thought foreign literature alone worthy of his attention, been possessed of an influence as great and undisputed over Germany, as Corvin had over Hungary. Whatever of the old legends of Hungary and of the monuments of its language and poetry escaped the barbarism of this foreign refinement, fell entire-

ly to the ground during the time of the Turkish invasions. The Hungarians have retained nothing but their predilection for historical heroic poetry. Several great masters of that art have appeared among them during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries; and now, in our own time, there has arisen one more illustrious than any of these, Kisfalud; who has devoted himself in his mature age to the national legends of his country with the same ardour and feeling which distinguished the amatory poems of his youth.

I close these sketches, these remarks upon the literature and language, more or less known and understood, of the different European peoples, with one general reflection which I have already thrown out upon a previous occasion. Every independent and distinct nation has, as I believe, the right to possess a peculiar literature; that is; to possess an improved and cultivated national language, for without that no degree of intellectual refinement can become truly national and effectual, nay the greatest, being embodied in a foreign vehicle, cannot fail to be tinged with a certain stain of barbarism. It is indeed a very absurd way of showing our partiality for our own language to desist from learning any other, or even to deny the advantages which some foreign languages may possess over our own. Besides the ancient languages, there are se-

veral of the modern dialects so useful in regard to general cultivation, that whatever department a man chooses for himself, he cannot fail to find one or other of them absolutely necessary for his purposes. The external relations of life have besides rendered the acquisition of some of them indispensable. The use of a foreign dialect in legislation and in courts of law is at all times distressing, and I might even say unjust; the use of a foreign dialect in diplomacy and in the social intercourse of polished life, can never fail to produce injurious effects upon the vernacular language. But when the custom of so using a foreign dialect has once been fairly introduced, the evil is, at least for individuals, an irremediable one. It then becomes the duty of the whole cultivated and higher order of society to come forward together, to point out by their influence the proper route between two extremes of entirely neglecting and exclusively studying foreign languages; to give to necessity that which she requires, but never to forget what is due to our country. The care of the national language I consider as at all times a sacred trust and a most important privilege of the higher orders of society. Every man of education should make it the object of his unceasing concern, to preserve his language pure and entire, to speak it so far as is in his power, in all its beauty and perfection. He should be acquaint-

ed generally, not superficially, not only with the political history, but with the language and literature of his country, and so far is the study of foreign languages from being hostile to all this, that, without such study I believe no man can acquire the degree of perspicacity or the facility of expression necessary for the purposes to which I have alluded. But the use of a foreign dialect in society should certainly be limited to the strictest bound of necessity. The obligation to watch over the language should be most sacred in the eyes of those who stand highest in the society; for the more rank, and wealth, and consequence any individual possesses, the more has the nation a right to expect from this individual that he shall contribute to the utmost of his power to the preservation and cultivation of that which is hers. A nation whose language becomes rude and barbarous, must be on the brink of barbarism in regard to every thing else.

A nation which allows her language to go to ruin, is parting with the last half of her intellectual independence, and testifies her willingness to cease to exist. The danger is no doubt great when a national language is assailed on the one hand by a systematic plan for its corruption, and on the other by a foolish and affected fashion which encourages from mere silliness the use of a foreign dialect. But, in such matters as these, the danger ceases to be, the



moment we are sensible of its existence. In every thing which depends not upon the spirit of a moment, but the perseverance of an age, the victory is always sure to be obtained by the universal and calmly progressive resistance of men of sense.

From this general survey of the different nations of Europe, I return to the thread of my history. The great improvements and discoveries which have given to the science and literature of modern Europe a new form and direction, belong, properly speaking, to the eighteenth century. But that intellectual cultivation which attained its mighty developement in the eighteenth, received its shape and form in the sixteenth century through the reformation. It was the moving spirit of that event which, both in the one of these periods, and in the other, determined the way in which the intellectual cultivation should run, the end it should strive to reach, and the limits within which it should be confined. In both periods the apparent subjects of dispute and tumult were matters at first sight little connected either with refinement or with literature—for these were either politics, and the ecclesiastical constitution, the being, the limits, and the exertions of spiritual powers, or those mysteries of religion which lie too deep even for the investigation of philosophers themselves. The reformation, nevertheless, although these were apparently its

objects, had the effect of shaking and altering the whole of Europe, and thus came to exert a very great and multifarious, although certainly an indirect, influence over literature and over all the exertions of intellect in whatever way applied. This influence was in part salutary, in part hurtful. To the first I refer the universal extension of the study of Greek, and the other ancient languages which now came to be considered as indispensable in a religious point of view, and which began therefore to be cultivated if not more zealously at least far more universally in all the Protestant countries—in Holland, in England, and in the North of Germany. The love for the ancient languages had in Germany, and above all in Italy, been such even before the reformation, that so far as these countries are concerned, its influence was merely an additional circumstance in their favour. The contests and rivalries of the contending parties were perhaps productive of little effect in relation to the true objects of their researches; for religion is a matter of faith and feeling rather than of disputation and dialectic combating. In a political point of view the effect of the great ferment has been far more happy; but perhaps even here the effect has been an indirect rather than an immediate advantage, and that too discovered, like most other advantageous consequences of the reformation, not instantly (as its evil

effects were) but long after, when the agitated elements had had leisure to subside into a calm. The effects upon the imitative arts were pernicious. I do not allude to those operations of active destruction which took place here and there, but rather to that more general evil which resulted from the arts being compelled to depart from their natural and original destination. The civil disturbances and wars which ensued, were, in like manner, as usually happens, more destructive to the arts than to literature. It was probably in consequence of these events, that the national painting of Germany, which had begun to flourish with so much success in the hands of Albert Durer, Lucas Cranach, and Holbein, stopped before it had time to reach the eminence it was fitted to attain. These great men were themselves contemporaries of the reformation, but they had been educated in the time before it took place, and in their art they found no followers. In the Protestant Netherlands painting became devoted to subjects of lesser importance, and so employed, in spite of the utmost perfection in execution, it could never approach the superior power and effect of the old painting which had been devoted to religion. In general there was produced a most unfortunate rupture between men and their ancestors; and these, not contented with laying aside the contested points of faith or eccle-

siastical government, thought it necessary to forget the whole middle age, and to despise the history, the art, and the poetry, with which its recollections were so intimately blended and united. The loss to Germany was peculiarly unfortunate. Such a break and throwing aside of the intellectual inheritance of our forefathers could scarcely indeed fail to be produced by a revolution so sudden and so entire. But, now that all the causes of the bigotry have ceased to operate with any violence, it is time surely that we lay it aside, that we begin to think liberally, and no longer to indulge in any contempt either of the art or the refinement of the middle ages. The principle, that the reformation was productive of liberty of thought, is one that can scarcely be defended now. The universal freedom, the full emancipation of intellect at the end of the seventeenth and eighteenth century, does not at least belong to the immediate consequences of the reformation; it was produced by a great mixture of causes over and above the reformation, and after all there is not a little reason to doubt whether the unfettered licence it has introduced has been so salutary and praiseworthy as we have sometimes heard. The near and immediate effect of the reformation upon philosophy and freedom of thinking, was one of constraint. The idea of such liberality as that which prevailed in Italy and Germany under the

Medici, Leo X. and Maximilian, was a thing entirely unknown among the zealous Protestants of the sixteenth and of the first part of the seventeenth century. The establishment of such tyranny, political and intellectual, as that of a Henry VIII. of a Philip II. or of a Cromwell, was only rendered possible by means of the reformation. He who is placed at the head of a new party, and a great revolution, at once religious and political, possesses a power so unlimited over thought and intellect, that it is at least entirely the effect of his own choice if he does not abuse it. To the defenders of the old faith, on the contrary, under a Philip II. and under several of the French kings, every mean appeared allowable which could contribute to check the farther diffusion of the new opinions. Should any one attempt to prove the beneficial tendency of the reformation by quoting instances of persecution from the times preceding it—such as the burning of John Huss and Jerome of Prague—my answer is, that these cruel enormities were in part at least the effects of political animosity, or if that be not sufficient, that abundance of similar horrors may be found after the reformation in the history of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and that too on both sides. The first great self-reflecting mind, the first writer of great and active power, whom the Protestants possessed after the

period of the first ferment—Hugo Grotius himself, living in the freest country then existing, could not escape imprisonment and persecution. On the other hand, the dangerous abuses which some had made of liberty led to narrow-mindedness and oppression on the part of rulers otherwise well disposed to be liberal. In Italy, in particular, a speedy termination was put to the then rapidly increasing progress of philosophy; insomuch that a fact soon came to be doubted, which seems to me abundantly clear and evident, I mean the natural capacity of that ingenious nation for the higher exertions of intellectual inquiry. The most distinguished philosophical talents possessed by Italy in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, took a turn so unfortunate that they have been almost entirely lost to their country—their doctrines having become adverse not only to the spirit of the Christian church, but to all those principles of moral belief without which there is no safety in the social intercourse of men. In the world of intellect, as well as in that of politics, the sure consequence of anarchy is despotism, and oppression is again invariably the harbinger of lawlessness. So that there is a perpetual flux and reflux from the one of these extremes to the other, both alike dangerous, unless some third and higher influence intervenes, or the whole bond of constitution is renewed

When certain panegyrists of the Reformation represent this as having been in itself alone a step forward of the human mind, and of philosophy—a deliverance from error and prejudice—they are just taking for granted the very fact upon which we are at issue. One should think also that men might be rendered more cautious in the use of such expressions, when they reflect that by the example of many great nations—of Spain—of Italy—of Catholic France during the seventeenth century—and of Southern Germany even in these latest times—it can be proved with little hazard of contradiction that a very high, nay that the very highest degree of intellectual cultivation is perfectly compatible with the belief of those doctrines which the friends of Protestantism decry as antiquated prejudices. The admirers of the reformation should lay less stress upon its consequences; for of these some were, as themselves admit, altogether unhappy, many remote and assisted by the co-operation of other causes. Besides the effects are perhaps in no case perfectly decisive as to the nature of the thing itself. The bigoted Catholics, on the other hand, who despise the reformation, and abhor it as altogether irreconcilable with their own religious opinions, should at least recollect that the later, if not the more immediate effects of that mighty convulsion, have been beneficial and salutary. If we sur-

vey the history of the world with the feeling of belief, if we are willing to recognize in the fortunes and fates of mankind the interposing hand of Providence, we shall perceive the same spectacle in every direction. Everywhere we shall see men presented with the happiest opportunities, intreated as it were, to do good, to know the truth, and to reach the eminence of true greatness and true excellence; intreated however, not compelled; for their own co-operation is necessary if they would be what fits the destiny of their nature. Rarely, very rarely, do men make the proper use of the means they are intrusted to employ; often do they pervert them to the most dangerous abuses, and sink even deeper into their ancient errors. Providence is, if we may so speak, ever struggling with the carelessness and the perversity of man; scarcely by our own guilt and blindness have we been plunged into some great and fearful evil, ere the benefactor of our nature causes unexpected blessings to spring out of the bosom of our merited misfortune—warnings, and lessons, expressed in deeds and events, furnishing us with ever returning admonitions to bethink ourselves in earnest, and depart no more from the path of truth.

With art or poetry Protestantism disclaimed, at first any connection; its effects upon both were injurious and depressing; history and grammar were,



in consequence of the reformation, both studied more accurately, and diffused more extensively; but with philosophy the change of religion stood in the most intimate connection.—But perhaps this may be no improper place for giving a short sketch of the history of philosophy, both before the reformation and in the first century after it—I mean, of course, only in so far as philosophy exerted a real influence upon the universal intellect of the time.

I have already called your attention to the most remarkable of those philosophical geniuses produced by England, Italy, and France, in the earlier period previous to the twelfth century. Germany too was fruitful in such productions, and may boast of an almost uninterrupted series of them from the reign of Charlemagne down to the reformation, and even after that event. Upon the whole, barrenness is of all reproaches the one least deserved by the modern Europeans, even by those of the middle age. If we must blame them, it should rather be for the mixture of useless and unprofitable weeds which they have allowed to spring up along with their good grain, more particularly when any new field has been added to the territories of science. It was thus that along with the mathematical, chemical, and medical learning which they borrowed from the Arabians, they admitted from the same quarter the trash of Astrology and Alchemy; and

it was thus that, with the knowledge of Aristotle, whom they considered as the perfection of all merely human wisdom, there grew up a whole wilderness of dialectical hair-splittings and sophistical artifices, of pretty nearly the same nature with those which had formerly infested the Greeks. The best thing in the philosophy of Aristotle is the spirit of criticism. But to perceive or comprehend this, required an enlarged and complete knowledge of antiquity, such as was in those days quite impossible, and as is, even in our own time, extremely rare. The critical spirit of Aristotle deserted him in the region of metaphysics alone, because there the only two guides which he followed, reason and experience, were incapable of leading him aright. From an absurd reliance on those metaphysics, which even in the works of the great master himself are unintelligible, arose that system of philosophy which has received the name of the Scholastic. The evil occasioned by this was, however, abundantly atoned for by the good effects of the study of the practical physics of Aristotle, particularly after the time of Albertus Magnus. That the morals of Aristotle were an important acquisition to the middle ages I can by no means allow; the value of that system to us consists chiefly in the illustration it affords of the manners, the domestic life, and the political institutions of the Greeks. Long before the works of

Aristotle began to be studied, our ancestors possessed a system of Ethics incomparably purer and better than his in the Bible; and their acquaintance with him only tempted them to deform that superior system by ingrafting upon it a great variety of superfluous niceties and classifications. Of the very pernicious effect which the Aristotelic system is capable of producing even upon a very refined and learned age, Spain can supply us with one very striking example. In the sixteenth century, when the great question of the treatment of the Americans was agitated, the minds of many of her best reasoners, and among others of one who, in every other respect, was a very excellent man, Sapolveda, were so infected with those notions of slavery so prevalent among the Greek authors, that, principally by their means, measures were adopted in the national councils equally repugnant to the principles of natural justice and to the express precepts of Christianity.

We are not however to suppose that all the evils of the scholastic system were occasioned entirely by the study of Aristotle. At first the opposition of the church to his doctrines was greatly enhanced on account of a crowd of most dangerous doctrines and opinions which began to come into fashion about the same time with those properly belonging to his philosophy. This much nevertheless must be ad-

mitted, that from the history of the Arabs, no less than from that of the middle ages in Europe and of the sixteenth century, there is reason to believe that the two notions of conceiving the Deity to be a mere animating principle of the universe, and of denying the personal immortality of the soul, appear to be, if not necessarily, at least were generally connected with a zealous adoption of Aristotelianism. However this might have been, the impulse of the age became in a short time irresistible, and the dominion of Aristotle could no longer be avoided. Christian philosophers, alike desirous of supporting the cause of truth, and of extending the limits of knowledge, then applied themselves to the study of Aristotle, in the hope of at least turning aside the stream which they found it was now impossible to turn back. It is no easy matter to form a proper general judgment concerning these men who, at least in so far as talents were concerned, deserved the very highest estimation. The false and scholastic turn of their philosophy was the natural consequence of the ancient sophistry (bequeathed as that was and too inconsiderately accepted), of the original defectiveness of the Aristotelic metaphysics, and the Arabian commentaries,—above all, of that spirit of sect which was the animating principle of the age, and from which (so enticing were its allurements), even they who were

most aware of its existence could seldom keep themselves entirely free. This spirit of sect and division was nourished and inflamed very powerfully by the universities, wherein many thousands of striplings were yearly educated in the very atmosphere of contention, and taught to consider the violence of disputation as the highest eminence of human merit. For the best things which the philosophers of the middle ages possessed, they were indebted either to Christianity, which at all times secured them from falling into the most dangerous species of errors, and to the greatness of their own genius and understanding. But after all, there can be no greater mistake than to suppose that what we commonly understand by the name of scholastic, that is the unprofitable waste of intellect in empty ideas, and unintelligible formulas, was an error peculiar to the middle ages. The evil had already displayed itself to excess in the philosophy of the Greeks, and that too in the most flourishing age of its cultivation. The same thing may be said of modern times; for not from Germany alone, but from France and England also, there could be no difficulty in producing abundance of examples—very often in the persons of those very men who have declaimed the most loudly against the scholastic philosophy, and against the Stagyrte. It is only requisite that we look to the essence of the

evil, and that we do not allow ourselves to hold sophistry to be less dangerous, merely because it presents itself in a form of greater skill and elegance.

The prevalence of empty ideas and meaningless words is a malady incident to human reason, which never fails to make its appearance the moment we desert the path of truth; in my opinion its most pernicious influences are exerted in active life by means of the distorted artifices of eloquence, and not in the retired and formal exercises of the schools. In every case, however, the spirit of sect is its inevitable consequence.

The philosophy of the middle age may be said to have been defective, chiefly because it was not thoroughly Christian; because the intellect, knowledge, and ideas of mankind, were not sufficiently penetrated with the spirit of our religion. In the philosophy of the modern Europeans, which these inherited as a legacy from the ancients, there are two great masters to be followed, and each is calculated to lead those that put confidence in his direction into a particular train of errors. On the one hand, there is the defect to which I have already alluded, that over-rationalism to which men are led by Aristotle and the ancient dialectics. The other is the Platonic and visionary system of error into which men are very apt to fall, whenever thought and faith overshoot those limits which are necessary to the right

exertion of every human faculty. From this proceeded the second species of philosophy common in the middle age, the mystic. So long as men confined themselves to the subjects of religious feeling and conscience, there is no doubt that this philosophy was not merely an excuseable but a very excellent guide. But its defectiveness was very apparent when they attempted to apply it to matters of science. Platonism, connected as it was with a host of Oriental mysteries, public and concealed, gave the fancy too much room for play, and in natural science in particular, the adoption of its tenets was almost always coupled with a belief in astrology, and a leaning to the study of magic. This was above all common in Germany. I may be the more easily excused for saying so, since, in our own days, there have occurred many symptoms of a tendency to recur to these errors. As in former times pious men began the histories of their lives with a prayer to God, or a religious sentiment or aspiration, so it has once more come in fashion to commence memoirs with a scheme of nativity, or some astrological conjecture\*. The speculations of natural philosophers may certainly select, without offence, any subjects which promise either knowledge or amusement to those that pursue them. I am not dispos-

\* Schlegel alludes to the first paragraph of Goethe's Life.

ed to throw entire ridicule even upon the study of secret influences, when it is kept in its proper place. But the application of such pursuits to the business of active life, and the belief that human destinies can in any degree be regulated by the position of the stars, are absurdities which deserve to be treated with something more severe than ridicule itself. The pernicious effect of a firm belief in the potency of these mysterious influences, the total ruin of all moral and religious principle which such a belief brings along with it, has already been depicted with terrible vigour by the tragic pencil of Schiller in his *Wallenstein*. Easy as is the abuse, and dangerous the partaking of such things, they have been dealt in by neither few nor inconsiderable persons. An Albertus Magnus, a mathematician of the fifteenth century, such as Nicolas of Cusa, a pious bishop, such as Trithemius, the first of all Orientalists, Reuchlin himself, confessed, without scruple, their hankering after the possession of secrets which can never be revealed to man. It would be as unjust as foolish to deny the merits of these great men, to call in question their genius, their knowledge, or their piety, on account of their addiction to follies which, in our own day, we have seen so nearly revived. But all the dabblers in the occult sciences were not men of this kind; the facility with which such pursuits could



be associated with the most profligate schemes of quackery and charlatanery is too apparent in the history of the times. It may be sufficient for my purpose to mention the name of Agrippa: Even Paracelsus himself was not free from some such errors. But Germany possessed, in these early days, many mystic philosophers, who devoted themselves entirely to the feelings of religion. No modern language was so soon applied to the purposes of the higher philosophy, and to spiritual subjects, as ours.

There were, from the thirteenth century, down to the time of the reformation, very many writers of this kind both in High and Lower Dutch. They were connected with each other, and formed a sort of school, and called themselves the servants of wisdom, or the heavenly Sophia, understanding by this name that divine and sublime truth which was the object of their ambition, and to their love of which they willingly sacrificed their lives. I shall, out of a great number, mention only one whose works were of great importance in the formation of our language. This is the preacher, or the philosopher, Tauler, who received, long after the reformation, the emulous praises both of Catholics and Protestants, but who has at last yielded to the common destiny of oblivion. The Scholars of Alsace, who, although their country has long

been politically annexed to France, still show, by the diligence and depth of their inquiries into our history and our language, that they are determined, by no means, to part with their character of Germans, have had the merit, in our own time, of recalling the public attention to this forgotten sage, and the very high importance of his works, at least so far as language is concerned. If we compare his writings with those upon similar subjects, composed in Luther's time, or even a century later, we shall find their superiority as manifest as is that of the harmonious love-poems of the thirteenth century, and the *Nibelungen-lied*, over the rude verses of the sixteenth century. In this respect also the elder time was by no means the more rude, but as its spirit was better, so its language also was purer than that of the age which came after.

When critics reproach our nation with a tendency to mysticism, they are probably not aware how old the failing is. It would be easy to show that we have been equally guilty of it ever since the time of Charlemagne. But whether the reproach be really well founded, or whether that which is the subject of it be not rather deserving of praise than of blame, I shall not take upon me, at the present time, to decide.

In the philosophy of the middle age, as in that of the more modern times, the strong and distinct

influence of national character is abundantly visible. In the older, exactly as in the later times, France and England were distinguished for the production of great thinkers, great doubters, and great sophists. The Italians were chiefly remarkable for their strict adherence to the truths of our religion; but they also, like the Germans, had a propensity to the higher, the more spiritual, and the more mystical kind of philosophy. The leaning to Platonism may be traced even in their poets. In one word, that philosophy of experience and reason, whose greatest master among the ancients was Aristotle, had the greatest number of followers during the middle ages, as well as more lately, in France and England. In this respect these two nations, in spite of their political rivalry, coincide at bottom in their views and opinions, much more closely than at first sight might be imagined. A propensity to the other and more Platonic species of philosophy has, on the other hand, distinguished both the Italians and the Germans, the one the most remarkable nation for love of art, and the other for depth of feeling; insomuch, that widely different as they are in origin, language, and manners, they have at all times been connected together by a certain sympathy and community of attachments.

## LECTURE XI.

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GENERAL REMARKS ON THE PHILOSOPHY OF THE TIMES IMMEDIATELY PRECEDING AND FOLLOWING THE REFORMATION—POETRY OF THE CATHOLIC NATIONS, THE SPANIARDS, THE PORTUGUESE, AND THE ITALIANS—GARCILASO, ERCILLA, CAMOËNS, TASSO, GUARINI, MARINO, AND CERVANTES.

THE state of universal thought, and the progress of philosophy, immediately before the reformation, and in the first century after it, formed the last subjects of our attention. The real result of our inquiries may be comprised in the following general remarks.

Throughout the whole of Europe, before the restoration of ancient learning and the reformation in religion, that empty logical system of words, which went by the name of Aristotle, was adopted almost universally by the learned; and, without any exception whatever, by all the public seminaries of instruction. In Germany, however, and afterwards in Italy, there sprung up, during the fifteenth century,

by the side of this dead philosophy of words, another and a higher species of philosophy, which coincided in part with the system of Plato, and in part with that of the Orientals. In particular things there is no doubt that this new system led the way to error; but, upon the whole, at least its principles were just, and, at all events, it was both richer in import and more profound in its views than the other. We may see the proof of its superiority even in the manner wherein it was studied, and in the persons of those by whom it was adopted. The seat of its sway was not in the universities and in the schools, its adherents formed, properly speaking, no sect; it deserved, in fact, the name of philosophy, according to the oldest signification of the word, a love of wisdom, sought and diffused for its own sake alone, by men who felt within them the irresistible vocation to the pursuit of truth. The greatest naturalists and mathematicians, the most profound masters of Greek learning, and the best Orientalists of the fifteenth century, both in Germany and Italy, belonged to the followers of this new system. The renewed acquaintance with the literature of Greece had, on the whole, no other effect upon this mystical and more Platonic mode of philosophizing, but that of affording to it new materials and new nourishment out of the innumerable treasures and monuments of ancient wisdom;

new means of enrichment, and new instruments of bolder developement. These advantages were, in some measure, counterbalanced by the simultaneous introduction of many new errors, or rather the revival of the forgotten dreams of new Platonism and the Orientals. By the restoration of ancient literature, the then prevalent species of philosophy, gained additional extent of knowledge, but an influx of visionary opinions accompanied the change, and upon the whole the power which was received was capable of being turned to evil as well as to good.

On the other species of philosophy, the Aristotelic, the effect was still greater. As yet this system had never been studied or comprehended in its purity, but always mingled with a variety of Platonic notions, and in some measure reduced to a sort of subjection to the doctrines of Christianity. But now the opinions of Aristotle began to be sought for in the original language, and to be viewed in connection with the whole system of Grecian cultivation; and the change could not fail to be extremely favourable at least in regard to form. The external part of the scholastic philosophy was at all events removed, and that which remained learned to clothe itself in a form not so entirely unworthy of the classical elegance of antiquity and the critical acuteness of the Stagyrice. But the better and the deeper that the spirit of the ancient philosophy

was comprehended, the more frequently did it happen that individual students were betrayed into the adoption of such consequences of their system as are irreconcilable with religion and morality; as for example, the dogma of establishing as first cause, in the room of God, a mere principle of universal existence, and the other equally dangerous one, of denying the personal immortality of the soul. These errors were abundantly common among the followers of Aristotle, particularly in Italy, during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. The attempts to renew some of the other systems of ancient philosophy, such as the Stoic, which were made about the same time, were productive of much less effect upon the general progress of philosophy. Plato and Aristotle have so distinctly marked out the two great paths of human thought and science, that they have remained, and always must remain, the master-guides of all succeeding generations. The other systems of antiquity are valuable, for the most part, only because they resemble one or other of these; they are slight deviations and by-paths, which soon return again into the main roads. It was for this reason that the plans for renewing Stoicism, or any other of the lesser systems, had very inconsiderable success, and produced indeed very little effect of any kind, except that they could not fail to stimulate thought,

and increase yet more the general ferment of opinions. Of all these systems, the worst alone, that of Epicurus and of pure materialism, which traces the origin of every thing to the collision of corporeal atoms, began to meet with some success in the seventeenth century, and in the eighteenth made such progress as might entitle its adherents to say that they belonged to a sect.

In common language we often hear the epoch of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries called a restoration or a second birth of the sciences. A restoration it undoubtedly was, at least in respect of that renewed acquaintance with Greek literature and antiquity, by means of which, if the historical knowledge of these matters was not indeed rendered perfect, it received at least incalculable improvement. But I can by no means approve of calling it a second birth of the human intellect and of the sciences, for I should consider that name as due not to such a change as amounts only to an increase of wealth, and is produced by any external circumstances, but to one which consists of an awakening out of previous death, and breaks out from the roused energies of internal life. Such an inward, a living, and a total change upon philosophy as this, was not even produced by the reformation; for after it, as before, the Aristotelic and Platonic systems still continued to be the two main divisions



of all science. Yet the reformation exerted a mighty influence upon the future progress, the development, and the extension of both systems. With those Platonic-Oriental doctrines which were before him, and during his lifetime, so prevalent in Germany, the acquaintance of Luther himself seems to have been extremely slight; such as it was, it helped him to a more cordial hatred of the scholastic system and of Aristotle, of whom he used to speak with great contempt as "a dead heathen." Nevertheless the best friend and follower of Luther, Melancthon, was of a very different way of thinking; it was indeed chiefly by his means that the authority of the improved scholastic system, and of Aristotle, was re-established in its supremacy. The cause of this was as follows; that higher and more spiritual philosophy which, wherever it loses sight of truth, is the most effectual means of introducing all sorts of visionary error, had this effect to a very remarkable extent in Germany during the anarchical times of the reformation. An universal mistrust of it was the consequence. The Aristotelic philosophy regained its predominant influence over both parties, in Spain as well as in Germany, for this ancient system of forms, the less spirit it had, the more easily was it bent and accommodated to the purposes of either sect, and the dogmas of either

creed. Although, however, this system was now united with a somewhat superior knowledge of nature, and with better skill in language and antiquity, the evils of which it had formerly been productive still adhered to it; it continued to be, after all, a logical word-system, and near at hand as its extinction appeared to be even during the fifteenth century, the effects of this favourable moment were now sufficient to secure the protraction of its existence in every cultivated country of Europe down to the end of the seventeenth century. In Italy the bolder species of philosophy, which there assumed, it must be allowed, the appearance of the most dangerous and violent opposition, was now oppressed, and many most distinguished talents fell a sacrifice to the struggle which ensued. In Germany and England the higher philosophy was not, it is true, altogether oppressed, but it certainly was discouraged, and even persecuted, and became, at all events, entirely excluded from the sphere of the learned. With so much the greater zeal was it cultivated by individuals of the lower orders of society, and extended in other quarters by the ministration of secret associations. In either of these ways it could not fail to be corrupted, and degraded, and kept back from that universal developement, and effectual influence to which it might otherwise have attained. It is true, indeed, that the gifts of

nature and God are open to all; the spirit of deep reflection, and of the highest science, is by no means confined to the polished classes of society, and is a thing entirely unconnected with what is called erudition. Many of the most distinguished of the Greek philosophers were men of little erudition, and destitute of any advantage over other men than what they gained by their power of thought; the wisest of them all, Socrates, was no scholar, and never wished to become one. The first preachers of Christianity were men taken from the vulgar of the people, and yet we see that they have no fear to treat subjects of the most mysterious depth in a manner the most easy and natural. Of such men there has been, through all ages, a successive series. There often lies, in the strong and undissipated spirit of the people, an astonishing energy both of moral and of intellectual strength. The founders of sects and of states, the avengers of their country, and the revivers of religion, have often been men of the vulgar, called and animated to their great works by the voice of internal inspiration. The greatest benefits have been conferred upon mankind not by writings but by active deeds. If we look to the spirit of invention, and the gift of language, and compare philosophy with poetry, we shall find that even in these respects genius is by no means the privileged possession of the learn-

ed. We know that it has been possible for a Shakspeare, a man whose learning seems to have been chiefly confined to popular poetry, to reach a height and depth of representation which the most skilful and erudite poets have in vain endeavoured to attain; I see no reason why it should appear to us a thing more marvellous that a man of the people in Germany should have penetrated into those depths of metaphysical inquiry, and excited an inventive genius on those secret departments of philosophy, which were entirely out of the reach of the erudite doctors of the time; need I add the name of Jacob Böhme, the Teutonic philosopher as he has been called, a name which is to the enlightened a stumbling block, and to the learned foolishness; a man who, in spite of all his disadvantages, had many followers, not in Germany alone, but even in other countries, also in Holland and England—among others in this last country the too celebrated and unfortunate King Charles. I have already, more than once, expressed my conviction that the very existence of a poetry of the vulgar is in itself a sufficient evidence of the decline and corruption of true poetry; for that is a possession which should not belong peculiarly either to the common people or to the learned, but equally to all the members of which the national body is composed. If a popular poetry cannot escape be-

traying some symptoms of this unnatural state, some traces of the corruption and barbarism which are inseparable from this unfortunate separation; how much more must all this be the case with a popular philosophy—a term which seems to involve in it the very necessity of a contradiction? However much the genius of individuals may triumph over the circumstances of their situation, it is impossible that philosophy can ever acquire, in their hands, the place which is due to her. This is not the time to depict and explain more fully the very remarkable system of this Teutonic philosophy. This much however I may remark, that, although it bears very distinctly the traces of having been the creation of one inventive spirit, it is by no means destitute of points of coincidence with those other forms of secret philosophy, the influence of which was at that time ever on the increase. Nor is it at all astonishing that this should have been so, for at that period the unconquerable thirst after truth was every where seeking for itself new and more mysterious paths—and removed as far as possible from the old tracts of verbal science and erudition; paths which led to fountains of sublime discovery, of lofty conception, but, we must also admit, not unfrequently, of wild dreams and unprofitable error. After the at once visible and invisible bond of the church was dissolved in certain

countries of Europe, another altogether invisible system of connection began to occupy its place. There are degrees in the knowledge of truth, there are higher and lower steps; the higher are scarcely ever attainable to the yet struggling nature of man. I will confess that, according to the opinion of Lessing, there are, among the component parts of human knowledge, some which are in their very nature secret; that is, which are of such a sort that even such as have them in their possession can never find resolution to reveal them. The publication appears always ill timed; and, moreover, the means of publication are almost perpetually wanting. The existence of such difficulties as these is proved by history to have been common to every age of the world; it is as impossible to prevent such species of knowledge as those of which I speak from being propagated in secret, as it is to render them common to all the world. However much of truth the secret system may contain, the opposition between it, and the open structure of truth, is at all times unfortunate. Even the separation in the visible church at the era of the reformation, cannot fail to be considered, by all good men, as a great misfortune, for it was a rupture in the family of the Christian people, and, as it were, a tearing asunder of the great body of our species. The existence of an invisible church, in opposition to the visible,

must have at that time appeared a yet more alarming occurrence; it must have been viewed as a sort of separation between soul and body, a sure mark of dissolution. But the evil effects which might have been expected have not been realized, the soul and body of mankind are not yet separated, and the unity of truth still remains. He who despises the rock upon which truth stands, will never be able to reach the place of her temple.

That spiritual, Platonic, and Oriental mode of philosophizing which had been openly adopted by the great men of Italy and Germany in the fifteenth century, was, after the reformation, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, either altogether suppressed, or left to the vulgar and to individual visionaries, or propagated in secret, and with great alterations and corruptions. Among the learned men, the old logical word system, which went so absurdly by the name of Aristotle, retained its undisputed sway, till almost two hundred years later; towards the end of the seventeenth century, it began to be pressed out of view by new sects and systems, the consideration of whose merits must belong to an after period, for their operation has continued down to our own day, and their full development was the work of the eighteenth century.

As the different nations of Europe became now again more separated from each other, a correspond.

ing and equally unfortunate division took place among the different sciences and studies. The events of the period were hurtful, above all, to the study of antiquity, and prevented it from bearing any right fruit, or having any active influence upon life. The first great restorers of erudition were philosophers, men whose knowledge of the middle ages and of their own time, was equal to their knowledge of antiquity, who united Oriental learning with that of the Greeks and the Romans. They viewed every thing in its proper place; they took a comprehensive survey of things, and judged of them by their relation to the history of the world, and by the real powers which they possessed. But after the miserable period of separation, when philosophy was persecuted, suppressed, or corrupted, and the middle age forgotten, the attention of the learned, who had no longer almost any connection with their own world or nation, was entirely restricted to the antiquity of the Greeks and Romans, which they admired without having any proper feeling for the true beauties of its productions. Among poets and artists alone did any lively perception of this exist: the learned, who scarcely ever united any philosophy with their classical erudition, were satisfied with a mere superstitious worship of the languages. The true and enlightened knowledge of the spirit of antiquity did not appear till the eighteenth century.



Even in regard to art and poetry, we must always regard it as unlucky that they should spring up without any connection with philosophy,—that the cultivation of the imagination should be separated from that of the understanding, and that the former of these should not unfrequently be placed in exact opposition to the latter. In these stormy days, however, in the ferment and revolutions of which philosophy and history were so much involved, art and poetry, it must be allowed, formed almost the sole asylum wherein feeling and intellect had leisure to unfold themselves in the natural calmness of their beauty.

The poetry of the Catholic countries, the Spanish, the Italian, and the Portuguese, were in that age so much parts of one whole, that I think they should all be considered together. The Spaniards, as we have already seen, possessed very early their national poem of the Cid: their love poetry continued to flourish in the fifteenth century, later than that of any other nation. The general spirit of chivalry, and of the poetry connected with it, was preserved here much longer than in any other country of Europe. Their Chivalric Romances have a tone of feeling almost peculiar to themselves, and are distinguished, (above all the oldest and best of them, the Amadis), by a more polished and beautiful mode of writing than is elsewhere to be found,

and by a prevailing fondness for tender and idyllic representations. Here too then, in the poetry of chivalry, and particularly in that of the Spaniards and the Germans, we find new confirmation of what I noticed in an early part of these lectures—the partiality of all heroic nations and warlike peoples to that which is soft and tender in poetical composition. Along with the Chivalric Romances, there grew up among the Spaniards and Portuguese, the kindred species of the Pastoral Romance. The poetry of Spain, particularly her love poetry, was cultivated with great success in the fifteenth century, by two men, whose birth, rank, and influence, were of the first order—Villena and Santillana. In general, ever since its first commencement the poetry of Spain has always been more cultivated by nobles and knights than by mere literati and authors. I know of no nation which numbers among its poets so many that have borne arms in the cause of their country. That poetry which we call Spanish should rather, in its oldest period, be denominated Castilian; for at first it was peculiar to that province alone; and many other countries of the Spanish peninsula cultivated poetry in a manner of their own quite different from that of the Castilians. In Catalonia there flourished a species of poetry, which, in respect to language, bore the greatest resemblance to the Provençal. The last and most

celebrated of its productions was consecrated to the melancholy fate of Charles of Viane, the last of the royal family who seems to have been beloved by the Catalonians as their native Prince, and the elder brother, by the first marriage, of that Ferdinand who afterwards ruled over Castile also under the name of The Catholic, and came on this account to be regarded somewhat as a stranger by the inhabitants of Arragon. That province was from this time more and more subjected and despised; and the peculiar poetry shared the fate of the independence of the country where it had flourished; by degrees, as the whole political importance came to centre in Castile, so also were all those ornaments of poetry swallowed up in the Castilian poetry, which had before been scattered throughout the different provinces of that poetical land. Of all the inhabitants of the beautiful Peninsula, the Portuguese alone, as they continued to be a peculiar nation, preserved a peculiar language and poetry of their own; yet their old strictness of connection with Castile was still preserved; many Portuguese composed in the Castilian dialect, and much of what commonly passes for Castilian is, in reality, by origin Portuguese. The poetry of the two nations is indeed so intimately connected, that it is far from easy to adjust their respective claims to the merit of invention. The Arabs contributed much to en-

rich and adorn the poetry of the country which they invaded. It is true, the Old Castilian poems are quite free from any such Arabian influence or Oriental tone; they are, on the contrary, distinguished by a strength and simplicity both of language and of feeling, which bear the sure marks of a very different origin. The more distinct is the absence of all Arabic ornament in the old Castilian poetry, the more clearly do we perceive its presence in the new. The separation occasioned by differences of religion and perpetual hostilities, may sufficiently account for the want of Arabian ornaments in the poetry of the remoter period. But when Isabella and Ferdinand the Catholic (I name Isabella first, because the generous principle was peculiarly hers), —when they with their knights conquered Granada, and after seven long centuries rendered Spain once more entirely free from the foreign yoke; during that last war between Moors and Spaniards, the fall of the Arabic kingdom of Granada was hastened by internal dissensions and the discord of its nobles. At the head of two contending parties were placed the two great families of the Bencerrajas and the Zegrís. The first embraced Christianity, and became Spaniards; the second retreated, after the final conquest of the capital, to Africa. There yet exist many romances which celebrate the fame and achievements of the Bencerrajas, their bloody feuds with

the Zegrís, and the last struggles of the Granadian Arabs. Proud songs of the most glowing love, and the wildest passion for glory; mutilated heroic fragments of the most tender feeling; simple in their language, but yet by no means devoid of the Eastern fire; these Granadian productions, consecrated to the glory of particular families and tribes, are in their tone and import entirely Saracen, and resemble in most things, so far as we can judge, the original poetry of the Arabian people. Here in these romances the most beautiful, according to my judgment, possessed either by the Spanish or by any other modern people, the Arabian spirit and Oriental colouring can no longer be mistaken; they have tinged with their own hue the whole of the succeeding poetry of Spain. The garden of Spanish poetry, its old Castilian soil being planted with the flowers of Portuguese invention and Provincial elegance, and now also cherished by the bright glow of Arabic ardour, became every day more beautiful and rich. Under Charles V. who crowned Ariosto as the first poet of Italy, the more artificial poetry of the Italians was introduced into Spain by Garcilaso and Boscan, who retained, however, a due regard for the nature of the old language and poetry, and were far from wishing to sacrifice these to their admiration for their foreign models. To these the whole nation was so much attached,

that the introduction of the Italian style met at first with great opposition, although afterwards it came to produce very favourable effects. No other poetry is composed of so many different elements as the Spanish; but these elements were neither unlike nor irreconcilable; they were all different tones of fancy and feeling whose union formed the perfection of harmony, and has left the Spanish poetry the matchless wonder of romantic writing. This poetry is not only rich; it is by itself both in its import and spirit, and in every respect is in perfect unison with the character and feeling of the nation.

Ever since that glorious period under Ferdinand the Catholic and Charles V., no literature has preserved a character of such pure nationality as that of the Spaniards. If we consider the works of literature by the principles of any universal theory of art, there is no end to the controversy which may arise with regard to the merits and defects either of an individual book, or of a whole body of literature; the great danger is, that we may perhaps, in the course of our controversies, lose sight altogether of our own feelings, and forget the first pure impression which was made upon us. But there is another point from which literature can be much more easily contemplated, and much more securely judged; I mean the moral point of view which commands

every thing, from which alone we can discover whether a literature be throughout national, and in harmony with the national weal and the national spirit. If we adopt this mode of deciding, every thing, I have little doubt, will be found in favour of the Spaniards. We may look at the literature of Italy; and, so far as form and style are concerned, we may have no difficulty in allowing its superiority over the Spanish; but if we regard national spirit and influence, how clear and decided is its inferiority. Some of the first Italian poets seem to have been destitute of all regard for their country, devoid of the least spark of national feeling;—such were Boccaccio, Ariosto, Guarini. In others, as, for instance, in Petrarch, we can perceive indeed some faint echo of national feeling, but this almost always ill directed and absurd, as in his case, the admiration of Rienzi, and the plans for re-establishing the Roman republic, render it abundantly manifest. The two most national of the great Italian writers are Dante and Machiavelli; but the first is far less a patriot than a Ghibelline, and the second has spent his whole genius in defending opinions and principles, the adoption of which strikes at the root of every thing like public virtue.

In this point of view the literature and poetry of Spain are most admirable. Every part of them is penetrated with the noblest natural feeling;

strong, moral, and deeply religious, even where the immediate subject of writing is neither morality nor religion. There is nothing which can degrade thought, corrupt feeling, or estrange virtue. Every where there breathes the same spirit of honour, principle and faith. I have already alluded to the great number of excellent historical writers, and to the early developed and long preserved manly eloquence of Spain. Their poets are, in like manner, true Spaniards. We may almost say that the only differences among them are those of language and expression; the mode of thinking which prevails among all these writers is one and the same, the Spanish. This high national value has but too often been overlooked by critics; the works of the Spaniards have been absurdly judged by the rules of the ancients or of the Italians—or what is still worse, by the narrow decisions of the French taste. In regard to national value, of all modern literatures, the first place belongs to the Spanish, the second to the English. I do not mean to say that the latter of these is inferior in any degree to the former; but it has had to contend with a greater variety of anti-national elements, and it has gone through a greater number of changes and temporary declensions from the right path. The national unity of the English literature has been preserved in spite of all these obstacles,



but rather as if in consequence of some tacit law, than as if from the mere feeling and tendency of its character. I am far from asserting that this is the only point of view from which literature ought to be surveyed. I shall have occasion in the sequel to show that many literatures derive the greater part of their interest from elements of a very different description.

Garcilaso, and some other poets of the time of Charles V., are usually held up by the Spanish critics as models of beautiful language and perfect taste. There is no doubt that they are models of composition worthy of great attention; above all, when we compare them with the artificial and corrupted style of the poets who succeeded them. But I can never believe that either Garcilaso, or any one of his contemporaries, has reached the same point of perfection in poetical language which Virgil did among the Romans, or Racine among the French. Their poems are rather happy effusions of the feeling of love, than great classical works. A lyrical and idyllic poet may show the happy condition of language and poetry in his country, but he can never bring either to their full perfection; for lyrical poems are of too narrow limits and too confined import for this. It is only an epic or a dramatic poet who can ever become an universal and abiding standard for the art and lan-

guage of his nation. The life of the Spanish people was then so chivalric and rich, their wars in Europe so great and glorious, and their adventures on the sea and in the New World so wonderful and so gratifying to the imagination, that the invented marvellous of the old romances appeared dull and common-place when contrasted with these realities. About this time, in other countries, the fashion commenced of turning the subjects of the old chivalric romances into epic poems. In Spain things took a different turn, and poetry became daily more and more historical in its themes. Such at least is the case with the most celebrated epic of the Spaniards, the *Araucana* of Ercilla—wherein the wars of the Spanish adventurers, with a free and brave American nation, are celebrated or narrated. The appearance of the foreign country, and its savage inhabitants, wildernesses, and natural curiosities, campaigns and combats, all are depicted with such truth and vivacity, that we are kept for ever in mind that the poet was an eye-witness of all that he describes. This first of Spanish epics abounds in individual passages of great poetical power and beauty; but as a whole, it is certainly rather a versified book of travels and history of war, than a poem. The heroic poem should at all times unite historical truth and dignity with the free play of fancy in the regions of the marvellous; it matters

little whether the ground-work be historical or fictitious. In my opinion the first of all the national heroic poems which the Spaniards possess is unquestionably the *Cid*. The Portuguese poet Camoens was in these respects far more fortunate than *Er-cilla*. As the wilderness of America then belonged to Spain, so the riches of India fell to the share of his nation; a circumstance infinitely more happy for the purposes of the poet. In him, too, we feel that the poet was also a warrior, a mariner, an adventurer, and a circumnavigator. He begins, indeed, with the most violent praise of truth, and boasts that he intends to beat Ariosto by means of real incidents, far surpassing in splendour or marvellousness the fictitious achievements of Orlando and Ruggiero. At its commencement his poem is written in strict imitation of the Virgilian model, a constant adherence to which was indeed the chief fault of all the epic poets of that age. But Camoens, like his own Gama, soon leaves the servile coast-sailing of his predecessors, ventures into the wide expanse of ocean, and makes his triumphant progress through rich and undiscovered lands. As the mariner in the midst of the troubles and tempests of the sea, perceives, by the spicy gales, that he is approaching to his Indian haven, so over the latter cantos of the *Lusiad* there is diffused

the rich air and resplendent sun of the Oriental skies. The language is indeed simple, and the purpose serious; nevertheless, in colouring and fullness of fancy, Camoens here surpasses even Ariosto, whose garland he so venturously aspired to tear away. But Camoens does not confine himself to Gama and the discovery of India, or even to the sway and achievements of the Portuguese of his day; whatever of chivalrous, great, beautiful, or noble, could be gathered from the traditions of his country has been inweaved and embodied into the web of his poem. It embraces the whole poetry of his nation; among all the heroic poets either of ancient or of modern times there has never, since Homer, been any one so intensely national, or so loved and honoured by his countrymen as Camoens. It seems as if the national feelings of the Portuguese, excluded from every other subject of meditation by the degraded condition of their empire, had centered and reposed themselves in the person of this poet, considered by them, and worthy of being considered by us, as worthy of supplying the place of a whole troop of poets, and as being in himself a complete literature to his country. The most interesting parts of the poem, are those passages at the beginning and the close; wherein Camoens addresses himself to the young monarch Se-

bastian, the same who was destined to involve in the miseries of his destinies the whole fortunes of his people, with love and animating admiration, and yet with some portion of seriousness and warning, as it might be the privilege of a grey-haired veteran, such as he was, to address his King.

Somewhat later than Camoens appeared Tasso, a poet nearer to ourselves by his language, and, in part also, by his subject, which, by the way, is chosen with the utmost possible felicity; for the Crusades unite, in a manner elsewhere unequalled, the whole fulness of the chivalrous and the marvellous, with the seriousness of historical truth. His subject was still more adapted for his own time than it is for ours; for the old contest between Christendom and the powers of Mahomet had not yet terminated. Even in the days of Charles V. the heroes and warriors of Spain still flattered themselves with the hope of regaining the lost conquests of Godfrey in the Holy Land; a thing which, after all, might well have seemed quite possible, after the naval power of Spain had acquired the undisputed superiority in the Mediterranean, and particularly after limits had fairly been set to the tremendous power of the Turkish Emperor by land. An inspiration not only poetical but patriotic was derived from the cause of Chris-

tendom by this poet, in whom love of glory, and piety of feeling, were equally predominant. But he has by no means equalled the greatness of his subject; on the contrary, he has made so little use of its riches, that he may be said to have spent only the superfluities of its treasure. He, too, was in some degree, confined by the Virgilian form, from which he has borrowed, with no great success, a few pieces of what is commonly called the epic machinery. Yet Camoens was not prevented by the same sort of belief in regard to the proper form of an epic, from interweaving into his poem every thing that could adorn a national heroic poem, and from doing entire justice to the materials of which he had made choice. But in truth, even had his ideas of epic art been more just, I doubt whether Tasso could ever have attained the same success. He belongs, upon the whole, rather to the class of poets who represent themselves and their own exquisite feelings, than of those who can create in their strength of imagination another world, and lose individual feelings in the luxury of their own inventions. The most beautiful parts of his poem are episodes which might have been introduced with equal propriety into any other epic, and have no strict connection with the subject of the Jerusalem. The magic of Armida, the beauty of Clorinda, and the love of Erminia,—these passages, and such

as these, are the things that bind us to Tasso; forms of which our German poet has made Tasso himself to say:

They are not shadows that produce a dream,  
I know they are eternal, for they are.\*

In Tasso's lyrical poems there is a glow of passion, and an inspiration of unfortunate love, which delight us even more than the little pastoral of *Aminta*, although that too is throughout impregnated with the feeling of love. We feel in these poems what the true fountain of love-poetry is, and cannot help contrasting them in a very favourable manner with the artificial and cold sonnets of the school of Petrarch. Tasso is altogether a poet of feeling; and as Ariosto is throughout a painter, so over the language and versification of Tasso there is poured forth the whole charm of music; a circumstance which has, without doubt, greatly contributed to render him the favourite poet of the Italians. His popularity exceeds very much that of Ariosto. Individual parts and episodes of his poem are frequently sung in the Gondolas of the Arno and the Po; and the Italians having no romantic ballads like those of the Spaniards, have, by cutting down the

\* Goethe.

Jerusalem into fragments, supplied themselves with a body of ballads by full more harmonious, graceful, noble, and poetical, than was ever possessed by any other people. Perhaps this mode of dividing their great poem was the best both for the enjoyment and the feeling of it, for there is in truth very little to be lost by throwing aside the connection of the poem as a whole. How little satisfied Tasso himself was with his own epical art, is sufficiently evident from the many changes and remodellings (for the most part unfortunate ones) which his great poem underwent. The first of his attempts was a mere romance of chivalry; afterwards in the decline of life, he entirely recast the whole of the Jerusalem upon which his fame is founded, sacrificing to the morose morality which he had adopted, all the most delightful passages in the poem, and introducing, throughout the whole work, a cold and destructive allegory, little calculated to make up for what he had taken away. He also attempted a Christian epic on the subject of the Creation. But even with poetical powers, much more powerful than his, how could it have been possible to extend a few mysterious words of Moses into as many cantos with any portion of success? In speaking of Dante I have already said something on the poetical treatment of such subjects, and I mention this poem of Tasso here chiefly



eca use it was this in particular which Milton had before his eyes. In his poem of the Creation, Tasso laid aside the use of rhyme, although that forms in truth the greatest charm of many of his productions, and although no poet ever possessed the same command over the instrument which he did; so severe a critic was Tasso of his own poems. I do not however think that we should judge equally hardly of him; he certainly does indulge in a few plays of thought, or concetti, as they are called, but he has beauties sufficient to atone for more than all his defects. What sort of an idea of poetry can remain to us, if we take from it the liberty to be a play of fancy? If we are determined to weigh and balance every thought so strictly, there is no question that nothing will remain with us but the sobriety of prose. Even in prose, if we analyze it with sufficient accuracy, we shall easily discover, in the works of the best writers, images, here and there, which are not perfectly just. Many of the fanciful thoughts of Tasso are not only full of meaning, but beautiful as images. A poet of feeling and of love may well be pardoned such trifling errors; faults of the same kind may be found even in these amatory poems of the ancients, which are usually held up by modern critics like the head of the Gorgon, a terrible image of classica strength and

purity, in opposition to the extravagant fancy of the romantic poets.

If we regard Tasso merely as a musical poet of feeling, it forms in truth no proper subject of reproach, that he is in a certain sense uniform, and throughout sentimental. Uniformity of this sort seems to be inseparable from that poetry which is in its nature lyrical; and I confess it seems to me even a beauty in Tasso, that he has spread this soft breath of elegy even over the representation of the charms of sense. But an epic poet must be richer in every thing; he must be multiform; he must embrace a whole world of circumstances, the spirit of the past and of the present, of his nation and of nature; he must have command, not over one chord alone, but be master of the whole complicated instrument of feeling. In this sort of poetical wealth Camoens is far the superior of Tasso; in his epic poem there are even many passages of tender feeling and of love, which may sustain a comparison with the most beautiful parts of Tasso. In him too, amidst all the splendour and charm of his southern imagination, there breaks through at times a tone of delightful lamentation and sorrow; and he is entitled to the name of a romantic poet, even had he no other claim, because he is entirely penetrated with the glow and inspiration of love. But

he unites the picturesque fulness of Ariosto with the musical magic of Tasso; and what is far more important, he connects both of these with the serious dignity of the true heroic poet—an attribute which Tasso rather wished for than possessed.

After what I have said, you will easily perceive that I make no secret of preferring Camoens to either of the other great Catholic epic poets, Ariosto and Tasso. I am, however, willing to confess that such judgments as these are at all times produced more or less by personal feeling, for of all those component parts which make up the excellence of a poet, a few only can be subjected to the decision of general principles, while far more is left to be approved or disapproved of, according as it may happen to suit the fancy or feeling of the individual. There is a well-known anecdote of Tasso, which I cannot help wishing to recal to your recollection. It is said that when he was asked which of the Italian poets was, in his opinion, the greatest, he replied, not without considerable emotion, that Ariosto was the second. The self-love of a poet makes him set too exclusive a value on those qualities which he himself possesses. A lover of poetry is apt to be prejudiced in the same way in favour of those which he is himself most capable of feeling.

I believe that in Tasso the poetical language of

Italy appeared with as much of the noble and graceful dignity of the old Roman, as it could have, without throwing totally aside the nature and beauty peculiar to its own construction. After his time the leaning to the antique became every day stronger, not only in respect to form and style of writing, but also to subjects. The last great poet of the yet flourishing period, Guarini, also a poet of love like Tasso, shows himself in many individual passages of his lyrical pieces, to have been possessed of deeper thought, and even master of a more elevated style, than was ever attained by the poet of Jerusalem. But in the love poems of Tasso, the strain of feeling is certainly more natural and charming. Guarini's Arcadian drama, the *Pastor Fido*, is without any laboured imitation, and although quite full of real feeling and love, entirely impregnated with the spirit of antiquity, and even in the form of its composition, great and noble like the drama of the Greeks. Upon the whole, the theatrical part of the elder Italian literature is by no means the most brilliant one, and their attempts at reviving the tragedy of the ancients have been above all miserably cold and unsuccessful; it is some compensation for this, that so much perfection was reached in a new species of writing which—at least as used dramatically—is quite peculiar to Italy. The superiority of the Italians, in

this respect, has been acknowledged by the other nations of Europe; I doubt whether any modern poem has been so much admired, and so often translated, as the *Pastor Fido*. In France itself down to the time of Corneille, it was the favourite model of imitation. As a drama, indeed, it was by no means a work fitted to form a path and establish a theatre, and in so far it may be said to be very deficient in merit. But, on the other hand, the lyrical poetry of the Italians never took a bolder flight than in some of the chorusses and particular speeches of this poem. In treating of Tasso, I have already spoken of that play of thought peculiar to the Romanic love poets, and the conceits of the Italians. The same grounds of apology which Tasso possesses, may in general be pleaded in favour of Guarini, although it must be admitted that some passages are too remote from the natural and the innocently playful, too coldly elaborate and artificial, to admit of any exculpation. Guarini has a few passages which might seem not unworthy of the noble and serious style of a great poet of antiquity; but he certainly touches the limit of that region of voluptuous taste in which Marino appears to have delighted—a poet who has united every thing of luxuriant and effeminate which is to be found in Ovid or any of the ancient amatory poets, with all of playful and conceited which can be

gathered out of Petrarch, Tasso, and Guarini; and blended them all together into one sea of luscious sweetness, which is the more disagreeable to good taste because every part of the flood has the appearance of proceeding from the fountain not of nature but of imitation.

The poetry of Spain, in its separated situation, was both much longer upheld and much more happily developed. The imitation of the antique was less predominant, because the national feeling was more acute and lively. For the same reason the poetry of Spain was more connected with *the present*; romance-writing acquired a point of excellence far above what is known among any other people, and the theatre became not only the most original but also the richest in Europe.

In poetry the language of Spain has never had any one era which can be taken as a complete model of perfection for all other periods; and although in later times Garcilaso and the writers of his time are commonly enough talked of as classics, this is only in a very limited meaning of the word. The poetical language of Spain remained at all times free; a great deal too much art has, indeed, been at times employed upon it, and it has often been formed into an appearance far too intensely poetical. But at no time has it been subjected to any universal rule, excepting only that which regards the prevalent

system of metre. This appears so much the more remarkable, because even in the earliest times the prose language of the Spaniards attained a form the most fixed and regular; the sharpest precision has there become so much a second nature, that while the prose of other languages has for the most part tended to corruption in the way of neglect and carelessness, theirs has rather had to struggle with errors of an opposite description. The danger has been that of degenerating from extreme accuracy and acuteness into a sort of over-nicety, from which they only have a precise name—*Ahudeza*. Yet of this defect there is no trace in some of the best Spanish writers—among whom the first place is unquestionably due to Cervantes. In his writing, the prose authors of Spain possess a model of perfection—pure and exquisite—such as has never been attained by her poets, chiefly, it is probable, on account of the extreme luxuriance of imagination and invention by which they are distinguished.

The great work of Cervantes is deserving of its fame, and of the admiration of all the nations of Europe, (which it has now enjoyed for more than two centuries) not merely on account of the beauty of its style, and the perfection of its narrative; not merely because of all works of wit, it is the richest in spirit and invention; but also because it is a most lively and altogether epic picture of the life and pe-

culiar character of Spaniards. It is from this that it derives its ever-enduring charm and value, while the many imitations of it, produced in France and England, are already forgotten or in a fair way of becoming so. What I once said before, in speaking of poetical works of wit—that in such works the writer should be careful so to adorn with a rich effusion of poetry his narrative, machinery, and the whole of his language, as to preserve undegraded his title to the name of a poet, receives a strong confirmation from the example of Cervantes. It is common enough to hear critics who talk of him enlarge altogether upon his satire and say nothing of his poetry; and there is no doubt that while satire is alike good to all the world, his poetry is exquisitely Spanish. But he who is capable of studying and relishing Cervantes aright, well knows that mirth and seriousness, wit and poetry, are mingled with success elsewhere unparalleled in this rich picture of life, and that of no one of these elements can the worth and beauty be appreciated unless we observe how it is graced and adorned by the juxtaposition or absolute infusion of the others. The other prose works of Cervantes, his pastoral romance *Galatea*, his novels, and the pilgrim romance which he wrote last of all, partake more or less in these qualities of style and invention which distinguish his *Don Quixote*—a work which is



entirely unique in species, and which, the more it is imitated, appears even the more inimitable. This work is the proudest ornament of Spanish literature; and with justice may the Spaniards be proud of a romance, which, as an universal national work, has been equalled by no other writer of this order, and which, as a picture of the life, manners, and spirit of a nation, is almost entitled to be classed with the most admirable productions of the epic muse.

## LECTURE XII.



OF ROMANCE—DRAMATIC POETRY OF THE SPANIARDS—SPENSER,  
SHAKSPEARE, AND MILTON—AGE OF LEWIS XIV.—THE FRENCH  
THEATRE.

**THE** romance of Cervantes has been, notwithstanding its high internal excellence, a dangerous and unfortunate model for the imitation of other nations. The Don Quixote, a work in its kind of unexampled invention, has been the origin of the whole modern romances, and of a crowd of unsuccessful attempts among French, English, and Germans, the object of which was to elevate into a species of poetry the prosaic representation of the actual and the present. To say nothing of the genius of Cervantes, which stands entirely by itself, and was sufficient to secure him from many of the faults of his successors, the situation in which he cultivated prose fiction was fortunate, far above what has fallen to the lot of any of them. The actual life in Spain, in his day, was much more chivalric and

romantic than it has ever since been in any country of Europe. Even the want of a very exact civil subordination, and the free, or rather lawless life of the provinces might be of use to his imagination.

In all these attempts to raise the realities of Spanish life by wit and adventure, or by the extraordinary excitements of thought and feeling, to a species of poetic fiction, we can perceive that the authors are always anxious to create for themselves, in some way or other, the advantages of a poetic distance; if it were only in the life of Italian artists, a subject frequently treated in German romances, or in that of American woods and wildernesses, one very common among those of foreigners. Even when the scene of the fable is laid entirely at home, and within the sphere of the common citizen life, the narrative, so long as it continues to be narrative, and does not lose itself altogether in wit, humour, or sentiment, is ever anxious to extend, in some degree, the limit of that reality by which it is confined, and to procure somewhere an opening into the region where fancy is more at liberty in her operations: when no other method can be found, travelling adventures, duels, elopements, a band of robbers, or the intrigues and anxieties of a troop of strollers, are introduced pretty evidently more for the sake of the author than of his hero.

The idea of the Romantic in these romances, even in some of the best and most celebrated of them, appears to coincide very closely with that of irregulated and dissolute conduct. I remember it was the observation of a great philosopher, that the moment the world should see a perfect police, the moment there should be no contraband trade, and a traveller's pass should contain an exact portrait and biography of its bearer, that moment it would become quite impossible to write a good romance; for that then nothing could occur in real life which might, with any moderate degree of ornament, be formed into the groundwork of such a fiction. The expression seems quaint, but, I suspect, the opinion is founded very nearly upon the truth.

To determine the true and proper relation between poetry, and the past or the present, involves the investigation of the whole depth and essence of the art. In general, in our theories, with the exception of some very general, meaningless, and most commonly false definitions of the art itself, and of the beautiful, the chief subjects of attention are always the mere forms of poetry, things necessary, without doubt, but by no means sufficient to be known. As yet there has scarcely been any theory with regard to the proper subject of poetry, although such a theory would evidently be

far the most useful in regard to the effect which poetry is to have upon life. In the preceding discourses I have endeavoured to supply this defect, and to give some glimpses of such a theory, wherever the nature of my topics has furnished me with the opportunity.

With regard to the representation of actual life in poetry, we must, above all things, remember that it is by no means certain that the actual and present are intractable or unworthy subjects of poetical representation, merely because in themselves they appear less noble and uncommon than the past. It is true that in what is near and present, the common and the unpoetical, come at all times more strongly and more conspicuously into view; while in the remote and the past they occupy the distance, and leave the foreground to be filled with forms of greatness and sublimity alone. But this difficulty is one which the true poet can easily conquer; his art has no more favourite mode of displaying itself than in lending to things of common-place, and every day occurrence, the brilliancy of a poetic illumination, by extracting from them higher signification, and deeper purpose, and more refined feeling, than we had before suspected them of concealing, or dreamed them to be capable of exciting. Still the precision of the present is at all times binding and confining for the fancy,

and when we, by our subject, impose so many fetters upon her, there is always reason to fear, that she will be inclined to make up for this restraint, by an excess of liberty, in regard to language and description.

To make my views upon this point intelligible to you in the shortest way, I need only recal to your recollection what I said some time ago, with regard to subjects of religious or Christian import. The invisible world, the Deity, and pure intellects, can never, upon the whole, be with propriety represented by us; nature and human beings are the proper and immediate subjects of poetry. But the higher and spiritual world can be every where embodied and shadowed forth in our terrestrial materials. In like manner the indirect representation of the actual and the present is the best and most appropriate. The bloom of young life, and the high ecstasies of passion, as well as the maturity of wise reflection, may all be combined with the old traditions of our nation; they will there have more room for exertion, and be displayed in a purer light than the present can command. The oldest poet of the past, Homer, is at the same time to us a describer of the present in its utmost liveliness and freshness. Every true poet carries into the past his own age, and, in a certain sense, himself. The following appears to me to be the true account of the proper

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relation between poetry and time. The proper business of poetry is to represent only the eternal, that which is, at all places, and in all times, significant and beautiful; but this cannot be accomplished without the intervention of a veil. Poetry requires to have a corporeal habitation, and this she finds in her best sphere, the traditions of a nation, the recollections and past of a people. In her representations of these, however, she introduces the whole wealth of the present, so far as that is susceptible of poetical ornament; she plunges also into the future, because she explains the apparent mysteries of earthly existence, accompanies individual life through all its developement, down to its period of termination, and sheds from her magic mirror the light of a higher interpretation upon all things; she embraces all tenses, the past, the present, and the future, in order to make a truly sensible representation of the eternal or the perfect time. Even in a philosophical sense, eternity is no nonentity, no mere negation of time, but rather its entire and undivided fulness, wherein all its elements are united, where the past becomes again new and present, and with the present itself, is mingled the abundance of hope, and all the richness of futurity.

Although, upon the whole, I consider the indirect representation of the present, as the one most

suitable for poetry, I would by no means be understood to be passing a judgment of condemnation upon all poetical works which follow the opposite path. We must leave the artist to be the judge of his own work. The true poet can show his power even though he takes a wrong way, and composes works which are far from perfection in regard to their original foundation. Milton and Klopstock must at all times be honoured as poets of the first class, although no one will deny that they have both done themselves the injustice to choose subjects which they never could adequately describe.

In like manner to Richardson, who erred in a very opposite way, by trying to imitate Cervantes, in elevating to poetry the realities of modern life, we cannot refuse the praise of a great talent for description, and of having at least manifested great vigour in his course, although the goal which he wished to reach was one entirely beyond his power.

The spirit of Spanish fiction has distinguished itself with equal excellence, and with far more richness, upon the theatre than in romance. The lyrical poetry of feeling is the fruit of solitary love and inspiration; even when it does not confine itself to the immediate circumstances of an individual, when it seizes upon an age and a nation, it is still powerful only as the emanation of individual feeling.



But heroic poetry implies a nation, one which either is now or has been, one which possesses recollections, a great past, a legendary history, an original and poetical mode of thinking and observing,—a mythology. Both of these species, the lyric as well as the epic, are much more the children of nature than of art. But dramatic poetry is the production of the city and society; nay it cannot flourish unless it have a great metropolis to be the centre point of its developement. Such, at least, is its most natural and happy situation; although schools of imitation and rivalry, established in smaller spheres of action, may in the sequel contend at times not unsuccessfully with the capital, the first seat of the dramatic art. There is no difficulty in perceiving why the stages of Madrid, London, and Paris, enjoyed a full century of splendour; were brought, each in its own way, to perfection; and were rich, almost to superfluity, long before either Italy or Germany could be said to possess any thing worthy, properly speaking, of the name of a theatre. For although Rome has been, even from antiquity, the capital of the church, and Vienna, ever since the fifteenth century, the seat of the German empire, yet neither the one city nor the other has ever become the metropolis of a nation in the same manner with

those three great cities of France, England, and Spain.

As the Spanish monarchy was, down to the middle of the seventeenth century, the greatest and the most splendid in Europe, and as the national spirit of the Spaniards was the most developed, so the stage of Madrid, the living mirror of Spanish life, was the first which arrived at its period of glory. Its riches and fulness of invention, have, at all times, been recognised by the rest of Europe; to its peculiar form and meaning, to the true spirit and sense of the Spanish drama, less justice has been done. Had it no other advantage but this, that it is thoroughly romantic, that alone would be sufficient to render it an object well worthy of attention; it would be a very interesting thing to see what sort of dramatic poetry that is, which is the pure production of the chivalric poetry in general, and of that peculiar direction of fancy which belongs to modern Europe and the middle ages. In the theatre of no other country can we find so good an example of this as in the Spanish, which always remained quite free from all influence and imitation of the antique; while, on the other hand, the Italians and French have been led away by their desire to renew in their purity, the proper tragedy and comedy of the Greeks,

and while these models (acting as they did, chiefly through the medium of Seneca and the older French plays) have not been without a very considerable influence even upon the drama of the English.

If we consider the Spanish stage in its first celebrated lord and master, Lope de Vega; its general excellencies will appear to us only in a dim and imperfect light; and we shall, upon the whole, form no very high opinion of the perfection of the Spanish drama; so hasty and redundant are his almost innumerable plays. As in the lyrical songs of one poet, so also in all the dramatic works of one artist, there may in general be observed a certain uniformity and resemblance, which must, of course, lighten very much the labour of his composition. In the dramas not only of one poet, but even of a whole age or an entire nation, the groundwork is often one general IDEA, which in all of them is properly the same, although in each it is presented in a different point of view, and acting with a different species of operation; like so many variations of a juridical theme, or so many various propositions in mathematics, all following from the adoption of the same general principle. When a poet has once clearly and thoroughly comprehended this idea, and fixed upon the manner in which he is to use it for his idea and his stage, provided he

be at the same time a perfect master of language and theatrical effect, it may very easily happen that he shall produce a very great number of works in a very regular form, and even without appearing to have been guilty of negligence either in regard to the expression or the arrangement of his productions. It was thus that the great dramatists of antiquity, produced, each of them, more than a hundred plays. But the number of the dramas of Lope de Vega, however liberal we may be, must certainly surpass all limit of permitted fertility. The greater part of them must have been not composed, in any proper sense of the word, but dashed off in the manner of a mere improvisatore. I admit that Lope, among all dramatical ready writers, and bulky writers of all nations, and down to the very latest times, is the first and the most of a poet in richness of invention, in splendour of imagination, and in the fire and strength of his language. The two last qualities are indeed so common in all the poetry of his nation, that we need scarcely enlarge upon their praise as belonging peculiarly to him. Considered by itself, this swiftness of dramatic composition, even with all the talent and fancy of Lope de Vega, is by no means excusable, either in a poetical or in a moral point of view. A strength of arrangement, and a steady law, are so much the more necessary for the stage, because in no other

species of composition are carelessness and corruption so easily tolerated, in no other are the public and the author in so much danger of leading each other astray. How easy it must be for a dramatist of such genius as Lope, to carry his age beyond all limits of judgment; how easily, even one without any very splendid qualifications, by means of a sort of theatrical routine, and a little skill in passionate effect, may bring the public taste to such a point that all higher requisites and ideas are entirely forgotten,—we have had so many examples of all this, that it would be quite useless to expatiate upon it. On the other side, theatrical success, we must remember, is of all other means of excitement the strongest and most irresistible in its operation on the vanity of a poet. The public themselves are in general the first to spoil a favourite dramatist; they express so much satisfaction with his early and imperfect attempts, that it is no wonder he should soon consider himself as absolved from all obligation to be careful in his compositions. This danger of demagogic corruption and anarchy is a circumstance which was often remarked and lamented by the best of all dramatic judges, the ancients.

However much, in regard to some other species of poetry, as for example that which is properly called popular poetry, our indulgence may be due to a rapid and careless method of composition, the

theatre has no similar claim. The stage is entirely a creature of art, and even although hasty and inaccurate writing may be tolerated in plays, unless their plan be clearly laid, and their purpose profoundly considered, they want the very essence of dramatic pieces; unless they be so composed, they may indeed amuse us with a view of the fleeting and surface part of life, and of perplexities and passions, but they can have none of that deep sense and import, without which the concerns of life, whether real or imitated, are not worthy of our study. These lower excellencies of the dramatic art, are possessed in great abundance by Lope de Vega, and many others of the ordinary Spanish dramatists; the plays of these men display great brilliancy of poetry and imagination, but when we compare them with the profounder pieces of the same or of some other stages, we perceive at once that their beauties are only of a secondary class, and that they afford no real gratification to the higher parts of our intellect. How little these, indeed, are accustomed to be taken into account, we may easily gather from the single fact, that very many critics usually speak of Calderon, and Lope de Vega, as poets of the same order, while in truth it would be difficult to find two men more entirely and radically dissimilar both in mind and in art. If we would form a proper opinion of the Spanish drama, we must

study it only in its perfection, in Calderon—the last and greatest of all the Spanish poets.

Before his time, affectation, on the one hand, and utter carelessness on the other, were predominant in the Spanish poetry; what is singular enough these apparently opposite faults were often to be found in the same piece. The evil example of Lope de Vega was not confined to the department of the stage. Elevated by his theatrical success, like many other fluent poets, he had the vanity to suppose that he might easily shine in many other species of writing, for which he possessed, in truth, no sort of genius. Not contented with being considered as the first dramatist of his country, nothing less would serve him but to compete with Cervantes in romance, and with Tasso and Ariosto in the chivalric epic. The influence of his careless and corrupt mode of composition was thus extended beyond the theatre; while the faults from which he was most free, those of excessive artifice and affectation in language and expression, were carried to the highest pitch by Gongora and Quevedo. Calderon survived this age of poetical corruptions; nay, he was born in it, and he had first to free the poetry of his country from this chaos, before he could ennoble it anew, beautify and purify it by the flames of love, and conduct it at last to the utmost limit of its perfection.

This incident in the history of Spanish poetry, its sudden rise to unexampled excellence, immediately following a period of unexampled corruption, is one very well worthy of our attention. It may serve as a sufficient correction of the common place opinions and theories on which the doctrine of regular progress and decline in art is maintained. For our own age and nation it may be a lesson of great value, to see how, from the midst of dead artifice and corrupted excrescence, the imagination and poetry of Spain sprung at the call of one voice into light and beauty, as the Phœnix is regenerated and renewed out of the ashes of her own decay.

But in order to set before you the spirit of the Spanish drama as it appears in its perfection in the works of Calderon, it is necessary for me to prefix a few words upon the true essence of the dramatic art in general, according to the peculiar views which I have adopted. It is only in the first and lowest scale of the drama, that I can place those pieces in which we are presented with the visible surface of life alone, the fleeting appearance of the rich picture of the world. It is thus that I view them, even although they display the highest sway of passion in tragedy, or the perfection of all social refinements and absurdities in comedy, so long as the whole business of the play is limited to external



appearances, and these things are brought before us merely in perspective, and as pictures for the purposes of drawing our attention, and awakening the sympathy of our passions. The second order of the art is that, where in dramatic representations, together with passion and the pictoric appearance of things, a spirit of more profound sense and thought is predominant over the scene, wherein there is displayed a deep knowledge, not of individuals and their affairs alone, but of our whole species, of the world and of life, in all their manifold shapes, contradictions, and catastrophes, of man and of his being, that darkest of riddles—as such—as a riddle. Were this profound knowledge of us and our nature the only end of dramatic poetry, Shakspeare would not merely deserve to be called the first in his art, but there could scarcely be found a single poet, either among the ancients or the moderns, worthy for a moment to be compared with him. But in my opinion the art of the dramatic poet has, besides all this, yet another and a higher end. The enigma of life should not barely be expressed but solved; the perplexities of the present should indeed be represented, but from them our view should be led to the last developement and the final issue. The poet should entwine the future with the present, and lay before our eyes the mysteries of the internal man. This is indeed something

quite different from what we commonly demand in a tragedy by the name of catastrophe. There are many celebrated dramatic works wherein that sort of denouement, to which I here allude, is altogether wanting, or which, at least, have only the outward form, but are quite destitute of the internal being and spirit of it. For the sake of brevity I may here refer you to what I said, in one of my late lectures, concerning the three worlds of Dante, and of the art with which he has represented to us three great classes of human beings, some in the abyss of despair, some in the region of hope and purification, some in the enjoyment of perfect blessedness. All that I then said may be applied in a certain way to the dramas, and in this sense might Dante himself be called a dramatic poet, but that he has chosen to give us only a series of catastrophes, without setting before us, except by some casual allusion, the actions and passions of which these catastrophes are the result. Corresponding to these denouements of human destiny, there are also three modes of that high, serious dramatic representation, which sets forth, not merely the appearances of life, but also its deeper purpose and spirit, which gives us not only the knot but the solution of our existence. In one of these we lose sight of the hero in the darkness of a perfect destruction; in another the conclusion, although ming-

led with a certain dawn of pleasure, is yet half sorrowful in its impression; and there is a third, wherein out of misery and death we see a new life arisen, and behold the illumination of the internal man. To show what I mean by dramas, whose termination is the total ruin of their heroes, I may mention among the tragedies of the moderns, Wallenstein, Macbeth, and the Faustus of the people. The dramatic art of the ancients had a peculiar fondness for this altogether tragical catastrophe, which accorded well with their belief in a terrible and predestinating fate. Yet a tragedy of this kind is perhaps the more perfect in proportion as the destruction is represented not as any thing external, capricious, or predestinated, but as a darkness into which the hero has sunk step by step, descending not without free will, and in consequence of his own guilt. Such is the case in those three great modern tragedies which I have cited.

This is, upon the whole, the favourite species among the ancients, yet their theatre is not without some beautiful specimens of the second and milder termination; examples of it occur in both of the two greatest of the Greek tragedians. It is thus that Æschylus, after he has opened before us the darkest abyss of sorrow and guilt, in the death of Agamemnon, and the vengeance of Orestes, closes his mighty picture in the Eumenides with

a pleasing feeling, and the final quelling of the spirit of evil by the intervention of a milder and propitious Deity. Sophocles, in like manner, after representing the blindness and the fate of Œdipus, the miserable fate and mutual fratricide of his sons, the long sorrows of the sightless old man and his faithful daughter, is careful to throw a ray of cheering light upon the death of his hero, and to depict in such colours his departure into the protection of pitying and expecting deities, as to leave upon our minds an impression rather of soothing and gentle melancholy than of tragical distress. There are many instances of the same kind both in the ancient theatre and the modern; but few wherein the working of the passions is adorned with so much beauty of poetry as in these.

The third method of dramatic conclusion, which by its representation makes a spiritual purification to be the result of external sorrows, is the one most adapted for a Christian poet, and in this the first and greatest of all masters is Calderon. Among the great variety of his pieces I need only refer you to *the Devotion to the Cross*, and *the Stedfast Prince*, plays which have been very frequently translated, and the remarkable excellence of which has been, upon the whole, pretty generally recognised. The Christianity of this poet, however, does not consist so much in the external circum-

stances which he has selected, as in his peculiar feeling, and the method of treating his subject which is most common with him. Even where his materials furnish him with no opportunity of drawing the perfect developement of a new life out of death and suffering, yet every thing is conceived in the spirit of this Christian love and purification, every thing seen in its light, and clothed in the splendour of its heavenly colouring. In every situation and circumstance, Calderon is, of all dramatic poets, the most Christian, and for that very reason the most romantic.

Since the Spanish poetry remained at all times free from foreign influence, and throughout purely romantic,—since the Christian chivalric poetry of the middle ages continued with this nation far longer than with any other even down to the times of their most modern refinement, and received among them a form more elegant than elsewhere, this may appear to be no improper place for saying something in general, concerning the essence of the romantic. It consists entirely in that feeling of love which is predominant in the Christian religion, and through it in poetry also, by which sorrows are represented as only the way to happiness, by which the tragic serious of the Greek mythology, and heathenish antiquity, is softened into a more cheering play of fancy, and in consequence of which,

even in regard to the external forms of representation and language, every thing is selected which seems most to harmonize with this feeling of love and this play of fancy. In this sense of the word, taking *the romantic* to mean nothing more than the peculiar beauty and poetry of Christianity, all poetry might seem to have some claim to the epithet. In fact, the romantic is by no means inconsistent with the ancients and the true antique. The legends of Troy, and the poems of Homer, are throughout romantic; so is all of the really poetic kind which is to be found in the old verses of Indians, Persians, Arabians, or Europeans. Wherever the highest life is comprehended and represented in its deeper meaning, there are to be heard at least some echoes of that godlike love, whose centre-point and full harmony lies certainly in the Christian religion. Even in the ancient tragedians the echoes of this feeling are here and there scattered, in spite of the general darkness and wordliness of their conceptions, the internal love in the midst of all their errors and false images of horror, breaks through in noble sentiments, and diffuses the light of its sublimity over all their bewildered imaginations. Æschylus and Sophocles are not worthy of admiration on account of their inimitable composition alone, but of their profound feeling and sentiment. In none of the vivid and

natural poets of antiquity is this charm entirely wanting. The romantic is not opposed to the ancients and the antique, but to those false and frigid erudite among ourselves, who strive to imitate the form without being gifted with any portion of the enthusiasm of the antique; and those other moderns who, labouring under an equal mistake, attempt to increase their influence upon active life by making the present their subject, and fail in their attempt, because the confinement to which they thus voluntarily condemn themselves is more than sufficient to neutralize any advantage which they might have hoped to derive.

It will easily be understood that between these three species of dramatic conclusion and representation; that of destruction, of reconciliation, and of glorification, there must be room for many intermediate steps and blendings. It was only for the purpose of letting you know what I conceive to be the true termination of a dramatic piece, that I have formally and separately described these three species,—although after all, they certainly are to be found separately as well as mingled. Even the opposition of ancients and moderns is not a perfect one, but depends merely on the preponderance of one element—a more or a less. Even among the ancient plays we may find some approximations to that method of tragic representation

which terminates in purification, and in like manner, we may find, among the moderns, tragedies of utter destruction, which can sustain a comparison with the most powerful masterpieces of the ancients, with whom that was the more favourite species of catastrophe.

Since, however, the excellence of dramatic representation lies in the internal depth of feeling, and the hidden mysteries of the spiritual life, it is evident that the works of antiquity, whatever may be their perfection as pieces of writing, and as high models to stimulate our ambition, they can in particular instances furnish no fit rule or example for our imitation. In general we may be assured, that in regard to the higher drama and tragedy, there cannot be such a thing as a rule useful for all nations. Even the modes of feeling among the Christian peoples (connected as they are by their common religion) here, where the peculiar principle of the internal life should be most powerfully brought forward, are found to be so essentially different, that it would be foolish to require any universal harmony, or to imagine that any one nation could lay down effectual laws for the other. In regard to tragedy and the higher drama at least, so intimately are these connected with internal life and peculiar feeling, that every nation must be the inventor of its own form and its own rules.



I am very far, then, from wishing to see the Spanish drama or Calderon adopted as a perfect and exclusive model for our theatre; but I am so sensible of the high perfection to which the Christian tragedy and drama attained in the hands of that great and divine master, that I think he cannot be too much studied as a distant and inimitable specimen of excellence, by any one who would make the bold attempt to rescue the modern stage, either in Germany or elsewhere, from the feeble and ineffectual state into which it has fallen. Least of all is the external form of the Spanish drama suitable for us. Its flowery fulness of images and southern fancies may be excellent, where this overflowing wealth is nature, but to imitate these qualities elsewhere is the height of absurdity. The remarks which I have already made on more occasions than one, with regard to the poetical representation of mystical subjects, may be applicable in general to those plays of Calderon which are in their import allegoric and Christian.

The chief fault of Calderon, for even he is not without them, is, that he, in other respects the best of all romantic dramatists, carries us too quickly to the great denouement of which I have spoken above;—for the effect which this produces on us would have been very much increased by our being kept longer in doubt, had he more frequently characterised the riddle of human life with the profun-

dity of Shakspeare,—had he been less sparing in affording us, at the commencement, glimpses of that light which should be preserved and concentrated upon the conclusion of the drama. Shakspeare has exactly the opposite fault, of too often placing before our eyes, in all its mystery and perplexity, the riddle of life, like a sceptical poet, without giving us any hint of the solution. Even when he does bring his drama to a last and a proper denouement, it is much more frequently to one of utter destruction after the manner of the old tragedians, or at least to one of an intermediate and half satisfactory nature, than to that termination of perfect purification which is predominant in Calderon. In the deepest recesses of his feeling and thought, it has always struck me that Shakspeare is far more an ancient—I mean an ancient not of the Greek but of the Northern or Scandinavian cast—than a Christian. In some particulars at least we must allow that the Spanish drama affords the best of all models; particularly in regard to its comedy, which is in every respect thoroughly romantic, and therefore truly poetical. Even upon the stage no true success can ever attend any attempts to raise the representation of the prosaic reality to the rank of poetry, either by means of psychological acumen, or the wit of society; and whoever compares what go on other stages by the name of *plays of in-*

*trigue* and *plays of character*, with the romantic witchery of the pieces of Calderon, and his countrymen, will scarcely be able to find words to express his sense of the immeasurable superiority of their poetical wealth, over the poverty of the German stage, above all, over what passes for wit in the comedies with which we are entertained.

The poetry of all the Southern and Catholic countries continued throughout the sixteenth, and even in the seventeenth century, to partake of the same qualities and undergo the same vicissitudes. In the other countries of Europe a great rupture was produced by the reception of the Protestant faith, for the old creed could not be driven into contempt without carrying along with it a variety of images, allusions, personifications, poetic traditions and legends, and modes of poetical composition which were more or less intimately connected with it. As among the Protestant countries, the one which retained most of the old system, both in regard to the condition of the clergy, and the external forms of worship, was England, so here also was poetry first cultivated in a rich and beautiful manner, and, it may be added, in a manner resembling in every important particular the poetry of the Catholic south; this is sufficiently manifest in Spenser, Shakspeare, and Milton. There is no occasion to recal to your remembrance how fond Shakspeare is of the

romantic of the chivalrous time, and even of the Southern colouring of fancy; Spenser is himself a poet of chivalry, and both he and Milton followed romantic, above all Italian, models. The nearer literature comes to ourselves, the richer her productiveness appears in these modern times, so much the more necessary does it become for me to confine myself to those poets and those writers alone, who mark the perfection of language and cultivation in their nations, and are on that account for other nations, and for the whole world, the most important and instructive. But in truth these three greatest poets of England contain within themselves every thing that is really great and remarkable in regard to her elder literature of the sixteenth and seventeenth ages.

The chivalrous poem of Spenser, the *Fairy Queen*, presents us with a complete view of the spirit of romance which yet lingered in England among the subjects of Elizabeth; that maiden queen who saw herself, with no ordinary delight, deified while yet alive, by such playful fancies of mythology and the muse. Spenser is a perfect master of the picturesque; in his lyrical pieces there breathes all the tenderness of the *Idyll*, the very spirit of the *Troubadours*. Not only in the species and manner of his poetry, but even in his language, he bears the most striking resemblance to our old

German poets of love and chivalry. The history of the English literature was indeed quite the reverse of ours. Chaucer is not unlike our poets of the sixteenth century; but Spenser is the near kinsman of the tender and melodious poets of our older time. In every language which is, like the English, the product of the blending of two different dialects, there must always be two ideals, according as the poet shall lean more to the one or the other of the elements whereof his language is composed. Of all the English poets the most Teutonic is Spenser, while Milton, on the contrary, has an evident partiality to the Latin part of the English tongue. The only unfortunate part of Spenser's poetry is its form. The allegory which he has selected and made the groundwork of his chief poem, is not one of that lively kind which prevails in the elder chivalrous fictions, wherein the idea of a spiritual hero, and the mysteries of his higher vocation, are concealed under the likeness of external adventures and tangible events. It is only a dead allegory, a mere classification of all the virtues of an ethical system; in short such a one, that, but for the proper names of the personages, we should never suspect any part of their history to contain "more than meets the ear."

The admiration with which Shakspeare regarded Spenser, and the care with which he imitated

him in his lyrical and idyllic poems, are circumstances of themselves sufficient to make us study, with the liveliest interest, the poem of the Fairy Queen. It is in these minor pieces of Shakspeare that we are first introduced to a personal knowledge of the great poet and his feelings. When he wrote sonnets, it seems as if he had considered himself as more a poet than when he wrote plays; he was the manager of a theatre, and he viewed the drama as his business; on it he exerted all his intellect and power, but when he had feelings intense and secret to express, he had recourse to a form of writing with which his habits had rendered him less familiar. It is strange but delightful to scrutinize, in his short effusions, the character of Shakspeare. In them we see that he who stood like a magician above the world, penetrating with one glance into all the depths, and mysteries, and perplexities of human character, and having power to call up into open day the darkest workings of the human passions—that this great being was not deprived of any portion of his human sympathies, by the elevation to which he was raised, but preserved, amidst all his stern functions, a heart overflowing with tenderness, purity, and love. His feelings are intense, profound, acute almost to selfishness, but he expresses them so briefly and modestly, as to form a strange contrast with most

of those poets who write concerning themselves. For the right understanding of his dramatic works, these lyrics are of the greatest importance. They show us, that in his dramas he very seldom speaks according to his own feelings, or his own thoughts, but according to his knowledge. The world lay clear and distinct before his eyes, but between him and it there was a deep gulf fixed. He gives us a portrait of what he saw, without flattery or ornament—having the charm of unrivalled accuracy and truth. Were understanding, acuteness, and profoundness of thought (in so far as these are necessary for the characterizing of human life), to be considered as the first qualities of a poet, there is none worthy to be compared with Shakspeare. Other poets have endeavoured to transport us, at least for a few moments, into another and an ideal condition of mankind. But Shakspeare is the master of reality; he sets before us, with a truth that is often painful, man in his degraded state, in this corruption which penetrates and contaminates all his being, all that he does and suffers, all the thoughts and aspirations of his fallen spirit. In this respect he may not unfrequently be said to be a satirical poet; and well indeed may the picture which he presents of human debasement, and the enigma of our being, be calculated to produce an effect far more deep and abiding than the whole body of splenetic and passionate re-

vilers, whom we commonly call by the name of satiric poets. In the midst of all the bitterness of Shakspeare, we perceive continually glimpses of thoughts and recollections more pure than satirists partake in; meditation on the original height and elevation of man,—the peculiar tenderness and noble-minded sentiment of a poet; the dark world of his representation is illuminated with the most beautiful rays of patriotic inspiration, serene philanthropy, and glowing love.

But even the youthful glow of love appears in his *Romeo* as the mere inspiration of death, and is mingled with the same sceptical and melancholy views of life which, in *Hamlet*, give to all our being an appearance of more than natural discord and perplexity, and which, in *Lear*, carry sorrow and passion into the utmost misery of madness. This poet, who externally seems to be most calm and temperate, clear and lively,—with whom intellect seems every where to preponderate; who, as we at first imagine, regards and represents every thing almost with coldness,—is found, if we examine into the internal feelings of his spirit, to be of all others the mostly deeply sorrowful and tragic.

Shakspeare regarded the drama as entirely a thing for the people, and at first treated it throughout as such. He took the popular comedy as he found it, and whatever enlargements and improve-



ments he introduced into the stage, were all calculated and conceived, according to the peculiar spirit of his predecessors, and of the audience in London. Even in the earliest of his tragic attempts, he takes possession of the whole superstitions of the vulgar, and mingles in his poetry, not only the gigantic greatness of their rude traditions, but also the fearful, the horrible, and the revolting. All these, again, are blended with such representations and views of human debasement as passed—or still pass—with common spectators for wit, but were connected in the depths of his reflective and penetrating spirit, with the very different feelings of bitter contempt or sorrowful sympathy. He was not, in knowledge, far less in art, such as since the time of Milton, it has been usual to represent him. But I believe that the inmost feelings of his heart, the depths of his peculiar, concentrated, and solitary spirit, could be agitated only by the mournful voice of nature. The feeling by which he seems to have been most connected with ordinary men is that of nationality. He has represented the heroic and glorious period of English history, during the conquests in France, in a series of dramatic pieces, which possess all the simplicity and liveliness of the ancient chronicles, but approach, in their ruling spirit of patriotism and glory, to the most dignified and effectual productions of the epic muse.

In the works of Shakspeare a whole world is unfolded. He who has once comprehended this, and been penetrated with its spirit, will not easily allow the effect to be diminished by the form, or listen to the cavils of those who are incapable of understanding the import of what they would criticise. The form of Shakspeare's writings will rather appear to him good and excellent, because in it his spirit is expressed and clothed, as it were, in a convenient garment. The poetry of Shakspeare is near of kin to the spirit of the Germans, and he is more felt and beloved by them than any other foreign, I had almost said, than any vernacular, poet. Even in England, the understanding of Shakspeare is rendered considerably more difficult, in consequence of the resemblance which many very inferior writers bear to him in those points, which come most immediately before the eye. In Germany, we admire Shakspeare, and are free from this disadvantage; but we should beware of adopting, either the form or the sentiment of this great poet's writings, as the exclusive model of our own. They are indeed, in themselves, most highly poetical, but they are far from being the only poetical ones, and the dramatic art may attain perfection in many other ways besides the Shaksperian.

The delightful chivalry of Spenser, and the freedom of the universal Shakspeare, were misunder-

stood, contemned, and even persecuted, after the spirit of fanaticism, which, in the days of Elizabeth and James, had existed only as a hidden disorder, burst forth at once in all its power and offensiveness, in all its overwhelming and disgusting virulence, under Charles I. Shakspeare was, in a peculiar manner, an object of hatred to the Puritans, for whom he certainly seems to have had no partiality, exactly as he still is to their descendants, the Methodists, and other similar sects, which are at present so powerful in Britain. But, although the Puritans dislike Shakspeare, they were by no means without poetry; on the contrary, in the bosom of their sect and age, there was produced a poet who must ever be classed with the first and most remarkable of his nation, and of the world. The poetry of the world and human nature was held as unlawful among the bigots; the art which would express the image of that time, was obliged to be entirely directed towards spiritual concerns, as is the case with the ever-serious and stately muse of Milton. The *Paradise Lost* partakes in all those difficulties and defects, which, as I have already said, attend all Christian poems which attempt to make the mysteries of our religion the subjects of their fiction. It is strange that Milton did not observe, that the *Loss of Paradise* forms in itself no complete whole, but is only the first act of the great Christian his-

tory of man, wherein the creation, the fall, and the redemption, are all equally necessary parts of one mighty drama. It is true that he sought afterwards to remove this main defect by the addition of the *Paradise Regained*, but this poem is too insignificant in its purpose and size to be worthy of forming the keystone to the great work. When compared with the Catholic poets, Dante and Tasso, who were his models, Milton, as a Protestant, laboured under considerable disadvantages, by being entirely denied the use of a great many symbolical representations, histories, and traditions, which were in their hands the most graceful ornaments of Christian poetry. He was sensible of this, and attempted to make amends for the defect, by adopting fables and allegories out of the Koran and the Talmud, such as are extremely unfit for the use of a serious Christian poet. The excellence of his epic work consists, therefore, not in the plan of the whole, so much as in particular beauties and passages, and in general in the perfection of the high language of poetry. The unusual admiration which was attracted to Milton in the eighteenth century, rested upon particular traits and representations of paradisaic innocence and beauty, and upon the picture of hell, and the character of its inhabitants, whom this poet has depicted in a style great and almost antique, as giants of the abyss. Whether it has, upon the whole, been

advantageous for the English language of poetry, that it has been leaning more to the Latin than to the Teutonic side, that it has followed Milton more than Spenser,—this is a point which I cannot help viewing as extremely doubtful. If such a leaning, however, was to take place, there is no question that Milton was the best model in that way, and in many respects well entitled to be himself the standard of the high and serious poetical language of England. But the truth is, that any exclusive standard is injurious in a language so composed of opposite elements as the English is; for it is the very nature of such a language, if not to be perpetually vacillating between two extremes, yet certainly to retain the freedom of approximating more nearly at different times to the two opposite boundaries of its domain.

The whole wealth of the English tongue, powerful it is in this mixture, and the various modifications which that admits of, can only be appreciated by those who study it in Shakspeare.

After the Puritan period had passed away, the English literature and language began to be infected with another species of barbarism; the adoption of the then corrupted but predominant taste of the French. It was not till the full restoration of political freedom took place, at the close of the seventeenth century, that intellect recovered from the oppression under which it had lain. So deeply had

the foreign taste taken root, that the eighteenth century had commenced before the old poets of the nation began to be as it were discovered, and brought into light out of oblivion.

The French literature possessed, in the latest Burgundian times, under Francis I. and in the sixteenth century, a great abundance of those historical memoirs of which it has at all times been so productive; pictures after the life, which, by their exquisite representation of individuals, and by the immense number of traits, the immediate offspring of personal observation, have the effect of entirely transporting us back into the manners, society, and general spirit of the age depicted. The peculiar talent for applying in a tone of social intercourse, a species of light and sarcastic philosophy to the ordinary affairs of life, was in like manner very early developed among the French. I need only allude to two great masters in these two different walks of literature, Philip de Commines and Montaigne. The old French language is for the most part careless, inaccurate, and perplexed with intricate periods, but along with all these defects it possesses, in the hands of Montaigne, and some of the better writers of the old time, a certain naiveté and natural tone of sentiment, which are the more charming, on account of the careless and unaffected style in which they are expressed. But that, upon the

whole, the French language of the sixteenth century was extremely ill adapted, either for poetry or wit,—that it was altogether unworthy of being compared with the languages of the neighbouring countries,—and gave little promise of the noble and tasteful perfection to which itself has since attained,—all this may easily be gathered from Marot and Rabelais, in spite of the high talents which both of these writers possess. If we take a general view of the neglected, uncultivated, and, in many respects, barbarous condition of the older French literature and language, we cannot fail to consider the changes introduced into both, by Cardinal Richelieu, and the academy of which he was the founder, as a very necessary and fortunate one. The literary supremacy of the new academy was indeed, like the political sway of its head, a yoke of iron; its operations partook of the celerity and decision of despotism. The regulation of language was its first attempt, and this certainly was very soon crowned with the most complete success. In prose this is universally to be seen; not only the first and most celebrated writers, but we might almost say, all the writers of the last part of the seventeenth century, are distinguished by a peculiar charm of noble style. We have only to reflect on the immense number of letters, memoirs (even of women), tracts of men of business, none of them ever intended for the press, and composed by

persons who made no pretensions to the character of writers; all these are remarkable for a peculiar and graceful taste, of which scarcely any trace is to be discovered among the French authors of the succeeding age. Among the poets I think that, at the same period, Racine attained, in language and versification, a point of harmonious perfection, even beyond what has been reached by Milton in English, or even Virgil in Latin,—and very far superior to any thing which has ever since been seen in France. With a view to the poetry itself, and even for its language, it is true there is much reason to wish that, along with this skilful perfection, a little more freedom had been left; that the elder French poetry of the chivalrous period, which, as we have seen, produced not a little of beautiful and lovely, both in regard to language and invention, had not been so entirely and without exception thrown aside. It might have been quite possible to unite, as was done by the Italians, and by some other nations, the perfection of a rich and earnest style with the poetical spirit of chivalry. The French language and poetry might then have preserved a great deal more of that romantic tendency and old poetical freedom which Voltaire so often wished they could regain, and which he himself attempted, although with very imperfect success, to restore. Yet such a forgetting and total contemning of all that has gone before is



inseparable from every great and entire change, even in literature. It was a revolution; as might have been expected, much secret opposition at all times remained against the harsh sway, and this became more and more apparent, when, in the days of the Regent and Lewis XV. the French learned to think, with even increasing earnestness, after the freedom of the English,—not only in civil affairs, but also in literature and in language. In consequence of the irregular, and in part ill-intentioned manner wherein these inclinations were gratified, and the foreign modes introduced and rendered predominant, there arose, during the time of these princes, that corruption of taste which, having gradually attained its summit, broke out into the wildest appearances of anarchy, even before the revolution, and which, like other rebels will, I fear, be with great difficulty, ever completely reconciled to the restoration of the ancient obedience.

The true flourishing period of the French poetry was the latter half of the sixteenth century. Ronsard, in the sixteenth century, was only the remote forerunner of the great poets of the age of Lewis XIV.; Voltaire, in the eighteenth, was only their ingenious follower, who attempted, with sometimes great and sometimes very indifferent success, to supply what he conceived to be the chief

defects of the poets of his own time. The true defect which presses most severely on the French poetry is this, that the cultivation of the more artificial species was not preceded by any truly classical, successful, and national epic poem. Ronsard, indeed, attempted this, nor is he without fire and energy, but his style is full of false bombast; as it often happens that when any one attempts to make a sudden escape from barbarous rudeness, he is very apt to fall into the opposite defect of farthought, pedantic, and artificial expression. Of all the poets, even including those of Italy, who have corrupted their language by desiring to make it too much like that of antiquity, the defect is most visible in the writings of Ronsard. Even the choice of the subject in his *Franciade*, must be considered as extremely unhappy. Had a French poet chosen some part of the ancient national history to be the groundwork of an epic poem, he might have been excused for introducing, by way of episode, the fable which traces the Franks from the heroes of Troy—an absurd fable to be sure, but one which was very commonly believed among the knights and minstrels of the middle ages. But it was certainly an unfortunate idea to think of making such a foolish legend the very basis of the epopee. The achievements and fortunes of St. Lewis might, in many respects, have appeared the

best subject of an epic poem for a poet of old France; for they stand in the most intimate connection with the whole world of romance, and in the midst of all the seriousness of historic truth, and the associations of patriotism and piety, connected with the adventures of a sainted hero, present to the fancy as wide a range as could have been produced by the most perfect rejection of every thing either true or natural. The only difficulty was that presented by the illfated termination of the crusade of St. Lewis. In the story of the Maid of Orleans, which was selected by Chapelain, the difficulty consisted in this, that the heroine who delivered France, was betrayed into the hands of her enemies, and abandoned to a shameful death by the hands of her own countrymen, who had, in the former part of her life, deified and adored her. The same thing which has oftener happened in the history of French heroes, occurred in literature to Ronsard. He was praised beyond all bounds in his own life time, and exalted to the very heavens; immediately afterwards he fell to the dust, and past into the most perfect oblivion. But the name of Ronsard is still one which must not be omitted in the history of literary France; for it is undeniable that the great Corneille, the friend and admirer of Chapelain, had formed himself in the elder school

of Ronsard, or at least reminds us, every now and then, of the peculiarities of his diction.

The tragedy of the French is considered by themselves as the most brilliant part of their literature, and as such has ever attracted the chief attention of other nations. Their tragedy expresses so abundantly their national character and mode of feeling, that there is no difficulty in conceiving why they should have come to think so highly of it, even although the subjects of its earlier productions are almost never taken from their own national history. It is not indeed to be denied, that all these Greeks, Romans, Spaniards, and Turks, whom it represents to us, are Frenchmen in many things besides their language; yet it is certainly unfortunate that the French tragedy has remained almost entirely foreign, and very rarely represented French heroes. The circumstance is probably to be explained by the want of any successful and universally known French epic poem. Besides, the most tragical incidents in the old French history could not fail to excite disagreeable recollections and comparisons, ill adapted for the purposes of a stage entirely dependent upon the Court. It was the great defect in French literature, that an authoritative tone of appeal to the national feeling was kept up by no one species of serious poetry—above all, that this

was utterly lost sight of by their first tragedians. The defect was well understood by Voltaire, and he attempted to remedy the evil, by choosing subjects out of the old French history, and more generally by introducing the feelings and manners of the chivalrous period upon the stage. The national feelings which he endeavoured to excite, did not begin to display themselves till considerably after; but the glory is indisputably his, of having succeeded, in romantic tragedy, beyond any other of his countrymen.

Although, however, the subjects of French tragedy are, with a few exceptions, foreign, yet this whole department of their literature is, without doubt, in the highest degree expressive of the peculiar turn and feeling of the French spirit and character. I therefore gladly recognize in it a species of poetry highly perfect in its execution, and thoroughly national in its tendency; but the more natural it is, the less is it adapted to be the standard and model of any other theatre. It is the duty of every nation to be the inventors and creators of their own drama.

The form of the French tragedy is regarded by most as a mere imitation of the Greek, and judged of by that standard; but it ought to be recollected that the great masters of the French stage were themselves the first who suggested the fact to us,

and pointed this out in their prefaces, as the proper point of view from which their productions should be contemplated. Racine appears in this respect to the greatest advantage; he speaks with a true and lively knowledge of the Greeks, which we should in vain seek for in any of the other French writers; and if his judgment be not always satisfactory to us, (for the Greeks have been much more accurately studied since his time than before it), we can yet recognize, in all that he says, a feeling of the excellence of their art and poetry, which none but great poets, such as Racine himself was, are capable of possessing. Corneille, in his prefaces, is always battling with Aristotle and his commentators, who are indeed very often much in his way, till at the close we find him ratifying either a total capitulation or a hollow truce with those fatal enemies of all poetical freedom. We cannot avoid being surprised at the humility with which this mighty genius seems to submit himself to fetters so confining, and so entirely self-imposed. The prefaces and dissertations of Voltaire always open with the same assertions, namely, that the French nation, and if possible, still more the French stage, is the first in the world, and that nevertheless Corneille and Racine, with all their excellencies, have left very much to be done. The reader is commonly left in a situation which enables him very easily to

discover, who is, in Voltaire's opinion, the great genius destined to supply all these defects, and to surpass Corneille and Racine as much as they do the tragedians of foreign nations.

That the form of the Grecian tragedy, and the celebrated treatise of Aristotle (as it is understood by them) have in many respects confined and injured the French poets—that a great part of the law of the three unities, more particularly of those of time and place, is absurd, and in total opposition to the true nature of poetry—in which we do not consider physical possibility with arithmetical exactness, but rather judge according to the effect produced on the imagination by a verisimilitude not historical but poetical,—all this has been so frequently handled since the time of Lessing, that it is needless to revive a contest which has been so often fought with the same issue. There is only one observation which I shall make, and that is of the historical kind; of all the French writers, the one who did most to establish the enslaving influence of the mistaken Greek models and critics, was Boileau. How hurtful the effects of his precepts must have been on the French poetry, may be gathered from the one fact—that he treats Corneille with almost the same severity as Chapelain. What gives the most perfect idea of the man is, to my view, that well known maxim of his, “of a rhyming couplet

“the last verse should, if possible, be first made.” Instead of the true judgment and feeling of art, in his own criticism, he is fond of a species of ridicule which is in general by no means the most delicate; and instead of poetry he is most anxious for a full and perfect rhyme. I perfectly agree with the opinion of Racine, who wrote in these terms to his son, concerning his friend Boileau, “Boileau is an excellent man, but at bottom he knows absolutely nothing about poetry.”

Another great rule of this critic is the one, borrowed from Horace, according to which a work of intellect should be as many years before it is published as a human child lies months in the womb before it is born. In spite, however, of all the authority of Boileau, there is no doubt that the *Athalie* of Racine and the *Cid* of Corneille, which I must always hold to be the two most glorious productions of French poetry, were neither of them subjected to any such process of tedious elaboration, but both brought at once before the world in the inspiration and glow of their first conception. These two creations, the finest of which the French stage can boast, may best inform us what height that stage has reached, and at what point it has been obliged to stop in its imitation of the nobler drama of the Greeks.

However little the modern expounders of Aris-



tote may be aware of its consequences, the fact itself is sufficiently certain, that the lyrical songs, form the essential part in the tragedy of the ancients; that the dialogue is a mere appendix and interlude to the chorus, not the chorus to the dialogue; and that he who would imitate this species of writing with success, must be at least as much a lyrical as a dramatic poet. The *Cid* of Corneille is intensely lyrical, and the tone of this inspiration alone gives it that magical power, against which envy and criticism are of no avail. Racine, in his *Athalie*, has restored the chorus of antiquity, with many alterations no doubt, but in a manner which seems to me exquisitely adapted for the purposes which he had in view. Had the French tragedy advanced farther in the path pointed out by its two greatest masters in their two most excellent productions, I have no doubt it might have approached, much more nearly than it has done, to the power and dignity of the antique; many of the narrow fetters, imposed by mere prosaic misunderstanding, would of themselves have dropt away, and the genius of the drama, being more at liberty, would certainly have attempted achievements of higher ambition than any to which it has as yet aspired.

The universal custom of striking out the lyrical part of the ancient tragedy, was productive of a very great inconvenience; more particularly when

the subject of the drama happened to be one of those same mythological legends which had of old been handled by the Greeks. When the lyrical part is taken away, the plot was found to be too little to fill up the tragedy, and recourse was had to the same means of supplying the vacant space, which had been adopted by the ancients themselves when their drama was on its decline. The plot was thickened by a crowd of interpolated intrigues extremely hurtful to the purpose and dignity of tragedy, or else the whole was filled up with that rhetoric of the passions, which every tragical subject affords such easy means of introducing. In one point of view this last expedient has been of great advantage to the French tragedy; it has lent to it a strength which it wants in all other respects, and enabled it to express, with great effect, the character and spirit of a nation, among whom, in all their relations, rhetoric has always exerted the greatest influence—whose private life itself is filled in a great measure with this very rhetoric of the passions. Besides, a certain measure of this rhetoric is a necessary and indispensable element of all dramatic representation. The thing is, no doubt, overdone in the French tragedy; but its preponderance there is founded upon national feeling, and any attempt to imitate the peculiarity would be quite absurd among any foreign people—

more particularly among those who have greater feeling for poetry, than natural talent for rhetoric.

The partiality of the French for this rhetorical part of their tragedy is so great, that the decision of the audience is founded much more upon the oratory of the individual speeches, than the dramatic connection and effect of the whole piece. But if we attend to those parts of their drama of which they themselves are in general negligent, and study in particular those plays which have a true and poetical denouement of the kind which I have above described, we shall find that, even in this respect, the French tragedy is the child of the antique; that its termination is in general one of complete destruction, or that, if there be any softening, the sorrow still continues to be by far the predominant material. There are indeed a few delightful exceptions. In his *Athalie*, Racine shows himself to be a Christian poet, and brings victory out of the conflict; and in the *Alzire*, in like manner, death and suffering are represented as the avenues of eternal life and blessedness. This last play is the masterpiece of Voltaire; in it he appears indeed worthy of his two illustrious predecessors.

## LECTURE XIII.

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PHILOSOPHY OF THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY—BACON, HUGO GROTIIUS, DESCARTES, BOSSUET, PASCAL—CHANGE IN THE MODE OF THINKING—SPIRIT OF THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY—PICTURE OF THE ATHEISM AND REVOLUTIONARY SPIRIT OF THE FRENCH.

**THE** seventeenth century was rich in distinguished writers, not only in elegant literature, poetry, and eloquence, but also in the sciences and in philosophy. The philosophy and system of thinking which belonged to the eighteenth century, which during that period extended themselves over all the departments of literature, and even acquired a most determinate influence over the fate of men and of nations,—these were not without their precursors in the age immediately preceding; although it is true that the first founders and establishers of the new doctrines soon ceased to attract much attention, after their labours were surmounted by the more imposing structures of their successors. It is absolutely

necessary, however, to take into view Bacon, Descartes, Locke, and some other of the heroes of the seventeenth century, before we can rightly depict or understand the true nature of those intellectual and moral changes which were introduced by Voltaire and Rousseau, not only into France, but into all Europe, and in general into the whole spirit of the eighteenth century.

The sixteenth century was the age of ferment and strife, and it was only towards its close that the human mind began to calm and collect itself after the violent convulsion it had undergone. With the seventeenth century commenced that new mode of reflection and inquiry to which the way had been laid open by the restoration of classical learning, the great improvement in natural science, and that universal shaking and separation of faith occasioned by the reformation of Luther. The first name to which we turn is that of the great Bacon. This mighty genius, by carrying the spirit of inquiry out of the verbal contentions of the dead schools, into the regions of experience, above all of life and nature, has become the father of modern physics; he made and completed many illustrious discoveries himself, of many more he seems to have had a dim and imperfect foresight; it is the work of ages to follow out the hints which are dropped by such a spirit in the progress of its

excursions. By means of his rich and undefatigable intellect, the whole sciences of experience have been immeasurably enlarged, or rather they have been entirely regenerated; the common shape of mind, nay, we may say, the common shape of life in modern Europe, has received a spark of new animation from the inspiring touch of this Prometheus. The dangerous consequences produced by the injudicious extension of his principles, at the time when his followers and admirers in the eighteenth century thought they could derive more than he had ever dreamed of, from experience and the senses,—the laws of life and commerce, and the just notion of faith and hope,—and threw away from them, as mysticism, whatever cannot be proved by the common experience of sense,—these indeed were alarming and reprehensible, but they cannot be with justice ascribed to the spirit of Bacon. I need only recal to your recollection one celebrated saying of his, which has by no means become obsolete,—that philosophy when studied superficially leads to unbelief and atheism, but when profoundly understood is sure to produce veneration for God, and to render faith in him the ruling principle of our life. Not only in religion, but even in natural science, this great man believed in many things which have been despised as mere superstitions by his followers and admirers in later times.

It is not easy to suppose that he was influenced in regard to these matters by the mere faith of custom, and some not yet overcome attachment to the common prejudices of his day. For in truth his expressions concerning the world above the senses, bear, as much as any part of his writings, the clear impress of his penetrative and peculiar spirit. He was a man who had as much feeling as invention, and although the world of experience had revealed itself to him in altogether a new light, the higher and divine region of the spiritual world, which is situated far above common experience and sense, was not viewed by him either obscurely or remotely. How little he himself partook, I will not say in the rude materialism of his followers, but even in that spiritual deification of nature which became fashionable in France, and, though in a lesser degree, in Germany, during the eighteenth century, this may be abundantly proved by a simple maxim which he has uttered respecting the proper essence of true and philosophical inquiry in physics. In the natural philosophy of the ancients, says he, there is this to blame, that they held nature to be an image of the Godhead; for, according to truth, with which also the Christian doctrine has no variance, man alone is a type and image of God, while nature is no glass, likeness, or similitude of him, but only the work of his hands. By the na-

tural philosophy of the ancients, it is sufficiently evident from the extensive form of Bacon's argument, that he here meant to designate not any one particular system, but in general every thing most good and excellent in the opinions of the ancients concerning natural philosophy—a term under which it is besides more than probable that he comprehended not physical science alone, but mythology and natural religion. When Bacon, according to the doctrine of the Scriptures, asserts that it is the privilege of man alone to be an image of the Deity, we are not to understand that he had ascribed to man this high and peculiar excellence, merely as being the most glorious and complex of all natural productions; he took the language of the Bible in its literal sense, and believed this resemblance and image to be the gift of God's love and inspiration. In the figurative expression, that nature is no mirror or image of God, but only the work of his hand, there may be found, if we understand it in its due profoundness of meaning, a perfect statement of the true relation between the world subject and the world superior to the senses,—between God and nature. It expresses that nature is not self originating or self existent, but a production of the Divine will for a particular purpose. We may obtain from this short and simple maxim respecting the natural philosophy of



the ancients, and that of the Christian Scriptures and of Bacon, a clear and intelligible guide to point out the right path between the dangers of impious veneration for nature on the one hand; and on the other, of that dark aversion for nature, into which confined and partial reason too often falls, when, directing itself entirely to morality, it can neither understand external nature, nor the Deity who is alike predominant over the natural and the moral world. The proper distinction and relation between nature and Deity, is the leading principle not only of all thought and belief, but of human life and intercourse. This circumstance, and the saying of Bacon, which embraces the result of all his reflections concerning nature, are the more worthy of our attention, because, even in our own time, philosophy is still, for the most part, divided between these two extremes; the one that culpable deification of nature, which distinguishes not between the Creator and his works, God and the world;—the other, the hatred and blindness of those despisers of nature, whose reason is too exclusively egotistical in its direction. The right middle-path between these two opposite errors, or the true recognition of nature, finds its expression in the feeling which we have of our own internal connection with nature, as well as of our superiority over it—and in that peculiar reverence and admiration with which

we regard all those parts of nature that have in them something of a higher and different character—all of lovely or of awful, which reveals to us, in a more striking manner, the traces of a fashioning hand and a superintending intellect.

The influence exerted during the seventeenth and a great part of the eighteenth centuries over philosophy and universal thought, by Lord Bacon, was not more considerable than that of Hugo Grotius over the practical and political world, and the general ethics of international intercourse. And in truth this influence was a happy and wholesome one; for as, after the dissolution of that religious bond which formerly united the Western nations in one political system, the universal and impious statesmanship of Machiavel had always been becoming more and more the favourite rule of conduct, surely no greater service could be rendered to humanity, than giving to self-destroying Europe, an universal and composing law for all her nations—unhappily so much divided in faith, so much inflamed in passions, and so much corrupted by the prevalence of a doctrine alike abounding in sophistry and vice. Hugo Grotius was universally acknowledged to have accomplished this noble purpose. It is an elevating thought that a mere man of letters, a philosopher, having no power except that of his own intelligence and eloquence, should have been

the unassisted founder of such a system of natural law; as he gained by his exertions the veneration of his contemporaries, so he is no less entitled to the gratitude and admiration of posterity. If we consider it as a system, the national law founded and introduced by Hugo Grotius and his followers may appear indeed extremely defective, and be sufficiently open to the cavils of a sceptic. The religious bond of the elder political union was an irremediable loss. In the absence of this the doctrine of right was now to be founded entirely upon the innate and necessary ideas of men respecting their own social place and destination. The more entirely the universal morality was grounded by Grotius and his followers on nature and reason, and conducted according to the capabilities of these imperfect guides, the more did the first great fountain of all morality come to be neglected; and the more unavoidably did it happen than both the theory and practice of national law lost themselves in a multitude of useless, and, in part at least, inextricable difficulties and niceties, on the one side, and on the other, in a set of conclusions which were no less dangerous than extravagant. It is indeed difficult to compute how much evil, both in opinion and in action, was produced by the doctrines of natural right, and the statesmanship of reason, in the last half of the eighteenth century.

Yet, it must always remain a great benefit, that through the doctrine of international law, extended and recognised by means of Grotius, a mighty bulwark was placed before the encroaching stream of corruption for at least one full century. From 1648 to 1740 there is no doubt that many evident and great outrages against international justice were committed, but they were all exclaimed against; and it was much that power and ambition were thus subjected to some constraint, and compelled to observe at least the appearances of rectitude. Even from 1740 to 1772 these beneficial effects were still displayed; and, although certainly in a less degree, perhaps even in the more stormy and tumultuous period which succeeded. Now, indeed, the nations of Europe have undergone a second great convulsion, and as peoples and states have been so much changed, it is no wonder that the old rules and forms, by which their intercourse was regulated, should have passed away.

Of all the writers who have produced a great and universal effect on the practical world, and the political relations of Europe, the influence of Grotius has certainly been the most salutary. In regard to the importance of his works, he can only be compared with Machiavel before, and Rousseau after him.

In addition to his labours for the restoration and

recognition of justice and its theory, the active intellect of Grotius was also exerted in the attempt to set forth the truth of religion in a formal, and, so to speak, in a *rational* manner. It was one of the indirect effects of Protestantism that religion came to be perpetually looked upon as a subject of contention, and consequently to be treated as a matter of reason—an error which formed besides a part of the original spirit and system of the second great leader of the reformation, Calvin. Grotius has had many followers in an attempt of which the audacity seems every day more remarkable, although there can be no reason to doubt the excellence of his motives. In itself I must consider it as a sure token of declining religion, that what is by nature a matter of the most internal feeling and lively faith, should be embraced as a business of mere reason, and considered as the fit subject of learned controversy—that the truth of religion should be handled like a process of civil law, or what is still worse, as Pascal would have desired to see it, like the solution of a regular problem in geometry.

I cannot bring myself to look upon the philosophical labours of Descartes as equally important with those of these two great men; his influence upon his own age, and the following one, was rather dangerous and productive of error, than salutary and truly vivifying. In general, Descartes

appears to me a perfect proof that a man may be, at least as the exact sciences have as yet been cultivated, a great mathematician (which he certainly was for his age) without being on that account the more successful in philosophy. It is true that these hypotheses, from which Descartes attempted to explain not only all the separate facts in physics, but even the origin of the universe, have been long forgotten. His system possessed only for a very short time its supremacy, and was, in fact, never very much extended out of France. Yet his strange hypothesis of the vortices was not without a considerable and even abiding effect upon the spirit of the seventeenth, and through that of the eighteenth century. Above all, his method, as he calls it, or the mode in which he began to philosophize, has found many imitators. It was the great object of his desire to be throughout an original thinker in the strictest and most perfect sense of the word. For this purpose he resolved to forget, once for all, every thing he had before known, thought, or believed, and to begin entirely anew. Of course all the philosophers and inquirers of preceding ages were entirely neglected, and their labours overlooked as matters unworthy of notice by this original reflector. Were it possible at pleasure to throw entirely and effectually aside the thread of inherited thought, (by which we are, in

spite of ourselves, inseparably connected through language), the consequences of this could be no other than destruction. The case would be exactly as if some innovator in the political world should dream himself capable of stopping the great wheel of public life, and of substituting in place of that complicated machinery, which a nation has formed for itself in the progress and struggle of ages, some simpler, and, as he thinks, better invention of his own devising—a constitution springing fresh and pure from his own unassisted reason. The absurdity of any attempt to attain either philosophical truth, or political faultlessness, by such contempt and oblivion of the past; has been demonstrated by many unhappy examples in the history both of nations and of literature. The most natural consequence of all such attempts is, that the inquirer neither sees nor avoids those first and usual errors into which human reason is most apt to fall, when it attempts to discover truth entirely by its own power; errors are thus needlessly revived, and even held up as great discoveries, which have already been often corrected or confuted. As for the total oblivion of all that has gone before us, that, as I have said above, is an impossibility; so impossible is it to erect any fabric of perfect and independent originality in philosophy, that Descartes is by no means the only one of these self-satisfied philosophers,

whose most boasted and original opinions turn out, after all, to be mere new versions of what had been often said, in different words, by their predecessors. The borrowing is indeed unintentional, but it is produced by a mixture of imperfect self-deception, and obscured but not extinguished reminiscence. It is usually supposed to have been a great merit of Descartes, that he drew so perfect a line between spirit and matter. It must, however, appear unquestionably somewhat strange and surprising, that it should have been looked on as something so new and original to make a distinction between intellect and body; but, in truth, the mode in which Descartes made his distinction was so unsatisfactory and merely mathematical, that no good resulted from it, and the whole thoughts of those who adopted it were lost in inextricable difficulties, in the attempt to explain the connection between soul and body, and their mutual influences upon each other. Philosophy continued, after the time of Descartes, to vacillate between the principle of personal consciousness and the world of the senses— one set of inquirers vainly endeavouring to explain every thing on the former; and another still more absurdly, to deduce from the experience of the latter even those doctrines of morality and theology with which it has not the smallest connection. In every case the true relation between the soul and



the senses remained entirely incomprehensible, so long as men had lost all sight of that higher and godlike region upon which both depend, and from whose light both must first be illuminated and explained. We often hear Descartes praised for the mathematical precision with which he has, from reason alone, described the being of God. If this be a merit, in my opinion, it does not belong to him: it was an idea borrowed from those elder philosophers of the middle age, who were treated with so much contempt by Descartes and his age. It is true that they considered the matter in a point of view quite different from that of Descartes and the period following their own. To the highest of all truths, of which, in a way peculiar to itself, we have also the most firm and fearless knowledge, and which forms, in fact, the animating spirit and central-point of all other thoughts and impressions, even of all the active purposes and views of life—to this truth these old philosophers attempted, with modesty and perseverance, to add the additional and far inferior arguments of reason. As every creature, or being in nature, makes known involuntarily, in one way or another, the inscrutable greatness of its Creator, so may also the human reason, otherwise so vain of itself, and its own powers, be permitted to join the general chorus which does honour to the Deity. As in human affairs it is

always looked upon as the highest triumph of a good and right cause, when even its enemies and opponents are compelled to bear unwilling witness to its truth and excellence, so also may the reason of man be admitted to furnish evidence of divine truth. But if we attempt, after the manner of Descartes, to explain exclusively or chiefly from reason the being of God, which we must learn to comprehend from the suggestions of very different authority, we are in fact degrading God to a dependence upon reason, or at least to a companionship and equality with it. There never has been, nor ever can be, any successful attempt after men have lost their respect for that other and higher authority, to demonstrate the existence of God to those who neither feel nor believe it.

The followers and disciples of Descartes founded a new sect in France, which for a short time maintained its supremacy. Yet there were not a few who, remaining independent, and even preserving their religious principles, embraced, nevertheless, as much of the Cartesian system as they imagined they could reconcile with their belief. This was, in many respects, the case with Malebranche, although he indeed was never able completely to get rid of those difficulties which Descartes had seen concerning the connection between thought and its external objects, between spirit and matter. Huet

acquired great fame as an opponent of Descartes, and a critical, acute, and philosophical defender of Revelation; while, at the same time, Fenelon, without partaking in any degree of the peculiar philosophical and metaphysical contentions of his day, wrote in the most exquisite language from no inspiration but that of his own amiable and Christian feelings. But religion owed her preservation much more to another distinguished Frenchman, whose name I have as yet purposely forborne to mention;—this is Bossuet, a writer who, so far as eloquence and language are concerned, has always been considered as one of the first which his country has produced. It may indeed be matter of some doubt, whether the splendour of such eloquence as his be altogether an appropriate vehicle for the truths of religion, whether the simplicity of our faith do not better accord with a more artless and unlaboured style of composition. But even if this should be so in the general, there can be no question that at that particular period, as in every other period when religion is a matter of contest, and truth not entirely triumphant, a preacher, such as he was, possessed at once of the clearest and most comprehensive understanding, and of the most vigorous eloquence, must have been an acquisition of the highest importance to the cause he had undertaken to defend. Besides, we must re-

collect that the eloquence of Bossuet was by no means confined to subjects, strictly speaking, theological; for whatever in life and in morality, in church and state, in politics and history, and in general whatever in human affairs is calculated to lead the mind to serious reflection, was always regarded by this great man in a religious point of view, and considered as a fit subject of the eloquence of the pulpit.

If it may be permitted to compare an orator, so far as his language and composition are concerned, with poets, I think there is something in Bossuet which places him on a higher level than any of the poets which were his contemporaries.—The perfection of style is enclosed in a very narrow sphere, between two extremes, that of the lofty and sublime, and the merely artificial; its charm consists in the mingling of these two elements. There is nothing more rare or difficult than to preserve this medium. On the one side there are many poets who are both great and sublime, but in whom there is a want of refinement, perfection, or, in general, of harmony. Others in their anxiety to be polished lean too much to the side of effeminacy and delicacy; they are noble and elegant, but not great; they want the strength which is necessary to constitute the sublime. Voltaire seems to have been well aware of this from the mode in which he criticises the two great tragedians his predecessors,

whom it was the highest ambition of his life to surpass. It was no difficult matter for him to detect in Corneille individual passages wherein the language appears obsolete, rude, or even corrupt and bombast. But it seems to me that he had a higher reverence for the genius of this poet than for that of his rival,—perhaps as bearing some resemblance to himself; and that he hoped, by his own fire and energy in passion, to surpass Racine, whom he held to be deficient in power and elevation. But, in truth, I apprehend that his opinion of Racine was not upon the whole a correct one; if we look only to the rhetoric of passion, among the crowd of French tragedies, which have made that the chief object of their ambition, we shall with difficulty find any one which can sustain a comparison with the *Phedre*. The *Athalie* is animated with the force of another and yet higher inspiration. If in many of his other plays, as, for example, in *Berenice*, the chief excellence appears to consist in a harmonious repose of representation, and exquisite delicacy of characterizing; this was rendered necessary by the nature of the fable. Yet this much may be easily conceded to Voltaire, that Racine would have been a greater and more perfect poet, had he united to the harmonious faultlessness of language and versification which he possessed, to that noble and graceful style which

forms of his peculiar beauty, here and there, somewhat more of that impetuous sublimity, which often loses a great part of its effect on account of the profuseness with which it is lavished among the scenes of Corneille. So far as language and representation are concerned, and so far as an orator can be classed with poets, I think that this union of excellencies was possessed by Bossuet. With the strictest purity and refinement, with a stile, the noble elegance of which has never been surpassed, he is master, whenever his subject requires it, of a greatness and sublimity which he never suffers to swell into the bombast. I am happy to agree with the most severe of the French critics in the judgment which they have formed respecting the high excellence of this man and his writings; and the more so because they are not only examples of perfect style and expression, but also rich fountains of the most sublime and salutary truths.

There is yet another point in which the excellence of Bossuet as a writer and orator, even above the great poets of his age and nation, is sufficiently conspicuous. The French literature is, in many essential circumstances, fashioned after the model of the earlier refined nations of antiquity; it is in part grounded on this imitation, in the same manner that the Roman literature was upon the imitation of the Greek. This in itself is no reproach,

and, in a certain degree, indeed, is necessary with the literature of every nation whose refinement has a date subsequent to that of others, and more particularly whose spirit, like that of the Romans and the French, has been more directed to the external and practical life, than to the internal activity of intellect. It would be absurd to class the literature of the Romans, in regard to inventiveness of spirit, with that of the Greeks; but I have endeavoured to show how, notwithstanding its great inferiority in poetry and philosophy, the Roman feeling and idea of Rome, predominant in all its works and writers, have been sufficient to give it a character and excellence of its own. The same effect was produced on Bossuet by the religion which animated him, for his religion was no mere faith of custom, but the spirit of his life, and, as it were, a second nature, by which he was enabled to see and comprehend more clearly all the mysteries of the first. For this reason it is, that he preserves all the independence of an original writer, and is the equal and rival, rather than the follower, of those ancients who were both his models in style, and the fountains of his learning and opinions. What the idea of their country and of the greatness of Rome was to the Romans, and what this idea gave to them even as writers, Christianity was, and gave, in a much higher degree, to

Catholic France, during the period when the spirit of Bossuet was the ruling one. Religion was the free part of the soul, which enabled it to maintain itself unsubdued by the encroaching influences of the antique. So far however was this from being commonly the case, that the best poet which France at that time possessed, who was also the most religious, stopped short in his career, before he had reached the point of perfection which he certainly might have attained, in consequence of the collision which took place between his ideas of Christianity, and his too exclusively antique notions in regard to the dramatic art. It is well known that Racine, after he had become completely penetrated with the opinions of the Jansenists, adopted ideas of absurd strictness respecting his own art, and even desisted from writing for the theatre. This excess of moral scrupulousness in the great poet, cannot fail to impress us with an amiable notion of the man, and that is indeed sufficiently confirmed by all that we know of his private history, and by the scope and tenor of his letters. And if it be true that he judged too severely of the capabilities of the theatre, it is unquestionably quite as true, that in the dramatic art and representation of his time, there were many things not very easily reconcileable with the doctrines and morality of the Bible. There was always a want of harmony between Christian



sentiments and the vehicle in which they were conveyed. Upon the whole, there is the greatest reason to regret that Racine did not finish what he so well begun in his *Athalie*, and demonstrate the possibility of making the drama of France a Christian drama, without diminishing its excellence. How great in these respects is the superiority of the Spanish poetry over the French. Among that thoroughly Catholic people, religion and fiction, truth and poetry, do not stand at variance from each other, but are all united in the most harmonious beauty.

The party of the Jansenists gave to France many distinguished writers, among whom I need only mention Pascal; but, upon the whole, I am convinced that the controversies which they introduced had any effect rather than a fortunate one on the French literature. I shall only recal to your recollection, in a very few words, the subject of most of their contests. It was a difficulty as old as human reason, and which human reason never can thoroughly explain; the nature of the free will of man, and its reconciliation with the necessity of nature—the omniscience and omnipotence of the Deity. This is a matter entirely subject to reason, and which of right, therefore, should never have been connected with religion. The judicious friends and defenders of Christianity have

never pronounced any opinion respecting it, excepting only a negative one, to express their dislike of the two equally reprehensible extremes. But as in the fifth and sixth centuries, when the doctrines of free will, and the power of man's own exertions, in regard to his virtue, were so much brought forward, that he was represented as a being independent of God, and not requiring his aid, all the friends of Christianity were obliged to bestir themselves in order to get the better of this error; so in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, their chief object was to combat those very opposite dogmatists who maintained that man, to obtain and fulfil all the purposes of his being, needs only to lay aside all exertion and all free will,—who adopted, in the main, the antique notions of dark and inflexible destiny, or at least the Mahometan ones of predestination and fatality. This controversy was in itself an unless one, but it was rendered far more hurtful than it needed to have been by the manner in which it was conducted. The Provincial Letters of Pascal have, in consequence of their wit, and the beauty of their language, become standard works in French literature; but if we would characterize them by their import and spirit, they form nothing more than a masterpiece of sophistry. He disdains none of the tricks of that dangerous art, by which he thinks he can render

his opponents, the Jesuits, contemptible or odious. That violence was in many respects done to truth, those acquainted with the history of the time well know, but even although that had been much less frequently the case than it really was with Pascal, every one must admit that an author, such as he was, employed his genius in a very culpable manner, when he set the example of writing concerning religion in the tone of apparent levity and bitter sarcasm. At first, indeed, this mode was adopted by one Christian against others, men whom he personally hated, although they were seriously religious, because they did not measure the truths of Christianity by the geometrical standard which he himself preferred. But how soon were the same weapons turned against religion itself. The witty and exquisitely expressed sophistry of Pascal, was an admirable but a dangerous model, copied with but too much success by Voltaire; and easily coupled by him with all the kindred artifices of Bayle—a genius of the highest order, who applied a most various erudition in order to throw out doubts, insinuations, mockeries, and jests, against religion, and to make his approaches on every side, like a treacherous underminer, towards the yet unshattered bulwarks of our faith.

In general the spirit of philosophy in the last part of the seventeenth century, leaned more and

more to evil. We may learn from the example of Hobbes alone how much the new doctrines of Bacon, without any intention or fault of that great man himself, had the tendency to promote unbelief and materialism. But as yet the spirit of the time was not ripe enough to receive the doctrine of unlimited right in the strongest, as expressed in the *Leviathan*. In order to have preached with success such an atheistical view both of the physical and political world, Hobbes should have come a century, or at least half a century later. Locke, on the other hand, received much greater favour, because his opinions were not so much at variance with the received moral principles and feelings of his time, and because the tendency of his book, although almost as greatly, was by no means so apparently irreligious. In truth his errors were the more dangerous, on account of the unsuspecting shape in which they made their appearance. It is quite evident that no higher kind of belief or hope can obtain a place, where every thing is inclosed within the narrow limits of the senses, and their experience. Locke himself, indeed, was a good Christian, but this is only one instance more, that he who first opens a new line of thought very seldom pursues it so far as to perceive even its most inevitable consequences. If we adopt his principles, we must inevitably renounce all other thoughts,

and limit ourselves to the feeling, the experience, and the enjoyment of the senses; and those who in later times have openly professed these notions, although they called themselves independent philosophers, were in truth only the disciples of Mr. Locke. When men began to reflect somewhat more deeply on the proper subjects of this sensible experience, and then on the power which it possesses, and the effects which it produces, a mighty variety of doubts sprung up in every direction—particularly in England. The doctrine, that the only true knowledge is that shaped out by the senses and experience, is in general decided, although not openly expressed, materialism—and in France it very soon threw aside the veil such as it was.—Indirectly, and indeed entirely contrary to his wishes, Newton himself paved the way for the philosophy of the eighteenth century; for the defenders of the new opinions were proud of appealing perpetually to his authority; and thought, indeed, that after his stupendous discoveries in physics, nothing is so great but that it may be attained without the assistance of religion. Both Newton and Bacon would have turned away with disgust from those who professed to be their greatest admirers in the eighteenth century. These, indeed, with all their reverence for his philosophy, did not scruple to talk at times of his

attachment to Christianity as a weakness in the mind of Newton. In many of his expressions concerning the Deity and his connection with nature, we may perceive the traces not merely of an animated feeling, but of a deep sentiment—marks that, though he was not, in strict speaking, a philosopher, and knew nothing of metaphysics, he had nevertheless thought, in an original manner, on all the highest subjects of reflection.

In the eighteenth century, the English were the first people of Europe, in literature as in every thing else. The whole of the modern French philosophy was produced by that of Bacon, Locke, and other Englishmen; at least, it borrowed all its first principles from them. In France, however, it soon assumed an appearance quite different from what it had ever had in England. In Germany, on the other hand, the mighty regeneration of literature in the middle of this century, received its first impetus and ruling direction, principally from the poetry and the criticism of the English.

Voltaire was the first who contributed, in a great degree, to bring the philosophy of Locke and Newton into France. It is singular with what a perversity of genius this man makes use of all the marvellous greatness of nature as revealed to him by the science of England, not for the purpose of exalting the character of the Creator,

but for lowering that of men;—how fond he is of dwelling on the insignificance of this earthworm, amidst the immeasurable splendours of stars and planets. As if the spirit, the thought which can comprehend all this universe of suns and stars, were not something greater than they; as if God were some earthly monarch, who, among the millions over which he rules, may well be supposed never to have seen, and almost to have forgotten the existence of some paltry village on the border of his dominions. The eighteenth century in general made no use of the physical knowledge it inherited from the seventeenth, except one extremely hostile to the higher truths of religion. In Voltaire, indeed, there is no such thing to be found as any regular system of infidelity, scarcely even a single firm principle, or settled philosophical opinion, or even precise form of philosophical doubt. As the sophists of antiquity took a pleasure in showing the versatility and ingenuity of their spirit, by defending first one opinion and then the one exactly opposite to it, so Voltaire wrote one book in favour and another in contradiction of providence. Yet in so far is he sincere, that he cannot help letting us see, very plainly, which of these works is his own favourite. Throughout all his writings, whatever be their subject, he cannot resist any opportunity of introduc-

ing his impious wit, and showing his aversion for Christianity, and, in part at least, for all religion. In this point of view his spirit operated as a corrosive and destructive engine for the dissolving of all earnest, moral, and religious modes of thinking. Yet it appears to me that Voltaire has done even more harm by the spirit and purpose which he has thrown over history, than by his derision of religion. He felt what was the defect of French literature in this department, as well as in that of poetry. Since the time of the Cardinal Retz, the abundance of historical memoirs, alike interesting from their subjects, and the lively mode of their composition, had increased to such a degree, that they might almost be said to be a proper literature by themselves—and certainly to form one of the most brilliant parts of the whole literature of France. But in consequence of these memoirs, there is no doubt that history declined too much into the tone of conversation, became split into particulars, and lost itself at last, to the great injury of historical truth, in an endless variety of anecdotes. However delightful the perusal of such works may be, they are, after all, only the harbingers and materials of history, not histories in the proper acceptation of the word. At least there is much space intervening between the best possible style of writing such anecdotes, and a



style of historical composition such as that of the ancients was, or among the moderns, that of Machiavelli. The French literature possesses many excellent narrators, some well collected, and (even as pieces of writing) praiseworthy tracts concerning the older history of the country, but no truly classical, national, and original work of history. Voltaire was very sensible of this defect in the literature of his nation, and with his usual vanity of universal genius, attempted to supply it himself. That in regard to art he was not entirely successful; that as a writer of history, even in respect to the mode of composition adapted for works of that kind, he can sustain no comparison, I do not say with the ancients, but even with the best English historians—Hume and Robertson; this is now universally admitted even in France itself. Nevertheless, the spirit in which he viewed history, very soon acquired very great influence even over English writers—particularly Gibbon—and became almost the ruling historical spirit of the eighteenth century. The essence of this mode of thinking in respect to history which proceeded from Voltaire, consists in expressing, on every opportunity, and in every possible form, hatred for monks, clergymen, Christianity, and, in general, for all religion. In regard to politics, its prevalent spirit is a partial, and, in the situation of modern Europe, an absurd

predilection for the republican notions of antiquity, accompanied very frequently with an altogether false conception, or at least extremely imperfect knowledge of the true spirit and essence of republicanism. Among the followers of Voltaire this went so far as to take the appearance of a decided and bigoted hatred of all kingly power and nobility, and in general of all those modes of life and government which have been produced by what is called the feudal system; and all this, in spite of Montesquieu, who characterized and praised with the acuteness and liberality of a true philosopher, what these comparatively ignorant writers were only capable of reviling. How much was set in a false light, how greatly historical truth was injured, and the whole of the past unworthily condemned, begins now to be discovered; since historical inquirers have adopted a more profound and accurate method of research. For after the philosophy of the eighteenth century had entirely accomplished its own destruction, and the religion which it would have overthrown had come victorious out of the struggle, every thing in history and in the past has begun to be seen in a more just and natural point of view. Yet there remain many falsifications, errors, and prejudices, with regard to past ages which have still to be amended; for in no department did the philosophy of the last century so deeply and so

extensively establish its influence as in history, where its wickedness and falseness are, of course, less observable to those who take facts upon trust, than when their spirit is brought distinctly forward in the shape of philosophical doctrine and opinion.

In regard to Voltaire, I must observe that he seems to have been actuated by motives of a personal nature, which render the spirit of his histories still more narrow and unjust. It is evidently his purpose to make us believe that all the ages before that of Lewis XIV. were ages of darkness, and that even then, all nations except his were mere hordes of barbarians. This much exalted monarch plays this important part in the historical and intellectual drama of Voltaire, because he, it seems, while the whole earth was wrapped in chaos and barbarism, was the first who pronounced a creative *FIAT LUX*. Yet the great writers of the time of Lewis, and even Newton and Locke, were, after all, only the first faint rays of the coming splendour. The mid-day sun of entire illumination and freethinking, did not, according to Voltaire's opinion, manifest himself till somewhat later. But however inclined he was in the general to flatter the foolish vanity of his nation; yet, in many moments of mirth or displeasure, he spoke either from levity or bitterness, in a very different tone,

as, for example, in that well known saying of his, that "the character of a Frenchman is made up of the tiger and the ape." In other more moderate but not less caustic expressions, it is easy to see how thoroughly Voltaire had studied and comprehended his countrymen. But this was a piece of knowledge which he never displayed except by accident.

Even Montesquieu contributed towards the formation of this philosophy of the eighteenth century; principally, as I apprehend, because he neglected to give any rule or standard of unity to that immense collection of admirable political remarks and opinions which he laid before the world. This was exactly in compliance with what was then the usual fashion in every department of thought and action. The erudition, the genius and powerful reflections of this great and remarkable writer, contributed only to increase the general relaxation of all principle; for the spirit of the age, being furnished with no guiding rule, floated hither and thither amidst that vast sea of political facts and precepts, like a ship without anchor or compass, upon the waves of the ocean.

The tendency to sublime and elevating thoughts, even to religious feelings and views, is so strong in our nature, and occasions to call these forth are so profusely scattered over the world around us,

that we cannot be at all surprised to find that many of the great French naturalists remained entirely, or at least in a great measure, free, from the prevalent spirit of irreligion, and have even here and there risen to a style of reflection much higher than that of their age. Although many of his opinions do not harmonize with revealed religion, and many others cannot stand the test of philosophy,—although he himself was by no means free from the material fetters of the entirely physical system of philosophy which was then in fashion; yet I can never help considering the great Buffon as one, who is entitled to be classed, at least in the way of comparison, with the better thinkers of the eighteenth century. Among the latter authors, I may justly allude to the zealous and intellectual Bonnet.

The social manners and constitution of modern Europe, and more particularly of France, had become, in very many respects, so remote from nature, that we can scarcely wonder that a restless and inquiring spirit should have gone entirely to the opposite extreme. But how little fitted admiration and respect for nature alone are to supply human life with a proper rule of conduct, the example of Rousseau affords a sufficient proof. In regard to the feeling and zeal which animated him, Rousseau, as a reasoner, is not only superior to

Voltaire, and all other French philosophers of the last century, but of a class entirely different from them. The influence which he exerted over his age and nation was perhaps only on that account the more hurtful. It is only when a strong mind, striving passionately in quest of truth, pursues its researches in a wrong direction, and embraces error in room of it, that error assumes a form of real danger, and becomes capable of seizing possession of generous natures, whose general principles are in an unsettled state. The wit of Voltaire contributed very much to unsettle and relax principle, and thereby paved the way for Rousseau. But this man's impetuous and overwhelming eloquence drew into the whirlpool of error, many whom the mere sophistry of wit and pleasantry could never have led astray. It is true that at first Rousseau's pictures of savage life, and his theory of a pure democracy of reason, gave rise to more wonder than conviction. But as it was this man's fortune to become the founder of a new system and method of education, wherein the development of the individual man is supposed to be best conducted upon the isolated principle of seclusion, and entirely without regard to his situation as a citizen, we need not be astonished to find that at a somewhat later period even the wildest of his dreams about natural politics found both admirers and defenders. After

having seen that the extension of physical science contributed very much, in its misapplied condition, to immorality, irreligion, and even atheism, it is no wonder that a direction equally culpable and dangerous was given by the philosophers of the eighteenth century to the improved knowledge of men and nations. But however much men might refine and adorn their descriptions of American savages, in order to promote the idea of the possibility of natural perfection, there remained always a few points in the testimony of every traveller which presented unsurmountable difficulties to the admirers of barbarity. In Voltaire, on the other hand, and in many other French writers of his time, we may observe an equally absurd prédilection, another extreme—one as far removed as can well be from the wild freedom of savages. I mean a passion for the Chinese, a people polished into perfect tameness and uniformity, and exhibiting the best specimen of what has since been called “the Despotism of Reason.” An age which was perpetually endeavouring to substitute a complete system of police in the room of the antiquated influences of religion and morality, which regarded the perfection of a few manufactures as the sole and highest object of human society, and what they called, “the doctrine of pure ethics,” as the

*ne plus ultra* of illumination—an age such as this could scarcely indeed fail to contemplate, with mighty admiration, the spectacle of a nation which has, according to its own account, possessed for some thousand years laws without religion, which has had newspapers some centuries longer than ourselves, which can imprint upon porcelain colours more brilliant than we are acquainted with, and make paper thinner and finer than any European manufactory. It is lamentable to see into what contemptible perversities, the misdirected ingenuity of a few rational men can conduct both themselves and their contemporaries.

Voltaire and Rousseau were the first who gave its form and shape to the spirit of the eighteenth century; but they had many coadjutors in their attempts, many who were indefatigable in rendering the moral philosophy of Locke more decided in its principles as well as bolder in its consequences, and in rendering it, so improved, the manual of the age. What results this produced in regard to human life, may be learned from the single example of Helvetius. This man proved to the satisfaction of his readers, that selfishness, vanity and sensual enjoyment are the true and certain guides, the only rational ends of enlightened men, the only realities in human life—and his readers soon



began to suspect that the same principles ought to be extended to the whole universe. Mind, according to this doctrine, there is none, for matter is every thing, and man is distinguished from the brutes not by intellect, but by hands and fingers—advantages which, in some degree at least, he appears to share with the monkey. The difference between the man and the monkey was indeed diminished very much in the opinion of many philosophers of this time, and it was a very favourite speculation to discover the existence of intermediate and connecting species between them. It is much to be regretted that Rousseau did not fulfil the intention he once expressed, of openly combating the dogmas of Helvetius. He must, in the course of such a controversy, have at least been compelled to settle and explain somewhat more fully his own principles—and these, however erroneous, possess, when compared with those of the other, much that is both good and noble, and capable of being improved.

The last step in the progress of the French ante-revolutionary philosophy, is that marked by the congenial spirit of Diderot. I may, without question, assume the fact, that this man was the centre-point and animating principle, not only of the *Encyclopædia*, but also of the *Système de la Nature*, and

of many other works connected in the same spirit of audacious atheism. He wrought indeed much more in secret than in public; he was different from Voltaire and Rousseau in this, that he had less vanity of authorship than they, and was perfectly satisfied when he could gain the victory, without wishing to be personally held up as a victor. He was peculiarly distinguished by a most fanatical hatred, not only of all Christianity, but of all kinds of religion. He maintained that these are all alike founded in the superstitious terrors left on the minds of a half destroyed race, by those terrible revolutions in the natural world, the traces of which are still so apparent around us. In many of the writings of this school, even the name of Atheism is not concealed, but it is openly stated that man can never be happy till he learns to throw aside the whole doctrine of a Deity—an opinion, the absurdity of which has been but too fatally demonstrated by the experience of a few subsequent years. Of all the forms in which this atheistical system was brought before the world, perhaps the most singularly extravagant was the theory which represented Christ as a mere astronomical symbol—a being never possessed of historical existence—and the twelve apostles as so many old signs of the zodiac. The whole spirit of this system, and the

whole of the practical purposes which it was intended to serve, may be learned from the single well known wish, of which the fathers of the revolution made no secret—"that the last king might be burned on a funeral pile, composed of the body of the "last priest."

## LECTURE XIV.

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LIGHTER SPECIES OF WRITING IN FRANCE, AND IMITATION OF THE ENGLISH—FASHIONABLE LITERATURE OF BOTH COUNTRIES—MODERN ROMANCE—THE PROSE OF BUFFON AND ROUSSEAU—POPULAR POETRY IN ENGLAND—MODERN ITALIAN THEATRE—CRITICISM AND HISTORICAL COMPOSITION OF THE ENGLISH—SCEPTICAL PHILOSOPHY—RETURN TO A BETTER AND HIGHER SPECIES OF PHILOSOPHY IN FRANCE—BONALD AND ST. MARTIN—SIR WILLIAM JONES AND BURKE.

FROM the time of Lewis XIV. the French language has always possessed great wealth in all these lighter species of writing, whose inspiration consists of imagination and wit. Yet even in this respect the elder times were the more fortunate. No later writer of comedies has come near to Moliere; the peculiar charm of La Fontaine, in his artless species of poetical narration, remains inimitable. Voltaire, who in his opinions and philosophy belongs so entirely to the later time, and was even the founder of its principles, so far as

literature and poetry are concerned, is one of the elder school, and so forms a sort of point of connection between it and the new. His success in comedy was far less than in tragedy; but he is quite unrivalled in his variety of miscellaneous, witty, and occasional poems of every kind. The minor poems and songs of the French had always this tendency to social wit and fashion, while those of the English, on the other hand, partook more of the true nature of lyrical poetry, and were distinguished by their depth of thought and their tone of natural feeling in description. The more poetry attaches itself to the present, and the life of society, the more local does it become, and subject to the influences of fashion. Many comedies, romances, and songs, produced in the end of the seventeenth or the beginning of the eighteenth century, which are in themselves full of talent, and were, in their day, very celebrated in France, have since become as obsolete as the manners and opinions of the society which they represent. Should the poetry of any nation confine itself entirely to these species, and to subjects exclusively modern—to dramatic pictures of manners without fable—to tales taken from the life of ordinary society—and witty occasional poems—it would be almost as impossible and absurd to attempt a historical or critical account of it, as to make a display of ana-

tomical skill upon the ephemerides of a summer evening. The object of these productions is nothing more than to fill up the idle hours of fashionable life and amusement; and even although, in order to fulfil this purpose, they may at times make use of feeling, passion, and original thoughts, their end still continues to be pastime—a thing which may be attained quite as well without poetry as with it.

It is true, without doubt, that in the miscellaneous and trifling species of poetry, there are to be found productions which bear as decidedly the stamp of genius as the first works of the epic poet or the tragedian. The beauty, however, is seldom so universal. It depends very often entirely upon expression, and its delicacies, things which can be more easily felt than explained. A heroic poem or a tragedy can be very well comprehended although translated into a different language, and in general the greater its intrinsic excellence is, the less does it suffer by such a transmutation. But I doubt whether any foreigner, however complete may be his familiarity with the French language, can ever sympathize in its utmost extent with the admiration which Frenchmen express for La Fontaine. Naiveté, elegance, and the stamp of genius, these every one must recognize in him; but a Frenchman feels and enjoys something still more exquisite

than these, and this depends on the language, to an entire feeling of whose numberless peculiarities no foreigner ever can attain. Many even of the most celebrated characteristic pieces of Moliere are now become too antiquated for the stage and actual representation, and can be admired only in reading. However high we may be inclined to place these as individual works and in the scale of French poetry, their effects, as the beginning of a new species of writing, and as models for future artists, have been very far from fortunate. The characters of *Labruyere* or *Theophrastus* may be set forth in a dramatic form, but they can never become poetry. Even the rhetoric of the passions, when it forms the sole animation of the tragedy, is far from coming up to our ideas of what tragedy ought to be; in like manner, the psychological wire-drawing of characters and passions in comedy furnishes a very unequal substitute for poetry and wit. The tendency to this extreme minuteness of characterisation has frequently formed a subject of reproach against the higher French comedy of the eighteenth century. From it the change was by no means a difficult one to those ethical treatises in the shape of comedies, of which, unfortunately for his own nation, and still more so for ours, *Diderot* was the inventor.

The original French character is, I believe, quite as light and careless as it is usually represented;

but among the French books of the eighteenth century, I confess, I can perceive very few traces of this, even in those situations where it might have appeared with the greatest propriety. This must be ascribed to the ever increasing spirit of philosophical and political sectarianism; and even from the external history of the period, it is quite easy to see why a passionate species of rhetoric came to acquire a complete predominance over the old trivial spirit of the French. The truth is, that the nation itself had undergone as great a change as its literature. The ruling philosophy of morals was indeed expressed by some poets in light and humorous strains; but it carried most, by much too far, and quite beyond all the limits of poetry. Materialism is essentially inimical to poetry and deadening to fancy. The magic of the muse must lose all its power over one who is thoroughly penetrated with the degrading doctrines of Helvetius.

On the other hand, the passion for freedom, and the adoration of nature, which chiefly, by means of the followers of Rousseau, became predominant in the new philosophy, were not easily to be reconciled with the formal accuracy of the elder French poetry in the seventeenth century. From this circumstance there arose an internal conflict, and enduring struggle, to get rid of the ancient authority, and this broke out in an open rebellion of



taste, and produced an entire, although perhaps only a transitory, anarchy in literature, even before the period of the political revolution: hence the predilection for the poetry of England. Even Voltaire had made much use of it in particular instances, not only without acknowledgment, but in the midst of perpetual sarcasms against Milton and Shakspeare. In all the French efforts in the higher walks of poetry, this influence of the English is even in our own times sufficiently apparent. The desire to give tragedy a greater freedom of construction and more of historical import, without however entirely laying aside the old system, is still undiminished, although it has never as yet produced any very considerable results. The last works of elevated poetry which have acquired a classical reputation in France, are descriptive poems of the species peculiar to England. But of all species of writing, none was so much the favourite of the literati of the new school as the romance; for whatever fetters might have been imposed on all the regular forms of poetical composition, this at least remained perfectly free. When Voltaire clothed his wit in this form, when Rousseau embodied in it his enthusiasm and his eloquence, when Diderot chose to make it the vehicle of his immorality, romance became, in the hands of each of these men of genius, exactly what he found it most

convenient for himself to make it. The two first of them had many followers, who attempted to embody a similar spirit in the form of a more regular narration, and under the guise of a more exact delineation of the present modes of life. No one is ignorant into how many romances the principles and opinions of *Candide* have been wrought. Others were more the imitators of Rousseau; among these not a few who partook in his passion for nature, have chosen to lay the scene of their fictions among the wildernesses of America,—regions in which they might certainly consider themselves as quite free from the domestic tyranny of Aristotle and Boileau. The most distinguished of these are Bernardin de St. Pierre, and Chateaubriand.

Voltaire, Rousseau, and Diderot, made use of the romance very frequently, merely because they knew not in what other form they could so conveniently express certain philosophical opinions. But if we regard romance as a species of poetry, and as the regular representation in narration of incidents taken from actual life and manners, it is quite evident that the French have even in this species of writing been the imitators of the English, although I am far from thinking that they have attained equal excellence with them. In invention and power of representation, perhaps, Richardson may

be entitled to the first place. Although this writer has already become antiquated and obsolete, both at home and abroad, although his attempts at the higher species of poetic fiction are in the main unsuccessful, and although his extreme copiousness is vulgar and disagreeable, we should, I suspect, attribute the decline of his popularity to any thing rather than a deficiency of genius. The species of writing which he adopted is a false one, and even a more powerful genius than that of Richardson could not easily get over the difficulties which it presents. Among the modern imitators of Cervantes, the most accomplished are Fielding and Smollet. Of all romances in miniature (and perhaps this is the best shape in which romance can appear), the *Vicar of Wakefield* is, I think, the most exquisite. That other species of romance, of which the purpose is not narration but humour, and which loses itself in the mere play of wit and sentiment, was carried by its first inventor, Sterne, to a point of excellence at which none of his French imitators have arrived.

If we must give an opinion of those works of intellect which serve the purposes of mere fashion and daily use, as we should of any other species of fashionable manufacture, I think the common run of English novels and romances are as much superior to the common run of the French, as Smol-

let and Fielding are superior to the best of the French novelists.

I must not omit to mention one circumstance which has been extremely unpropitious to French romance; I allude to the extraordinary abundance in this literature of memoirs, confessions, books of letters and anecdotes, all more or less partaking in the nature of the romance. I am not aware that any tale of Marmontel has ever excited so universal an interest as his memoirs; and I am quite sure that no French romance ever produced half so much effect as the Confessions of Rousseau.

In general, poetry, during the eighteenth century, was driven out of fashion in France by prose; this, we must admit, although not without many great errors and faults, was rich, and in the hands of the most eminent writers was developed with the highest power and eloquence. Voltaire's style in prose is animated and witty like himself; it is perfectly adapted to him and his purposes. The more severe French critics disapprove of his prose, and in history, indeed, I think it is by no means a suitable one. Many Germans find something very delightful to them in the style of Diderot, and I agree with them that he shows a perception and feeling of the more delicate beauties of imitative art by no means common among the writers of his country;

but his language is incorrect and hasty, and wholly devoid of that pure elegance which characterises the witty writings of the best French authors. In respect to style, Buffon and Rousseau are justly regarded with the highest admiration. The former is perhaps the richest and most graceful of the two; but he was so much fettered by the nature of his work, that he never could introduce his rhetoric without an episode, and this has destroyed in a great measure the effect which he was fitted by nature to produce. It may appear natural enough that he should have given his theory of love in the article *Dove*. But we could scarcely have looked for a rhetorical treatise on the subject of the dispersion of nations under the word *Hare*. Aristotle allowed himself no such liberties in his capacity of natural historian. As a scientific writer Buffon can sustain no comparison with the illustrious Greek whom it was his chief ambition to rival. Upon the whole, I coincide with those who give the preference to Rousseau over Buffon; for, although his style is in particular respects equally defective, there is more unity of purpose, and a more eloquent flow of composition in his works. His charm lies much more in this last peculiarity, than in the extraordinary beauty of individual passages. My feelings perfectly accord with those who esteem Rousseau the first of all the French writers of the

last century, in regard to skill and power of eloquence; but I must not conceal from you that I, nevertheless, look upon the beauty of his composition as holding a place extremely below the sublime oratory of Bossuet.

Should the present condition of affairs ever be altered, and the superiority of prose over poetry in the language and literature of France become less tyrannical—in other words, should poetry ever revive among the French, I am clearly of opinion that their best means of attaining great excellence will consist, not in any strict imitation of English models, or of any foreign models whatever, but in a hearty recurrence to the old spirit and poetry of their own nation. The imitation of another nation can never be perfectly successful, for the most perfect productions of this nation remain always foreign to those who make them their models. Every nation has enough in its power when it can go back to its own original and most ancient poetry and legends. The farther back we go in history, the more intimate do we find the connection between different nations to be. But it is in the very first ages of national existence that the foundations both of national character and national poetry are laid.

In England, at the beginning of last century, the leaning towards a French taste in poetry was still

evident; its influence is apparent in the elaborate versification of Pope, and in the tragedy which Addison wrote with a view to promote what he conceived to be more just ideas concerning poetical theory among his countrymen. Yet both of these authors contributed in no small degree towards bringing Shakspeare and Milton out of oblivion. Pope's translation of Homer, however remote it may be from the simplicity of the old bard, increased nevertheless the general love for this great poet of nature and antiquity, and is itself a proof of the existence of this love. In the original poems of Pope, we can perceive abundant traces of that predilection for thought which has rendered didactic poetry so much a favourite among the English. I have already expressed my belief that this species contains always something of the frigid and unpoetic; and England has furnished another example that, such as it is, it becomes very soon exhausted. The common materials of didactic poetry were, however, often combined in England with the more poetical elements of passion and melancholy; as, for example, in the gloomy and enthusiastic Young. Thomson expressed his feelings more tastefully and beautifully in that species of poetry so much loved by his countrymen, and after his own time so much copied by foreigners,—the descriptive. The passion for nature was the

origin of the national love of Ossian; and although neither the sorrow of Ossian nor the despair of Young be every where prevalent, the spirit of serious meditation is certainly much more diffused over the lyrical poems of England during the eighteenth century, than even those of France. By the side of the ever increasing veneration of Shakspeare, there grew up, chiefly in consequence of the writings of Percy, a passionate love for the old ballads and popular poems. The more of these were discovered (and the wealth of the Scots in particular is almost boundless), the more did the love of them overcome that of every other kind of writing, and engross the whole of the English literature, with the single exception of romances and plays for daily use. In France, then, at the end of the seventeenth and beginning of the eighteenth centuries, the higher kinds of poetry were cultivated in a manner too regular and precise, and gradually sunk into the tone of social wit. In England, on the other hand, serious thoughts and poetical descriptions of natural scenery were the chief materials at the commencement of the last century, and at its close, the universal passion was for the ancient national ballads,—melancholy echoes of the lost poetry of a more heroic time. Those acquainted with the modern literature of England are well aware how this propensity has been fos-



tered by the genius of the poets who are our own contemporaries.

Upon the whole, during last century, the state of poetry was a very poor one, at least when compared with the riches of antecedent times, even in countries where poetry is intermingled with all the enjoyments of life, as in Spain; or where the spirit of art forms almost the character of the nation, as in Italy. In this last country, however, although the higher species of poetry produced no new works worthy of being placed by the side of those of the more ancient period, the theatre at least was more successful and fruitful than it ever before had been. In Metastasio, Goldoni, Gozzi, Alfieri, we may discover, in a separate state, all those elements of a poetical drama, which in a more blended condition characterize our own stage. In Metastasio we find the highest musical beauty of language; in Goldoni common life is represented in a light and delightful manner, with those airy accompaniments of masking and carnival which appear natural to an Italian. In Gozzi's fantastic popular stories, and plays of witchcraft and *spectacle*, we can perceive an abundance of the true poetical power of invention; but there is a great want of that musical harmony and elegance of fancy which are requisite before invention can take just possession of the stage. In the dramas of Alfieri an attempt is made to revive the

sublimity of the antique; an attempt so noble, that it is well worthy of great praise, even when it is not entirely successful.

I am not certain but the same remark which I made a few pages back, respecting the comparative merits of the modern French and English romances, might be with equal propriety applied to their modern dramas. Both are mere species of manufacture, and I think the English are rather the best of the two. The Italian theatre lies much nearer ourselves, both in regard to external shape and later development.

The critical books of the English, and in particular most of their treatises concerning poetry and the imitative arts, are distinguished by greater freedom, originality, and knowledge of the antique, and bear on these accounts more affinity to our own modes of thinking than those of the French. Although, however, our German criticism certainly received its first impulse from the study of the English works of Harris, Home, Hurd, Watson, &c. we soon became sufficiently independent of these; and perhaps in no department of our literature is there so much originality as in this.

Of all the works connected with elegant literature which the English produced during the last century, by far the most important are their great historical writings. They have in this department

surpassed all the other European nations; they had at all events the start in point of time; and have become the standard models both in France and in Germany. The first place is, I believe, universally given to David Hume. But however salutary may be the spirit of scepticism in the conduct of historical researches, I am strongly of opinion that this spirit, when it is not confined to events alone, but extends its doubts to all the principles of morality and religion, is by no means becoming in a great national historian, and will, in the end, diminish in a very considerable measure the influence which the native genius of this singular man might well have entitled him to maintain over the minds of his countrymen.

Narrow principles and views of things not perfectly just, are, I am free to confess, in my estimation, much better fitted for a great historian than no principles at all, and a deadening want of feeling, warmth, and passion. When these are removed, the only remaining means of creating interest in a historical work is the love of opposing the ruling opinions and of paradoxy. The leaning to this species of opposition is most evident in Hume. However praiseworthy and salutary it might be, that such a writer as Hume was, should take up a set of opinions opposed to those of the Whigs—a party in his day, as well as in our own,

possessed of perhaps too much influence over the literature of England—and should represent a most important part of the British history with a predilection for the unfortunate house of Stuart, and the principles of the Tories; it is evident that had he written without any such views, he might have attained to an eminence far beyond that which he has reached, and descended to posterity not as the first of all party-writers of history, but as the author of a truly great national work, the spirit and excellence of which should have been equally admired and appreciated by all the English. In his treatment of the elder periods of the English history he is quite unsatisfactory and meagre; he had no love for its antiquities, and could not transport himself back into the spirit of remote ages.—In regard to style, few writers of any country can sustain a comparison with Robertson; his expressions are select and elegant, but always clear and unlaboured. But he is very inferior in respect to other matters of far greater importance, the research and import of his histories.

The English themselves are now pretty well convinced that he is a careless, superficial, and blundering historian, although they study his works, and are right in doing so, as models of pure composition, extremely deserving of attention, during the present declining state of English style. To speak

from my own feelings, I think Robertson, although upon the whole a beautiful writer, is too fond both of verbosity and of antithesis. The ambition of fine writing, and of the desire to treat matters in an elaborate and oratorical manner, appear to me to be extremely erroneous and out of place in a writer of history. If historical composition is to be considered merely as a display of writing, no modern author need ever flatter himself with the least hope, I do not say of equalling, but of approaching the great historians of antiquity. We have it in our power, however, to surpass them in another way, namely, by considering history in a more scientific manner, and making use of those opportunities and instruments of information in which our times are so much superior to those of Greece and Rome. If we make this our object, the best style which we can adopt is the most simple; we should write clearly and carefully, but avoid all appearance of artifice, superfluity, affectation, or ambitiousness.—Gibbon is a writer full of thoughts; his language is in general powerful and exquisite, but it has, to a great excess, the faults of elaborateness, pompousness, and monotony. His style is full of Latin and French words and phrases; the English language, as being of so very mixed a nature, and as possessing such a variety of words and phrases, and constructions, Latin, French, and domestic,—has no very exact stan-

dard to regulate the proportion of the different elements which are placed at the disposal of those who use it. That elaborate and half-Latin manner of writing by which Gibbon is distinguished, had before him been brought very much into fashion by the example of the critic Johnson; in principle at least the English have now departed from it, and speak of it as a false species, and hostile to the spirit of their language. The work of Gibbon, however instructive and fascinating it may be, is nevertheless at bottom an offensive one, on account of his deficiency in feeling, and his propensity to the infidel opinions and impious mockeries of Voltaire. These are things extremely unworthy of a historian, and, in the periodic and somewhat cumbrous style of Gibbon, they appear set off to far less advantage than in the light and airy compositions of his master. He never seems to be naturally a wit, but impresses us with the idea that he would very fain be one if he could. Although I have mentioned some faults which I think I perceive in each of these three great writers, yet their general excellence is not to be disputed, and is felt by none more deeply than myself; they appear indeed to great advantage with whomsoever we compare them, and never more so than when we turn from their writings to those of their followers and imitators. With all the abundance of his Italian elegance, what is the overload-

ed and affected Roscoe when compared with Gibbon? Coxe, although master of a good and classical style, resembles Robertson in no respect so much as in the superficialness of his researches; and the statesman Fox has nothing in common with Hume but the bigotry of his party zeal. The art of historical writing is evidently quite on the decline in England. One great cause of this consists, I imagine, in the want of any stable and satisfactory philosophy—a defect sufficiently apparent even in the three great writers whom I have enumerated. Without some rational and due conceptions of the fate and destiny of man, it is impossible to form any just and consistent opinion, even concerning the progress of events, the developement of times, and the fortunes of nations. In every situation history and philosophy should be as much as possible united. Philosophy, if altogether separated from history, and destitute of the spirit of criticism which is the result of the union to which I have alluded, can become nothing more than a wild existence of sect and formality. History, on the other hand, without the animating spirit of philosophy, is merely a dead heap of useless materials, devoid of internal unity, proper purpose, or worthy result. The want of satisfying and sane views and principles, is nowhere more conspicuous than in those histories of mankind, as they have been called, originally produced

in England, and more recently written among ourselves. From the immense storehouse of travels and voyages, a few facts are collected, which make up loose portraits of the fisher, the hunter, the emigration of the early nations, and the different conditions of agricultural, pastoral, and commercial peoples. This is called a view of the history of mankind, and there is no doubt that it contains many individual points of great interest and importance, with respect to the progress and habits of our species. Such would be the case, even if we should treat of men entirely according to their corporeal subdivisions of white, black, red, and brown. But how little is gained by all this, as to the only real question, an answer to which should form the proper history of mankind? How little do we learn as to the origin and proper state, or the present lamentable and fallen condition of human nature? The answer to this question, which is the essence of all history, can only be supplied by religion and philosophy; that philosophy, I mean, which has no other ambition and no other end but to support religion. In these false histories of mankind, the worthy offspring of the degraded and material philosophy of the eighteenth century, the predominant idea is always, that man sprung originally from the dust like a mushroom, and differed from it only by the possession of locomotive power and of consciousness.



The ambition of their authors is to represent us as originally brutes, and to show how, by the progress of our own ingenious contrivances, art has been added to art, and science to science, till our nature has gradually reached the high eminence on which it now stands. The greater intimacy of connection can be established between us and the Ourang-outang (that favourite of so many philosophers of the last century), the more rational are supposed to be our opinions concerning our species, and its history.

The philosophy of sensation, which was unconsciously bequeathed to the world by Bacon, and reduced to the shape of a regular system by Locke, first displayed in France the true immorality and destructiveness of which it is the parent, and assumed the appearance of a perfect sect of atheism. In England it took a different course; in that country it could not indeed be supposed likely to produce the same effects, because the old principles of religion were regarded as far too intimately connected with national welfare, to be easily abandoned. The spirit of English thought was moreover naturally inclined to adopt the paradoxical and sceptical side of this philosophy rather than the material and atheistical. The most singular phenomenon in the whole history of philosophy is perhaps the existence of such a man as Berkeley, who carried the system of Locke so far as utterly to disbelieve the existence of the

external world, and yet continued all the while a devout Christian bishop. How external objects come into contract with our intellect, so that it forms notions of them—this was a point upon which the philosophy of that time neither came nor could come to any satisfactory conclusion. All that we perceive or feel of these things, is after all only an impression, a change upon ourselves. We may pursue it as far as we will; we can lay hold on only such a notion or perception of an object, not the object itself. That seems, the more we seek it, to fly the farther from us. If we consider nature, as either itself animated, or as the medium instrument and expression of life, then this perplexity is at an end, and every thing becomes clear. We have no difficulty in conceiving, that between two living and mutually operating spiritual natures, there may exist a third nature apparently inanimate, to serve as the bond of connection and mutual operation, to be their word and language, or to serve as the separation and wall of partition between them. We are familiar with such an idea, from our own experience, because we cannot have any intercourse of thought with our brother men, or even analyse our thoughts, except through the operation of exactly similar means. The simple conviction, however, that the sensible world is merely the habitation of the intellectual, and a medium of separation as well

as connection between intellectual natures, had been lost along with the knowledge and idea of the world of intellect, and the animating impression of its existence. The philosophy of the senses stumbled, in this way, at the very threshold, and proceeded to become more and more perplexed in every step of its progress. Berkeley believed that the external world has no real existence, and that our notions and impressions of it are directly communicated to us by the Deity. From the same doubts Hume fell into a totally different system, the sceptical,—a philosophy which humbles itself before its doubts, and denies the possibility of attaining knowledge. This man, by the penetrating and convulsive influence of his scepticism, determined the future condition of English philosophy. Since his time nothing more has been attempted than to erect all sorts of bulwarks against the practical influence of this destructive scepticism; and to maintain, by various substitutes and aids, the pile of moral principle uncorrupted and entire. Not only with Adam Smith, but with all their later philosophers, national welfare is the ruling and central principle of thought,—a principle excellent and praiseworthy in its due situation, but quite unfitted for being the centre and oracle of all knowledge and science. The two great substitutes to which I allude are neither scientifically nor practically of a durable and effective na-

ture. Common sense is poor when compared with certain knowledge, and moral feeling is a very inadequate foundation for a proper system of ethics. Were the common sense of man even as sound and universal as these English reasoners maintain, if we should take its conclusions for the last, and subject them to no higher review, we should find it more likely to cut than to unloose the knot of the great questions in philosophy. The innate curiosity of man is not to be so satisfied, but however frequently we may put it off, returns to the charge with undiminished pertinacity. Moral feeling and sympathy are things too frail and uncertain for a rule of moral action. We must have, in addition to these, an eternal law of rectitude, derived not from experience and feeling, but from reason or from God. A fair and unshaken faith is indispensable for our welfare. But the faith which the English philosophers have established upon the dictates of common sense and moral feeling, is like the props upon which it leans, uncertain and unworthy of our confidence. It is not worthy of the name of faith; the name applied to the impression made upon by us reason and external experience, and with equal propriety to the impressions we receive in a totally different way from the internal voice of conscience and the revelations of a superior nature. That which is called faith among these men is nothing more than

weak and self-doubting faith of necessity,—a thing as incapable of standing the test of time, as the frail faith of custom is to resist the arguments of unprincipled sophistry. This nation is powerful and free in its whole being and life. Even in poetry, it regards the profound and internal rather than the outward and ornamental, but by means of its own errors it is cramped and confined in its philosophy. In regard to this mighty department of human intellect and exertion, the English of later times are neither original nor great; they even appear to be fundamentally inferior to some of the best writers among the French. If a few authors in England have pursued an intellectual path of their own, quite different from the common one, they have exerted no powerful, or at least no extensive influence over their fellow countrymen. The attempts with which I myself am acquainted do not indeed display genius such as might entitle them to much consideration.

We may compare the mode of philosophical thought in England, to a man who bears every external mark of health and vigour, but who is by nature prone to a dangerous distemper. He has repressed the first eruptions of the disease by means of palliatives, but the evil has on that very account had the more leisure to entwine itself with the roots of his constitution. The disease of philosophical

error and unbelief can never be got the better of, unless by a thorough and radical cure. I think for this reason that it is extremely probable, nay, that it is almost certain, England has yet to undergo a mighty crisis in her philosophy, and of necessity, in her morality and her religion.

If we regard not so much the immediate practical consequences, but rather the internal progress of intellect itself, we shall be almost compelled to think error is less dangerous when open and complete, than when half-formed and disguised. In the midst of moderate errors our self-love keeps us ignorant of our danger. But when error has reached its height, it is the nature of the human mind to promote a re-action, and to rise with new strength and power out of the abyss into which at last it perceives itself to have fallen.

Such a return, and certainly a most remarkable one, to the truth and true philosophy, has occurred of late years in France. After that altar upon which shortly before, reason, the goddess of the age, was worshipped, more appropriately than her devotees suspected, under the shape of an actress or a harlot,—after this altar had been purified, and religion restored, after a church without a creed and the chimera of *Theophilanthropy* had been reduced to their original nothingness, the voice of oppressed and persecuted truth began on every side to make

itself heard. I do not mean to refer in any particular way to that one celebrated writer who has consecrated his powerful eloquence entirely to the service of his religion. For however useful Chateaubriand may have been by representing Christianity in her most amiable form and her beneficial consequences, nay, however necessary such a writer as he is may have been to break the ice of infidelity in France, he has attached far too much to the sensible and external part of religion, and I suspect, indeed, has never penetrated into the deep and proper essence of our Christianity.

Many attempts have been made in a quite different way, to enlarge the mode of thinking, and establish a higher species of philosophy in France. Even the efforts which have been made to introduce and naturalize the spirit of our German philosophers, are worthy of much attention. They have been supported by the genius and erudition of several of the first and most celebrated Frenchmen of the age. The attempt indeed is still opposed by many serious and almost unsurmountable obstacles. Perhaps the Germanizing French scholars have plunged too widely into the whole of our literature, instead of thoroughly mastering, in the first instance, the principles and essence of our philosophical systems. A still more important difficulty is presented by the lingering tone of infidel thought, with which

the general body of the nation is still, I fear, infected. The political establishment and external observances of religion are not sufficient for the purpose. Philosophy must proceed from, and return to a sincere, and unalterable, and undoubting faith.

What I view as the most essential and important change in French literature of these last years, is the return to a higher morality, and that united system of Platonic and Christian philosophy, which stands exactly in the opposite extreme from the atheism of the preceding age. In some measure, even before the revolution, and even in the period of the most entire corruption, this return had been begun. But it was not till after the whole system of thought had undergone a convulsion, that it began to manifest its perfect influence. A few philosophers cut off from their age, and superior to it, France at all times possessed. I may refer, in the first place, to Hemsterhuys, who, although not a Frenchman by birth, wrote entirely in this language; and that too with so much grace and harmony, that even in this point of view his Socratic dialogues are worthy of the noble spirit of Platonism and Christianity which they express. The return has, however, been most of all promoted by two very remarkable philosophers, men in all their views and principles thoroughly Christian. Of the one of these, St. Martin, many writings were known



even before the revolution, and he was spoken of by the name of *the unknown philosopher*; the other, Bonald, has since that time become the best and most profound champion of the old French monarchical constitution. Both, along with their good and excellent qualities, have many great and essential errors. They are full of French prejudices; and although despisers of the spirit of their own age, they have so much partaken in it as to be very unfit judges of ages and nations different from their own. Even the most essential parts of their philosophy bear witness at what period they wrote, and have a share of the spirit of the eighteenth century. The chief error of St. Martin consists in this, that he viewed religion entirely as a matter of individual revelation, and as having no connection whatever with forms, and the external church of God. For this, in the situation of things immediately before or during the revolution, there might indeed be some apology; but the error is in itself a dangerous one, and has prevented in a great measure the powerful genius of St. Martin from producing the effect which might otherwise have been expected to follow its exertions. He belongs to the adherents of that Oriental and Christian philosophy, which as I have already said, although despised and ridiculed by doctors and universities, has ever since the revolution been making silent but sure progress in the

spirit of the age. However little of the praise of invention may be due to St. Martin, and however much of error may be mingled with all his ideas, it still must remain a very remarkable circumstance, that at the period when France was most filled with atheism, an unknown and solitary philosopher should have arisen, who devoted the whole of his talents to destroy the atheistical philosophy of the time, and substitute in its place the doctrines of divine revelation and ancient tradition—a Mosaic and Christian system of philosophy. It is no less remarkable that at the very commencement of our century, while others were restoring religion merely for political purposes, and with a view to maintain the faith of the ignorant, a learned Jurist, and political philosopher, like Bonald, should have seriously made the attempt to found the theory of justice upon God alone, and that of government on the doctrines of the Bible. In a philosophical point of view we may blame him for having too much confounded and identified revelation with reason. But we must remember that he wrote in a country where these had been treated as not only distinct but irreconcilable means of knowledge. Many champions of Christianity have injured themselves by their too indiscriminating rejection of all philosophy. Bonald goes into the other extreme; he errs by making Christianity too rational, and almost resolving it

into reason. Truth itself, when waging war with error, is apt to go to the opposite extremity, and to regard the arguments of its adversaries in too narrow a point of view. After such errors and principles as those of the last century were, it is no wonder that the human mind should have received a shock sufficient to render it incapable of moving at once firmly and independently even in a better way. Such appears to have been the case with these illustrious Frenchmēn, Bonald and St. Martin.

Such a radical change in philosophy cannot easily occur in England. The great incidents of external life, commerce, and the British constitution, India and the Continent, engross the active intellect of this most active of all countries. There remains no talent or time for those pursuits of deeper thought and philosophy, in which, for these very reasons, the English are inferior at this moment to the French. Even in our own days, however, there has been no want of illustrious writers, of men alike distinguished by research and eloquence, in England—these stand alone as tokens of the changing spirit of our time. William Jones has as yet had no rivals in the department which he selected; no one appears to have comprehended, as he did, the antiquities of Asia, and above all of India, with the acuteness of a philosopher, or to have seen the mode of reconciling every thing with the doctrine and history of the

scriptures. Were such paths pursued with spirit and power, the usual prejudices and fetters of British thought might be easily got rid of. But if we are to praise a man in proportion to his usefulness, I am persuaded that no task could be more difficult than that of doing justice to another Englishman, his contemporary, the statesman and orator Burke. This man has been to his own country and to all Europe—in a very particular manner to Germany—a new light of political wisdom and moral experience. He corrected his age when it was at the height of its revolutionary phrenzy; and without maintaining any system of philosophy, he seems to have seen farther into the true nature of society, and to have more clearly comprehended the effect of religion in connecting individual security with national welfare, than any philosopher, or any system of philosophy of any preceding age.

## LECTURE XV.



RETROSPECT—GERMAN PHILOSOPHY—SPINOZA AND LEIBNITZ—  
 GERMAN LANGUAGE AND POETRY IN THE SIXTEENTH AND SE-  
 VENTEENTH CENTURIES—LUTHER, HANS SACHS, JACOB BOHME  
 —OPITZ, THE SILESIAN SCHOOL—CORRUPTION OF TASTE AFTER  
 THE PEACE OF WESTPHALIA; OCCASIONAL POETRY—GERMAN  
 POETS OF THE FIRST HALF OF THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY—  
 FREDERICK THE SECOND; KLOPSTOCK; THE MESSIAD AND  
 NORTHERN MYTHOLOGY—THE CHIVALROUS POEMS OF WIE-  
 LAND—INTRODUCTION OF THE ANCIENT METRES OF QUANTITY  
 INTO THE GERMAN LANGUAGE; DEFENCE OF RHYME—ADE-  
 LUNG, GOTTSCHED, AND “THE (SO CALLED) GOLDEN AGE”—  
 FIRST GENERATION OF THE LATER GERMAN LITERATURE, OR  
 “THE PERIOD OF THE FOUNDERS.”

TO some of my hearers it may appear as idle and  
 superfluous to write against the philosophy of the  
 eighteenth century, as it would be to fight with  
 the shadow of a departed enemy. In truth, how-  
 ever, the cases are not at all parallel ones, although  
 I can easily suppose they may seem so to such as  
 form their judgments entirely from the external ap-

pearances of things. The evil is by no means annihilated, although it has become less visible. In England the disease of the age never broke out openly, and for that very reason has never been radically cured. In that country as in France there are a few illustrious exceptions, and symbols of a self-regenerating age; symptoms of a gradual return from error, and the invincible power and majesty of truth. But, I fear, those who are best able to judge will agree with me in suspecting that the general tone of thought, particularly among those who have the empire of literature in their hands, is not yet altered. Among the latest writers of France, the prevalence of the old system is still manifest; the world and all its phenomena are still explained upon the old principles of the atomical and material philosophy. Of all the foolish hypotheses which have ever cheated the human intellect with the empty show of explanation, that of materialism is the most unsatisfactory. In a scientific point of view, it is void of foundation and fantastic; in regard to morality, national welfare, and religion, its influences are utterly unworthy and pernicious. Although this system is now seldom pursued to its consequences, and although experience has convinced all men how dangerous these inevitably are, yet we have still before our eyes the miserable spectacle of men entitled

to every respect as natural philosophers, and justly occupying a high place in the intellectual scale of our age, who disgrace all their knowledge by the most lamentable and childish ignorance respecting whatever is most truly worthy of the name of philosophy. The cause of truth is gaining strength every day, but these men are not ashamed to advocate, at least by insinuations and calumnies, the cause of her adversary. Such is the situation of affairs abroad. Here, in Germany, the common disease of the century, the false philosophy, and the mania for reason, assumed quite a different appearance—a form of more temperance, and perhaps of less practical danger. We should err very much, nevertheless, if we should imagine that the evil does not exist, or flatter ourselves that our disease is entirely vanquished, merely because the symptoms have undergone a change.

If the German philosophy did not fall into such violent extremes as the French, it was not guarded by the same strong feelings of nationality, whose influence I have already described upon the English. The sentiment of national union had before this time become quite extinct among the subjects of our innumerable petty states. But perhaps the very smallness of our states was in some measure the cause of our security. Every thing was conducted upon so small a scale, and was so much in

the view of men, that no open or audacious adoption of any pernicious systems of injustice, such as those of Hobbes or Machiavel, could be ventured upon. Still, however, in private life, manners certainly were becoming more relaxed, and so paving the most easy way for vicious theory. But the circumstance which preserved the German philosophy, at its commencement, from falling into the extreme of error, was, I imagine, the erudition of the German writers. These were in general full of recollections and ideas of that philosophy of antiquity, which had become entirely forgotten in France and England. Leibnitz was, in this point of view, a great blessing to his country. It is very true that he was a physician who made use of palliatives, but was incapable or unambitious of effecting a radical cure; yet even this was much if we consider the wants of the time. He was a scholar as well as a philosopher, and his works contain innumerable points which call us back to those who preceded him. It is perhaps the chief fault of Leibnitz that he is too fond of reviving exploded difficulties, but even by this defect of his, he has been the most admirable harbinger of men who felt within them the spirit, the call, and the passion, to plunge more deeply into all the labyrinths of thought, and all the secrets of knowledge. He marks the point of transition from the philosophy



of the seventeenth to the new mode of thinking of the eighteenth century—one of the most remarkable eras in the whole history of mankind. As he and his philosophy have never exerted much influence out of Germany, and have been little studied in France, and not at all in England, I have thought fit to pass him over in silence while treating of foreign philosophers, and reserved him for a place by himself. The same conduct has been adopted in respect to his adversary Spinoza, because he too has had a similar fate; has been little heard of either in his own country or in England, and not at all in France, but been zealously defended and attacked by Germans alone. Spinoza's greatest error, that of making no distinction between God and the world, is one of the most pernicious nature. He denied to individual beings independence and self-direction, and saw in them all only various manifestations of one eternal and all comprehending existence; he thus took personality from the Deity, and freedom from man, and by representing all that is immoral, untrue, and impious, as appearances, not realities, he went far to destroy all distinction between good and evil. This error is so intimately connected with the doctrines of unassisted reason, that it is probably the very oldest of all the falsities which sprung up in the room of the truth originally com-

municated to mankind by his Maker. But Spinoza threw pantheism into a more scientific shape than it ever possessed before his time. The error itself is one so natural to scientific and self-confident reason, that Descartes, from whose system that of Spinoza immediately sprung, was prevented only by the want of depth and decision in his spirit, from falling into the abyss upon the brink of which he stood. In this, as in many other cases, we must be careful to separate the error from the person. It frequently happens that he who first opens up a new path of error, who even thoroughly prepares it, and points it out in the most decided and fearless manner, is nevertheless far less dangerous than his followers who pursue the same track without the same confidence. The morality of Spinoza is not indeed that of the Bible, for he himself was no Christian, but it is still a pure and noble morality resembling that of the ancient Stoics, perhaps possessing considerable advantages over that system. That which makes him strong when opposed to adversaries who do not understand or feel his depth, or who, unconsciously, have fallen into errors not much different from his, is not merely the scientific clearness and decision of his intellect, but in a much higher degree the open heartedness, strong feeling and conviction with which all that he says seems to gush from his heart and soul. We can-

not call this a natural inspiration, such as that which animates the poet, the artist, or the naturalist, still less the inspiration of the supernatural world, for where can this find a place when there is no faith in an affective Deity? But it is a thorough and penetrating impression and feeling of the eternal which accompanies him in all the ranges of his thought, and lifts him above the world of the senses. The remarkable error which lies at the root of all his philosophy is indeed a pernicious and detestable one, and it might appear as if nothing could be worse. Yet if we compare the error of Spinoza with the atheism of the eighteenth century, we shall be at no loss to discover a mighty difference between them. That material philosophy, if we must give it such a name, which explains every thing by matter, and gives the first place to sense, is an error which seems almost to lie lower than the region of humanity. Rarely, among particular individuals who have embraced such a system, can there be much reason to hope for a return to truth; although there can be no difficulty in conceiving that an age or nation, which has seen its pernicious moral consequences openly displayed, should throw it off with abhorrence. The high spirituality, on the contrary, of that other error into which Spinoza fell, may well appear to leave greater means and more open paths

for reformation. But after all, an error is surely so much the more pernicious, that it is fitted to seize on noble and intellectual disciples; the immediate consequences are then not so practically dangerous, but the evil principle has by this means time to fasten itself more deeply, and sooner or later is sure to manifest the power of its corruption upon the whole either of an age or of a nation; as that disease is the most fatal to the human body which makes its slow but steady attacks upon the very vitals of our frame.

The philosophy of Leibnitz is almost entirely fastened upon that of Spinoza. It is almost throughout a Polemic philosophy; and even when it does not assume the external form of controversy, its object is always to pull down the common philosophy of his age, to answer it, resolve its doubts, and supply its deficiencies; it is entirely devoted to the spirit and necessities of his time, and never comes forward in the independence and confidence of its own original power. The literary sceptic Bayle, and Locke, the founder of the sensation-system, were the principal adversaries of Leibnitz, to say nothing of a few more personal opponents. But the most prominent of them all is Spinoza, with whom he frequently, nay, almost perpetually contends, even where he does not name him, as if with an invisible and dreadful enemy. Of the philosophers with

whom he agrees, and of the sources from which he derived a great part of his arguments, he says very little. It was no part of his character to recognise the existence of an eternal and spiritual world, whereof the sensible world is only the external vehicle and veil. His hypothesis, on the contrary, (according to which sensible objects are merely a perplexed chaos of solitary spiritual principles or monads, in a state of slumber, or imperfection) coincides with, or at least stands at no very remote distance from the atomical doctrine of Epicurus and the modern Atheists, and is at the best only a sort of intermediate system between that and the proper belief in a spiritual world. His attempt to solve the difficulties of the contemporary philosophy concerning the connection of the mind and the body, by saying that the common Creator of both made them originally to go together, as a watchmaker might make two watches, is only a piece of ingenious sophistry, and tends to give a degrading view of the nobler part of our nature. His celebrated *Theodicee*, or justification of God on account of the existence of moral evil, answers that question which so perpetually recurs to the natural reason, with the bold dexterity of a practised diplomatist, who conceives it to be his duty, to promote by every means, good, bad, or indifferent, the cause of his master—and to conceal as much as possible from the eyes of

his opponent any thing that seems favourable to the other side of the question. It is impossible for the philosophy of reason to answer the question concerning the existence of evil in the world, without either denying the existence of evil in contradiction to our daily experience, or ascribing its creation to the Deity, in contradiction to our own feeling and the voice of conscience. The solution of Leibnitz (that of optimism) which gave so much room for the wit of Voltaire, has more lately found a counterpart in the theory of a celebrated philosopher, who explains every thing upon a principle of which Leibnitz had no idea, who thinks that the only end for which the external world was created, was to afford the spirit room to exercise and develope itself, and maintains that the worse the world is, the better is it adapted to serve this purpose. Neither this Spartan, nor that elaborate solution, is satisfactory either to feeling or to philosophy.

In the Leibnitzian ideas concerning space and time, we have a remarkable evidence how entirely the views of the truest and highest philosophy were at that period forgotten. The philosophy of antiquity recognised in time and place an endless theatre for the display of the eternal, and of the living pulsation of eternal love. By the contemplation of such things, however imperfect and inadequate, the natural, even the merely sensible man,

was affected with a stupendous feeling of admiration well calculated to prepare the way for religious thoughts. It extended and ennobled his soul to regard, in such a manner as this, the past, the present, and the future. But Leibnitz saw in time and space nothing but the arrangement of contemporary or consecutive incidents. So apt are deadening and insignificant ideas to creep into the place of living and just feeling, in all that is most fitted to elevate man above the world of the senses. The philosophy of Leibnitz was brought into fashion in Germany, and established in the schools, chiefly by means of Wolf; the circumstance is sufficient to characterise it. A sect which lays hold of active life, is judged by the direction which it pursues, and the consequences which it produces. But the spirit of a sect confined to schools soon becomes a mere being of formality: Aristotle, Descartes, Leibnitz, or Kant, is called the master, and the ideas are said to be his, but in truth they are no longer ideas as they were in him; they are mere formulas. Germany, nevertheless, has to thank this scholastic system for preventing, or at least checking, the introduction of the yet more dangerous sectarian spirit of the atheistical philosophy of the senses; and after all, the pedantry was not of long duration. Leibnitz himself, although he wrote mostly in Latin and French, gave quite a new spring to the

study of the German language, history, and antiquities; and even Wolf's German writings were of considerable service to the language. They were followed by some, who, although belonging to their school, had both originality of thought and power of writing; and these, along with a few better poets than had lately appeared, first brought our language out of the state of barbarism into which it had fallen. They prepared the way for Klopstock, who arose in the middle of the last century, and became the founder of a new epoch, the master and father of the present literature of Germany.

But before I proceed to depict Klopstock, I must direct your eyes to a short review of the period which intervened between the old and the new literature of our country. The sixteenth and seventeenth centuries produced indeed few great German writers, but these few are, on account of the rarity, the more worthy of our attention. I have already explained in what way the chivalrous poetry and art of the middle age were lost during the controversies of the sixteenth, and how our language itself became corrupted during the long continued civil wars by which the internal peace of our country was so cruelly agitated and convulsed. There was one instrument by which the influx of barbarism was opposed, and one treasure which made up for what had been lost—I mean the German translation of



the Bible. It is well known to you that all true philologists regard this as the standard and model of classical expression in the high Dutch language; and that not only Klopstock, but many other writers of the first rank, have fashioned their style, and selected their phrases, according to the rules of this version. It is worthy of your notice, that in no other modern language have so many Biblical words and phrases come into the use of common life, as in ours. I perfectly agree with those writers who consider this circumstance as a fortunate one; and I believe, that from it has been derived not a little of that power, life, and simplicity, by which I think the best German writers are distinguished from all other moderns. The Catholic as well as the modern Protestant scholar, have many things to find fault with in this translation; but these after all regard only individual passages wherein Luther erred, either by writing in the spirit of his own sect and contrary to the old doctrines of the Christian church, or from a want of knowledge in history, physics, or geography. In these later times we have witnessed an attempt to render a new and *rational* translation of the Bible an instrument of propagating the doctrines of the illuminati; and we have seen this too much in the hands even of Catholics themselves. But the instant this folly had blown over, we returned with

increased affection to the excellent old version of Luther. Luther himself has not indeed the whole merit of producing it. He only selected the best parts of translations existing before his time, and he was assisted in this labour by several of his friends, in particular by the indefatigable Melancthon. We owe to him, nevertheless, the highest gratitude for placing in our hands this most noble and manly model of German expression. Even in his own writings he displays a most original eloquence surpassed by few names that occur in the whole history of literature. He had, indeed, all those properties which render a man fit to be a revolutionary orator. This revolutionary eloquence is manifest, not only in his half-political and business writings, such as the *Address to the Nobility of the German Nation*, but in all the works which he has left behind him. In almost the whole of them we perceive the marks of mighty internal conflict. Two worlds appear to be contending for the mastery over the mighty soul of this man so favoured by God and nature. Throughout all his writings there prevails a struggle between light and darkness, faith and passion, God and himself. The choice which he made—the use to which he devoted his majestic genius—these are subjects upon which it is even now quite impossible for me to speak so as to please you all. For myself I am free to acknowledge, that I can never regard either

his writings or his life, except with some portion of that compassion which is due to a great nature led astray by over-confidence in its own vigour. As to the intellectual power and greatness of Luther, abstracted from all consideration of the uses to which he applied them, I think there are few even of his own disciples who appreciate him highly enough. His coadjutors were mostly mere scholars, indolent and enlightened men of the common order. It was upon him and his soul that the fate of Europe depended. He was the man of his age and his nation.

Luther was thoroughly a popular writer. No country in Europe can boast of so many remarkable, comprehensive, powerful, and extraordinary writers for the common people, as Germany. However much the higher orders of Germany were inferior, or however lately they came up to those of France, England, and Italy, it is certain that the common people of none of these countries has displayed so much profoundness of intellect, and natural power of mind, as that of our own nation. It is an old saying, that the power of kings is given by God; it is an equally old one, and one quite as much worthy of being kept in mind, that the voice of the people is the voice of God. Both are clear, perfect, and true; wo to those that disregard, or would mislead this oracle of the Deity. They are much to be

pitied who conceive that they are capable, by the tricks of empty and vain politics, of leading the people entirely according to their own selfish and unworthy purposes and desires. The people is wiser than they imagine, and far wiser than themselves. The people sees through their tricks, and will not easily be deceived. But of all men they surely are guilty of the greatest crime who would make use of the natural power of our people for the purposes of destruction and convulsion.—This strength must indeed be appalling, should it ever be directed by any other guides than those it has as yet obeyed,—obedience to the precepts, and faith in the doctrines of religion. Narrow must their judgment be who conceive that this power is extinct, because it is seldom visible. It is the inheritance of our ancestors, and can never be thrown away; but like many of the other hidden powers of nature, it is too great to be often manifested.

The popular writing of northern Germany was by no means confined to religious subjects (as in Luther's works), but embraced also poetry and philosophy. I shall for the present mention only two of the most remarkable authors,—the celebrated *Meistersanger* of Nurnberg, and that Christian visionary who was so much celebrated throughout Europe, about the time of the thirty years war, under the name of *the Teutonic philosopher*.

In popular songs and poems the possessions of Germany are abundant. The popular poetry is generally of two kinds; it consists in part of songs, solitary fragments of a departed age of heroism and chivalry, whose recollections have been disturbed and broken by the revolutions of external events, or have become exploded in consequence of the gradual change in the modes of our social life and ideas; in part of the productions of the vulgar themselves,—and this is the most striking division of the popular poetry of Germany. The master of Nurnberg was an artificer in poetry as well as in common life. He is however a writer full of power and fancy; he possesses abundance of wit and shrewdness, and if we are to compare him with the early writers of other languages, he is I think more inventive than Chaucer, more rich than Marot, and more poetical than either. In regard to our language, his works form a treasure, of which no proper use has as yet been made.

The same remark may be applied to Jacob Bohme, that Teutonic philosopher, who is so much ridiculed by the general race of literary men. These are themselves sensible that they understand neither the good nor the bad that is in his writings; but they are ignorant that they know absolutely nothing either respecting the man himself, or the relation in which

he stood to his contemporaries. I have, on a former occasion, shown you what my opinion is respecting the effects of philosophy being cultivated by the common people, and neglected by the higher orders of a nation. Such, however, was actually the case at that period, both in Protestant Germany and in England. Jacob Bohme is commonly called a dreamer, and it is very true, that in his writings there may be more marks of an ardent imagination than of a sound judgment. But we cannot at least deny this strange man the praise of a very poetical fancy. If we should consider him merely as a poet, and compare him with those other Christian poets, who have handled subjects connected with the supernatural world, with Klopstock, with Milton, or even with Dante, we shall find that he rivals the best of them, in fullness of fancy and depth of feeling, and that he falls little below them, even in regard to individual beauties, and poetical expression. Whatever defects may be found in the philosophy of Jacob Bohme, the historian of German literature can never pass over his name in silence. In few works of any period have the strength and richness of our language been better displayed than in his. His language possesses indeed a charm of nature, simplicity, and unsought vigour, which we should look for in vain, in the tongue which we now speak, enriched as it is by the immense importation of fo-

reign terms, and the invented phraseologies of our late philosophers.

The permanent effects produced by the thirty years war upon our literature were extremely hurtful; but there is no doubt that, while it actually raged, it operated as an awakener and animator of German intellect. The Silesian Opitz arose in the midst of it, and gave to our language and poetry a direction which has since found many imitators. His immediate models were sought from Holland, a country which at that time possessed a Hugo Grotius, which was not only the most learned and enlightened of all Protestant states, but also rich and cultivated in its poetry, and abounding in vernacular tragedies composed after the antique model, a considerable time before the great French tragedians were fostered in the court of Lewis XIV. Yet the excellence of Opitz is quite independent of what he borrowed from any foreign literature, from the Dutch tragedies, and the pastoral romances of the Spaniards. Even his dramatic attempts, free translations, or imitations of the Greek and Italian theatres, have not produced any effect. The truth is, that in the very best and most original of his lyrical, miscellaneous, and didactic poems, we should always regard more what he was fitted by nature to be, what he desired and felt and aspired to, than what he really was. He is commonly called the father of German

poetry; it appears to me that, at least since Klopstock, few of the sons have been grateful enough to cultivate much acquaintance with this parent. If any man was ever formed by nature to be a heroic poet, this was Opitz. He felt this, and wished to be the heroic poet of the German nation. But his life was spent amidst the perplexities and agitations of a tumultuous period, and he died in early manhood before he had time to complete either his purposes or his poetry. Throughout all his works, imperfect as they are, there break forth flashes and emanations of that course of thought and greatness of soul which create a heroic poet; and even, in regard to language, those noble sentiments and strong thoughts of Opitz are in general expressed with an artless simplicity and naiveté, which, I think, have not since been equalled. His style is superior to that of Klopstock.

Next to Opitz, the most distinguished of the Silesian poets of this period is Flemming. His poetry is intensely personal; it is filled with the inspiration of his own friendships, passions, and loves. His life was worthy of his being so celebrated; he travelled through the then unknown interior of Russia into Persia, and has described all that he saw or experienced during this interesting journey, with the most glowing feeling, and a truly oriental splendour of fancy. In style, however, he is quite infe-



rior to Opitz. It is much to be regretted, that both of these men were, after all, or were at least held to be, not national but provincial poets, not Germans but Silesians. After the unfortunate civil war, whose flames, fed by the participation or policy of the half of Europe, wasted and devoured our country for thirty years—after the still more miserable peace of 1648, the strength of the German nation was broken, and German poetry shared in the general decline. Its substance and life were fled, and it soon degenerated into a mere artificial and phantastic display of insignificant thoughts upon worthless subjects. The first introducer of the false taste was Hoffmanswaldau, but it was rendered general by the more powerful talents of Lohenstein. This period, from 1648 to the middle of last century, was our proper age of barbarism, a sort of division and chaotic interregnum in the history of German literature. Our language hesitated between a species of would-be French and wavering German, and was, with all this weakness, full of affectation and artifice. Even, in a political point of view, the most degraded and unfortunate period of our history is that immediately subsequent to the peace of Westphalia. With the beginning of the eighteenth century the power of Germany began again to revive. Austria again attained the summit of strength and glory, some of the first thrones in Europe were

ascended by princes of the German houses, and one of them founded in Germany itself a new and splendid monarchy. All these circumstances, particularly when taken together, could scarcely fail to produce a reviving and quickening effect on the intellect, language, and manners of our country. Many princes were compelled, even by considerations of mere political interest, to become the patrons of science. These causes did operate, but not speedily; they were opposed by many serious obstacles; above all by the deep-rooted corruption which had extended itself through all the German notions of art and style. The first in thought and language of the better lyrical poets of the eighteenth century, resembled in a great measure their predecessors of the seventeenth, and devoted themselves entirely to the occasional poetry of gallantry, court, festival, and panegyric. Those of them who paid the greatest attention to style, Hagedorn, and after him Utz, were more addicted to imitation, and certainly very happy imitation, of French and English poets, than to the open expression of their own feelings and passions. Those who, by a higher tone of inspiration, like Haller, or by a more graceful and elegant fertility, like Gleim, are most deserving of the name of poets, are, in respect of language, always careless, frequently corrupt. At the same time they must be regarded,

even in respect to language and its construction alone, as great and meritorious, when compared with the state of barbarism into which the taste and judgment of the time immediately preceding them had fallen. They must receive still greater admiration, when we reflect on the unfavourable circumstances of some of their lives. Several of these first revisers of the German language and poetry died in very early life; such was the fate of Kleist, who was perhaps the greatest genius of them all, of Kronenk, and of Elias Schlegel; others devoted their chief attention to the bustle of active life, or passed into foreign countries and forgot their destiny. They all felt the want of a point of union, and looked for it in vain from the youthful hands of Frederick the second. It is common of late to justify the conduct of this monarch, by asserting that at the time when he arose, the language and poetry of his country were really in such a state, that they could not possibly be viewed with any thing but contempt and aversion by one of so much talent as he possessed. There is, however, no foundation in fact for such a plea: What might not have been done for German literature by a prince, in whose time (and some of them too in whose own dominions) there arose and flourished such men as Klopstock, Winkelmann, Kant, and Lessing? Where, in any age, could better materials have been

found, and what were the foreign favourites of Frederic (Voltaire alone accepted) when placed by the side of these great resuscitators of science and art? What was a Maupertuis, or a La Metrie?—the mere mob of French literati. We may well excuse Klopstock for expressing, with somewhat of the keenness of personal resentment, his indignation for the unmerited contempt poured upon the language and literature of his country. He felt and expressed this with bitter severity, when he instituted a comparison between Frederick and Cæsar. In the time of Julius, more Greek, good, bad, or indifferent, was written at Rome, than French in Germany during the whole of the eighteenth century. The Roman language possessed at that period as few classical works as the German did before 1750. And yet Cæsar thought it well worth his while to devote the most careful attention to his mother tongue, nay, to be himself a Roman philologer and grammarian. And it was thus that he made himself one of the first of orators and of writers, distinctions which no man ever can reach who makes use of a foreign dialect.—But upon the whole we should perhaps scarcely regret the want of such an union of German writers as Frederick had it in his power to effect. Individuals would indeed have written better and more easily, but it may be that the literature as a whole might have suffered,

that it might have been narrowed in its spirit and comprehension, and become the affair of a province rather than of the whole German people. We should have paid dearly for a somewhat more rapid developement, by sacrificing what constitute at this moment the chief excellence of our writers—riches and freedom. But the whole of the argument in defence of Frederick proceeds upon a wrong view of the subject. If kings are to defer their patronage of national literature till such time as there are in the country abundance of elegant and perfect writers, the utmost which it can be in their power to effect, must be the establishment of some tame and unprofitable academy. The monarch who is ambitious to befriend and guide the intellect of his people, must foster and cherish talents not yet completely developed, and furnish young men with the instruments and opportunities of distinction. We may pardon the zeal of Klopstock, for he had in his own person abundant experience of the neglect of princes. He was conscious to himself of a genius capable of diffusing new spirit and life, not over poetry alone, but over all the departments of literature. The evil influence of Voltaire over France was not more extensive, than the good influence of Klopstock might have been over Germany, had he been supplied with room, occasion, means, and instruments, worthy of his genius.

Klopstock stood conspicuous, and almost alone in the German literature of his time, in respect of his intensely national feelings, feelings with which few of his contemporaries sympathised, and which still fewer could understand. It was his ambition to transfer these German feelings into poetry. With the *Messaid* the new literature of our country may be said to begin; so immeasurable have been the benefits derived from it, particularly in respect to style and expression, although the poem is now admired chiefly *upon trust*, or has not at least become a work of true power and living feeling in our hands. The plan labours under the same disadvantages which I have described as inseparable from all poems of this species. Klopstock's most successful poetry is that conceived in the spirit of elegy. Every gradation, blending, and depth of elegiac feeling, is handled by him with the power and ease of a master; however far he pursues the stream of his melancholy reflections, he never doubts, nor needs to doubt, that his readers will willingly follow him, and deliver up their spirits to his control. He calls forth the most melting of our sympathies even for a fallen spirit—*Abbadona*. There is another element which enters as largely, but far less happily into the composition of his poetry. In prose he is a writer who errs by being too sententious, brief, and epigrammatic; but in poetry he indulges in a

verbose and elaborate species of rhetoric, which often destroys in a very great measure the effect of his feeling. Both Milton and Virgil are chargeable with the same defect, but Klopstock has carried it much farther than either of them. We may allow him to assume that his heavenly personages make use of human, nay, of German language, but we can with difficulty suppose that beings of so elevated a nature can waste their time in such frivolous and long-winded conversations as occur in the *Messiad*.

That neither the nation or the poet himself was satisfied with the *Messiad* as a whole, is sufficiently proved by the very great dissimilarity of the first and second halves of the poem.

There lay in the spirit of Klopstock a lofty idea of a new and eminently German poetry. His mighty hand put an end to the greatest reproach of our literature; he demonstrated that Christianity on the one hand, and Gothic mythology and antiquity on the other, must be the main elements of all new European poetry and inspiration. In his time the scholars of Denmark were zealously employed in bringing into notice the northern mythology and the *Edda*; and Klopstock himself was willing to take a part in their labours. But the small lyrical poems and odes by which he attempted to promote their views were not the proper means for accomplishing it. The Danish poets were wiser in adopt-

ing the department of narrative and descriptive poetry.

To the *Hermann* of Klopstock, next to the *Messiad* his most considerable poem, the same general remarks may be applied which I have already made concerning the elegiac spirit of all his poetry, and the abuse of rhetorical acuteness. As a drama it is calculated for a future and ideal theatre, not for that actual theatre either of his time or of ours, which seems to regard with a favourable eye all manner of pleasure and purpose, rather than the poetical. Klopstock seized and felt only the two extreme points of German poetry; he overlooked all that lies in the middle between the Christian and the northern, and all that is produced by the blending of these two elements,—the whole middle age, the thousand or twelve hundred years, which intervened between Attila and that peace of Westphalia, of which so much against our wishes we are compelled to make an epoch both in literature and in history. He omitted, therefore, to survey the region of all others most fruitful and most obvious, the only one upon which poetry ever can be established so as to become a matter of historical and national influence in our eyes. This great blank which Klopstock left, many subsequent writers have attempted to fill up; particularly Bodmer as a scholar, and Wieland as a poet. Bodmer was passion-



ately fond of the old romantic chivalrous poetry, and was the first who brought the riches of Germany in that department into light; although he adopted a method which was ill calculated to hasten the effects he wished to produce. The poetry of Wieland was entirely devoted to the romantic, which had been left untouched by Klopstock. It is true, that a historical romantic poem, after the manner of Tasso, not perhaps founded on the crusades, but on some other of the rich poetical materials of the middle age, might have been a better and more effectual instrument, than an entirely fanciful and playful subject, such as that of Oberon. But notwithstanding all this, and in spite of many absurd modern things which he has interwoven, the services of Wieland have been eminently useful in recovering romantic feelings. It is a shame and a pity that one who had recreated in so glorious a manner the minstrelsy of the Provencial period, should have so soon laid poetry aside. This is the greatest reproach which can be made to the poet of Oberon, that he who, had he acted wisely, might have become the German Ariosto, or the rival of the Italian one, should have stooped to be the imitator of such a prose writer as Crebillon. In prose it is quite evident that his style and expressions are vastly inferior to what they appear in his verses. I believe that when all his Greek romances are for-

gotten, the fame of Wieland will still be supported by his Oberon.

Of the other poets of the first generation, the most original is Gessner. But he deals in a species of poetry too remote from actual life, and too devoid of any precise species of mythology. He wanders therefore in a world of shades, and every thing assumes in his hands the appearance of a tame uniformity. A contempt of rhyme and metre may harmonize well enough with such a sort of poetry, but it also promotes and cherishes its most characteristic errors and defects.

In one respect alone the doctrine and example of Klopstock operated unfavourably upon the German language. In order to recal a language out of a situation of entire corruption, few better means can be selected than the introduction of severe, elaborate, and foreign forms of writing. These at first indeed produce the appearance of restraint and difficulty, but they destroy the prevalent absurdities of carelessness. The ancient hexameter measure accords well with our language, and ours is the only modern language in which it is tolerable. But with whatever excellent effects the introduction of foreign forms may be attended, they should be still regarded merely as exercises. He who would create a truly national poem must choose a national and familiar measure. The accents of a foreign metre do not

come upon the ear with the effect of domestic influence, or fasten themselves in the memory and heart of the readers. The hexameter when carelessly executed, displeases scholars, and when written with accuracy appears monotonous and wearisome to ordinary readers. The *Messiad* is prevented by its import from becoming an universal favourite. But for this I should consider the measure in which it is written as the great cause of its unpopularity.

It was a great error in an illustrious poet, such as Klopstock, to hate and banish rhyme. It is well that he has not succeeded in all that he wished to effect. It was a most absurd thing to suppose that rhyme, a custom which has been familiarised to German ears by nine hundred or a thousand years, and which has become intertwined among the very roots of our language, could be thrown off with so much ease. Besides rhyme is not merely an adventitious habit, it is founded in the very nature of Teutonic speech. Klopstock conceived that the most ancient German songs and poems were rhythmical, but without rhyme: but he was mistaken. It is true that they are without that regular rhyme at the end of lines which we now use, but they all possess that species of repetition of sound, which is alike observable in the Islandic, Anglo-Saxon, Scandinavian, old English, and old Saxon poets, which goes by the name of *Alliteration*, and of which

even in the latest poetry of Germany and England, the traces are abundantly manifest. The transition from this kind of rhyme to ours was a very easy one. Rhyme is not indeed so necessary in our language as in the unmusical one of France, but it is intermingled with the very foundation of our speech, and has entered long since into our pronunciation. Wieland deserves much praise for restoring rhyme, and putting an end to that mania for blank endings and unsatisfactory metres, which was introduced by Klopstock, which was tolerated in him, but utterly disgusting in the hands of his imitators.

Wieland's love of philological pursuits led him sometimes into bigoted paradox, and the same thing may be said of a much greater philologist than he was—Adelung. I am far from wishing to deny the merits and talents of this great etymologist; but in our time it is no longer easy to overlook such monstrous absurdities as some of those into which he fell; that, for instance, of confining the pure High Dutch language entirely to the limits of the old Margravate of Meissen, and of despising Klopstock, who was the first writer among his own contemporaries, nay the first master of the German language which had then appeared.

How relative the idea of a golden period must always be, at least in respect to our literature, we

have now had many examples; Gottsched fixed it in the age of Frederick the first King of Prussia, and talked of Besser, Neukirch, and Pietch, as if they were to be in German literature, what Virgil is in the Roman, and Corneille and Racine in the French. These writers are now, however, regarded without any of the enthusiastic admiration of Gottsched. So convinced was he that human intellect and German poetry had at that time reached their summit, that he persuaded himself he could see all around him the marks of a decline, and he wrote in such terms as these in the year 1751—the very year in which the first part of the *Messaid* was published. The poets whom he praised so highly produced only odes and small pieces; but a literature can never reach its perfection till it can boast of a great epic poem and a great history. We must be grateful to those earlier writers for the care with which they purified our language, but they were only preparing the way for the more stately march of those who came after them. The rapid and yet gradual improvement which occurred in our last century is indeed a subject which cannot be considered by us with too much satisfaction. There is no privileged period in which the great change took place. The earliest works of Lessing can scarcely be said to be written in the same language of which he lived to make use. From 1750

till 1800, a constant succession of works appeared in Germany, of which, although few are perfect, there are none that have not added both strength and elegance to the language in which they are composed.

Although the whole of this period has been distinguished by unintermitted fertility, there is no difficulty in classing our writers into their different generations. Each of these generations has its own characteristic excellencies and defects—derived in general from the situation or circumstances of the time, rather than from the genius of the individuals.

In the first generation I class those writers whose developement and first exertions occurred between the years 1750 and 1760. My limits do not permit me to enumerate the whole even of those who are entitled to great respect. I have already touched on the most celebrated. But I cannot pass over in silence the learned Jesuit Denis, who should be remembered with peculiar honour by my audience, because it was he who first introduced into the literature of Austria that pure taste which had been created in the north by Klopstock.

Of prose writers, many of those philosophers whom I shall mention hereafter belong to the first generation; even Kant himself, if we consider the period of his birth, and the nature of his earliest

writings. The most distinguished were Lessing and Winkelmann.

The writers of this period exhibit many traces of the unfortunate state into which German literature had fallen in the age immediately preceding their own. With what difficulties Winkelmann had to contend before he succeeded in forming his rich and exquisite style, we may learn from the perusal of his youthful Letters. Kant's mode of writing bears innumerable marks of long, hard, and severe labour. The juvenile works, in particular the poems, of Lessing, should be considered merely as a tribute paid by a man of genius to the spirit of his age. Even Klopstock, however much he is to be admired, would, without doubt, have been far better, had he been preceded by writers of great eminence.

Such were the injurious consequences produced on the writers of the first generation, by the miserable state of German literature at the period when they made their appearance. We must not forget, however, that the difficulties with which they had to contend, stimulated them to exertions of power and greatness to which they might not otherwise have aspired. They were obliged to concentrate all their powers upon one point; this was the case with Klopstock, Winkelmann, and, in another way with Kant. More lately our literature, and

above all our poetry, has lost that tone of severe simplicity and dignity which distinguished the best authors of the first generation. The admirable works of Winkelmann may perhaps have been very instrumental in producing this effect. The beautiful and the tasteful have become too exclusively the object and passion of our writers. We must return to the still more exalted inspiration of national feeling and religion.



## LECTURE XVI.

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GENERAL REVIEW—SECOND GENERATION—GERMAN CRITICISM—  
LESSING AND HERDER—LESSING AS A PHILOSOPHER—FREE-  
THINKING AND THE ILLUMINATI—THE EMPEROR JOSEPH THE  
SECOND—CHARACTER OF THE THIRD GENERATION—THE PHI-  
LOSOPHY OF KANT—GOETHE AND SCHILLER—ANTICIPATION  
—FICHTE AND TIECK—TRUE CHARACTER OF GERMAN LITERA-  
TURE—CONCLUSION.

THOSE who are best able to form an opinion concerning the modern literature of Germany, are sensible that its principal defect is its want of harmony. To point out in a general way where this harmony should be sought, and wherein alone it may be found, might seem perhaps to be no very difficult task. But I know not that it could be productive of much good to point out the remote termination, unless we could accompany this with some directions as to the way which must lead to it, some warnings concerning the bye-paths which deflect from it, the obstacles which interrupt, and the

dangers which surround it. Before we think of solving the problem, we must first thoroughly comprehend it in all its extent and all its difficulty; we must discover the extremities of the several cords, and follow them through all the mazes of their intertexture, ere we need hope to loosen the Gordian knot of our literature.

The nearer we come to our own time, the more am I obliged to contract the extent of my researches, and to dwell less upon the characters of individuals, and confine myself to the universal progress and ruling spirit of intellect and letters. The time is not yet come for a complete history of German literature. Many things will not appear in their just light, till the nature of their consequences has been more fully developed. It is impossible to raise the structure till the materials be at our disposal.

I have already attempted to depict, in a general manner, the most illustrious poets of the first generation. In order that I may adhere as closely as may be to the order of chronology, I shall defer for a little my view of the philosophers, and other prose writers, their contemporaries, because neither of the most celebrated of them, Lessing and Kant, began to exert an effectual influence upon the general mind till somewhat later.

After the long feuds between Austria and Prus-

sia had at last terminated in a durable peace, Germany enjoyed a number of years of repose alike salutary to her states, her sciences, and her intellect. At one time, indeed, it seemed as if this quiet was about to be broken, but the danger was a transitory one, and Germany continued to flourish in the enjoyment of peace and her own power, without being conscious at the time, to what causes she was indebted for the happiness of her condition.

The first establishers of our literature, and purifiers of our language and poetry, who either immediately preceded or immediately followed Klopstock, and devoted their lives to the same purposes which he always kept in view, were placed in a situation of no ordinary difficulty. Many of the obstacles which were opposed to them they overcame; their honourable toils prepared and smoothed the path; even the errors and defects which may be remarked in them have warned and guided their successors, and are deserving of the respect of posterity.

It need not surprise us to find that the second generation of German poets and writers, whose genius was first developed about the year 1770, have an appearance of boldness and facility to which their predecessors were strangers. They used and inherited what the labours of the first generation had founded and created. The most dis-

tinguished poets of this epoch are Goethe, Stolberg, Voss, Burger; to these I might add the names of a few other individuals who were nearly or exactly their contemporaries, and who by their genius are well entitled to stand beside them, although either from the character of their works, or from the incidents of their own lives, they have not been able to obtain an equally splendid portion of celebrity. It is very true that along with these there arose, at that period, a band of popular writers, very inferior to them, whose writings have almost brought the time of their production into some contempt. But that this epoch was in itself one of the most brilliant and fruitful in the whole course of our literary history, it is not possible to doubt. We need only remember that in addition to those I have named, Jacobi, Lavater, Herder, and John Müller, both by the date and character of their works, belong to this epoch; men whose fame is not confined to Germany, but has in part at least been echoed by every country in Europe. The writers of the second generation are both in spirit and in style entirely different from those who went before them. Their method of writing is full of soul, fire, and life; abundant in animation and wit, original, new, and, in many respects, exquisite. They want, however, uniformity, regularity, and a standard; and are often chargeable

with a neglect of the necessary purity of language. This is true even of Herder and John Müller, the most erudite as well as the most comprehensive spirits of their day. It might almost seem as if the adherents of the first generation were right in asserting, that purity of language is, if not exclusively, at least principally the portion of those whom they admire. But this must not be taken in its fullest extent; in some writers, and particularly some poets of the second epoch, in Voss, in Stolberg, and in many of the works of Goethe, the purity of language is found in all its strictness and perfection—more so than perhaps in any writers or poets of the first generation. The carefulness of Voss in respect to language is such as to render his style, on some occasions, painful and hard; and if it be true that in many of the minor works, both early and late, of Goethe, there occur many carelessnesses, yet in his noblest poems the language is as beautiful as German can be, and possesses indeed an artless elegance and grace to which Klopstock never could attain.

The language was not only enriched by the genius of these writers and poets, who followed out with greater freedom of step the path opened by their predecessors, but individual works were produced more perfect in their kind than Germany had even yet possessed. Poetry at that time took

a totally new direction. Somewhat earlier it had been separated into two parties, the imitators of Wieland and those of Klopstock. The first set thought of nothing but muses, graces, love, roses, zephyrs, nymphs, and hamadryads; the second re-echoed the old minstrelsy of the bards, the ice-dance, or the bear-hunt among rocks and wildernesses; they wandered among the clouds with Eloah, and trod heavenly paths strewn with suns and stars; or, if they stooped to earth, it was in thunder, storm, and whirlwind, like the trumpet of the judgment. Between these two extremes of monotonous and uninteresting elevation, and luscious, half-Greek, half-modern effeminacy, the new poets endeavoured to establish something possessed of greater power, and more akin to nature. They made Homer, as the great poet of living nature, the chief subject of these eulogies, and translated him with much success into the German language. Or they revived the faded recollections of ancient German history, art and poetry, although they were, in some instances, little qualified in point of erudition to do what they had undertaken. Their attempts were in general mere echoes; but some were both admirable in themselves, and have been productive of important results. The single work, "Gotz of Berlichingen with the iron hand," was the parent of a numerous progeny of steel-clad knights and brother-

hoods, who preserve alive, even down to our own time, the memory of old German freedom and heroism, at least upon the stage. The poem itself is a juvenile one, and has many errors and imperfections, and the history and manners represented in it are very far from being the true ones; but it must always retain its value as a poetical picture of great energy, and be honoured as the best of all the youthful poems of its author.

Upon the whole, perhaps, this new turn of things carried poetry somewhat too far from that lofty idea which Klopstock conceived of it; it was separated too much into individual points, and brought too soon and too exclusively to the service of the stage. It seems to me at least quite certain, that a national theatre is never the better of being an early one. The Greek theatre itself owes much of its excellence to the period of its developement. A theatre cannot possibly assume an air of exquisite perfection, unless it has been preceded by a literature and poetry cultivated with high success. Above all, the more lofty and serious species of poetry are its best harbingers, because these imply a national intellect and spirit in a state of developement most fitted to receive it. The criticism of Lessing had the effect of drawing our attention too much to the stage. With all his acuteness and erudition, of which none can be a greater admirer than myself,

it may, I think, be doubted whether Lessing produced a favourable effect on the German theatre. The translations of Corneille and Voltaire soon gave place to that species of moral domestic pictures introduced into France by Diderot, and prose was even supposed, for a considerable time, to be necessary for a truly natural dialogue. This pernicious error, however, at last passed away. The enthusiasm for Shakespeare, to which Lessing greatly contributed, was more permanent; and from him we derived notions both of nature and of poetry, far more profound and exquisite than were ever entertained by any of the school of Diderot.

As a critical writer, Lessing was better adapted for discovering and destroying particular errors in taste than for assigning to any one work, author, or species of writing, a true and just place in the scale of literary merit. He had not leisure nor patience to study the perfections of any one great work, as Winkelmann did; and without such mature consideration and quiet enthusiasm, no man can become an universal critic. We must learn to comprehend the essence of art from admiration of excellence, rather than from detection of error. Lessing is too much a philosopher, and too little an artist in his criticism. He wants that energy of fancy by which Herder was enabled to transport himself into the spirit and poetry of every age and



people. It is this very perception and feeling of the poetical, in the character of natural legends, which forms the most distinguishing feature in the genius of Herder. The poetry of the Hebrews was that which most delighted him. He may be called the mythologist of German literature, on account of this gift, this universal feeling of the spirit of antiquity. His power of entering into all the shapes and manifestations of fancy, implies in himself a very high degree of imagination. His mind seems to have been cast in so universal a mould, that he might have attained to equal eminence, either as a poet or as a philosopher.

Since Winkelmann wrote, the taste and feeling for art has been perpetually on the increase among the Germans. This has been promoted, not only by the natural love which we have for poetry, but by the removal of almost all German talents from the affairs of external life. The German intellect has been left only two fields, in which to exert itself—taste and philosophy. The first of these was at first cultivated to a degree which injured the second; for many German writers, who spent their lives in discoursing of subjects of mere art and taste, were evidently formed by nature for the higher species of philosophy. Such a natural predilection is apparent enough, even in Winkelmann; the whole

of his high ideas of art are established upon the ground of a Platonic inspiration, which he had cultivated in the best manner, and which was the ruling principle of all his thoughts. Of all kinds of philosophy there is none which harmonizes so well with a love of art as this; but in him the Platonism was so strong, that it lifted him not unfrequently very far above the subjects of which he treated. In particular, his later writings are full of manifestations of this philosophical propensity, and I know not but it might have been very fortunate for German philosophy, had it set out in the hands of such a Platonist as Winkelmann.

Lessing, so soon as his spirit had reached the height of its manly maturity, laid aside, as follies of his youth, the whole of his antiquarian, dramatic, and critical pursuits. The philosophical inquiry after truth was the object of all his later exertions, and he devoted himself to this noble pursuit with an earnestness of enthusiasm to which even his ardent mind had as yet been a stranger. In his earlier pursuits he seems to have written rather by way of exercising his genius, and from the wish of overthrowing his adversaries, than from any profound love of his own cause. However much nature had fitted him to be a critic, his highest destination was for philosophy. He was too far above

his age to be understood by it; and moreover he did not live to fill up the outline of the system which he embraced.

Of the philosophers of the elder school, Sultzer devoted his thoughts and researches to art—with the views and habits of his time; Mendelsohn's ambition was to establish the universal truths of religion upon philosophical principles; Garve was no adherent of the school of Leibnitz; but his whole character shews that he should be classed with the elder period. He devoted himself principally to the moral philosophy of the ancients and the English. He seems to have partaken in the errors of his masters, and to have viewed ethics as founded rather on the principles of elegance and the agreeable than on those true and more profound principles with which German feelings have greater sympathy. The philosophical romances of Wieland had a still more dangerous tendency to promote a merely Epicurean system of morality. These men were not well fitted to be the guides of a nation and age placed on the brink of such conflicts and difficulties as were then about to agitate the world.

Kant was not as yet known. Lavater pursued a path of his own quite remote from all the rest. The world has become well acquainted with the follies of his physiognomical reveries, and have considered him as a mere dreamer. The profoundness of his

philosophical views, and the best of his works, are equally unknown. Of all the inquirers of the last century, I know of none, who, next to Lessing, laboured more to pursue the traces of forgotten truth than Lavater.

The writings of Reimarus concerning natural religion contain nothing but what is quite commonplace. Lessing laid hold of the same subject with very different views, and with very superior genius. The then prevalent doubts, produced by the philosophy of Locke and Descartes, had no interest for him. In all his controversial writings (and in none more than his *Education of the human race*, and his *Freemason Dialogues*) we may discover things more intimately connected with the principal subjects of the higher philosophy, than any contemporary inquirer seems ever to have contemplated. Leibnitz was the only philosopher near his own time of whom he thought much, and him he considered as standing at a very great distance from those who at that time conceived themselves to be of the Leibnitzian school. He understood him better than any of them, because he studied Spinoza whom they neglected. The metaphysics of Lessing are indeed imperfect, and in some respects he seems not only not to have overcome, but even not to have understood that greatest of all his adversaries; but I must confess that I think he saw farther than

Kant, although not with so systematic an eye, into the deep places of philosophy. Had he lived longer and husbanded his strength, his influence and fame might have become very superior to what they are. The freedom and boldness of his spirit might have given a better direction to German philosophy than it received from Kant and his adherents. He is sometimes said to have been a Spinosist; but of this reproach he is by no means deserving. One of his most favourite notions was that of the metempsychosis—a doctrine obviously quite irreconcilable with the genius of a philosophy that denied the personal duration of the soul. Lessing's leaning was rather to the old Oriental philosophy, and of this he himself makes no secret. I perfectly agree with those who maintain that enthusiasm cannot be guarded against with too much care and anxiety; for it is clear that all the masterly learning of Leibnitz, and all the sound judgment of Lessing, could not preserve these great men from mistakes which are very easily discovered and ridiculed by their inferiors.

The enthusiasm and dreams of Lessing did not pass into the spirit of the age, along with the example of his boldness, and the inheritance of his doubts. He has become an instrument in the hands of his most inveterate enemies. In a certain sense he may be said to have completed the work

which was begun by Luther. It was he who established Protestantism in the most enlightened part of Germany, or at least who annihilated there the cause of Catholicism. It is lamentable indeed to see with what perversity of ingenious mischief the principles of this deep and philosophical believer, were converted into the weapons of *illumination* and infidelity by Basedow, Nicolai, and Weisshaupt. Unbelief and contempt of religion did not indeed make the same bold and rapid strides as in France, or as among certain individuals of England, but the undecided and fantastic shape they have assumed have rendered them more dangerous to such a people as the Germans; and it may be that we have not as yet seen the worst of their consequences.

Even the repose of universal peace, and the flourishing condition of Germany must have been favourable to the rise of a new mode of thinking, quite as much as to the developement of the arts and sciences. Although these did not indeed receive any very open patronage, yet the internal satisfaction of a powerful and thriving nation must have had a very considerable effect even in this respect. Germany in the middle of last century, and in the period immediately subsequent, possessed the two most imposing rulers in Europe. Frederick and Maria Theresa were in different ways the pride of their people, and expectations even of a still

higher nature were excited by the youth of the Emperor Joseph II. His active reign satisfied the hopes of his subjects; but so far as science and art were concerned the prophecies of the patriotic Klopstock were not fulfilled. As the sovereign of so many countries out of Germany, this emperor might rather have been expected to found a great scientific institute for the whole of Europe, than for Germany by itself; and in another work I have expressed my conviction of the important nature of those services which by so doing he might have rendered to the spirit and mind of the age in which he appeared. He regarded too exclusively the practical side of the sciences. He was so far, however, from having any contempt of them, that he entered with even too much keenness into many of those theories of law, finance, and police, which were started during his time. It is fit and natural that a great monarch should be a practical man, even in regard to science, but they who are the best politicians are aware that physical power and external splendour are not the only component parts of the greatness of a nation.

I now proceed to the third generation in German literature—a period remarkably different from either of the foregoing. By fixing our eyes distinctly and closely upon the general character of these different epochs and generations, we shall adopt the surest means of solving many otherwise dangerous contra-

dictions, of reconciling many apparently opposite opinions, taken up either from total misunderstanding or from looking at things in a partial, not a general point of view. The whole external circumstances and ruling spirit of that epoch in which the first education and developement of a writer occur, determine very frequently the character of his genius, and in all cases exert a very decisive influence over his choice of the subjects to which he applies it.

I account those to belong to the third generation who mostly formed their taste and habits of thinking during the last fifteen years of the eighteenth century. The external events and prevalent spirit of the time had a mighty influence upon the German literature; not only on the writers but on the public. The public for which the German writers and poets laboured, consisted at the period before this, of a few particular friends and patrons of the arts, a few scattered dilettanti. Such was the public of Klopstock and his contemporaries, and it was long before the small band became increased. The revolution promoted reading and writing, and soon extended its influence over literature and philosophy, quite as widely as over politics. However injurious in many instances its influence may have been, there is no question that it roused to an unexampled degree the public interest for all things, and that even the



violence of party rage, like most other species of conflict, was advantageous to the development of human intellect. If I should characterise this epoch by a single word, I would call it the revolutionary one—protesting, however, against mistakes, and using the term in a sense not a little different from the common one. It is true, indeed, that to the honour of the German writers, the most distinguished of them, at least, remained entirely free and pure from the democratic phrenzy of the first years of the revolution. There is only one exception, and he, we must all allow, was not one of the deceivers, but one of the deceived. It was difficult at that period to resist the treacherous hopes which were everywhere held forth for acceptance, but such of our better writers as had been so deceived, soon returned to their right judgment, and did all they could to atone for their errors. I make use of the term rather in the same sense with that in the admirable saying, “Burke wrote a revolutionary book against the revolution.” The meaning of this is, that Burke painted with such a terrible eloquence the convulsions of the age, and so perfectly felt and understood the danger and the greatness of the existing struggle, that he himself was thrown into a state of agitation and contagious violence when he composed his book. It is this state of an internal rather than

of an external struggle, that I consider as the distinguishing mark and characteristic of the third generation. In order to make my meaning perfectly understood, I need only name one great poet and writer of this period, whose splendid career has already been brought to its close. Schiller in the first enthusiastic writings of his youth, exhibits all the most striking symptoms of internal conflict, and breathes the full confidence of all those visionary hopes and violent opposition to existing institutions, which were the immediate harbingers of the revolution. In some of his early works he expresses a passionate and painful scepticism—an unbelief, which is accompanied in his young spirit with so much sublime earnestness and fire of energy, that we contemplate it not with aversion, but with compassion, and with the hope that a soul so fearfully agitated and so panting for the truth, would in its period of manhood and maturity, attain the repose of faith. What a mighty change do we observe in the subsequent progress of his career! what a dignified struggle with himself, the world, the philosophy of the age, and his own art! Restless in himself, and perpetually tossed about in unquietness, he comprehends and compassionates the universal convulsions of the time. It is this which I mean to express by the word I have adopted, for,

in a greater or in a less degree, the remark I have made concerning Schiller applies to all the illustrious writers of his epoch.

The poets and other authors of the second generation lived in a state of carelessness, which appears to us very remarkable, accustomed as we are to trace in the events which occurred during their time, the seeds of all the subsequent agitations. In political events they took no sort of concern, and lived in a total contempt of the whole external world, existing only for themselves and the enjoyment of their own art. John Müller alone forms an exception; his spirit was entirely devoted to historical events, and looking down from the solitary elevation of his Alps, he saw farther into the gathering tempests of the political world than any of his brethren, inhabitants of the peaceful valley, or the tumultuous capital. Instead of this artist-like and happy unconcern, the whole of the writers of the late generation, who appeared between the year 1780 and the year 1800, appear to be thoroughly penetrated with the spirit and feelings of their age; they either coincide in, or oppose, with the violence of partizans, the prevalent system of opinions. One of our writers, the most fertile of his age, creates the greater part of his interest by taking possession of the merciful and tolerant side of the time; and another much greater

genius, going to the totally opposite extreme, thinks that in his favourite  $\tau$  he has discovered the  $\Pi\epsilon\ \Sigma\tau\omega$  of Archimedes. A third writer, who is the favourite of his age and nation, is so, because he has seized upon the whole wealth of this variously developed epoch, and represented all its dissonances and complaints, with wit, sympathy, and a peculiar species of humour—in a style the remarkable nature of which is of itself a sufficient proof that the period in which it was formed, was a revolutionary one. Other authors, disgusted with the chaotic situation of actual affairs, betook themselves to the regions of mere fancy, or of pure science. A few made a wiser use of their experience, and returned with a sense of humility and submission to the aids of religion, and the long neglected sublimities of the Bible.

I cannot pretend to bring my history any farther down, for I am sensible how impossible it must be for a man to depict a period to which he himself belongs. When an external struggle becomes universal in any department of human activity, the social as well as the intellectual, it is impossible that either party should be entirely in the right. Even they who have espoused the right cause will mingle something wrong in the feelings of their triumph. The creative influence of a period of convulsion may be sufficiently proved by a reference to the history

of Schiller—what mighty spaces intervene between the Robbers, the Don Carlos, and the Wallenstein. Invention is certainly more favoured by such a period than perfect finishing; but many German works produced during these years exhibit both, in a beauty which they can manifest only when they are united.

During this period the philosophy of Kant was at the height of its power in Germany. That its effects were injurious in respect to religion, I cannot upon the whole believe, for that had already been attacked in its more fundamental principles by adversaries much more fitted to produce a popular effect. If in some respects it fostered doubts, these doubts were of the more profound and serious nature, and carried their own antidote along with them. I do not mean to say any thing in favour of the mere faith of reason, but I maintain that, if the truth had been entirely lost, there are to be found in the writings of Kant many hints, by means of which a serious inquirer might have been greatly assisted in its recovery. If we reflect how generally a degrading infidelity had been received among the Germans, we shall easily admit that a more dignified system of infidelity must have been advantageous rather than pernicious. It is no doubt to be regretted, that the philosophy of Kant so soon became a sect. But even this was, like his corrup-

tion of our language, only a transitory evil. Kant's own style has the stamp of his character; it is perfectly original, and displays much philosophical acumen, spirit, and wit. But, upon the whole, and particularly in his method of constructing periods, we can see evident marks of a soul toiling painfully after truth, and undergoing perpetual concussions from its doubts. Hence arose the unfortunate Terminology. But that barbarism—the cypher language of philosophy, has now in a great measure disappeared; only a few of our better writers still make some use of it, and that from slovenliness. The best philosophical writings of later years are quite pure in respect of language.

In Kant's philosophy are to be found many of the defects of his predecessors in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. He sets out with ideas of time and space quite as dead as those of Leibnitz; like almost all other philosophers since Descartes he wavers between the principle of personal consciousness and the external world of the senses, and he at last lands in the system of experience, like Locke. As this, however, is quite silent respecting all moral and divine things, he formed, in a manner not very consistent, either with the spirit of the English philosopher, or with his own principles, a system of rational faith out of the scattered fragments of rational knowledge. This found

no believers or followers. The Kantian doctrines of morality and law are indeed valuable, because they shew exactly how far reason does enter into the formation of true morality and true law; but they furnish an example even more striking than that of the Stoics, how inadequate, nay, in some instances, how pernicious, any system of ethics must be which rests upon no higher foundation than reason can afford.

The chief merit of Kant in regard to this subject is, that he demonstrated the incapacity of pure reason to decide any thing at all respecting such subjects—that she can acquire some knowledge of God and divine things, only by her power of gathering facts out of the experience of human life. Instead, however, of placing reason where he should, in the second place, he erroneously assigned her the first, and the ill used name of faith, which he bestowed on her, was a very insufficient mask. Had he avoided this ancient error, and laid open the path to true knowledge, with that accuracy of which his genius was capable, he might have attained the great object of his ambition, and become to philosophy what Bacon has been to physics. He might have put an end for ever to verbal difficulties, and established religion upon the foundation of experience and science.

To explain at greater length the two main errors which have sprung from the philosophy of Kant, and to give you a general picture of the present philosophy of Germany, would carry me very far beyond the limits which I have for the present prescribed to myself. Living poets who have already composed a series of great works, and finished their career before our eyes, may be taken into the historical picture of the latest period. Not so philosophers; their ideas may yet assume a different form of developement, their system is as yet *in futuro*. I shall only make this one general remark, that our country has been distinguished since Kant by a spirit of profound and patient investigation; and that our philosophers have formed their own speculations with the advantages of a more extensive learning than has as yet been equalled in any other country of modern Europe. These are the best preparations and symptoms of a return from error to truth. Some have already made great progress in the removal of the errors which were bequeathed by Kant. I may be pardoned for mentioning the name of my own departed friend Novalis\*; not that he was the first who returned to the right path, or that he has carried

\* Heinrich von Hardenberg.



his views farther than many others, but because the fragments which he has bequeathed to us are a sufficient proof that, had he lived, he would have done more for true philosophy than any of those whom he has left behind him. With a dignified simplicity and clearness Slotberg expresses the loftiness of that faith, which not only gave repose to his feelings, but energy to his genius. Many approximations have been made, and are now in making to the truth. I hope that ere long the return will be universal, and the philosophy of Germany assume a shape in which she will be no longer the enemy and darkener, but the champion and torch-bearer of the truth. At all times we should separate persons from opinions; but above all we should beware of hating or distrusting philosophy in general, merely on account of the individual errors into which her adherents may have been betrayed. False philosophy can only be supplanted by the true. This consideration should quicken the energy and sustain the confidence of the age.

I now turn to the poets—but I must confine myself to a very few remarks even concerning them. During this period the more mature works of Goethe first became known and admired, as they deserved to be, and many of them belong to it even by the date of their compositions. The best of them are now very generally admitted to be, both

in respect to poetical art and beauty of language, the most excellent of which the German language can boast. This poet possesses, in an unequalled degree, that power and ease by which the writers of the second generation are distinguished. In some particular pieces his example might indeed be a misleading one; for even in his maturer years he has too often brought down his poetry to the present; and there is indeed perhaps no other poet who has bestowed so much art upon subjects entirely modern. But nothing can enable us to judge better of the difficulty of this whole undertaking than the simple comparison of his writings of modern representation, with those poems of which the subjects are taken from periods more remote. How inferior is *Eugenie* to *Egmont*, considering both as poetical representations of the mode in which civil disorder and revolution are fostered and extended in the vulgar and in the cabinet. Or, if we may be allowed to class together works externally of different species, on account of the kindred nature of their internal import, how superior is the *Tasso* to the *Affinities of Choice*, as a picture of the development of passion, in the higher orders of society. If we look upon the last named work, merely as a representation of the mind struggling with the world (like the *Faustus*), and compare it in that point of view with the *William Meister*, how greatly must

it appear its inferior, both in respect to thought and style. If we look to the poetry alone, I imagine that these works, *Faustus*, *Iphigenia*, *Egmont*, and *Tasso*, will maintain in future ages the fame of this author, along with the most beautiful of his songs. In that mode of composition he has, in every period of his life, been alike admirable.

Many doubt whether Goethe was meant by nature for a dramatic poet, and think that even in such of his pieces as are best adapted for the stage, as for instance in *Egmont*, the repose of his descriptive representations points out a poet whose tendency is rather to the epic. His attempts, however, in the epic, or in those species most nearly allied to it, have never been eminently successful. It seems as if he had never been able to light upon either a subject or form of epic composition exactly to his mind. His feelings led him more to the romantic than the proper heroic; and the romantic, in the widest sense of the word, when it affords play alike for fancy, wit, feeling, and observation, seems to be indeed the proper sphere of this great poet.

The influence which he exerted over his age was twofold, and such also appears to be his nature. In respect of his art, many have called him with justice the Shakspeare of our age—an age, namely, which leans more to riches of ideas and variety of cultivation, than to high perfection of art in

any one department of poetry. In respect to his mode of thinking, as he has applied it to the concerns of actual life, our poet deserves his other appellation of the German Voltaire.—A German he is in every thing; and even his mockeries, ironies, and unbelief, are expressed with a tone of good-heartedness, seriousness, and eloquence, to which the French Voltaire was an utter stranger. The want of settled principle is indeed the defect which most frequently strikes us in the midst of all the polished elegance, exquisite irony, and profuse wit, which this great poet has lavished over all the creations of his genius.

The unhappy relation of the German poetry to the German stage, is apparent from this circumstance, that both Klopstock and Goethe have written many dramas which they never meant for representation; although some of the pieces of Goethe, so composed, have, at a subsequent period, been brought upon the stage. The same circumstance occurred with respect to the *Don Carlos* of Schiller; and after he had resisted all the seductive influence of his first success, he has not been able to produce so much effect by the more dignified exertions of his art. But, even although there remains some want of harmony between his poetry and our stage, still he was the true founder of our drama. He gave it its proper sphere, and its most happy form. He

was thoroughly a dramatic poet; even the passionate rhetoric which he possessed along with his poetry, belonged exactly to this character. His historical and philosophical works and attempts are only to be considered as the studies and preparations of a dramatic artist. Yet his philosophical tracts are very valuable, from the light which they afford us into his internal spirit, and the proof they give of his want of mental harmony. A doubting, sceptical, unsatisfied disposition seems to accompany his spirit in all its inquiries. He himself appears to have remained always at the very threshold of doubt, and even in the noblest and most animated of his works we are chilled by the breath of an internal coldness.

Some have been of the opinion, that Schiller's philosophical pursuits were injurious to him, even in respect to his own art. But, in truth, his infidelity had its origin at an earlier period, and the satisfying of a spirit such as his was a matter of greater moment than any thing which regards the mere finishing of an art. And even with a view to the drama, I think that the historical and philosophical turn which Schiller has given to some of his tragedies, is by no means deserving of censure. Our theatre is not to flourish by means of voluminous authors; but like those of Greece, England, and Spain, by means of profound thought and historical import. At one period of his life Schiller seems indeed to

have entertained some false notions respecting the essence of the ancient tragedy—but this we must consider merely as a proof that he had not at that time brought the studies which he pursued so earnestly, to their proper termination.

The same lofty ideas of tragedy which Schiller entertained were also held by Henry Collin. So intensely was his spirit imbued with the inspiration of patriotism, that even when he treats of subjects of antiquity, he is always a national poet.

I feel that I have now reached the termination of the picture which I undertook to unfold. The multitude of circumstances which pressed upon me, and the interest which I took in the representation of the middle age, have abridged me in the latter part of my labours. I have done little more in these last lectures but point out the names of men upon whose works I should have dilated with much more fulness, both for your sake and for my own. In regard to German literature, if I had not confined myself to very narrow limits, each several province or department might easily have occupied a space as considerable as that which I have devoted to the whole.

I see plainly that a new generation are arising and fashioning themselves, and that the nineteenth century will be no less distinguished in the history of German letters than the eighteenth has been.

But the spirit and tendency of this young generation are not yet so much developed that I can venture to give any certain opinion as to its character. Much will be expected from them, for great things have been done to prepare the way for them. If we are to speak of the whole body of the German literature, I do not hesitate for a moment to say, that I expect all our most sanguine expectations will, at no very distant period, be fulfilled. At present I see much both of false taste and affectation in our art and poetry. The imitation of the antique, and of the great men of the preceding age, is conducted on narrow principles. Even in philosophy we have not borrowed the best part of those who have gone before us. But I hope that ere long all these things will exist only in remembrance. If the times proceed as they have lately done, literature will soon become much less the concern of individuals than of the public, and the influence of readers upon authors will at least be as great as that of authors upon readers. Since the middle of last century, literary works and literary men have assumed a totally new character in Germany—more so than in any other country of Europe. The greater the number of spectators is, the more is the interest in the spectacle; and I know not that any literature can be inspired more favourably than by the constant contemplation of such a spirit and nation as our own.

Even the spirit of sectarianism, however deeply it has been implanted among us, has of late years been visibly on the decline. Of those sects which in the last half of the eighteenth century had most influence in Germany, and on that account, if on no other, are historically of some importance, the illuminati sunk into the background, at the first appearance of the more profound philosophy; the Kantians have now begun to be as weary of their own system as the world was before them, and even the natural philosophers have become split into so many parties that they can scarcely be said to form any longer a particular sect. I am far from flattering myself that the errors of any one of these systems no longer exist, but they do not show themselves in the same imposing form as before. The spirit of sect has become milder; scholastic forms have sunk into comparative contempt, and all parties prepare to labour in unison on the great work of developing the intellect of Germany.

It is scarcely necessary for me to recal to your recollection that our literature, even from the first epoch of its developement, has been in a state of perpetual contest and struggle. At first the conflict lay between the Swiss, who admired exclusively the poetry and criticism of England and antiquity, and the Saxons who were the professed worshippers of the literature and taste of France; then between the serious and playful poets, the



followers of Klopstock and those of Wieland; and in another department between the orthodox party, and the new sect of illuminati. The contest assumed a more serious appearance in the time of the Kantian philosophy, as a regular struggle between idealism and empiricism. Both of these last combatants have in a certain sense gained the victory. Empiricism has with justice become the ruling system in all that regards practical life, physics, and pure science. Idealism, taking it in the highest acceptation of the word as the system of those who recognise ideas as superior to sensation, has exerted a powerful and an abiding influence upon our art, our criticism, and our higher philosophy. We often hear men speak of the new school, and the golden age. I have already said that our literature has no proper golden age, and I acknowledge I can as yet observe nothing that is deserving to be called a new school. We should be ambitious to perfect what has been begun, not to show our invention at the expense of our judgment.—Another foolish enmity which has become forgotten, is that which subsisted between the literary men of the North, and of the South of Germany. We were never so sensible of our national identity as now.

If we consider the remarkable struggles of intellect which occurred during the last century, in a more general point of view—as they developed

themselves not in Germany alone but in England, in France, and in the whole of Europe; and ask for a merely historical solution of this great phenomenon, the following is probably the conclusion at which we should arrive. This struggle has had its seat not in those persons and events alone, wherein it has been manifested to us, but rather in a great internal awakening throughout the whole intellect of man.

The wild wanderings of reason and power of thought set free from all control, and then the reviving of imagination which had so long slept beneath the pressure of a formal and (apparently only) a scientific system, were probably the moving causes of all these manifold convulsions and conflicts. In France despotic and contemptuous reason renounced all the bonds of faith and love, and displayed its destructive influence upon the external life and manners of a nation, in a way which has furnished us and our posterity with a warning and a terrible example. In Germany, from the different character of the nation, the spirit of the time manifested itself not in bloody revolutions, but in the entangled warfares of metaphysicians. The regeneration of fancy has in more countries than one, shown itself in the revived love of old traditions and romantic poetry. To the extent and depth, however, wherein this love has been kindled

among the Germans, no other nation of Europe can furnish a parallel. They have had their time, it is fit that we should now have ours.

Were I called upon to select one example of the prevalent power and freedom of reason, of the endless rapidity with which strong spirits weaken, destroy, and recreate the structure of thought, I should fix upon none more readily than Fichte; not merely on account of power of invention and masterly management of thought, which are in so high a degree peculiar to him, but also because he takes the materials of his thoughts entirely from himself, trusts every thing to nature, and depends in nothing upon those who have gone before him. The corresponding energy in the exertions of imagination, the resurrection, as I might call it, of fancy in Germany, cannot be more strongly exemplified than in Tieck—a poet who is so perfectly master of all the depths, and observations, and wonders, and mysteries of his art.

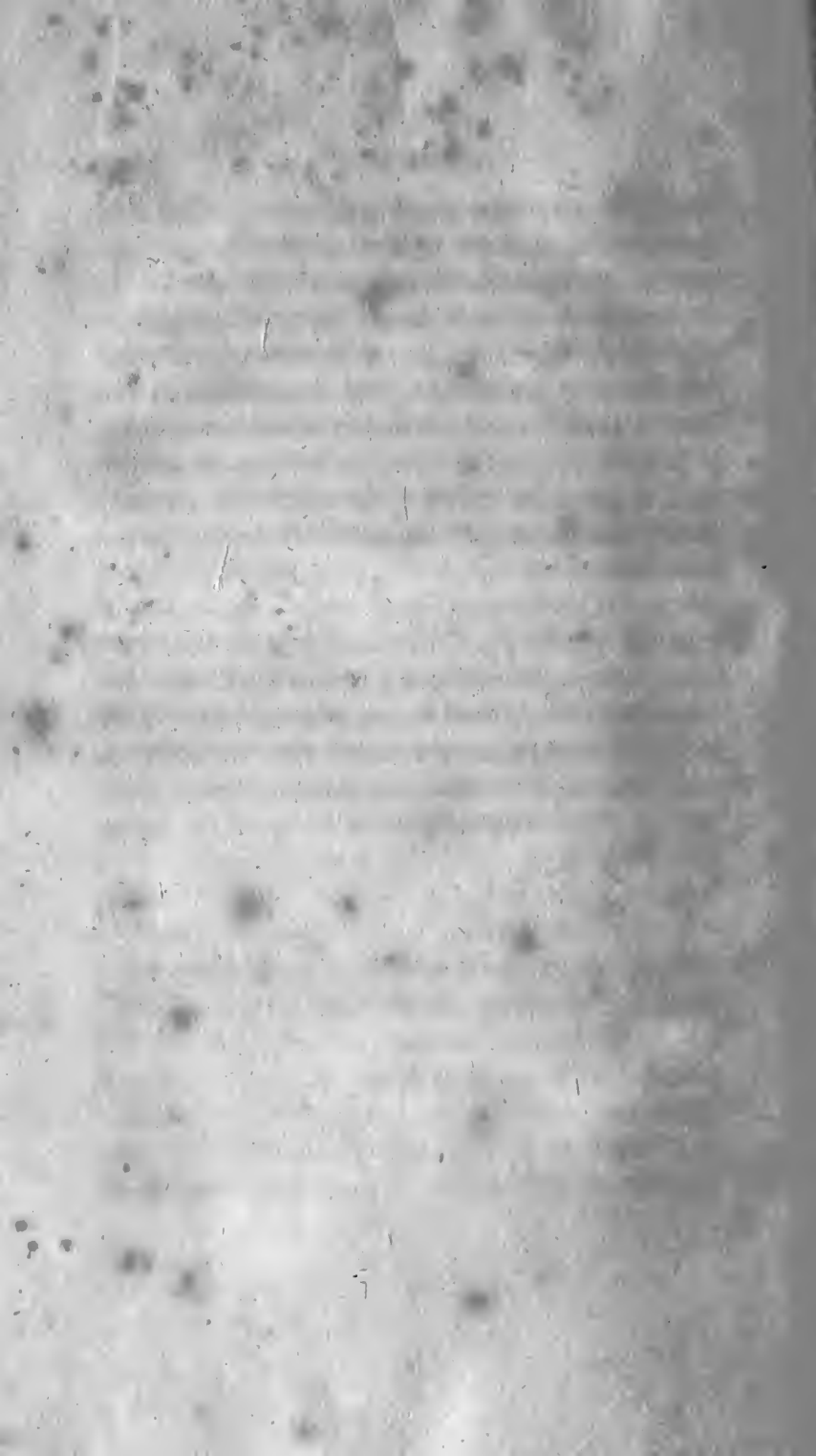
So far have reason, and imagination, and the century advanced; but as yet no farther. We must not, however, forget, that unless we retrograde, we must of necessity proceed. To this profoundness of reason which we have attained, and this fulness and majesty of fancy which have been restored to us, there must yet be added that stability of will and purpose, which brings the seeds

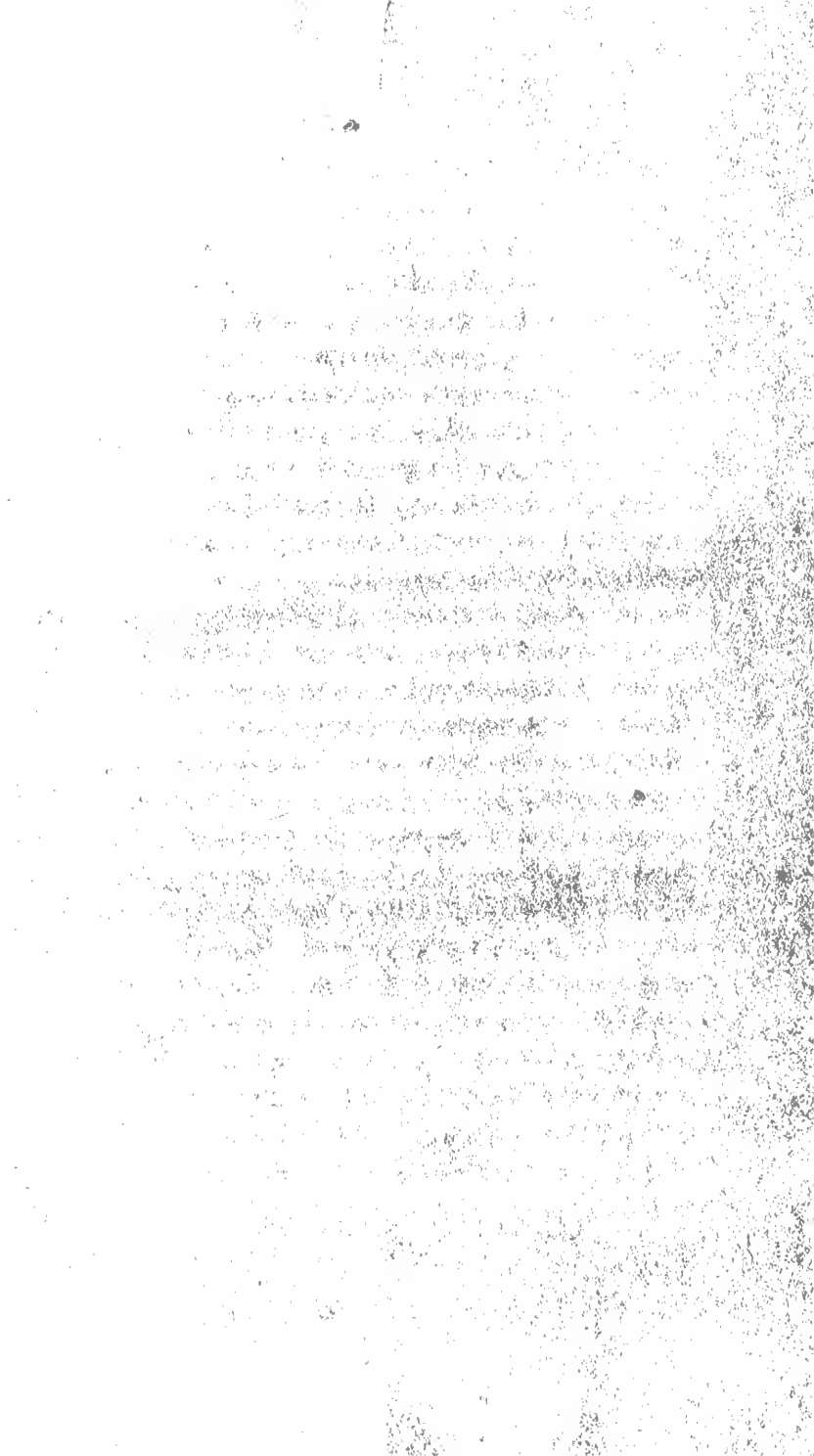
of good to maturity, and guards them from the first encroachments of corruption. The clearness of an enlightened judgment must watch over those mighty energies of reason and of fancy. True judgment depends in all things upon universality of observation, and discernment of that which is right in the midst of much more that is wrong.

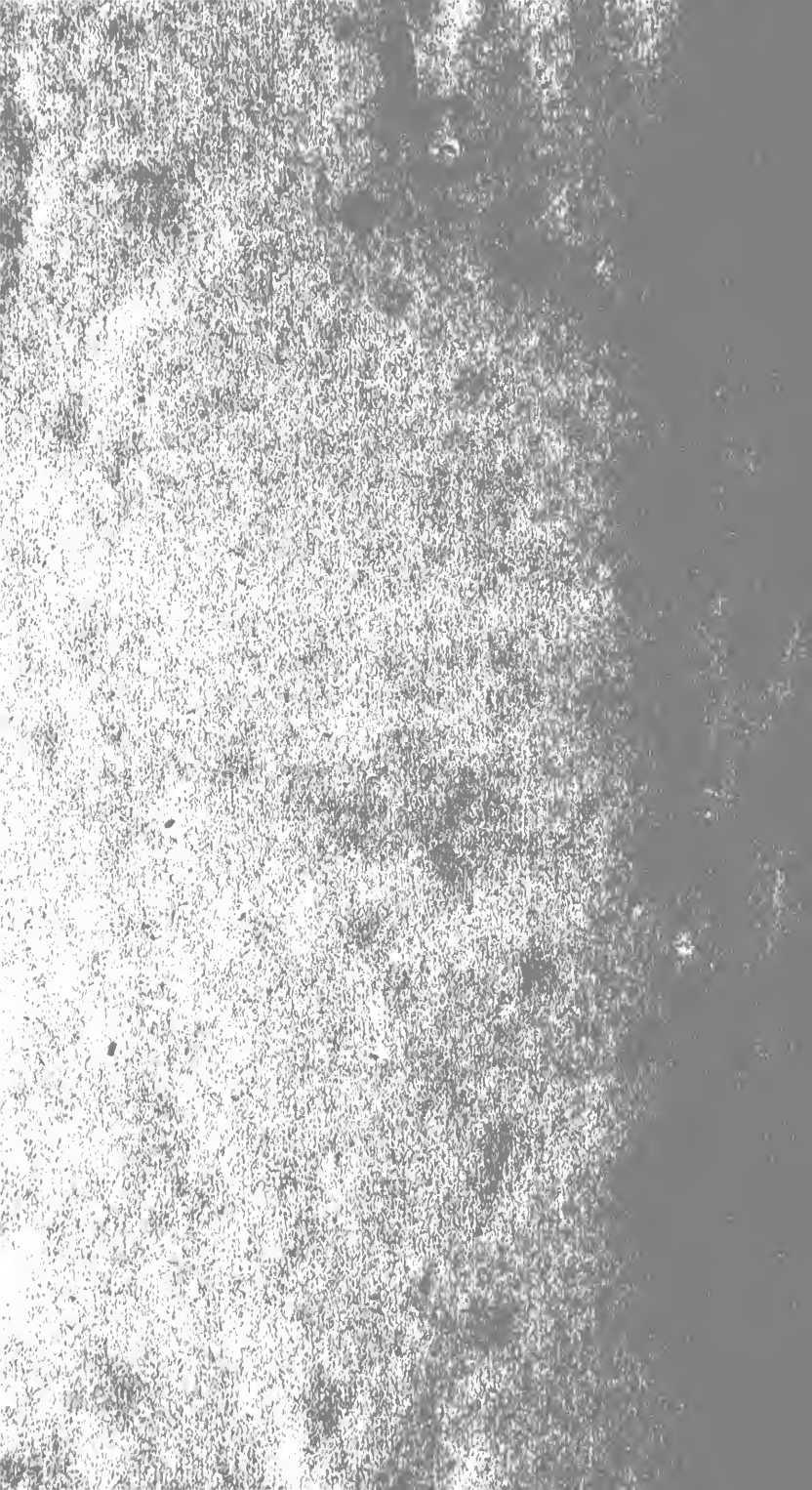
I have endeavoured in these lectures, to lead you to a point of view from which all our literature and all the operations of our intellect should be surveyed; as in all my more early attempts, my object has been to discriminate between the good and the evil, without any ambition to display those arts of rhetoric which might have pleased your ears but could not have aided your judgment.

THE END.













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