wisdom, counsel, moderation, religion, etc. Their unfailing presence on or near the stage was a source of great embarrassment to the poet, for it was not probable that opposing parties should plot in presence of the same witnesses. The chorus was thus an encumbrance as well as an ornament. From time to time they sang an ode suggested by the play, thus relieving the attention of the spectators. Hence originated the division of a play into **acts**, usually five in number.

826. **The great French tragedians**, with their natural love of regularity, were very particular about **the three unities** just explained. In the course of an act the place, with them, could not be changed, because the scenes were all connected with each other, so that the stage was never vacant except at the close of an act. When a new actor enters or any one retires they count it another **scene**; and they require that each scene shall flow naturally from the preceding, no actor coming or going without apparent reason for so doing. Their tragedies thus exhibit the most perfect regularity, but the poet is constantly shackled by such restrictions.

827. Both Greeks and French confine their tragedies to serious events, to what is grave, terrible, and pathetic; rigidly excluding all that is comical or too familiar. This is a leading feature of **classical** as distinct from **romantic** taste. The English idea of tragedy is very different from all this. Shakspeare (born 1564) originated it independently of Grecian models. His genius created the romantic tragedy, which is as different from the classic as a magnificent and wild landscape is from a beautiful and regular garden.

As in a landscape we may have vast plains, towering mountains, deep gorges, frightful precipices, interspersed with delightful vales, clear lakes, and refreshing fountains,

all mixed in wild confusion, so we have in Shakspeare the most varied grandeur mixed with scenes of tender pathos, loud merriment, buffoonery, extravagance, all in endless profusion.

"The ancient art of poetry," says Schlegel, "rigorously separated things which are dissimilar. The romantic delights in indissoluble mixtures and contrarieties; nature and art, poetry and prose, seriousness and mirth, recollection and anticipation, spirituality and sensuality, terrestrial and celestial, life and death, are by it blended together in the most intimate combination" (Lect. xxii.)

828. **Shakspeare** displayed a wonderful fertility of invention. He created highly dramatic scenes, intricate plots full of interest, and characters so grand, so distinct, so varied, so true to nature, and so consistent that no poet has ever surpassed him. His language has a power of its own; every sentence is a coin destined to circulate, and stamped with the mark of his particular mint. He generally observes unity of action, which is the essential unity of dramatic poetry; but he totally disregards the minor unities of time and place. Some of his dramas include the transactions of many years and the scenes of distant lands. He carries this liberty to the extent of license, with no slight detriment to probability and naturalness.

829. **An English play** is divided into acts and scenes, but these terms with us have not the same meaning as with the French. **An act** may consist of detached scenes laid in various lands and at various times; and **a scene** embraces all that is done in close succession at a given place, provided the same leading personages remain on the stage.

830. On one important point classic and romantic poets are agreed, both classes making tragedy the realm, chiefly if not solely, of the powerful passions—of pity and terror, of admiration for exalted virtue and detestation of crime

and villany. In this respect tragedy is **favorable to virtue.** Aristotle says of it that it "purifies the passions of men by means of pity and terror." The pernicious influence which the stage is justly accused of usually exercising results from abuses not essential to it, but unfortunately too common; the passions, instead of being purified, are perverted by it, especially the passion of love. Beaumont and Fletcher in particular are shockingly immoral. All the old tragedians, Shakspeare included, indulged in gross vulgarity. Modern tragic poets are more polished, but often more corrupting withal.

831. From a literary point of view Shakspeare is **at times deserving of severe criticism,** his comic wit degenerating into meaningless puns, his serious passions swelling into bombast. Besides, he is exceedingly irregular, and sometimes extravagant; he so mixes faults with beauties as to be a very unsafe model for imitation.

832. But he superabundantly atones for these defects by **unrivalled excellences,** several of which we have already mentioned. One we must explain more fully, as it is the characteristic perfection of dramatic poetry. It is thus described by Cardinal Wiseman in his last literary effort, a lecture on Shakspeare, intended to be delivered, by invitation, before the Royal Institution of Great Britain:

"Its essence [that of Shakspeare's dramatic art] consists in what is the very soul of the dramatic idea—the power to throw himself into the situation, the circumstances, the nature, the acquired habits, the feelings, true or fictitious, of every character which he introduces. This forms, in fact, the most perfect of sympathies. We do not, of course, use the word in that more usual sense of harmony of affection or consent of feeling. Shakspeare has sympathy as complete for Shylock or Iago as he has for Arthur or King Lear. For a time he lives in the astute villain as in the innocent child; he works his entire power of thought into intricacies of the traitor's brain; he makes his heart beat in concord with the usurer's sanguinary spite, and then, like some beautiful creature in the animal world, draws himself out of the hateful evil, and is himself again, and able, even, often to hold his own noble and gentle qualities as a mirror, or exhibit the loftiest, the most generous and amiable examples of our nature. And this is all done without study, and apparently without effort. His infinitely varied characters come naturally into their places, never for a moment lose their proprieties, their personality, and the exact flexibility which results from the necessary combination in every man of many qualities. From the beginning to the end each one is the same, yet reflecting in himself the lights and shadows which flit around him.

"This extraordinary versatility stands in striking contrast with the dramatic productions of other countries. The Greek tragedian is Greek throughout—his subjects, his mythology, his sentences play wonderfully indeed, but yet restrictedly, within a given sphere." —*Catholic World* for 1865, vol. i. p. 559.

833. There lived in England about the time of Shakspeare a number of brilliant **tragic writers,** such as Marlowe, Webster, Decker, Tourneur, Heywood, Middleton, Chapman, Ben Jonson, Marston, Massinger, Ford, Beaumont and Fletcher. (See a criticism of these in Whipple's *Essays*, vol. ii.)

834. **Spanish tragedy** was created about the same time as the English by two geniuses, Lope de Vega and Calderon, who have supplied their nation with dramatic works of the highest merit and suited to the purer morals of a Catholic people. De Vega resembles Shakspeare. Calderon is more like Racine; his priestly office did not cool his poetic ardor.

835. **To become acquainted with the great tragedians** it would be of little use to study such brief extracts as might here be given. Those who wish to apply themselves to this portion of literature should read a few, at least, of the great masterpieces; for instance, the "Agamemnon," "Electra," and "Eumenides" of Æschylus; the "Œdipus Tyrannus,"

"Antigone," and "Œdipus at Colonos" of Sophocles; the "Medea" and "Iphigenia in Aulis" of Euripides; Corneille's "Le Cid," Racine's "Esther" and "Athalie," Shakspeare's "Macbeth," "Hamlet," "Julius Cæsar," and "Coriolanus." Shakspeare's tragedies may be read to advantage with the judicious notes of Hudson or of Rolfe in their school editions, in which the most offensive passages are omitted or toned down. George H. Miles' comments on "Hamlet" find favor with many. But it must be allowed that even in most of the expurgated editions of Shakspeare there is much in plot and scene, if not always in expression, bearing on such vices as the apostle tells us should not even be named among Christians.

Happily we have some beautiful dramas of a very different kind, the reading of which can only benefit the student. Such are "The Hidden Gem" of Cardinal Wiseman; "The Dumb Orphan," "Sebastian," "The Family of Martyrs," etc.

836. It remains for us to add some further **precepts on the composition of tragedy:**

1. The *story* should be interesting and full of pathos.

2. The *characters* should be distinctly drawn, naturally presented, and made to act and speak consistently throughout the play. They need not be taken from history nor from public life, nor should they all be virtuous; mixed characters—that is, those partly good and partly bad—are the most natural.

3. The *first act* must make us acquainted with the situation, excite interest, and introduce some of the leading characters. It is desirable that the play should explain itself without needing introduction or comment.

4. In the *second, third, and fourth acts* the plot thickens; the great point to be aimed at is to keep the passions alive: let there be no languor, no personages but such as are needed—and these should be put in interesting situations—no idle declamation. All must be action rather than discourse.

5. The ***fifth act*** contains the catastrophe, which is the surest test of the poet's genius. After the suspense has been carried to a great height in the preceding acts it is brought to a crisis in the fifth. The catastrophe should be brought about by natural means, in a plausible though quite unexpected manner. It should discard long speeches and idle declamation. It should be so clear as not to check passion by obscurity, so simple as not to embarrass the mind by intricacy. The end may be the success of the innocent, as in Racine's "Athalie"; but usually the impression of virtuous sorrow is left full and strong on the heart.

6. Throughout the play the greatest *probability* must be preserved: nothing must appear unaccountable, in order that curiosity may be fully satisfied.

7. *Poetical justice* requires that the actors meet with their just deserts, so that the lot of the virtuous appear on the whole far preferable to that of the wicked.

8. ***Unity of action*** is essential: it can never be dispensed with in tragedy, whether classic or romantic. The *unities of time and place* add to the probability of the story and to the symmetry of the poetic structure. They are beauties, but, like rhyme in verse, they may be discarded, provided they be replaced by greater beauties. Let no one imagine that irregularity is pleasing in itself to a well-ordered mind, especially in works of art: irregularity is inartistic.

837. It is a much-debated question **whether the classic or the romantic drama is to be preferred.** An analogous question would be whether a garden or a grand architectural structure is more beautiful than a delightful, varied landscape. This is a matter of taste. We appreciate both clas-

sical and romantic art; preference for the one or the other depends usually on early associations.

838. **Exercise.** Write a criticism of a tragedy. (See b. iv. c. v. art. ii. § 3.) Notice in particular: 1. What is known of its author? 2. Is the subject historical or fictitious? how far historical? 3. Narrate the story briefly. 4. Criticise the poem according to the eight precepts for tragedy just explained.

§ 2. *Comedy.*

839. The **ancient comedy** had not the regularity of the modern; it formed a complete contrast to the ancient tragedy, of which it was a wild parody. Tragedy delighted in harmonious unity, comedy in chaotic exuberance, seeking out the most motley contrasts and the unceasing play of cross-purposes. The action of an ancient comedy might be as fantastic as possible, if only it could place a series of comic incidents in a glaring light. Man is shown by it, not in all his nobility, but in all his frailties and often in all his baseness. Many consider the old comedy as only a beginning of the comic art; but Schlegel defends it as distinguished from the later comedy in kind rather than in point of perfection. It was a school of scandal, as is evident from its only representative whose poems are extant, Aristophanes. (See Schlegel, lectures xi., xii.) Felton's *Ancient and Modern Greece* contains an interesting analysis of Aristophanes' "Ecclesiazousæ," or comedy on 'Women's Rights,' the agitation of which question appears to be an old vagary (vol. i. course i. c. xii.)

Later Greek comedy was more like our own; it was less licentious than earlier comedy, but still very objectionable.

840. **Modern comedy** has a regular plot; it requires unity of action; it sometimes observes the minor unities of time

and place and the proper connection of the successive scenes. It requires, above all, great probability in the representation. Unlike tragedy, it requires the scene to be laid in the present time and as much as possible in our own country, "to catch the manners living as they rise." The Latin poets Plautus and Terence, successful in other respects, made the mistake of attempting little more than translating Menander and other Greeks. The reason why we should prefer home scenes is that comedy aims at correcting frailties and follies by ridicule; but there is no advantage to be derived from ridiculing the defects of foreign nations.

841. There are **two kinds of comedy,** that of *character* and that of *intrigue.* In the latter, the plot is more artfully kept up; in the former, character is the chief object of attention. Molière's "Misanthrope" and "Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme" ("The Upstart") are excellent examples of this kind. But the comedy of character should connect its scenes by some kind of plot, and the other species must not neglect the exhibition of characters. It is best to unite both sources of interest in as high a degree as possible. Care should be taken not to exaggerate the peculiarities of character beyond what is natural or at least plausible.

842. The **style** should be pure, elegant, and lively, seldom rising above that of ordinary conversation; never vulgar.

843. Though comedy, like satire, is **intended for the correction** of human frailties, it has been, as a rule, so handled by ancient and modern poets as to be more injurious to the ordinary reader than beneficial. Among the ancients the "Captivi" of Plautus is a piece entirely free from immodesty. His other comedies, as well as those of Terence, are often scandalous. Of Menander we have nothing left except some fragments in Terence's translations.

844. **Shakspeare** is the pride of our literature in comedy as well as in tragedy. He lived, unfortunately, in an age which was most licentious; and though he is less grossly offensive to modesty than many of his contemporaries, still his pieces would need much purgation before they could be made edifying reading for those not familiar with vice.

Article V. Accidental Variations of Poetry.

845. Any poetical composition whatever may be classed under one or other of the four species of poetry so far explained. Still, it is usual in rhetorical treatises to take particular notice of some varieties of poetic composition which have peculiar features of their own besides the properties of the species to which they belong. The principal of these varieties are *Pastoral poetry* and the *poetry of the Holy Scriptures.*

§ 1. *Pastoral poetry.*

846. **Pastoral poetry** is that which is intended to exhibit a life of simple and natural happiness, or, as others express it, the simple happiness of a country life. Poems of this character may be narrative or descriptive, dramatic, lyric, or didactic. Whatever species they belong to, they have certain features of their own to which it is proper to call particular attention.

847. The following are the **principal features of pastorals:**

1. The *emotions* excited are of the gentler kind, such as arise in the beholder from the contemplation of innocence, quiet, candor, and freedom from great anxiety.

2. The *characters* introduced must be amiable in their simplicity; neither too refined nor too rude; of lively but not excessive sensibility; possessed of some ambition, and at times of some cunning, but never vicious; more or less quick of parts, but not too learned. Shepherds and farmers are usually represented, but Theocritus and Moschus introduce also soldiers and inhabitants of cities.

3. The *subjects* are the joys, the cares, the troubles of country life, with its various incidents.

4. The *style* must be sweet and gentle, elegant and melodious. The ornaments must be suitable to the subjects and the characters, and be drawn from the scenes and associations of a country life. Brief and neat descriptions are great ornaments.

848. **Theocritus,** a Sicilian, was the father of pastoral poetry; his Idyls (*εἰδύλλιον*, a little picture) are very tender, full of naïveté, and expressed in gently-flowing language. Not all his idyls are pastorals, and not all deserve high commendation. **Virgil** has mostly reproduced the beauties of Theocritus in a Latin version, and often improved on the original. Unlike his Greek model, he never descends to what is low or common. His four books called "Georgics" (*γεωργικός*, agricultural) are a didactic treatise on agriculture. His most charming pastorals are his "Eclogues" (*ἐκλογή*, a choice piece), in particular his first, fourth, fifth, and eleventh.

849. The fourth of Virgil's Eclogues is remarkable for the beauty of its imagery and for the nobility of its thoughts. It describes the expected coming of a Saviour of mankind under the image of a divine child, who is to restore the golden age. Pope has translated this eclogue, blending with it many images taken from the prophecy of Isaias concerning the Messias. It is the most beautiful of Pope's translations, and the grandest pastoral poem in the English language. Shenstone has written a pastoral ballad in four parts, from which we quote a brief passage:

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

" Not a pine in my grove is there seen
But with tendrils of woodbine is bound ;
Not a beech is more beautiful green
But a sweetbriar entwines it around ;
Not my fields in the prime of the year
More charms than my cattle unfold ;
Not a brook that is limpid and clear
But it glitters with fishes of gold."

§ 2. *The Holy Scriptures.*

850. We have occasionally in the course of this work referred to passages of **the Sacred Scriptures,** and compared the language of the Holy Spirit with the most perfect productions of human genius. An impression may thus have been produced upon the minds of pupils that there is some kind of equality between the works of God and the works of man. It is proper here to add a word of caution against so erroneous an inference. The beauty and sublimity of Holy Writ are far more elevated above the poems of Homer, Dante, and Shakspeare than the productions of these great geniuses above the daily conversation of ordinary mortals.

851. In all the literary works of men there is a constant effort to rise above the level of common thoughts. The word of God, on the contrary, appears to stoop down in order to bring truths of infinite grandeur within the comprehension of our little minds. Hence result two **characteristics of Holy Writ**—*simplicity* and *majesty.*

852. The *thought* is ever **majestic,** and so vast that the more we meditate upon any utterance of God the more meaning we find in it. (See, for an example, Father Coleridge's comments on the " Magnificat," " The Nine Months," c. ix.)

The *expression* in Holy Scripture is usually **simple,** except when God wishes to rebuke the pride of man, or when the prophet or the psalmist labors, as it were, to give utterance to thoughts and sentiments too vast for human language.

853. We shall give a few **examples:**

1. **God rebukes the pride of man** in language full of power and majesty:

" Behold, I come against thee, O Tyre: and I will cause many nations to come up to thee, as the waves of the sea rise up. And they shall break down the walls of Tyre, and destroy the towers thereof: and I will scrape her dust from her, and make her like a smooth rock. She shall be a drying-place for nets in the midst of the sea: because I have spoken, saith the Lord God ; and she shall be a spoil to the nations. Her daughters also that are in the field shall be slain by the sword: and they shall know that I am the Lord " (Ezechiel, xxvi. 3-6).

See also Job, chapters xxxviii. and xxxix., in which God rebukes the arrogance of Job's friends; these chapters are sublime in thought and language.

854. 2. In the first and second chapters of Genesis God reveals the events of **the Creation** in terms of the utmost simplicity:

" God made two great lights: a great light to rule the day, and a lesser light to rule the night ; and the stars " (i. 16).

Ecclesiasticus, speaking in his own person, though, of

course, under the influence of inspiration, exclaims in terms full of magnificence :

"The firmament on high is His beauty, the beauty of heaven with its glorious show. The sun when he appeareth showing forth at his rising, an admirable instrument, the work of the Most High. At noon he burneth the earth ; and who can abide his burning heat ? As one keeping a furnace in works of heat : the sun three times as much, burneth the mountains, breathing out fiery vapors, and shining with his beams, he blindeth the eyes. Great is the Lord that made him ; and at His words he hath hastened his course. . . . The glory of the stars is the beauty of heaven : the Lord enlighteneth the world on high" (xliii. 1–10).

855. 3. Compare the simple language in which the **passage of the Red Sea,** in Exodus (xiv.), is described by Moses as the historian of the Lord, and the magnificence with which the same facts are set forth in the canticle of Moses (*Ib.* xv.), as also in the Psalm, "Attendite popule meus" (Ps. lxxvii.)

856. 4. Lastly, the history of **Christ's sacred Passion** is told by the Evangelists in language touching, indeed, but exceedingly simple—*e.g.* :

"They crucified Him there ; and the robbers, one on the right hand and the other on the left. And Jesus said : Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do. But dividing His garments, they cast lots" (Luke xxiii. 33, 34).

Now compare with this passage the sublime language of the Prophet Isaias, chapter liii.

857. As might be expected from the preceding reflections, we find that **the poetical portions** of the Holy Scriptures are chiefly the Psalms, the Book of Job, a great portion of the prophetical writings, in particular the "Lamentations of Jeremias," also some passages scattered through the historical books. "The Canticle of Canticles" and the didactic portions of Holy Scripture are likewise full of poetry.

Though not written for the purpose of pleasing literary critics, still our bountiful Lord has scattered through the Sacred Volumes the same profusion of beauty and grandeur which is so conspicuous in all the works of His Omnipotence.

THE END.