

*Abolishing Christianity*, his *Modest Proposal* for utilizing the surplus population of Ireland by eating the babies of the poor, and his *Predictions of Isaac Bickerstaff*. In the last he predicted the death of one Partridge, an almanac maker, at a certain day and hour. When the time set was past, he published a minute account of Partridge's last moments; and when the subject of this excellent fooling printed an indignant denial of his own death, Swift answered very temperately, proving that he was dead and remonstrating with him on the violence of his language. "To call a man a fool and villain, an impudent fellow, only for differing from him in a point merely speculative, is, in my humble opinion, a very improper style for a person of his education." Swift wrote verses as well as prose, but their motive was the reverse of poetical. His gross and cynical humor vulgarized whatever it touched. He leaves us no illusions, and not only strips his subject, but flays it and shows the raw muscles beneath the skin. He delighted to dwell upon the lowest bodily functions of human nature. "He saw blood-shot," said Thackeray.

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1. History of Eighteenth Century Literature (1660-1780). Edmund Gosse. London: Macmillan & Co., 1889.
  2. Macaulay's Essay, The Comic Dramatists of the Restoration.
  3. The Poetical Works of John Dryden. Macmillan & Co., 1873. (Globe Edition.)
  4. Thackeray's English Humorists of the last Century.
  5. Sir Roger de Coverley. New York: Harpers, 1878.
  6. Swift's Tale of a Tub, Gulliver's Travels, Directions to Servants, Polite Conversation, The Great Question Debated, Verses on the Death of Dean Swift.
  7. The Poetical Works of Alexander Pope. London: Macmillan & Co., 1869. (Globe Edition.)

## CHAPTER VI.

## FROM THE DEATH OF POPE TO THE FRENCH REVOLUTION.

1744-1789.

POPE'S example continued potent for fifty years after his death. Especially was this so in satiric and didactic poetry. Not only Dr. Johnson's adaptations from Juvenal, *London*, 1738, and the *Vanity of Human Wishes*, 1749, but Gifford's *Baviad*, 1791, and *Maeviad*, 1795, and Byron's *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers*, 1809, were in the verse and the manner of Pope. In Johnson's *Lives of the Poets*, 1781, Dryden and Pope are treated as the two greatest English poets. But long before this a revolution in literary taste had begun, a movement which is variously described as the Return to Nature or the Rise of the New Romantic School.

For nearly a hundred years poetry had dealt with manners and the life of towns—the gay, prosaic life of Congreve or of Pope. The sole concession to the life of nature was the old pastoral, which, in the hands of cockneys like Pope and Ambrose Philips, who merely repeated stock descriptions at second or third hand, became even more artificial than a *Beggar's Opera* or a *Rape of the Lock*. These at least were true to their environment, and were natural just because they were artificial. But the *Seasons* of James Thomson, published in installments from 1726-1730, had opened a new field. Their theme was the English landscape, as varied by the changes of the year, and they were written by a true lover and observer of nature. Mark Akenside's *Pleasures of Imagination*, 1744, published the year of Pope's death, was written, like the *Seasons*, in blank verse;

and although its language had the formal, didactic cast of the Queen Anne poets, it pointed unmistakably in the new direction. Thomson had painted the soft beauties of a highly cultivated land—lawns, gardens, forest-preserves, orchards, and sheep-walks. But now a fresh note was struck in the literature, not of England alone, but of Germany and France—romanticism, the chief element in which was a love of the wild. Poets turned from the tameness of modern existence to savage nature and the heroic simplicity of life among primitive tribes. In France, Rousseau introduced the idea of the natural man, following his instincts in disregard of social conventions. In Germany Bodmer published, in 1753, the first edition of the old German epic, the *Nibelungen Lied*. Works of a similar tendency in England were the odes of William Collins and Thomas Gray, published between 1747 and 1757; especially Collins's *Ode on the Superstitions of the Highlands*, and Gray's *Bard*, a Pindaric in which the last survivor of the Welsh bards invokes vengeance on Edward I., the destroyer of his guild. Gray and Mason, his friend and editor, made translations from the ancient Welsh and Norse poetry. Thomas Percy's *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry*, 1765, aroused the taste for old ballads. Richard Hurd's *Letters on Chivalry and Romance*, Thomas Warton's *History of English Poetry*, 1774–1778, Tyrwhitt's critical edition of Chaucer, and Horace Walpole's Gothic romance, the *Castle of Otranto*, 1765, stimulated this awakened interest in the picturesque aspects of feudal life, and contributed to the fondness for supernatural and mediæval subjects. James Beattie's *Minstrel*, 1771, described the educating influence of Scottish mountain scenery upon the genius of a young poet. But the most remarkable instances of this passion for wild nature and the romantic past were the *Poems of Ossian* and Thomas Chatterton's literary forgeries.

In 1762 James Macpherson published the first installment of what professed to be a translation of the poems of Ossian,

a Gaelic bard, whom tradition placed in the 3d century. Macpherson said that he made his version—including two complete epics, *Fingal* and *Temora*—from Gaelic MSS., which he had collected in the Scottish Highlands. A fierce controversy at once sprang up over the genuineness of these remains. Macpherson was challenged to produce his originals, and when, many years after, he published the Gaelic text, it was asserted that this was nothing but a translation of his own English into modern Gaelic. Of the MSS. which he professed to have found not a scrap remained: the Gaelic text was printed from transcriptions in Macpherson's handwriting or in that of his secretaries.

But whether these poems were the work of Ossian or of Macpherson, they made a deep impression at the time. Napoleon admired them greatly, and Goethe inserted passages from the "Songs of Selma" in his *Sorrows of Werther*. Macpherson composed—or translated—they in an abrupt, rhapsodical prose, resembling the English version of Job or of the prophecies of Isaiah. They filled the minds of their readers with images of vague sublimity and desolation; the mountain torrent, the mist on the hills, the ghosts of heroes half seen by the setting moon, the thistle in the ruined courts of chieftains, the grass whistling on the windy heath, the gray rock by the blue stream of Lutha, and the cliffs of sea-surrounded Gormal.

"A tale of the times of old!"

"Why, thou wanderer unseen! Thou bender of the thistle of Lora; why, thou breeze of the valley, hast thou left mine ear? I hear no distant roar of streams! No sound of the harp from the rock! Come, thou huntress of Lutha, Malvina, call back his soul to the bard. I look forward to Lochlin of lakes, to the dark billowy bay of U-thorno, where Fingal descends from Ocean, from the roar of winds. Few are the heroes of Morven in a land unknown."

Thomas Chatterton, who died by his own hand in 1770, at the age of seventeen, is one of the most wonderful examples of precocity in the history of literature. His father had been sexton of the ancient Church of St. Mary Redcliff, in Bristol, and the boy's sensitive imagination took the stamp of his surroundings. He taught himself to read from a black-letter Bible. He drew charcoal sketches of churches, castles, knightly tombs, and heraldic blazonry. When only eleven years old, he began the fabrication of documents in prose and verse, which he ascribed to a fictitious Thomas Rowley, a secular priest at Bristol in the 15th century. Chatterton pretended to have found these among the contents of an old chest in the muniment room of St. Mary Redcliff's. The Rowley poems included two tragedies, *Aella* and *Goddwyn*, two cantos of a long poem on the *Battle of Hastings*, and a number of ballads and minor pieces. Chatterton had no precise knowledge of early English, or even of Chaucer. His method of working was as follows. He made himself a manuscript glossary of the words marked as archaic in Bailey's and Kersey's English dictionaries, composed his poems first in modern language, and then turned them into ancient spelling, and substituted here and there the old words in his glossary for their modern equivalents. Naturally he made many mistakes, and though Horace Walpole, to whom he sent some of his pieces, was unable to detect the forgery, his friends, Gray and Mason, to whom he submitted them, at once pronounced them spurious. Nevertheless there was a controversy over Rowley hardly less obstinate than that over Ossian, a controversy made possible only by the then almost universal ignorance of the forms, scansion, and vocabulary of early English poetry. Chatterton's poems are of little value in themselves, but they are the record of an industry and imitative quickness marvelous in a mere child, and they show how, with the instinct of genius, he threw himself into the main literary current of

his time. Discarding the couplet of Pope, the poets now went back for models to the Elizabethan writers. Thomas Warton published in 1753 his *Observations on the Faerie Queene*. Beattie's *Minstrel*, Thomson's *Castle of Indolence*, and William Shenstone's *Schoolmistress* were all written in the Spenserian stanza. Shenstone gave a partly humorous effect to his poem by imitating Spenser's archaisms, and Thomson reproduced in many passages the copious harmony and luxuriant imagery of the *Faerie Queene*. John Dyer's *Fleece* was a poem in blank verse on English wool-growing, after the fashion of Vergil's *Georgics*. The subject was unfortunate, for, as Dr. Johnson said, it is impossible to make poetry out of serges and druggets. Dyer's *Grongar Hill*, which mingles reflection with natural description in the manner of Gray's *Elegy written in a Country Churchyard*, was composed in the octosyllabic verse of Milton's *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*. Milton's minor poems, which had hitherto been neglected, exercised a great influence on Collins and Gray. Collins's *Ode to Simplicity* was written in the stanza of Milton's *Nativity*, and his exquisite unrimed *Ode to Evening* was a study in versification, after Milton's translation of Horace's *Ode to Pyrrha*, in the original meters. Shakspeare began to be studied more reverently: numerous critical editions of his plays were issued, and Garrick restored his pure text to the stage. Collins was an enthusiastic student of Shakspeare, and one of his sweetest poems, the *Dirge in Cymbeline*, was inspired by the tragedy of *Cymbeline*. The verse of Gray, Collins, and the Warton brothers abounds in verbal reminiscences of Shakspeare; but their genius was not allied to his, being exclusively lyrical and not at all dramatic. The Muse of this romantic school was Fancy rather than Passion. A thoughtful melancholy, a gentle, scholarly pensiveness, the spirit of Milton's *Il Penseroso*, pervades their poetry. Gray was a fastidious scholar, who produced very little, but that little of the finest quality. His famous

*Elegy*, expressing a meditative mood in language of the choicest perfection, is the representative poem of the second half of the 18th century, as the *Rape of the Lock* is of the first. The romanticists were quietists, and their scenery is characteristic. They loved solitude and evening, the twilight vale, the mossy hermitage, ruins, glens, and caves. Their style was elegant and academic, retaining a little of the stilted poetic diction of their classical forerunners. Personification and periphrasis were their favorite mannerisms: Collins's Odes were largely addressed to abstractions, such as Fear, Pity, Liberty, Mercy and Simplicity. A poet in their dialect was always a "bard;" a countryman was "the untutored swain," and a woman was a "nymph" or "the fair," just as in Dryden and Pope. Thomson is perpetually mindful of Vergil, and afraid to speak simply. He uses too many Latin epithets, like *amusive* and *precipitant*, and calls a fish-line

The floating line snatched from the hoary steed.

They left much for Cowper and Wordsworth to do in the way of infusing the new blood of a strong, racy English into our exhausted poetic diction. Their poetry is impersonal, bookish, literary. It lacks emotional force, except now and then in Gray's immortal *Elegy*, in his *Ode on a Distant Prospect of Eton College*, in Collins's lines, *On the Death of Thomson*, and his little ode beginning, "How sleep the brave."

The new school did not lack critical expounders of its principles and practice. Joseph Warton published, in 1756, the first volume of his *Essay on the Genius and Writings of Pope*, an elaborate review of Pope's writings *seriatim*, doing him certainly full justice, but ranking him below Shakspeare, Spenser, and Milton. "Wit and satire," wrote Warton, "are transitory and perishable, but nature and passion are eternal. . . . He stuck to describing modern manners; but those manners, because they are familiar, artificial, and

polished, are, in their very nature, unfit for any lofty effort of the Muse. Whatever poetical enthusiasm he actually possessed he withheld and stifled. Surely it is no narrow and niggardly encomium to say, he is the great Poet of Reason, the first of Ethical authors in verse." Warton illustrated his critical positions by quoting freely not only from Spenser and Milton, but from recent poets, like Thomson, Gray, Collins, and Dyer. He testified that the *Seasons* had "been very instrumental in diffusing a general taste for the beauties of nature and landscape." It was symptomatic of the change in literary taste that the natural or English school of landscape gardening now began to displace the French and Dutch fashion of clipped hedges, and regular parterres, and that Gothic architecture came into repute. Horace Walpole was a virtuoso in Gothic art, and in his castle at Strawberry Hill he made a collection of ancient armor, illuminated manuscripts, and bric-a-brac of all kinds. Gray had been Walpole's traveling companion in France and Italy, and the two had quarreled and separated, but were afterward reconciled. From Walpole's private printing-press at Strawberry Hill Gray's two "sister odes," the *Bard*, and the *Progress of Poesy*, were first issued in 1757. Both Gray and Walpole were good correspondents, and their printed letters are among the most delightful literature of the kind.

The central figure among the English men of letters of that generation was Samuel Johnson (1709-1784), whose memory has been preserved less by his own writings than by James Boswell's famous *Life of Johnson*, published in 1791. Boswell was a Scotch laird and advocate, who first met Johnson in London, when the latter was fifty-four years old. Boswell was not a very wise or witty person, but he revered the worth and intellect which shone through his subject's uncouth exterior. He followed him about, note-book in hand, bore all his snubbings patiently, and made the best biography ever written. It is related that the doctor once

said that if he thought Boswell meant to write his life, he should prevent it by taking Boswell's. And yet Johnson's own writings and this biography of him have changed places in relative importance so completely that Carlyle predicted that the former would soon be reduced to notes on the latter; and Macaulay said that the man who was known to his contemporaries as a great writer was known to posterity as an agreeable companion.

Johnson was one of those rugged, eccentric, self-developed characters so common among the English. He was the son of a Lichfield book-seller, and after a course at Oxford, which was cut short by poverty, and an unsuccessful career as a school-master, he had come up to London, in 1737, where he supported himself for many years as a book-seller's hack. Gradually his great learning and abilities, his ready social wit and powers as a talker, caused his company to be sought at the tables of those whom he called "the great." He was a clubbable man, and he drew about him at the tavern a group of the most distinguished intellects of the time: Edmund Burke, the orator and statesman; Oliver Goldsmith, Sir Joshua Reynolds, the portrait painter, and David Garrick, the great actor, who had been a pupil in Johnson's school, near Lichfield. Johnson was the typical John Bull of the last century. His oddities, virtues, and prejudices were thoroughly English. He hated Frenchmen, Scotchmen, and Americans, and had a cockneyish attachment to London. He was a high Tory, and an orthodox churchman; he loved a lord in the abstract, and yet he asserted a sturdy independence against any lord in particular. He was deeply religious, but had an abiding fear of death. He was burly in person, and slovenly in dress, his shirt-frill always covered with snuff. He was a great diner out, an inordinate tea-drinker, and a voracious and untidy feeder. An inherited scrofula, which often took the form of hypochondria and threatened to affect his brain, deprived him of control over

the muscles of his face. Boswell describes how his features worked, how he snorted, grunted, whistled, and rolled about in his chair when getting ready to speak. He records his minutest traits, such as his habit of pocketing the orange peels at the club, and his superstitious way of touching all the posts between his house and the Mitre Tavern, going back to do it, if he skipped one by chance. Though bearish in his manners and arrogant in dispute, especially when talking "for victory," Johnson had a large and tender heart. He loved his ugly, old wife—twenty-one years his senior—and he had his house full of unfortunates—a blind woman, an invalid surgeon, a destitute widow, a negro servant—whom he supported for many years, and bore with all their ill-humors patiently.

Among Johnson's numerous writings the ones best entitled to remembrance are, perhaps, his *Dictionary of the English Language*, 1755; his moral tale, *Rasselas*, 1759; the introduction to his edition of Shakspeare, 1765, and his *Lives of the Poets*, 1781. Johnson wrote a sonorous, cadenced prose, full of big Latin words and balanced clauses. Here is a sentence, for example, from his *Visit to the Hebrides*: "We were now treading that illustrious island which was once the luminary of the Caledonian regions, whence savage clans and roving barbarians derived the benefits of knowledge and the blessings of religion. To abstract the mind from all local emotion would be impossible, if it were endeavored, and would be foolish, if it were possible." The difference between his colloquial style and his book style is well illustrated in the instance cited by Macaulay. Speaking of Villiers's *Rehearsal*, Johnson said, "It has not wit enough to keep it sweet;" then paused and added—translating English into Johnsonese—"it has not vitality sufficient to preserve it from putrefaction." There is more of this in Johnson's *Rambler* and *Idler* papers than in his latest work, the *Lives of the Poets*. In this he showed himself a sound and judicious

critic, though with decided limitations. His understanding was solid, but he was a thorough classicist, and his taste in poetry was formed on Pope. He was unjust to Milton and to his own contemporaries, Gray, Collins, Shenstone, and Dyer. He had no sense of the higher and subtler graces of romantic poetry, and he had a comical indifference to the "beauties of nature." When Boswell once ventured to remark that poor Scotland had, at least, some "noble wild prospects," the doctor replied that the noblest prospect a Scotchman ever saw was the road that led to London.

The English novel of real life had its origin at this time. Books like De Foe's *Robinson Crusoe*, *Captain Singleton*, *Journal of the Plague*, etc., were tales of incident and adventure rather than novels. The novel deals primarily with character and with the interaction of characters upon one another, as developed by a regular plot. The first English novelist, in the modern sense of the word, was Samuel Richardson, a printer, who began authorship in his fiftieth year with his *Pamela*, 1740, the story of a young servant girl who resisted the seductions of her master, and finally, as the reward of her virtue, became his wife. *Clarissa Harlowe*, 1748, was the tragical history of a high-spirited young lady who, being driven from her home by her family because she refused to marry the suitor selected for her, fell into the toils of Lovelace, an accomplished rake. After struggling heroically against every form of artifice and violence, she was at last drugged and ruined. She died of a broken heart, and Lovelace, borne down by remorse, was killed in a duel by a cousin of Clarissa. *Sir Charles Grandison*, 1753, was Richardson's portrait of an ideal fine gentleman, whose stately doings fill eight volumes, but who seems to the modern reader a bore and a prig. All these novels were written in the form of letters passing between the characters, a method which fitted Richardson's subjective cast of mind. He knew little of life, but he identified himself intensely with his principal

character and produced a strong effect by minute, accumulated touches. *Clarissa Harlowe* is his masterpiece, though even in that the situation is painfully prolonged, the heroine's virtue is self-conscious and rhetorical, and there is something almost ludicrously unnatural in the copiousness with which she pours herself out in gushing epistles to her female correspondent at the very moment when she is beset with dangers, persecuted, agonized, and driven nearly mad. In Richardson's novels appears, for the first time, that sentimentalism which now began to infect European literature. *Pamela* was translated into French and German, and fell in with the current of popular feeling which found fullest expression in Rousseau's *Nouvelle Heloise*, 1759, and Goethe's *Leiden des Jungen Werther*, which set all the world a-weeping in 1774.

Coleridge said that to pass from Richardson's books to those of Henry Fielding was like going into the fresh air from a close room heated by stoves. Richardson, it has been affirmed, knew *man*, but Fielding knew *men*. The latter's first novel, *Joseph Andrews*, 1742, was begun as a travesty of *Pamela*. The hero, a brother of Pamela, was a young footman in the employ of Lady Booby, from whom his virtue suffered a like assault to that made upon Pamela's by her master. This reversal of the natural situation was in itself full of laughable possibilities, had the book gone on simply as a burlesque. But the exuberance of Fielding's genius led him beyond his original design. His hero, leaving Lady Booby's service, goes traveling with good Parson Adams, and is soon engaged in a series of comical and rather boisterous adventures.

Fielding had seen life, and his characters were painted from the life with a bold, free hand. He was a gentleman by birth, and had made acquaintance with society and the town in 1727, when he was a handsome, stalwart young fellow, with high animal spirits and a great appetite for pleasure. He soon ran himself into debt and began writing for the