

lighthearted good-humour, to rally, ridicule, and instruct their age. The partnership was continued to the conclusion of a third paper, the *Guardian*, when it ceased. But by this date (October 1713) the Essay, as a branch of that 'ingenious way of Miscellaneous Writing' upon the introducer of which Lord Shaftesbury invokes ironic benediction, had found its special form, a form admirably adapted for short swallow-flights of criticism, for humorous character-drawing, and for social satire. It was produced, after Addison and Steele, by many inferior 'hands;' but, for the present, we may leave it until it was revived, with a personal note and renewed ability, under the pens of Goldsmith and Johnson.

In the first years of Queen Anne, a hush seems to have fallen upon the poets; and, save for a rumbling epic or so by Blackmore, and a worthless miscellany by Wycherley, the Muses might have been in exile with the Stuarts. Addison, indeed, put forth his over-praised *Campaign*. Prior, too, was forced by piracy into a premature appearance; but his full-dress revelation was not made until Anne had been for four years indubitably dead. Oddly enough, it is with the *Spectator* that is connected the first notable effort of that superlative artificer who, for more than three decades to come, held the first place in English verse, and influenced its voice for a longer period still. Towards the end of 1711, Addison reviewed, and certainly not, on this occasion, with 'faint praise,' what he termed 'a Master-piece in its kind.' It was the work of a youth of twenty, named Alexander Pope, and aimed at occupying, in English, much the same ground as the *Art Poetica* of Horace, or perhaps—to speak more precisely—the *Art Poétique* of Boileau, with this difference, that while Horace and the French critic kept their precepts for their maturity, their English imitator, when he proceeded a metrical legislator, was only just out of his teens. Naturally enough, Pope's work was a *contro*, but it was a *contro* of extraordinary ingenuity; and Mr Spectator, from his full-bottomed wig, might justifiably nod Olympian approval of the skill with which the youthful poet's couplets were made to exemplify the errors they condemned. The lines—

These Equal Syllables alone require,
That oft the Low the *great* Couplet tire,
While *Explicite* their feeble Aid do join,
And ten low Words oft creep in one dull Line:

no less than the well known

*A new-born Alexandrine ends the Song,
That like a wounded Snake, drags its slow Length
along*

certainly, as Addison admits, 'would have been very much admired in an Ancient Poet'—praise which fully justified Mr Pope in offering to Steele's periodical his next performance, the 'sacred Eclogue' entitled *The Messiah* (*Spectator*, No. 378), which he had modelled upon Virgil's *Tollo*. Much of his subsequent work, of which it is not here the place to speak, was of this imitated or adapted kind. But the precocious *Essay on Criticism* must have made it abundantly clear to every reader of intelligence that its author had already entered the arena fully armed as a metrist, and needed nothing but a theme to his hand. During his long literary activity, he was fortunate enough, on more than one occasion, to find such a theme. He found it in the flawless jewel-work of the *Rape of the Lock*; he found it in the terrible Epic of the Dunces; he found it, unanswerably and triumphantly, in the *Moral Essays* and the *Satires and Epistles*. Lastly, with leave of all the Bentleys, alive or dead, he found it in that paraphrase of Homer, which has stimulated more Homer-lovers than the critics would care to count. It may be true that his version is 'a pretty poem, but must not be called Homer;' it may be true that it is—

half pretence,

Where Wits, not Heroes, prove their Skill in Fence,
And great Achilles' Eloquence doth show
As if no Centaur trained him, but Boileau!

but it is, at least, a magnificent performance, which, as one of Pope's own rivals, Professor Conington, has admitted, by the 'calm, majestic flow' of its language, carries on its readers 'as irresistibly as Homer's own could do, were they born readers of Greek;' and fills their minds 'with a conception of the heroic age, not indeed strictly true, but almost as near the truth as that which was entertained by Virgil himself.' It was in this prolonged and tedious task that Pope perfected the heroic couplet which he had caught from Dryden, and which is his chief present to his own time, and to posterity. Like Johnson he has suffered from the public impatience begotten of imitators who only copied his defects; and it may perhaps be granted, even by a devotee, that his style, like the style of Macaulay, grows wearisome if taken in immoderate doses. But it is easy to select, from the *Epistle to Arbuthnot* alone, dozens of passages which, in spite of the