

century; such a revolt was neither so natural nor so necessary in prose. The eighteenth century, unpropitious as it was to the higher imaginative literature, favored the production of an effective prose style. Dignity, clearness, correctness had been the chief characteristics of the later form of eighteenth century prose, and in the hands of great masters like Samuel Johnson, it was also eminently virile and forcible. The sense of dignity and propriety, however, kept it too far aloof from the living colloquial speech; in weaker hands; it became stiff, cold, and abstract, and failed to accommodate itself to varying tone and thought. These weaknesses are very apparent in the prose of the first third of the following century when the traditions of the previous age still held sway; and there is no marked development in style to attract the notice of the literary historian.

## II.

This first literary movement of the century may be considered as closing with the era of the Reform Bill, and therefore as covering one-third of the whole period. By the year 1833 the great spirits whom we have named had either passed away or practically finished their work; but the intellectual stimulus had by no means exhausted itself. It was strong enough to inspire another group of literary men, whose works made the second third of the century almost equal in brilliancy to the first. The force of inspiration, however, in the domain of poetry at least, is evidently on the wane. This is to show not merely by the general inferiority of the later group, but by the special characteristics of their work. In Tennyson we find the effective combination of limits, devices, phrases and ideas borrowed from predecessors, immediate and remote:—the work of genius, not, however, of genius working under a strong impulse and conviction, but laboriously elaborating, with taste and judgment and the finest technical skill, a wealth of material handed down from the past. In Browning, on the

of his immediate predecessors in originality and force, the intellectual and critical impulse is apt to be stronger than the imaginative and creative, so that there is an imperfect fusion of thought and form. In their contemporaries the marks of exhaustion are clearer. Matthew Arnold is more manifestly imitative (his masters are Wordsworth and Goethe) than the poets of the earlier period. In both Arnold and Clough, one is conscious of the tenuity and uncertainty of the poetic afflatus; and in fact with Arnold, the inspiration gave out, and his ripper years were given to critical prose.

But if, on the whole, then the poetical product of the second third of the century, choice as it is, is inferior to that of the earlier, the converse holds, in the case of prose. There is in the first place a marked development of style—quite parallel to the earlier change wrought in poetry. The conventional propriety and regularity of the eighteenth century is abandoned and the reins are given to individual idiosyncrasies or even to caprice; hence the prose of this age becomes as varied as were the poetic styles of Wordsworth's contemporaries. Prose ceases to be abstract and academic, and draws closer to the language of ordinary life. It becomes more colloquial both in vocabulary and sentence-forms; its diction grows more concrete and imaginative, and is often impassioned or poetical. Carlyle and Macaulay (the two most influential prose writers of the period), and the later Ruskin, sufficiently illustrate this; the same tendencies, though less conspicuous, are discoverable in the writings of Newman, the greatest master of English prose in the century. All these men were not merely great stylists, but producers of great works. To emphasize further the greatness of the period in prose, one may add to the names already mentioned those of J. S. Mill, Dickens, Thackeray, Charlotte Brontë, and later, George Eliot, whose best works were all published in 1866. This second period culminated about 1850, when with the