

SKETCH OF ENGLISH LITERATURE.

FROM THE AUGUSTAN AGE TO THE PRESENT TIME.

BY PROFESSOR LYALL.

It is difficult to say when the Augustan Age begins and when it closes—to draw sharply the dividing line in either case. Who was the Augustus, too, it is not easy to determine—whether it was William the third—it could not be Queen Anne—or George the first, or George the second. One thing at least is certain, the Augustan Age was preeminently the age of Addison and of Pope. They were the Horace and the Virgil of the period. The contemporary authors of course belonged to it, were of it, so far characterized and distinguished it; but they were the lesser lights that revolved round the greater luminaries, or shone in the same hemisphere, adding to its brilliance, but not so conspicuously arresting the eye or filling the horizon. Swift perhaps possessed greater force of intellect than either Pope or Addison: he was master at least of a more vigorous style, wielded by a more savage nature, while his observation of men and manners extended over a wider survey: Defoe had more invention and greater powers of vivid and realizing description: Nicholas Rowe—author of “*Jane Shore*” and other well-known tragedies—and Farquhar and Vanbrugh, had more dramatic art, or excelled in comedy where Addison failed: but for the amenities of the Augustan Age—the exquisite grace and polish—the peculiar refinement—the finish of style whether in prose or verse—that we always connect in thought with that period of English Literature, we at once single out Addison and Pope as the representative names. Sir Richard Steele must always bear the honour of having originated the idea of the *Spectator*, while he contributed the greater number of its papers: Tickell and Hughes and Budgell share the honour of having written papers not unworthy of a literary partnership with Steele and Addison: Arbuthnot, the friend of Pope, belonged to the literary fraternity of the period, exhibited both learning and wit in his writings, as “*Martinus Scriblerus*” must ever afford decisive testimony: still Pope and Addison are the two *effigies* that always rise up before the mind when we name the Augustan Age. If it continued to the time of Johnson, and included the conspicuous writers that perpetuate the prestige at least of the Augustan age—carry down the lineage of poets and essayists till Johnson perhaps marks a new era, we may think of the Augustan age as commencing with Steele and Addison, and ending with the great literary dictator of the time—the early years—of George the third. This is perhaps, however, an arbitrary arrangement, and may be accepted or not at the will or pleasure of our readers; but somehow or other we always think of the Augustan age till we come near to the time of Johnson, when a new era was inaugurat-