

"the ordered march of his lordly prose, stately as a Roman legion's," that is the secret of Macaulay's charm; and it is the unstudied grace of Hume's periods which renders him, in spite of his unfairness and defective erudition, in spite of his Toryism and infidelity, the popular historian of England.

Dr. Johnson, writing in the "Idler" upon the fate of books, declares that if an author would be long remembered, he must choose a theme of enduring interest; but the interest with which the "Provincial Letters" are read to-day, by men who never look into the pages of the "Rambler" or the "Vanity of Human Wishes," shows that the manner in which a subject is treated is often of more importance than the matter. It is one of the most signal triumphs of genius that it can thus not only overcome the disadvantages of a topic of ephemeral interest, but even gives permanent popularity to works which the progress of knowledge renders imperfect; that it can so stamp itself upon its productions, and mould them into beauty, as to make men unwilling to return the gold to the melting-pot, and work it up afresh. What is it but the severe and exquisite beauty of their form which has given such vitality to the ancient classics, that time, which "antiquates antiquity itself," has left them untouched? Why do we never tire of lingering over the pages of Virgil, unless we are drawn to them by "the haunting music of his verse, the rhythm and fall of his language?" "The ancients alone," it has been truly said, "possessed in perfection the art of *embalming* thought. The severe taste which surrounds them has operated like the pure air of Egypt in preserving the sculptures and paintings of that country; where travellers tell us that the traces of the chisel are often as sharp, and the colours of the paintings as bright, as if

the artists had quitted their work but yesterday."

In works of art, or pure literature, the style is even more important than the thought, for the reason that the style is the artistic part, the only thing in which the writer can shew originality. The raw material out of which essays, poems and novels are made, is limited in quantity, and easily exhausted. The number of human passions upon which changes can be rung is very small; and the situations to which their play gives rise may be counted on the fingers. Love returned and love unrequited, jealousy and envy, pride, avarice, generosity and revenge, are the hinges upon which all poems and romances turn, and these passions have been the same ever since Eden. I live, I love,—I am happy, I am wretched,—I was once young,—I must die,—are very simple ideas, of which no one can claim a copyright; yet out of these few root-ideas has flowed all the poetry the world knows, and all that it ever will know. In Homer and Virgil, Plautus and Terence, we have an epitome of all the men and women on the planet, and the writer who would add to their number must either repeat them or portray monstrosities. Joubert felt this when he cried; "Oh, how difficult it is to be at once ingenious and sensible!" La Bruyère, long before him, had felt it when he exclaimed: "All is said, and one comes too late, now that there have been men for seven thousand years, and men that have thought." It is common to talk of originality as the distinguishing mark of genius, when, on the contrary, it is essentially receptive and passive in its nature. Its power lies, not in finding out new material, but in imparting new life to whatever it discovers, new or old; not in creating its own fuel, but in fanning its collected fuel into a flame. All the thought, the stuff or substance, of a new poem or essay, is necessarily