

THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE.

FRENCH and English literature, which have now been in a high state of activity for two entire centuries, and perhaps as nearly as possible have been subject to the same allowance for lulls arising out of civil agitations, cannot reasonably be supposed to have left any nook or sly recess in the broad field of national interest at this day unvisited. Long after the main highway of waters has felt the full power of the tide, channels running far inland, with thousands of little collateral creeks, may be still under the very process of filling; for two powers are required to those final effects of the tide;—the general hydrostatic power for maintaining the equilibrium, and also hydraulic power for searching narrow conduits. On the same analogy, many human interests, less obvious or less general, may long linger unnoticed, and survive for a time the widest expansion of intellectual activity. Possibly the aspects of society must shift materially before even the human consciousness, far less a human interest of curiosity, settles upon them with steadiness enough to light up and vivify their relations.—For example—odd as it may seem to us, it is certain that, in the Elizabethan age, Political Economy was not yet viewed by any mind—no, not by Lord Bacon's—as even a *possible* mode of speculation. The whole accidents of value and its functions, were not as yet separated into a distinct conscious object; nor, if they had been, would it have been supposed possible to trace laws and fixed relations amongst forms apparently so impalpable, and combinations so fleeting. With the growth of society, gradually the same phenomena revolved more and more frequently; something like order and connection was dimly descried; philosophic suspicion began to stir; observation was steadily applied; reasoning and disputation ran their circle; and at last a science was matured—definite as mechanics, though (like *that*) narrow in its elementary laws.

Thus it is with *all* topics of general interest. Through several generations they may escape notice; for there must be an interest of social necessity visibly connected with them before a mere vagrant curiosity will attract culture to their laws. And this interest may fail to arise until society has been made to move through various changes, and human needs have assumed attitudes too commanding and too permanent to be neglected. The laws of the drama—that is, of the dramatic fable—how subtle are they! How imperceptible—how absolutely non-existences—in any rude state of society! But let a national theatre arise—let the mighty artist come forward to shake men's hearts with

scenic agitations,—how inevitably are those laws brightened to the apprehension, searched, probed, analyzed. *Sint Mæcenates*, it has been said, *non decrunt* (*Fluere*) *Marones*. That may be doubted; and nearer to the probabilities it would be to invert the order of succession.—But however this may be, it is certain from manifold experience, that invariably there will follow on the very traces and fresh footing of the mighty agent—(mighty, but possibly blind)—the sagacious theorist of his functions—in the very wake and visible path of the awful Æschylus, or the tear-compelling Euripides, producing their colossal effects in alliance with dark forces slumbering in human nature, will step forth the torch-bearing Aristotle, that pure starry intelligence, bent upon searching into those effects, and measuring (when possible) those forces. The same age accordingly beheld the first pompous exhibitions of dramatic power, which beheld also the great speculator arise to trace its limits, proportions, and the parts of its shadowy empire. “I came, I saw, I conquered”—such might have been Aristotle's vaunt in reviewing his own analysis of the Athenian drama—one generation, or nearly so, having witnessed the creation of the Grecian theatre as a fact, and the finest contemplative survey which has yet been taken of the same, fact viewed as a problem; of the dramatic laws, functions, powers, and limits.

No great number of generations, therefore, is requisite for the exhaustion of all capital interests in their capital aspects. And it may be presumed, with tolerable certainty, that by this time the plough has turned up every angle of soil, properly national, alike in England or in France. Not that many parts will not need to be tilled over again, and often absolutely *de novo*. Much of what has been done has been done so ill that it is as if it had not been done at all. For instance—the history of neither kingdom has yet been written in a way to last, or in a way worthy of the subject. Either it has been slightly written as to research—witness Hume and Mezeriaz, Smollett and Pere Daniel—(not but some of these writers lay claim to antiquarian merits)—or written artificially or feebly as regards effect—or written without knowledge as regards the political forces which moved underground at the great eras of our national development.

Still, after one fashion or another, almost every great theme has received its treatment in both English literature and French; though many are those on which, in the words of the German adage upon psychology, we may truly affirm that “the first sensible word is yet to be