

shall all have gone down in glory. Others, no doubt there are, whose merits have been already partially recognized, who in another decade or quarter of a century, will seem as great and of as noble art as those who have recently left our sphere, or whose chief works here may be supposed to have been already achieved.

More or less, the literature of every nation has had its periods of brightness and shadow; its golden, silver, and iron periods; its origin, its perfection, and its decadence—if not its close. The Hebrews could distinguish the strong and originative period of Samuel and David, from the more magnificent period of the great prophets, and still more from that of the minor ones. The Rig Veda, containing a literature stretching over a vast period, is succeeded by a poorer and ever poorer kind. Greece had its glorious period, commencing with Homer and ending with the great tragedians and comedians, after which nothing worthy of note is to be observed. Italy, too, had its Augustan Age, and afterwards, but works of little worth. Looking to the past examples, we have been accustomed to hear prophecies of the decadence of English literature. We have high authority for supposing that every language, by the very necessity of its nature, must grow, and must stand so long apparently stationary, but in reality must always advance, and finally, like a tree that has lived out its term of years, it must then decay and fall, sending out, it may be, some shoots that for a time appear as though they would take the place of the original stock, but, short lived and useless, soon to wither and decay.

It may be that this inherent progress and decadence is the law of all language, and that the English, like the Greek, and Latin, and Hebrew, and Sanscrit shall also decay. All we know is that there does not seem to be any immediate prospect of this at present. It was supposed that the Elizabethian period was that in which English literature rose to perfection, and that then it must begin to decline. Between the Shakespearian and Ben Johnson group and that of Pope, Steele and Addison, intervened a wide period, so that that generation supposed the good old English tongue henceforth was only to lisp and halt. Milton, indeed, made men pause when giving in their verdict at after dinner inquests, when it was supposed that they were sitting in judgment on the dead body of English literature. Afterwards rose the Johnson school, and after a very wearisome interval, the splendid