

we may be allowed the paradox, in some parts more poetical than his poetry.

Another reason for this peculiarity in prose writing, when first attempted, may have been, that it could not be all at once seen that prose should be, far more than poetry, the language of conversation or of ordinary spoken address. It should be this, pruned of the merest colloquialisms; and to this it arrived in the age of Addison, and even earlier. Cowley and Dryden had already found out the secret, and wrote in charming prose. But even the conversation of that age partook of the picturesqueness of the age itself: it was still formed after the chivalresque model in life and manners which was just passing away, or which lingered on into the time of the Charleses. The euphuisms of the age of Elizabeth were a remnant of the same institutions and manners, but perverted into a fashion, and degenerating into foppery. Still another reason perhaps was that a certain inversion and stateliness of language are always the effect of high, if not strong emotion; and that was an age, or these were ages, of much higher and intenser feeling than the frivolous times of Charles the Second, or the more disciplined and practical period of Swift and Pope and Addison.

It must, we think, have struck the attentive peruser of English Literature that the poetry of the period we are considering exhibits actually less inversion than the prose, and is more the language of ordinary conversation and familiar speech. This is particularly to be noted in the drama of the Elizabethan period. It cannot, we think, have failed to suggest itself to the thoughtful student of this age of our Literature, why it was that the prose was so inverted and stilted, so twisted out of its natural order and flow, while the poetry, for the most part, maintains the very construction and arrangement that would be adopted at the present day, is even a model which the writers of the present day can hardly approach. The blank verse of Milton indeed partakes more of a latinised order or construction than is observable, or obtains, in the dramatists, but that was perhaps from Milton's peculiarly classic character of mind and habits, while the elevation of his theme admitted of it, and even in some degree invited it. The dialogue of the early dramatists is the model to us of poetic composition, especially in drama. It would be in vain indeed to attempt to copy after Shakspeare, or imitate *his* style, but that is for another reason than its thoroughly idiomatic and appropriate English. And yet Alexander Smith, author of the "Life Drama," not untruly says of Shakspeare, what all must have felt, although the thought may not have taken any very positive form or shape, that "In Shakspeare's characters, as in his language, there is *surplusage*, *superabundance*; the measure is heaped and running over. From his sheer wealth he is often the most undramatic of writers. He is so frequently greater than his occasion, he has no small change to suit his emergencies, and we have guineas instead of groats. Romeo is more than a mortal lover, and Mercutio more than a mortal wit; the kings in the Shakspearian world are more kingly than earthly sovereigns; Rosalind's laughter was never heard save in the forest of Arden. His very clowns are transcendental, with scraps of wisdom springing out of their foolishness speech." We think this is a true criticism; and yet, for the most part, it never occurs to us to think that this surplusage is any other than it ought to be—that the different characters speak in a language at all beyond themselves, and utter thoughts, and sport themselves with wit, which only Shakspeare could have put into their mouths. It seems but the most natural utterance of the occasion and the character. The truth is we are imbued by Shakspeare with a higher instinct ourselves: there is a keener edge put upon