

exception of a few obsolete words and phrases, the common version of the Scriptures, is regarded by literary men, at the present day, as an English classic; and many an orator has kindled the fire of his eloquence at this great fountain of light and of warmth, and many a poet has adorned his imagination by a careful attention to the imagery of the prophets. Pope, in his 'Messiah,' one of his most elegant and sublime productions, in admiration no doubt of the splendour of the prophet, invokes the aid of Him,

'Who touch'd Isaiah's hallowed lips with fire!'

It is scarcely possible to calculate how great has been the effect of a book of such a character, so widely circulated, and so generally read, upon the public taste; and how extensive has been its influence in promoting a general acquaintance with the beauty and force of the English language. If the Scriptures had not trained up a nation of intelligent readers, distinguished authors would not have addressed a public so well prepared to admire their beauties, and to estimate their worth. In the seventeenth century, distinguished writers arose, in almost every department of literature and science, to instruct the world by their wisdom, and to cultivate and adorn the English language. In this rapid sketch but a few of them can be noticed.

Milton, an epic poet, to whom no age or nation has produced a superior, who is more sublime than Homer, and more diversified, and not less elegant, than Virgil, contributed not a little to the cultivation of the language in which he wrote, and signally displayed its compass and its power. Waller, Dryden, and others, in the department of poetry, contributed largely to the improvement of their native tongue. Locke and Newton, in philosophy, who flourished in the latter part of this century, contributed to the precision and perspicuity of the language, and evinced that it is as well adapted to the purposes of the philosopher, as it is to those of the poet.

The divines of the seventeenth century were distinguished for the copiousness and force of their language, as well as for the depth and compass of their thoughts; and in proportion as theological learning advanced, these divines are held in increasingly high estimation. Barrow, in the fullness and exuberance of his periods, has an eloquence like that of Cicero. Dr. Jeremy Taylor, from his spirited descriptions of human character and human life, has been significantly called the theological Shakspeare. The silver-tongued Bates, the eloquent and devout chaplain of that profligate monarch Charles the Second, added elegance to correctness, and is alike distinguished for the beauty and the force of his language. Charnock was a writer of great depth of thought, and great copiousness and force of expression. A distinguished recent English critic, in speaking of the writings of this author, says, "If any student in theology be destitute of the writings of Charnock, let him sell his coat and buy them." Baxter and Tillotson, and others little less distinguished, contributed largely to the improvement of their native tongue, as well as to the instruction of their own age, and of succeeding generations.

But while the English language, during the seventeenth century, was distinguished for its copiousness and strength, with a good degree of elegance, it was reserved for the writers of the eighteenth century to give it the finishing touch of beauty and of grace. The old prose writers made not the ornaments of language a primary object of attention. Their periods are generally long and somewhat heavy, and are frequently encumbered with extensive parentheses, which later writers have very properly rejected. Whether, in the acquisition of elegance, the language has not lost some of its strength, is not quite beyond question; and he who would perfect his style, should labour to add the grace of the writers of the eighteenth, to the strength of those of the seventeenth century.

In the latter part of the seventeenth, and early in the eighteenth century, a galaxy of authors appeared, who have left a track of light across the literary hemisphere. The reign of Queen Anne has been denominated, and not without reason, the Augustan age of English literature. Then flourished Addison, who brought philosophy from the schools to dwell among the common people; whose writings are distinguished for a simplicity and elegance of style, which have rarely been equalled, and never surpassed; and which has caused him to be regarded as a model of fine writing. It is the language of the great Johnson, that, 'whoever wishes to acquire a style, which is familiar but not coarse, and elegant but not ostentatious, must give his days and nights to the volumes of Addison.' Young, to great diversity of thought, added an affluent magnificence of language. Pope scattered over the fields of literature flowers of the most delightful fragrance, and of every hue. Thomson displayed the beauties of the English language in the most enchanting descriptions of the prospects of nature, and the scenes of life. Neatness and perspicuity of style were finely illustrated in the history of Hume. Bolingbroke, corrupt as he was in moral principle, produced, as a political writer, some of the most beautiful specimens of elegant writing. Among theologians, Watts and Doddridge, Butler and Berkeley, Sherlock and Lardner, Warburton and Lowth, furnished examples of writing different from each other, but all excellent of their kind. But space would fail us, were we to attempt an allusion to all the poets and philosophers, historians and moralists, who shed a glory over the earlier half and the middle of the eighteenth century.

The orthography of the preceding century had been unsettled, and encumbered with many needless letters; and the same writer was often found spelling the same word in a different manner, in

different parts of his work. In the eighteenth century, the orthography of the language became nearly settled, the meaning of words had become definite and precise, and usage had in a great measure given law to language. It only remained that a commanding lexicographer should arise, to collect from the scattered works of distinguished authors a complete vocabulary, to fix, by the authority of good writers, accurately the meaning of words, and to embody the whole in a standard dictionary.

This work, it was the high honour of Dr. Samuel Johnson to perform; and by doing it so ably and so satisfactorily, he became one of the greatest benefactors to the English language and literature, that has ever lived. When we consider what a vast compass of reading it required to collect the unnumbered quotations from distinguished authors, by which the meaning which he has attached to words was illustrated and supported; the discrimination which was necessary to fix accurately the import of terms, and to assign to his authorities their proper place; and the patience and labour which a work so complicated and extensive required for its completion, we cannot fail to regard this as one of the most astonishing efforts of literary industry and skill. Happy it was, perhaps, for the world, that Johnson was comparatively a poor man. Necessity is not only the mother of invention, but the parent of industry. Johnson had eaten up the avails of his Dictionary by the time he had completed it; and while he was toiling for the benefit of his own age, and of generations unborn, without being stimulated by the certainty that they would duly appreciate his labours, he had the ever-present stimulus of a desire to procure his daily bread. His 'Rasselas,' also, one of his most elegant productions, was the fruit of a week's labour, to procure the means of defraying the expenses of his mother's funeral.

Johnson's Dictionary, immediately on its publication, and in every period since, has been resorted to as a standard of the language; and from his authority there have been few appeals. Johnson understood, and confined himself to, the true province of a lexicographer, which is, not to give law to language, but merely to ascertain and to promulgate it. His is an original work, totally unlike every thing which had gone before; and later lexicographers have mostly lived upon his labours.

Since the time of Johnson, the English language has been adorned by many distinguished writers, and the advancement of the arts and sciences has required the adoption of many new terms. These have, by different editors, been incorporated with the work of Johnson. Some words have also been gleaned up, which Johnson, in the extent of his range had overlooked; and so complete has this catalogue of authorized words become, and so definite have been the meanings which have been attached to them, that the English must be regarded as a settled language. The 'daily-changing tongue,' of which our motto complains, will not be ours, unless foreign corruptions are permitted to creep in, and pervert it.

The latter part of the eighteenth century was particularly fruitful in distinguished authors, whose works have received the highest finish of style. Johnson, not only by the publication of his Dictionary, but by his miscellaneous writings, has done much to improve his native tongue. While his constant use of words of Latin derivation gives a degree of stiffness, and sometimes of pedantry, to his style, it has yet the highest redeeming qualities. The nice discrimination with which he applies his epithets, the splendour of his imagery, and the majestic flow of his periods, have received, as they have deserved, universal admiration. The poetry of Cowper has excellencies of its kind, not inferior to those of his distinguished predecessors. In history, Robertson has given the finest specimens of a dignified elegance, and Gibbon of a lofty splendour of style. Goldsmith has written with a simplicity, correctness, and elegance, which have never been exceeded. Melmoth has all the ease and grace of Addison, without his negligence and slight incorrectness.

Among the favourable circumstances respecting the English language, which have latterly taken place, the new turn which has been given to fictitious writing, deserves to be mentioned. The character of works of this kind, some forty or fifty years since, was miserable in the extreme. Many of them were written by half-learned men, or pedantic women; and they were generally most extravagant in their incidents, and clothed in a style which set all good taste at defiance. It is well that the reading public have agreed to make a bonfire of these works, and that the shelves of circulating libraries no longer groan beneath them. To this change, the prose writings of Sir Walter Scott have essentially contributed. He, in conjunction with some others, has been the means of bringing the authors of fictitious writings in some measure back to nature; and has caused the public taste on this subject to flow in a new channel.

The English language has excellencies which place it, at least, on a level with any language that was ever written or spoken; and perhaps such various excellence was never before combined in any tongue. The great versatility of this language is among its distinguishing features. It is alike adapted to history, to philosophy, to poetry, to oratory, and to the less elevated kinds of composition. In the hands of a skilful writer, it is sometimes smooth as the stream which scarcely ripples as it runs, and sometimes it is impetuous as the mountain torrent, which dashes from precipice to precipice, in fury and in foam: sometimes it is beautiful as the gentle cascade; and sometimes it thunders like the Falls of Niagara.

If the English language is less sonorous than the Greek, it is

more copious; if it is less majestic, in the ordinary flow of its periods, than the Latin, it is more precise and more various in its import. If it wants something of the familiarity and ease of the French, it is much better adapted to the higher kinds of writing. For the purpose of poetry it has a vast advantage over the French. The accented and unaccented syllables of the English enable it to approach very near to the poetic feet of the Latin and Greek. This adapts it alike to rhyme and to blank verse. The French poetry cannot be sustained without rhyme, which must be regarded, in a greater or less degree, as a clog upon genius; and as a substitute for blank verse, their only resort is to poetic prose, a good example of which is to be found in the *Telemaque* of Fenelon. How poor a species of poetry this is, contrasted with the English blank verse, must be evident to all who have compared them. The English, unlike most other languages, has a dialect that is appropriately poetic; and by the natural division of genders, it has a preparation, by the application of the masculine or feminine gender to an inanimate object, to convert the simplest form of speech into a bold personification.

The diversified character of English poetry displays, in a striking light, the richness of the language. Milton bears no resemblance to Young; nor Young to Dryden; nor Dryden to Thomson; nor Thomson to Pope; nor Pope to Cowper; and yet each has distinguished excellencies of his kind. The same diversity will be found in the historical writers of the language. Their sentences are never cast in the same mould. The simple neatness of Hume is quite unlike the dignified eloquence of Robertson; the dignity and elegance of Robertson are unlike the loftiness and splendour of Gibbon; and the chaste beauty of Goldsmith is unlike them all. The same remark holds true in every other department of literature. Addison is widely different from Johnson in his style, and Melmoth is different from both. There is a variety in the character of English literature, which would probably be sought for in vain in any other language.

The grammar of this language is more simple than that of any other tongue, if we except the Hebrew, without the points; and the facility with which its grammatical construction may be acquired, is one of its advantages. The article has no variation. The adjective is only varied to express the degrees of comparison. The verbs have but one conjugation, and the original verb remains mostly unchanged in all the moods and tenses, which are chiefly expressed by auxiliaries. He who, with great labour, has mastered the various inflections of the Latin, Greek, or French verbs, will know how to estimate this advantage. The order of the words in the construction of sentences, in the English is the order of nature; nor does the idiom of the language allow extensively of inversion, except it be in poetry. This gives to it a philosophical character.

But if the English language has distinguished excellencies, it has also its defects; which it would evince a want of perspicacity or of candour to deny. The short words with which the language abounds which extensively terminate with consonants, detract much from the harmony of its pronunciation. The similarity in the form of the verb, in different tenses and different persons, often creates an ambiguity in regard to its import, which can only be removed by a careful attention to that which precedes, and that which follows it in the sentence. The division of accented and unaccented syllables in English, though it fits the language for poetry without rhyme, is by no means as well defined, and as extensively productive of harmony of versification, as were the long and the short syllables in the Latin and the Greek. By the transposition of the words, also, they could secure a variety of cadence, and a harmony of pronunciation to which the English language can never attain.

Another and concluding number will be devoted to a consideration of the best means of cultivating an acquaintance with the English language; the danger of corruption to which it is exposed from innovation; with some allusion to British criticism upon the manner in which the English language is written and spoken in America; and an examination of its future prospects, in regard to its prevalence and extension.

SIGNOR HERVIO NASIO, a dwarf, who has recently arrived at New York, is thus described by a London paper:—"He is a full sized man to the hips, and owes the shortness of his stature to his legs, which are not more than a few inches long; these, however, enable him to perform various feats, which for dexterity are unequalled. In the "Gnome Fly," (a piece which he performs) he assumes the shape first of a baboon, and then a gigantic fly. As the ape, he excels even Gouffe and Mazurier; the strength of his arms is wonderful, and enables him to perform feats which must be seen to be credited. As the Fly, he is equally true to the character; he creeps and hops about with wonderful facility; flies across the stage into the window of a tower, and actually crawls across the ceiling above the heads of the people in the pit. This is effected by the wonderful strength of his hands, which enables him to cling to the mouldings, and thus appear to set the laws of gravitation at defiance. The effect is thrilling, and the applause which follows tremendous."

HORSES.—These are men's wings, wherewith they make such speed. A generous creature a horse is, sensible in some sort of honour, and made most handsome by that which deforms man—pride.