

herence to the rules of art, deduced from the investigation of the works of the great writers. But mere art soon wearies, and hence poetry languishes or dies of mere inanition and the nation lies waiting for some great event to arouse it to renewed life.

Of the different phases through which our literature has passed we might take as representatives Chaucer, Shakespeare, Pope and Wordsworth.

The period of Chaucer was not followed by a critical age in England, owing to the lamentable condition of the nation; but on the continent it is called the period of Classical Revival, or the Renaissance. The second productive period, that of Shakespeare and the drama, follows the religious reformation, and was influenced by the literatures of Italy, and of Greece and Rome, for England had at last been affected by the classical revival. When this Elizabethan period was exhausted it passed through the usual critical stage, but owing to various circumstances this critical period became a very prominent feature in our poetry, and is known as the Augustan Age, or the period of artificial excellence. It followed the stirring times of the political revolution in England, and was modelled on the great Augustan Age of French literature, that of Louis XIV. This gradually died out and left us a barren transitional period, lasting from Johnson to Cowper, during which little was produced worthy a place in literature. The baleful effect of giving too much prominence to outward form at the sacrifice of thought and feeling, was clearly shown. French art and formality and classical purity were everywhere. Artistic imitation was abundant, but no creative energy; the nation lay ready waiting for a new creative impulse which soon came. Some premonitory symptoms of the coming change were seen in Gray's *Elegy*, Goldsmith's works, Thomson's *Seasons*, etc.; but the harbingers of the *natural* school were Cowper in his *Task*, and Burns in his songs. These were quite divorced from the old school; both were natural, spontaneous and sincere; no artificial sentiment or form in either. The human sympathies of Burns shown in such pieces as the *Mountain Daisy*, and the rough, vigorous line and love of nature in Cowper, put them