

The drama then waned during the Johnsonian Age. Not so oratory. Chatham, Fox, Burke, Sheridan, Pitt, Grattan, form a group unequalled in modern days. The time was peculiarly adapted to the development of this form of literature. Critical in spirit, yet marked by vigorous thought touching on great political and national interests, it gave the best conditions attainable for the encouragement of eloquence. In addition, daily newspapers began at this time to print full reports of the proceedings of the House of Commons, so that orators were urged to surpass themselves by the consciousness that their audience was a nation.

The Muse also, gradually shaking herself free from the trammels of the classical school, began to return to her first love, Nature and Man, and thereby to attain a freshness and spontaneity to which she had long been a stranger. The tendency to criticism had over-reached itself and slowly the poetic mind began to swing back to a creative state. The motion began, unconscious to himself, in the writings of Thompson. He viewed Nature with an artist's eye, and, in his Seasons, he gave glowing pictures of her depths of colour and brilliancy of garb. But he went no further; her beauties charmed his imagination but did not touch his heart: in him classicism was still predominant. Goldsmith had not moral energy enough to shake off prevailing influences, did it rest with himself to make the effort. Fortunately for his fame it was not so, for his warm Celtic temperament of itself permeated his poems with an ardent love for Nature and a soft, rich glow of sympathy for oppressed humanity. Collins and Gray were imbued with the same spirit; they admired nature, but subordinated this to greater love for man. "As to description," says Gray in one of his letters, "I have always thought that it made the most graceful ornament of poetry, but never ought to make its subject." The sympathy with humanity took a revolutionary shade in the writings of Burns which places him, though in point of time a poet of the Johnsonian age, amongst those of the next period. "The rank is but the guinea-stamp, the man's the gowd for a' that," he wrote, and what he wrote he felt as only a poet can feel.

The lines voice the spirit of the times. From ages immemorial the masses had

toiled from early morn to eventide for the benefit of the classes. Feudalism was dead in name, yet the majority of Europe's population were as truly serfs as when William fought the battle of Hastings. The limit of endurance had now been well-nigh reached, and literature, ever the faithful mirror of the people's thought, began to reflect the new ideas of the dignity of man then springing up. One of the clearest of these reflections was that contained in Adam Smith's "Enquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations." In this work he maintained that labor, not money or land, was the origin of wealth. He thus invested the laborer with a dignity hitherto unheard of, and made him at once the most important factor in the economy of the state. Hence came clamors for rights—clamors founded no doubt upon a correct principle but, owing to pernicious influences, degenerating into mad execrations against all law and authority.

Unfortunately for the fair fame of literature some of its leading lights in the Johnsonian age became the first causes of these excesses. History was the material upon which they worked, and as will shortly be shown, they could not have chosen a better means to cloud men's judgments or to leave the trail of the serpent upon aspirations in themselves just and honorable. The leading spirits in England were Gibbon and Hume—men of marked ability, but imbued with principles entirely opposed to religion and morality. The English mind is essentially practical, and whilst this has led them to the greatest achievements in the application of physical forces to man's use, it has also rendered the whole of their philosophy for the last three centuries grossly materialistic. To this national error Hume added skepticism, holding that we are certain of our ideas only, but ignorant alike of the truth of their objectivity and of the mind that produces them. In consequence such words as God, soul, immortality, are to him but empty sounds. His views spread to the mainland where they found a responsive echo in the rationalist movement of the French Encyclopedists. In Germany they met, at first, with a direct antagonism in the transcendentalism of Kant, which, however, in its ultimate results, as shaped by his Idealistic and Pantheistic disciples, became a source