

splendid impulses had cooled and settled, schools of science sprang up; the sympathetic relish for the beauties of nature changed slowly into an earnest inspection of the laws of nature.

The fourth distinctive period is called the Classic Age. A moral experiment on a large scale had undergone a crucial examination. The Puritans had stiffened religion, and they tried to force the nation to bend under a straightlaced ethics; this was the mistake of those noble spirits. When Charles II. came to the throne the national desire swung to the opposite extreme. The people plunged into sensuous pleasures. The theatres, which had languished under the interdict of Puritanism, were extremely popular. It was the custom, too, to praise vice ingeniously and to stigmatize virtue gently and obliquely. Morality was loose and frivolous. Scepticism was the sign of intellect. The poetry corresponded with the period. Wycherley is a representative of the early outburst of vulgar, poisonous literature. Dryden is a representative of a milder school which instinctively felt that the nation was sickening of its licentiousness, and which, therefore, tuned its poetry to the public taste. There was little creative originality; there were elegant diction, withering satires, classic translations and able criticism. Lord Bacon emerges from the crowd and dictates a higher ethics than the greedy Utilitarianism of Hobbes who, however, voiced the public sentiment. One majestic towering spirit moved amid this period of gross voluptuousness, as the iceberg from the Arctic floats into warmer water, its cold cliffs and rugged peaks glistening in the sunlight; John Milton had outlived cold, austere Puritanism, and now saw a gay, giddy, dancing, social, pleasure-loving society. His very existence, although in solitude, was a rebuke to the land that had come too much under the evil spell of French genius.

Somewhat later, German thought wielded a perceptible influence over English literature. Coleridge and Carlyle chaperoned it into England, and its impression has been permanent.

This is a very rapid and therefore a very meagre sketch of the manner in which our English Classics have been developing through various causes, both native and foreign; and if the account has even approached to accuracy, it will be quickly conceded that our literature is not only national but European; it has been shaping and evolving not isolatedly, but under the hands of every nation of Western and Southern Europe.

There are what may be called literary importations. Most German and French works have been translated into English. The ancient classics have competing translators. And when our learned Bachelors of Arts do not blush to own that they cannot decipher the Latin on the rough parchments, it is a clear sign that Greek and Latin are losing that undue value which was not long ago accorded them. Nor is the day very distant when young ladies will read Homer and Æschylus and Virgil in plain English—as most unscrupulous undergraduates find it very convenient to do! The greatest work which has been thrown into our tongue is the Holy Scriptures. It is the right boast of those who prize it that even from a literary point of view its natural eloquence; its intellectual melancholy, as in Job; its poetry, as in Moses, Isaiah, and the Apocalypse; its historic simplicity, as in the Gospels; its ratiocination, as in the Pauline works; its lyric tenderness, as in the Psalms; its pastoral quietness and loveliness, as in Ruth, are unequalled. It suffers from one disadvantage, however; it is in a book called "The Bible," and prejudice against the book dims the blaze of its excellence.

*(To be continued.)*