

agreement on the part of the governed, but are acknowledged (as they were by Burke) to be the gradual product of national growth, the expression of the indwelling national genius.

Now, though this new world of emotion and insight had already been more or less vaguely apprehended by Englishmen, and had found some expression, for the most part inadequate and incomplete, it was reserved for the generation which reached full maturity about the year 1800 to feel the full inspiration of the new spirit and to embody it in great imaginative works. The first evidence within the limits of the new century of the presence of great and original literary power was afforded by the publication of the *Lay of the Last Minstrel* (1805). It was Scott's distinctive office to reveal the historic past (brought close to his sympathies by ties of kinship and race and patriotic feeling) as no longer a bare series of names and events, but as picturesque and alive, and akin to the actual world through the presence of the permanent traits of human nature. Wordsworth, in the *Poems* of 1807 and subsequent volumes, following the lines laid down in the *Lyrical Ballads*, revealed the new aspects of material nature, and the poetic worth and beauty of the ordinary life of the peasantry, hitherto regarded as outside the realms of art. His work is probably the most original and substantial contribution made to the stock of English poetry by any single writer during the whole century. In 1812 Byron became the conspicuous figure on the poetic stage, and held public attention by a series of poems, many of which, different as they were in tone and matter, followed the style introduced by Scott. Scott, accordingly, sought a fresh and more congenial field in prose, and produced a series of novels unparalleled in any age or country. At the same time a much shorter series, but, in some respects not less remarkable, was being published by Jane Austen. Another prose writer of genius, whose work also belongs to the imaginative side, is Charles Lamb. As we approach the twenties, to the elder group of poets is added two men of extraordinary endowments, belonging to a somewhat later generation, Shelley and Keats; so that we have, about 1820, an epoch of extraordinary brilliancy in imaginative literature, embracing a larger number of great writers than does any other equally brief period in our history.

The poetry of the time was a revolt against the canons of the eighteenth century; such a revolt was neither so natural nor so necessary in prose. The eighteenth century, unpropitious as it was to the higher imaginative literature, favored the production of an effective prose style. Dignity, clearness, correctness had been the chief characteristics of the later form of eighteenth century prose, and in the hands of great masters like Samuel Johnson, it was also eminently virile and forcible. The sense of dignity and propriety, however, kept it too far aloof from the living colloquial speech; in weaker hands, it became stiff, cold, and abstract, and failed to accommodate itself to varying tone and thought. These weaknesses are very apparent in the prose of the first third of the following century when the traditions of the previous age still held sway; and there is no marked development in style to attract the notice of the literary historian.

II.

This first broad literary movement of the century may be considered as closing with the era of the Reform Bill, and therefore as covering one-third of the whole period. By the year 1833 the great spirits whom we have named had either passed away or practically finished their work; but the intellectual stimulus had by no means exhausted

itself. It was strong enough to inspire another group of literary men, whose works made the second third of the century almost equal in brilliancy to the first. The force of inspiration, however, in the domain of poetry at least, is evidently on the wane. This is shown not merely by the general inferiority of the later group, but by the special characteristics of their work. In Tennyson we find the effective combination of limits, devices, phrases and ideas borrowed from predecessors, immediate and remote:—the work of genius, not, however, of genius working under a strong impulse and conviction, but laboriously elaborating, with taste and judgment and the finest technical skill, a wealth of material handed down from the past. In Browning, on the other hand, who does not yield to any of his immediate predecessors in originality and force, the intellectual and critical impulse is apt to be stronger than the imaginative and creative, so that there is an imperfect fusion of thought and form. In their later contemporaries the marks of exhaustion are clearer. Matthew Arnold is more manifestly imitative (his masters are Wordsworth and Goethe) than the poets of the earlier period. In both Arnold and Clough, one is conscious of the tenuity and uncertainty of the poetic afflatus; and in fact with Arnold, the inspiration gave out, and his ripper years were given to critical prose.

But if, on the whole, then, the poetical product of the second third of the century, choice as it is, is inferior to that of the earlier, the converse holds, in the case of prose. There is in the first place a marked development of style—quite parallel to the earlier change wrought in poetry. The conventional propriety and regularity of the eighteenth century is abandoned and the reins are given to individual idiosyncrasies or even to caprice; hence the prose of this age becomes as varied as were the poetic styles of Wordsworth's contemporaries. Prose ceases to be abstract and academic, and draws closer to the language of ordinary life. It becomes more colloquial both in vocabulary and sentence—forms; its diction grows more concrete and imaginative, and is often impassioned or poetical. Carlyle and Macaulay (the two most influential prose writers of the period), and the later Ruskin, sufficiently illustrate this; the same tendencies, though less conspicuous, are discoverable in the writings of Newman, the greatest master of English prose in the century. All these men were not merely great stylists, but producers of great works. To emphasize further the greatness of the period in prose, one may add to the names already mentioned those of J. S. Mill, Dickens, Thackeray, Charlotte Brontë, and later, George Eliot, whose best works were all published by 1866. This second period culminated about 1850, when with the exception of the last-mentioned, all these writers were successfully exercising their literary gifts.

The earlier period had been a time when novel ideas and methods were struggling for admission, and were opposed by authority and tradition. It was an era of bitter conflict; this true not merely of literature and of the intellectual world in general, but in the practical sphere of society and politics. But at the opening of the second division of the century the chief obstacles had already been surmounted. Hence a sense of progress, of hopefulness, of room for 'diffusive thought to work and spread.' It was a time for optimism, for broad generalizations and sanguine projects; the germinal ideas of which we have spoken were energetically developed, and applied in every department. The prevailing tendency, already mentioned, to explain things as organic involved the idea of growth, of the influence of surroundings, and of the importance of following the successive stages of change. Hence the conception of development,