

## CHAPTER IX

MILTON, TAYLOR, CLARENDON, BROWNE, HOBBS

DURING the second and third quarters of the seventeenth century, or (to take literary rather than chronological dates) between the death of Bacon and the publication of *Absalom and Achitophel*, there existed in England a quintet of men of letters, of such extraordinary power and individuality, that it may be doubted whether any other period of our own literature can show a group equal to them ; while it is certain that no other literature, except, perhaps, in the age of Pericles, can match them. They were all, except Hobbes (who belonged by birth, though not by date and character of writing, to an earlier generation than the rest), born, and they all died, within a very few years of each other. All were prose writers of the very highest merit ; and though only one was a poet, yet he had poetry enough to spare for all the five. Of the others, Clarendon, in some of the greatest characteristics of the historian, has been equalled by no Englishman, and surpassed by few foreigners. Jeremy Taylor has been called the most eloquent of men ; and if this is a bold saying, it is scarcely too bold. Hobbes stands with Bacon and Berkeley at the head of English-speaking philosophers, and is, if not in general grasp, in range of ideas, or in literary polish, yet in acuteness of thought and originality of expression, perhaps the superior of both his companions. The excellence of Browne is indeed more purely literary and intensely artistic first of all—a matter of expression rather than of sub-

stance,—while he is perhaps more flawed than any of them by the fashionable vices of his time. Yet, as an artist, or rather architect, of words in the composite and florid style, it is vain to look anywhere for his superior.

John Milton—the greatest, no doubt, of the five, if only because of his mastery of either harmony—was born in London on 9th December 1608, was educated at Cambridge, studied at home with unusual intensity and control of his own time and bent; travelled to Italy, returned, and engaged in the somewhat unexpected task of school-keeping; was stimulated, by the outbreak of the disturbances between king and parliament, to take part with extraordinary bitterness in the strife of pamphlets on the republican and anti-prelatical side, defended the execution of the king in his capacity of Latin secretary to the Government (to which he had been appointed in 1649); was struck with blindness, lay hid at the Restoration for some time in order to escape the Royalist vengeance (which does not seem very seriously to have threatened him), composed and published in 1667 the great poem of *Paradise Lost*, followed it with that of *Paradise Regained*, did not a little other work in prose and poetry, and died on 8th November 1674. He had been thrice married, and his first wife had left him within a month of her marriage, thereby occasioning the singular series of pamphlets on divorce, the theories of which, had she not returned, he had, it is said, intended to put into practice on his own responsibility. The general abstinence from all but the barest biographical outline which the scale of this book imposes is perhaps nowhere a greater gain than in the case of Milton. His personal character was, owing to political motives, long treated with excessive rigour. The reaction to Liberal politics early in the nineteenth century substituted for this rigour a somewhat excessive admiration, and even now the balance is hardly restored, as may be seen from the fact that a late biographer of his stigmatises his first wife, the unfortunate Mary Powell, as “a dull and common girl,” without a tittle of evidence except the bare fact of her difference with her husband, and some innuendoes

(indirect in themselves, and clearly tainted as testimony) in Milton's own divorce tracts. On the whole, Milton's character was not an amiable one, nor even wholly estimable. It is probable that he never in the course of his whole life did anything that he considered wrong; but unfortunately, examples are not far to seek of the facility with which desire can be made to con-found itself with deliberate approval. That he was an exacting, if not a tyrannical husband and father, that he held in the most peremptory and exaggerated fashion the doctrine of the superiority of man to woman, that his egotism in a man who had actually accomplished less would be half ludicrous and half disgusting, that his faculty of appreciation 'beyond his own immediate tastes and interests was small, that his intolerance surpassed that of an inquisitor, and that his controversial habits and manners outdid the license even of that period of controversial abuse,—these are propositions which I cannot conceive to be disputed by any competent critic aware of the facts. If they have ever been denied, it is merely from the amiable but uncritical point of view which blinks all a man's personal defects in consideration of his literary genius. That we cannot afford to do here, especially as Milton's personal defects had no small influence on his literary character. But having honestly set down his faults, let us now turn to the pleasanter side of the subject without fear of having to revert, except cursorily, to the uglier.

The same prejudice and partisanship, however, which have coloured the estimate of Milton's personal character have a little injured the literary estimate of him. It is agreed on all hands that Johnson's acute but unjust criticism was directed as much by political and religious prejudice as by the operation of narrow and mistaken rules of prosody and poetry; and all these causes worked together to produce that extraordinary verdict on *Lycidas*, which has been thought unintelligible. But it would be idle to contend that there is not nearly as much bias on the other side in the most glowing of his modern panegyrists—Macaulay and Landor. It is, no doubt, in regard to a champion so formidable,

both as ally and as enemy, difficult to write without fear or favour, but it must be attempted.

Milton's periods of literary production were three. In each of them he produced work of the highest literary merit, but at the same time singularly different in kind. In the first, covering the first thirty years of his life, he wrote no prose worth speaking of, but after juvenile efforts, and besides much Latin poetry of merit, produced the exquisite poems of *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*, the *Hymn on the Nativity*, the incomparable *Lycidas*, the *Comus* (which I have the audacity to think his greatest work, if scale and merit are considered), and the delicious fragments of the *Arcades*. Then his style abruptly changed, and for another twenty years he devoted himself chiefly to polemical pamphlets, relieved only by a few sonnets, whose strong originality and intensely personal savour are uniform, while their poetical merit varies greatly. The third period of fifteen years saw the composition of the great epics of *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained*, and of the tragedy of *Samson Agonistes*, together with at least the completion of a good deal of prose, including a curious *History of England*, wherein Milton expatiates with a singular gusto over details which he must have known, and indeed allows that he knew, to be fabulous. The production of each of these periods may be advantageously dealt with separately and in order.

Milton's Latin compositions both in prose and verse lie rather outside of our scope, though they afford a very interesting subject. It is perhaps sufficient to say that critics of such different times, tempers, and attitudes towards their subject as Johnson and the late Rector of Lincoln,—critics who agree in nothing except literary competence,—are practically at one as to the remarkable excellence of Milton's Latin verse at its best. It is little read now, but it is a pity that any one who can read Latin should allow himself to be ignorant of at least the beautiful *Epitaphium Damonis* on the poet's friend, Charles Diodati.

The dates of the few but exquisite poems of the first period are known with some but not complete exactness. Milton was

not an extremely precocious poet, and such early exercises as he has preserved deserve the description of being rather meritorious than remarkable. But in 1629, his year of discretion, he struck his own note first and firmly with the hymn on the "Nativity." Two years later the beautiful sonnet on his three-and-twentieth year followed. *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso* date not before, but probably not much after, 1632; *Comus* dating from 1634, and *Lycidas* from 1637. All these were written either in the later years at Cambridge, or in the period of independent study at Horton in Buckinghamshire—chiefly in the latter. Almost every line and word of these poems has been commented on and fought over, and I cannot undertake to summarise the criticism of others. Among the greater memorabilia of the subject is that wonderful Johnsonism, the description of *Lycidas* as "harsh, the rhymes uncertain, and the numbers unpleasing;" among the minor, the fact that critics have gravely quarrelled among themselves over the epithet "monumental" applied to the oak in *Il Penseroso*, when Spenser's "Builder Oak" (Milton was a passionate student of Spenser) would have given them the key at once, even if the same phrase had not occurred, as I believe it does, in Chaucer, also a favourite of Milton's. We have only space here for first-hand criticism.

This body of work, then, is marked by two qualities: an extraordinary degree of poetic merit, and a still more extraordinary originality of poetic kind. Although Milton is always Milton, it would be difficult to find in another writer five poems, or (taking the *Allegro* and its companion together) four, so different from each other and yet of such high merit. And it would be still more difficult to find poems so independent in their excellence. Neither the influence of Jonson nor the influence of Donne—the two poetical influences in the air at the time, and the latter especially strong at Cambridge—produced even the faintest effect on Milton. We know from his own words, and should have known even if he had not mentioned it, that Shakespeare and Spenser were his favourite studies in English; yet, save in mere scattered phrases.

none of these poems owes anything to either. He has teachers but no models; masters, but only in the way of learning how to do, not what to do. The "certain vital marks," of which he somewhat arrogantly speaks, are indeed there. I do not myself see them least in the poem on the "Nativity," which has been the least general favourite. It shows youth in a certain inequality, in a slight overdose of ornament, and especially in a very inartistic conclusion. But nowhere even in Milton does the mastery of harmonies appear better than in the exquisite rhythmical arrangement of the piece, in the almost unearthly beauty of the exordium, and in the famous stanzas beginning "The oracles are dumb." It must be remembered that at this time English lyric was in a very rudimentary and ill-organised condition. The exquisite snatches in the dramatists had been snatches merely; Spenser and his followers had chiefly confined themselves to elaborate stanzas of full length lines, and elsewhere the octo-syllabic couplet, or the quatrain, or the dangerous "eights and sixes," had been chiefly affected. The sestines and canzons and madrigals of the sonnet-eers, for all the beauty of their occasional flashes, have nothing like the gracious and sustained majesty of the "Nativity" piece. For technical perfection in lyric metre, that is not so much to be sung as said, this ode has no precedent rival. As for *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*, who shall praise them fitly? They are among the few things about which there is no difference of opinion, which are as delightful to childhood as to criticism, to youth as to age. To dwell on their technical excellences (the chief of which is the unerring precision with which the catalectic and acatalectic lines are arranged and interchanged) has a certain air of impertinence about it. Even a critical King Alfonso El Sabio could hardly think it possible that Milton might have taken a hint here, although some persons have, it seems, been disturbed because skyjarks do not come to the window, just as others are troubled because the flowers in *Lycidas* do not grow at the same time, and because they think they could see stars through the "starproof" trees of the *Arcades*.

The fragments of the masque just mentioned consist only of three songs and an address in rhymed couplets. Of the songs, those ending—

Such a rural queen,  
All Arcadia hath not seen,

are equal to anything that Milton has done; the first song and the address, especially the latter, do not fall far below them. But it is in *Comus* that, if I have any skill of criticism, Milton's poetical power is at its greatest height. Those who judge poetry on the ground of bulk, or of originality of theme, or of anything else extra-poetical,—much more those (the greater number) who simply vary transmitted ideas,—may be scandalised at this assertion, but that will hardly matter much. And indeed the indebtedness of *Comus* in point of subject (it is probably limited to the *Odyssey*, which is public property, and to George Peele's *Old Wives' Tale*, which gave little but a few hints of story) is scarcely greater than that of *Paradise Lost*; while the form of the drama, a kind nearly as venerable and majestic as that of the epic, is completely filled. And in *Comus* there is none of the stiffness, none of the *longueurs*, none of the almost ludicrous want of humour, which mar the larger poem. Humour indeed was what Milton always lacked; had he had it, Shakespere himself might hardly have been greater. The plan is not really more artificial than that of the epic; though in the latter case it is masked to us by the scale, by the grandeur of the personages, and by the familiarity of the images to all men who have been brought up on the Bible. The versification, as even Johnson says, is the versification of *Paradise Lost*, and to my fancy at any rate it has a spring, a variety, a sweep and rush of genius, which are but rarely present later. As for its beauty in parts, *quis vituperavit?* It is impossible to single out passages, for the whole is golden. The entering address of *Comus*, the song "Sweet Echo," the descriptive speech of the Spirit, and the magnificent eulogy of the "sun-clad power of chastity," would be the most beautiful things where all is beautiful, if the unapproachable "Sabrina fair" did not come later, and were not sustained

before and after, for nearly two hundred lines of pure nectar. If poetry could be taught by the reading of it, then indeed the critic's advice to a poet might be limited to this: "Give your days and nights to the reading of *Comus*."

The sole excuses for Johnson's amazing verdict on *Lycidas* are that it is not quite so uniformly good, and that in his strictures on its "rhyme" and "numbers" he was evidently speaking from the point of view at which the regular couplet is regarded as the *ne plus ultra* of poetry. There are indeed blotches in it. The speech of Peter, magnificently as it is introduced, and strangely as it has captivated some critics, who seem to think that anything attacking the Church of England must be poetry, is out of place, and in itself is obscure, pedantic, and grotesque. There is some over-classicism, and the scale of the piece does not admit the display of quite such sustained and varied power as in *Comus*. But what there is, is so exquisite that hardly can we find fault with Mr. Pattison's hyperbole when he called *Lycidas* the "high-water mark of English poetry." High-water mark even in the physical world is a variable limit. Shakespere constantly, and some other poets here and there in short passages go beyond Milton. But in the same space we shall nowhere find anything that can outgo the passage beginning "Alas what boots it," down to "head of thine," and the whole conclusion from "Return Alpheus." For melody of versification, for richness of images, for curious felicity of expression, these cannot be surpassed.

"But O the heavy change"—to use an irresistible quotation, the more irresistible that the change is foreshadowed in *Lycidas* itself—from the golden poetry of these early days to the prose of the pamphlets. It is not that Milton's literary faculty is less conspicuous here, or less interesting. There is no English prose before him, none save Taylor's and Browne's in his time, and absolutely none after him that can compare with the finest passages of these singular productions. The often quoted personal descriptions of his aims in life, his early literary studies, his views of poetry and so forth, are almost equal in the "other



harmony of prose" to *Comus* and *Lycidas*. The deservedly famous *Areopagitica* is full of the most splendid concerted pieces of prose-music, and hardly anywhere from the *Tractate of Reformation Touching Church Discipline* to the *History of Britain*, which he revised just before his death, is it possible to read a page without coming across phrases, passages, and even whole paragraphs, which are instinct with the most splendid life. But the difference between Milton's poetry and his prose is, that in verse he is constantly under the restraint (sometimes, in his later work especially, too much under the restraint) of the sense of style; while in his prose he seems to be wholly emancipated from it. Even in his finest passages he never seems to know or to care how a period is going to end. He piles clause on clause, links conjunction to conjunction, regardless of breath, or sense, or the most ordinary laws of grammar. The second sentence of his first prose work contains about four hundred words, and is broken in the course of them like a wounded snake. In his very highest flights he will suddenly drop to grotesque and bathos; and there is no more difficult task (*haud inexpertus loquor*) than the selection from Milton of any passage of length which shall not contain faults of which a modern schoolboy or gutter-journalist would be ashamed. Nor is the matter made much better by the consideration that it is not so much ignorance as temper which is the cause of this deformity. Lest it be thought that I speak harshly, let me quote from the late Mr. Mark Pattison, a strong sympathiser with Milton's politics, in complete agreement if not with his religious views, yet with his attitude towards dominant ecclesiasticism, and almost an idolater of him from the purely literary point of view. "In *Eikonoclastes*," Milton's reply to *Eikon Basilike*, Mr. Pattison says, and I do not care to attempt any improvement on the words, "Milton is worse than tedious: his reply is in a tone of rude railing and insolent swagger which would have been always unbecoming, but which at this moment was grossly indecent." Elsewhere (and again I have nothing to add) Mr. Pattison describes Milton's prose pamphlets as "a

plunge into the depths of vulgar scurrility and libel below the level of average gentility and education." But the Rector of Lincoln has not touched, or has touched very lightly, on the fault above noted, the profound lack of humour that these pamphlets display. Others have been as scurrilous, as libellous, as unfair; others have prostituted literary genius to the composition of paid lampoons; but some at least of them have been saved by the all-saving sense of humour. As any one who remembers the dreadful passage about the guis in *Paradise Lost* must know, the book of humour was to Milton a sealed book. He has flashes of wit, though not many; his indignation of itself sometimes makes him really sarcastic. But humorous he is never.

Destitute of this, the one saving grace of polemical literature, he plunged at the age of thirty-three into pamphlet writing. With a few exceptions his production in this kind may be thrown into four classes,—the *Areopagitica* and the *Letter to Hartlib* (much the best of the whole) standing outside. The first class attacks prelatical government, and by degrees glides, under the guise of apologetics for the famous *Smectymnuus*, into a fierce and indecent controversy with Bishop Hall, containing some of the worst examples of the author's deplorable inability to be jocular. Then comes the divorce series, which, with all its varied learning, is chiefly comic, owing to Milton's unfortunate blindness to the fact that he was trying to make a public question out of private grievances of the particular kind which most of all demand silence. Next rank the pieces composing the Apologia of regicide, the *Eikonoclastes*, the controversy with Salmasius (written in Latin), and the postscript thereto, devoted to the obscure Morus. And lastly come the pamphlets in which, with singular want of understanding of the course of events, Milton tried to argue Monk and the weary nation out of the purpose to shake off the heavy yoke of so-called liberty. The *History of Britain*, the very agreeable fragment on the *History of Muscovy*, the late *Treatise Against Popery*, in which the author holds out a kind of olive branch to the Church of England, in the very act of proclaiming his Arianism, and the

two little masterpieces already referred to, are independent of any such classification. Yet even in them sometimes, as always in the others, *furor arma ministrat*; and supplies them as badly as if he were supplying by contract.

Nevertheless both Milton's faults and his merits as a prose writer are of the most remarkable and interesting character. The former consist chiefly in the reckless haste with which he constructs (or rather altogether neglects the construction of) his periods and sentences, in an occasional confusion of those rules of Latin syntax which are only applicable to a fully inflected language with the rules necessary in a language so destitute of inflections as English, and in a lavish and sometimes both needless and tasteless adaptation of Latin words. All these were faults of the time, but it is true that they are faults which Milton, like his contemporaries Taylor and Browne, aggravated almost wilfully. Of the three Milton, owing no doubt to the fury which animated him, is by far the most faulty and uncritical. Taylor is the least remarkable of the three for classicisms either of syntax or vocabulary; and Browne's excesses in this respect are deliberate. Milton's are the effect of blind passion. Yet the passages which diversify and relieve his prose works are far more beautiful in their kind than anything to be found elsewhere in English prose. Though he never trespasses into purely poetical rhythm, the solemn music of his own best verse is paralleled in these; and the rugged and grandiose vocabulary (it is particularly characteristic of Milton that he mixes the extremest vernacular with the most exquisite and scholarly phrasing) is fused and moulded with an altogether extraordinary power. Nor can we notice less the abundance of striking phrase, now quaint, now grand, now forcible, which in short clauses and "jewels five words long" occurs constantly, even in the passages least artistically finished as wholes. There is no English prose author whose prose is so constantly racy with such a distinct and varied savour as Milton's. It is hardly possible to open him anywhere after the fashion of the *Sortes Virgilianæ* without lighting on a line

or a couple of lines, which for the special purpose it is impossible to improve. And it might be contended with some plausibility that this abundance of jewels, or purple patches, brings into rather unfair prominence the slips of grammar and taste, the inequalities of thought, the deplorable attempts to be funny, the rude outbursts of bargee invective, which also occur so numerously. One other peculiarity, or rather one result of these peculiarities, remains to be noticed; and that is that Milton's prose is essentially inimitable. It would be difficult even to caricature or to parody it; and to imitate it as his verse, at least his later verse, has been so often imitated, is simply impossible.

The third and, in popular estimation, the most important period of Milton's production was again poetical. The characteristics of the poetry of the three great works which illustrate it are admittedly uniform, though in *Samson Agonistes* they exhibit themselves in a harder, drier, more ossified form than in the two great epics. This relation is only a repetition of the relation between *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained* themselves on the one hand, and the poems of twenty years earlier, especially *Comus* and *Lycidas*, on the other. The wonderful Miltonic style, so artificial and yet such a triumph of art, is evident even so early as the ode on the "Nativity," and it merely developed its own characteristics up to the *Samson* of forty years later. That it is a real style and not merely a trick, like so many others, is best shown by the fact that it is very hard, if not impossible, to analyse it finally into elements. The common opinion charges Milton with Latinising heavily; and so he does. But we open *Paradise Lost* at random, and we find a dozen lines, and not the least beautiful (the Third Day of Creation), without a word in them that is not perfectly simple English, or if of Latin origin, naturalised long before Milton's time, while the syntax is also quite vernacular. Again it is commonly thought that the habits of antithesis and parallelism, of omission of articles, of reversing the position of adjectives and adverbs, are specially Miltonic. Certainly Milton often indulges in them; yet in the same way

the most random dipping will find passages (and any number of them) where no one of these habits is particularly or eminently present, and yet which every one would recognise as Miltonic. As far as it is possible to put the finger on one peculiarity which explains part of the secret of Milton's pre-eminence, I should myself select his unapproached care and felicity in building what may be called the verse-paragraph. The dangers of blank verse (Milton's preference for which over rhyme was only one of his numerous will-worships) are many; but the two greatest lie in easily understood directions. With the sense generally or frequently ending as the line ends (as may be seen in the early dramatists and in many bad poets since), it becomes intolerably stiff and monotonous. With the process of *enjambement* or overlapping, promiscuously and unskilfully indulged (the commonest fault during the last two centuries), it is apt to degenerate into a kind of metrical and barely metrical prose, distinguished from prose proper by less variety of cadence, and by an occasional awkward sacrifice of sense and natural arrangement to the restrictions which the writer accepts, but by which he knows not how to profit. Milton has avoided both these dangers by adhering to what I have ventured to call the verse-paragraph—that is to say, by arranging the divisions of his sense in divisions of verse, which, albeit identical and not different in their verse integers, are constructed with as much internal concerted variety as the stanzas or strophes of a so-called Pindaric ode. Of the apparently uniform and monotonous blank verse he has made an instrument of almost protean variety by availing himself of the infinite permutations of cadence, syllabic sound, variety of feet, and adjustment of sense to verse. The result is that he has, it may almost be said, made for himself out of simple blank verse all the conveniences of the line, the couplet, and the stanza, punctuating and dividing by cadence, not rhyme. No device that is possible within his limits—even to that most dangerous one of the pause after the first syllable of a line which has “enjambéd” from the previous one—is strange to him, or sparingly used by

him, or used without success. And it is only necessary to contrast his verse with the blank verse of the next century, especially in its two chief examples, Thomson and Young,—great verse-smiths both of them,—to observe his superiority in art. These two, especially Thomson, try the verse-paragraph system, but they do it ostentatiously and clumsily. Thomson's trick of ending such paragraphs with such lines as "And Thule bellows through her utmost isles," often repeated with only verbal substitutions, is apt to make the reader think with a smile of the breath of relief which a man draws after a serious effort. "Thank heaven that paragraph's done!" the poet seems to be saying. Nothing of the kind is ever to be found in Milton. It is only on examination that the completeness of these divisions is perceived. They are linked one to another with the same incomparably artful concealment of art which links their several and internal clauses. And thus it is that Milton is able to carry his readers through (taking both poems together) sixteen books of epic, without much narrative interest, with foregone conclusions, with long passages which are merely versifications of well-known themes, and with others which the most favourable critics admit to be, if not exactly dull, yet certainly not lively. Something the same may be said of *Samson*, though here a decided stiffening and mannerising of the verse is to some extent compensated by the pathetic and human interest of the story. It is to be observed, however, that Milton has here abused the redundant syllable (the chief purely poetical mistake of which he has been guilty in any part of his work, and which is partly noticeable in *Comus*), and that his choric odes are but dry sticks in comparison with *Lycidas*.

It may be thought strange that I should say little or nothing of the subject of these immortal poems. But, in the first place, those critics of poetry who tell us that "all depends on the subject" seem to forget that, according to this singular dictum, there is no difference between poetry and prose—between an epic and a blue-book. I prefer—having been brought up at the feet of Logic—to stick to the genus and differentia of poetry, and not to

its accidents. Moreover, the matter of *Paradise Lost* and its sequel is so universally known that it becomes unnecessary, and has been so much discussed that it seems superfluous, to rediscuss it. The inquiries into Milton's indebtedness to forerunners strike me as among the idlest inquiries of the kind—which is saying a great deal. Italians, Frenchmen, Dutchmen, Englishmen even, had doubtless treated the Creation and the Fall, Adam and Satan, before him. Perhaps he read them; perhaps he borrowed from them. What then? Does any one believe that Andreini or Vondel, Sylvester or Du Bartas, could have written, or did in any measurable degree contribute to the writing of *Paradise Lost*? If he does he must be left to his opinion.

Reference may perhaps be made to some remarks in Chapter IV. on the comparative position of Milton in English poetry with the only two writers who can be compared to him, if bulk and majesty of work be taken into consideration, and not merely occasional bursts of poetry. Of his own poetical powers I trust that I shall not be considered a niggard admirer, because, both in the character of its subject (if we are to consider subjects at all) and in its employment of rhyme, that greatest mechanical aid of the poet, *The Faërie Queene* seems to me greater, or because Milton's own earlier work seems to me to rank higher than *Paradise Lost*. The general opinion is, of course, different; and one critic of no mean repute, Christopher North, has argued that *Paradise Lost* is the only "great poem" in existence. That question need not be argued here. It is sufficient to say that Milton is undoubtedly one of the few great poets in the history of the world, and that if he falls short of Homer, Dante, and Shakespere, it is chiefly because he expresses less of that humanity, both universal and quintessential, which they, and especially the last, put into verse. Narrowness is his fault. But the intense individuality which often accompanies narrowness is his great virtue—a virtue which no poet, which no writer either in verse or prose has ever had in greater measure than he, and

which hardly any has been able to express with more varied and exquisite harmony.

Jeremy Taylor, the ornament and glory of the English pulpit, was born at Cambridge in 1613. He was the son of a barber, but was well educated, and was able to enter Caius College as a sizar at thirteen. He spent seven years there, and took both degrees and orders at an unusually early age. Apparently, however, no solid endowment was offered him in his own university, and he owed such preferment as he had (it was never very great) to a chance opportunity of preaching at St. Paul's and a recommendation to Laud. That prelate—to whom all the infinite malignity of political and sectarian detraction has not been able to deny the title of an encourager, as few men have encouraged them, of learning and piety—took Taylor under his protection, made him his chaplain, and procured him incorporation at Oxford, a fellowship at All Souls, and finally the rectory of Uppingham. To this Taylor was appointed in 1638, and next year he married a lady who bore him several sons, but died young. Taylor early joined the king at Oxford, and is supposed to have followed his fortunes in the field; it is certain that his rectory, lying in a Puritan district, was very soon sequestrated, though not by any form of law. What took him into Wales and caused him to marry his second wife, Joanna Brydges (an heiress on a small scale, and said to have been a natural daughter of Charles I.), is not known. But he sojourned in the principality during the greater part of the Commonwealth period, and was much patronised by the Earl of Carbery, who, while resident at Golden Grove, made him his chaplain. He also made the acquaintance of other persons of interest, the chief of whom were, in London (which he visited not always of his own choice, for he was more than once imprisoned), John Evelyn, and in Wales, Mrs. Katherine Philips, "the matchless Orinda," to whom he dedicated one of the most interesting of his minor works, the *Measure and Offices of Friendship*. Not long before the Restoration he was offered, and strongly pressed to accept, the post of lecturer at



Lisburn, in Ireland. He does not seem to have taken at all kindly to the notion, but was over-persuaded, and crossed the Channel. It was perhaps owing to this false step that, when the Restoration arrived, the preferment which he had in so many ways merited only came to him in the tents of Kedar. He was made Bishop of Down and Connor, held that see for seven years, and died (after much wrestling with Ulster Presbyterians and some domestic misfortune) of fever in 1667.

His work is voluminous and always interesting; but only a small part of it concerns us directly here, as exhibiting him at his best and most peculiar in the management of English prose. He wrote, it should be said, a few verses by no means destitute of merit, but they are so few, in comparison to the bulk of his work, that they may be neglected. Taylor's strong point was not accuracy of statement or logical precision. His longest work, the *Ductor Dubitantium*, an elaborate manual of casuistry, is constantly marred by the author's inability to fix on a single point, and to keep his argumentation close to that. In another, the *Unum Necessarium*, or Discourse on Repentance, his looseness of statement and want of care in driving several horses at once, involved him in a charge of Pelagianism, or something like it, which he wrote much to disprove, but which has so far lasted as to justify modern theologians in regarding his ideas on this and other theological points as, to say the least, confused. All over his work inexact quotation from memory, illicit argumentation, and an abiding inconsistency, mar the intellectual value, affecting not least his famous *Liberty of Prophesying*, or plea for toleration against the new Presbyterian uniformity,—the conformity of which treatise with modern ideas has perhaps made some persons slow to recognise its faults. These shortcomings, however, are not more constant in Taylor's work than his genuine piety, his fervent charity, his freedom from personal arrogance and pretentiousness, and his ardent love for souls; while neither shortcomings nor virtues of this kind concern us here so much as the extraordinary rhetorical merits which distinguish all his work more or

less, and which are chiefly noticeable in his *Sermons*, especially the Golden Grove course, and the funeral sermon on Lady Carbery, in his *Contemplations of the State of Man*, and in parts of his *Life of Christ*, and of the universally popular and admirable tractates on *Holy Living* and *Holy Dying*.

Jeremy Taylor's style is emphatically and before all things florid and ornate. It is not so elaborately quaint as Browne's; it is not so stiffly splendid as Milton's; it is distinguished from both by a much less admixture of Latinisms; but it is impossible to call it either verbally chastened or syntactically correct. Coleridge—an authority always to be differed with cautiously and under protest—holds indeed a different opinion. He will have it that Browne was the corruptor, though a corruptor of the greatest genius, in point of vocabulary, and that, as far as syntax is concerned, in Jeremy Taylor the sentences are often extremely long, and yet are generally so perspicuous in consequence of their logical structure that they require no reperusal to be understood. And he will have the same to be true not only of Hooker (which may pass), but of Milton, in reference to whom admirers not less strong than Coleridge hold that he sometimes forgets the period altogether.

It must be remembered that Coleridge in these remarks was fighting the battle of the recoverers of our great seventeenth century writers against the devotees of "correctness," and that in the very same context he makes the unpardonable assertion that Gibbon's manner is "the worst of all," and that Tacitus "writes in falsetto as compared to Tully." This is to "fight a prize" in the old phrase, not to judge from the catholic and universal standpoint of impartial criticism; and in order to reduce Coleridge's assertions to that standard we must abate nearly as much from his praise of Taylor as from his abuse of Gibbon—an abuse, by the way, which is strangely contrasted with praise of "Junius." It is not true that, except by great complaisance of the reader, Jeremy Taylor's long sentences are at once understandable. They may, of course, and generally can be understood *kata to semaino*

*menon*, as a telegram with half the words left out may at the other end of the scale be understood. But they constantly withstand even a generous parser, even one who is to the fullest extent ready to allow for idiom and individuality. They abuse in particular the conjunction to a most enormous extent—coupling by its means propositions which have no logical connection, which start entirely different trains of thought, and which are only united because carelessness and fashion combined made it unnecessary for the writer to take the little extra trouble necessary for their separation. Taylor will, in the very middle of his finest passages, and with hardly so much as a comma's break, change *oratio obliqua* to *oratio recta*, interrupt the sequence of tenses, make his verbs agree with the nearest noun, irrespective of the connection, and in short, though he was, while in Wales, a schoolmaster for some time, and author of a grammatical treatise, will break Priscian's head with the calmest unconcern. It is quite true that these faults mainly occur in his more rhetorical passages, in his exercises rather of spoken than of written prose. But that, as any critic who is not an advocate must see, is no palliation. The real palliation is that the time had not yet aroused itself to the consciousness of the fact that letting English grammar at one moment go to the winds altogether, and at the next subjecting it to the most inappropriate rules and licenses of Latin, was not the way to secure the establishment of an accomplished and generally useful English prose. No stranger instance of prejudice can be given than that Coleridge, on the point of asking, and justly, from Dryden "a stricter grammar," should exalt to the skies a writer compared to whom Dryden is grammatically impeccable.

But a recognition of the fact that Taylor distinctly belongs to the antinomians of English prose, or at least to those guiltless heathens who lived before the laws of it had been asserted, can not in any competent critic dull the sense of the wonderful beauty of his style. It has been said that this beauty is entirely of the florid and ornate order, lending itself in this way easily enough to

the witty and well-worded, though unjust and ungenerous censure which South pronounced on it after the author's death. It may or may not be that the phrases there censured, "The fringes of the north star," and "The dew of angels' wings," and "Thus have I seen a cloud roiling in its airy mansion," are not of that "apostolic plainness" that a Christian minister's speech should have. But they and their likes are extremely beautiful—save that in literature no less than in theology South has justly perstringed Taylor's constant and most unworthy affectation of introducing a simile by "so I have seen." In the next age the phrase was tediously abused, and in the age after, and ever since, it became and has remained mere burlesque; but it was never good; and in the two fine specimen passages which follow it is a distinct blot:—

*The Prayers of Anger and of Lust.*

"Prayer is the peace of our spirit, the stillness of our thoughts, the evenness of recollection, the seat of meditation, the rest of our cares, and the calm of our tempest. Prayer is the issue of a quiet mind, of untroubled thoughts; it is the daughter of charity and the sister of meekness; and he that prays to God with an angry—that is a troubled and discomposed—spirit, is like him that retires into a battle to meditate and sets up his closet in the outquarters of an army, and chooses a frontier garrison to be wise in. Anger is a perfect alienation of the mind from prayer, and therefore is contrary to that attention which presents our prayers in a right line to God. For so have I seen a lark rising from his bed of grass, soaring upwards and singing as he rises and hopes to get to Heaven and climb above the clouds; but the poor bird was beaten back with the loud sighings of an eastern wind and his motion made irregular and inconstant, descending more at every breath of the tempest than it could recover by the vibration and frequent weighing of his wings; till the little creature was forced to sit down and pant and stay till the storm was over; and then it made a prosperous flight and did rise and sing as if it had learned music and motion from an angel as he passed sometimes through the air about his ministries here below. So is the prayer of a good man: when his affairs have required business, and his business was matter of discipline, and his discipline was to pass upon a sinning person, or had a design of charity, his duty met with infirmities of a man and anger was its instrument, and the instrument became stronger than the prime agent and raised a tempest and overruled the man; and then his prayer was broken and his thoughts troubled.

. . . . .

“For so an impure vapour—begotten of the slime of the earth by the fevers and adulterous heats of an intemperate summer sun, striving by the ladder of a mountain to climb to heaven and rolling into various figures by an uneasy, unfixed revolution, and stopped at the middle region of the air, being thrown from his pride and attempt of passing towards the seat of the stars—turns into an unwholesome flame and, like the breath of hell, is confined into a prison of darkness and a cloud, till it breaks into diseases, plagues and mildews, stinks and blastings. So is the prayer of an unchaste person. It strives to climb the battlements of heaven, but because it is a flame of sulphur salt and bitumen, and was kindled in the dishonourable regions below, derived from Hell and contrary to God, it cannot pass forth to the element of love; but ends in barrenness and murmurs, fantastic expectations and trifling imaginative confidences; and they at last end in sorrows and despair.”

Indeed, like all very florid writers, Taylor is liable to eclipses of taste; yet both the wording of his flights and the occasion of them (they are to be found *passim* in the *Sermons*) are almost wholly admirable. It is always a great and universal idea—never a mere conceit—that fires him. The shortness and dangers of life, the weakness of children, the fragility of women's beauty and men's strength, the change of the seasons, the vicissitudes of empires, the impossibility of satisfying desire, the disgust which follows satiety—these are, if any one chooses, commonplace enough; yet it is the observation of all who have carefully studied literature, and the experience of all who have observed their own thoughts, that it is always in relation to these commonplaces that the most beautiful expressions and the noblest sentiments arise. The uncommon thought is too likely if not too certain to be an uncommon conceit, and if not worthless, yet of inferior worth. Among prose writers Taylor is unequalled for his touches of this universal material, for the genius with which he makes the common uncommon. For instance, he has the supreme faculty of always making the verbal and the intellectual presentation of the thought alike beautiful, of appealing to the ear and the mind at the same time, of never depriving the apple of gold of its picture of silver. Yet for all this the charge of over-elaboration which may justly be brought against Browne very rarely hits Taylor. He seldom or never has the appearance which ornate writers of all times, and of

his own more especially, so often have, of going back on a thought or a phrase to try to better it—of being stimulated by actual or fancied applause to cap the climax. His most beautiful passages come quite suddenly and naturally as the subject requires and as the thought strikes light in his mind. Nor are they ever, as Milton's so often are, marred by a descent as rapid as their rise. He is never below a certain decent level; he may return to earth from heaven, but he goes no lower, and reaches even his lower level by a quiet and equable sinking. As has been fully allowed, he has grave defects, the defects of his time. But from some of these he was conspicuously free, and on the whole no one in English prose (unless it be his successor here) has so much command of the enchanter's wand as Jeremy Taylor.

Sir Thomas Browne was born in the heart of London in 1605, his father (of whom little is known except one or two anecdotes corresponding with the character of the son) having been a merchant of some property, and claiming descent from a good family in Cheshire. This father died when he was quite young, and Browne is said to have been cheated by his guardians; but he was evidently at all times of his life in easy circumstances, and seems to have had no complaint to make of his stepfather, Sir Thomas Dutton. This stepfather may at least possibly have been the hero of the duel with Sir Hatton Cheeke, which Mr. Carlyle has made famous. With him Browne visited Ireland, having previously been brought up at Winchester and at Broadgates Hall, which became, during his own residence, Pembroke College, at Oxford. Later he made the usual grand tour. Then he took medical degrees; practised it is said, though on no very precise evidence, both in Oxfordshire and Yorkshire; settled, why is not known, at Norwich; married in 1641 Dorothy Mileham, a lady of good family in his adopted county; was a steady Royalist through the troubles; acquired a great name for medical and scientific knowledge, though he was not a Fellow of the Royal Society; was knighted by Charles II. in 1662, and died in 1682. His first literary appearance had been made forty years earlier in

a way very common in French literary history, but so uncommon in English as to have drawn from Johnson a rather unwontedly illiberal sneer. At a time unknown, but by his own account before his thirtieth year (therefore before 1635), Browne had written the *Religio Medici*. It was, according to the habit of the time, copied and handed about in MS. (there exist now five MS. copies showing remarkable differences with each other and the printed copies), and in 1642 it got into print. A copy was sent by Lord Dorset to the famous Sir Kenelm Digby, then under confinement for his opinions, and the husband of Venetia wrote certain not very forcible and not wholly complimentary remarks which, as Browne was informed, were at once put to press. A correspondence ensued, and Browne published an authorised copy, in which perhaps a little "economy" might be noticed. The book made an extraordinary impression, and was widely translated and commented on in foreign languages, though its vogue was purely due to its intrinsic merits, and not at all to the circumstances which enabled Milton (rather arrogantly and not with absolute truth) to boast that "Europe rang from side to side" with his defence of the execution of Charles I. Four years later, in 1646, Browne published his largest and in every sense most popular book, the *Pseudodoxia Epidemica* or *Enquiry into Vulgar Errors*. Twelve more years passed before the greatest, from a literary point of view, of his works, the *Hydriotaphia* or *Urn-Burial*,—a magnificent descant on the vanity of human life, based on the discovery of certain cinerary urns in Norfolk,—appeared, in company with the quaint *Garden of Cyrus*, a half-learned, half-fanciful discussion of the mysteries of the quincunx and the number five. Nor did he publish anything more himself; but two collections of posthumous works were issued after his death, the most important item of which is the *Christian Morals*, and the total has been swelled since by extracts from his MSS., which at the death of his grandson and namesake in 1710 were sold by auction. Most fortunately they were nearly all bought by Sir Hens Sloane, and are to this day in the British

Museum. Browne's good luck in this respect was completed by the devotion of his editor, Simon Wilkin, a Norwich bookseller of gentle blood and good education, who produced (1835) after twelve years' labour of love what Southey has justly called the best edited book in the English language. Not to mention other editions, the *Religio Medici*, which exhibits, owing to its history, an unusual variation of text, has been, together with the *Christian Morals*, separately edited with great minuteness by Dr. Greenhill. Nor is it unimportant to notice that Johnson, during his period of literary hack-work, also edited Sir Thomas Browne, and wrote what Wilkin's good taste has permitted to be still the standard text of his Life.

The work of this country doctor is, for personal savour, for strangeness, and for delight, one of the most notable things in English literature. It is not of extraordinary voluminousness, for though swollen in Wilkin's edition by abundant editorial matter, it fills but three of the well-known volumes of Bohn's series, and, printed by itself, it might not much exceed two ordinary library octavos; but in character and interest it yields to the work of no other English prose writer. It may be divided, from our point of view, into two unequal parts, the smaller of which is in truth of the greater interest. The *Vulgar Errors*, those of the smaller tracts which deal with subjects of natural history (as most of them do), many of the commonplace book entries, the greater part of the *Garden of Cyrus*, and most of the *Letters*, are mainly distinguished by an interest of matter constantly increased, it is true, by the display of the author's racy personality, and diversified here and there by passages also displaying his style to the full, but in general character not differing from the works of other curious writers in the delightful period which passed between the childish credulity of mediæval and classical physics and the arid analysis of the modern "scientist." Sir Thomas Browne was of a certain natural scepticism of temperament (a scepticism which, as displayed in relation to other matters in the *Religio Medici*, very unjustly



brought upon him the reproach of religious unorthodoxy); he was a trained and indefatigable observer of facts, and he was by no means prepared to receive authority as final in any extra-religious matters. But he had a thoroughly literary, not to say poetical idiosyncrasy; he was both by nature and education disposed to seek for something more than that physical explanation which, as the greatest of all anti-supernatural philosophers has observed, merely pushes ignorance a little farther back; and he was possessed of an extraordinary fertility of imagination which made comment, analogy, and amplification both easy and delightful to him. He was, therefore, much more disposed—except in the face of absolutely conclusive evidence—to rationalise than to deny a vulgar error, to bring explanations and saving clauses to its aid, than to cut it adrift utterly. In this part of his work his distinguishing graces and peculiarities of style appear but sparingly and not eminently. In the other division, consisting of the *Religio Medici*, the *Urn-Burial*, the *Christian Morals*, and the *Letter to a Friend*, his strictly literary peculiarities, as being less hampered by the exposition of matter, have freer scope; and it must be recollected that these literary peculiarities, independently of their own interest, have been a main influence in determining the style of two of the most remarkable writers of English prose in the two centuries immediately succeeding Browne. It has been said that Johnson edited him somewhat early; and all the best authorities are in accord that the Johnsonian Latinisms, differently managed as they are, are in all probability due more to the following—if only to the unconscious following—of Browne than to anything else. The second instance is more indubitable still and more happy. It detracts nothing from the unique charm of “*Elia*,” and it will be most clearly recognised by those who know “*Elia*” best, that Lamb constantly borrows from Browne, that the mould and shape of his most characteristic phrases is frequently suggested directly by Sir Thomas, and that though there seldom can have been a follower who put more of his own in his following, it may be pronounced with confidence, “no Browne, no

Lamb," at least in the forms in which we know the author of "Elia" best, and in which all those who know him best, though they may love him always, love him most. Yet Browne is not a very easy author to "sample." A few splendid sustained passages, like the famous one in the *Urn-Burial*, are universally known, but he is best in flashes. The following, from the *Christian Morals*, is characteristic enough:—

"Punish not thyself with pleasure; glut not thy sense with palative delights; nor revenge the contempt of temperance by the penalty of satiety. Were there an age of delight or any pleasure durable, who would not honour Volupta? but the race of delight is short, and pleasures have mutable faces. The pleasures of one age are not pleasures in another, and their lives fall short of our own. Even in our sensual days the strength of delight is in its seldomeness or rarity, and sting in its satiety: mediocrity is its life, and immoderacy its confusion. The luxurious emperors of old inconsiderately satiated themselves with the dainties of sea and land till, wearied through all varieties, their refectations became a study with them, and they were fain to feed by invention: novices in true epicurism! which by mediocrity, paucity, quick and healthful appetite, makes delights smartly acceptable; whereby Epicurus himself found Jupiter's brain in a piece of Cytheridian cheese, and the tongues of nightingales in a dish of onions. Hereby healthful and temperate poverty hath the start of nauseating luxury; unto whose clear and naked appetite every meal is a feast, and in one single dish the first course of Metellus; who are cheaply hungry, and never lose their hunger, or advantage of a craving appetite, because obvious food contents it; while Nero, half famish'd, could not feed upon a piece of bread, and, lingering after his snowed water, hardly got down an ordinary cup of *Calda*. By such circumscriptions of pleasure the contemned philosophers reserved unto themselves the secret of delight, which the Helluos of those days lost in their exorbitances. In vain we study delight: it is at the command of every sober mind, and in every sense born with us; but Nature, who teacheth us the rule of pleasure, instructeth also in the bounds thereof and where its line expireth. And therefore temperate minds, not pressing their pleasures until the sting appeareth, enjoy their contentations contentedly and without regret, and so escape the folly of excess, to be pleased unto displacency."

"Bring candid eyes unto the perusal of men's works, and let not Zoilism or detraction blast well-intended labours. He that endureth no faults in men's writings must only read his own, wherein for the most part all appeareth white. Quotation mistakes, inadvertency, expedition and human lapses, may make not only moles but warts in learned authors, who notwithstanding, being judged by

the capital matter, admit not of disparagement. I should unwillingly affirm that Cicero was but slightly versed in Homer, because in his work *De Gloria* he ascribed those verses unto Ajax which were delivered by Hector. What if Plautus, in the account of Hercules, mistaketh nativity for conception? Who would have mean thoughts of Apollinaris Sidonius, who seems to mistake the river Tigris for Euphrates; and, though a good historian and learned Bishop of Auvergne, had the misfortune, to be out in the story of David, making mention of him when the ark was sent back by the Philistines upon a cart, which was before his time? Though I have no great opinion of Machiavel's learning, yet I shall not presently say that he was but a novice in Roman History, because he was mistaken in placing Commodus after the Emperor Severus. Capital truths are to be narrowly eyed, collateral lapses and circumstantial deliveries not to be too strictly sifted. And if the substantial subject be well forged out, we need not examine the sparks which irregularly fly from it."

Coleridge, as we have seen, charges Browne with corrupting the style of the great age. The charge is not just in regard to either of the two great faults which are urged against the style, strictly speaking; while it is hardly just in reference to a minor charge which is brought against what is not quite style, namely, the selection and treatment of the thought. The two charges first referred to are Latinising of vocabulary and disorderly syntax of sentence. In regard to the first, Browne Latinises somewhat more than Jeremy Taylor, hardly at all more than Milton, though he does not, like Milton, contrast and relieve his Latinisms by indulgence in vernacular terms of the most idiomatic kind; and he is conspicuously free from the great fault both of Milton and of Taylor—the clumsy conglomeration of clauses which turns a sentence into a paragraph, and makes a badly ordered paragraph of it after all. Browne's sentences, especially those of the books regularly prepared for the press by him, are by no means long and are usually very perspicuous, being separable in some cases into shorter sentences by a mere mechanical repunctuation which, if tried on Taylor or Milton, would make nonsense. To say that they are sometimes longer than they should be, and often awkwardly co-ordinated, is merely to say that he wrote when he wrote; but he by no means sins beyond his fellows. In regard to Latinisms his case is not so good. He constantly uses such

words as "clarity" for "clearness," "ferity" for "fierceness" or "wildness," when nothing is gained by the exotic form. Dr. Greenhill's useful glossary to the *Religio* and the *Morals* exhibits in tabular form not merely such terms as "abbreviatures," "æquilibrium," "bivious," "convincible," "exantlation," and hundreds of others with which there is no need to fill the page, but also a number only less considerable of those far more objectionable usages which take a word generally understood in one sense (as, for instance, "equable," "gratitudes," and many others), and by twisting or translation of its classical equivalents and etymons give it some quite new sense in English. It is true that in some case the usual sense was not then firmly established, but Browne can hardly be acquitted of wilfully preferring the obscurer.

Yet this hybrid and bizarre vocabulary is so admirably married to the substance of the writing that no one of taste can find fault with it. For Browne (to come to the third point mentioned above), though he never descends or diverges—whichever word may be preferred—to the extravagant and occasionally puerile conceits which even such writers as Fuller and Glanville cannot resist, has a quaintness at least equal to theirs. In no great writer is the unforeseen so constantly happening. Every one who has written on him has quoted the famous termination of the *Garden of Cyrus*, where he determines that it is time to go to bed, because "to keep our eyes open longer were but to act our antipodes. The huntsmen are up in America, and they are already past their first sleep in Persia." A fancy so whimsical as this, and yet so admirable in its whimsies, requires a style in accordance; and the very sentence quoted, though one of the plainest of Browne's, and showing clearly that he does not always abuse Latinising, would hardly be what it is without the word "antipodes." So again in the *Christian Morals*, "Be not stoically mistaken in the quality of sins, nor commutatively iniquitous in the valuation of transgressions." No expression so terse and yet so striking could dispense with the classicism and the catachresis

of "stoically." And so it is everywhere with Browne. His manner is exactly proportioned to his matter; his exotic and unfamiliar vocabulary to the strangeness and novelty of his thoughts. He can never be really popular; but for the meditative reading of instructed persons he is perhaps the most delightful of English prosemen.

There are probably few English writers in regard to whom the judgment of critics, usually ranked as competent, has varied more than in regard to Edward Hyde, Earl of Clarendon. To some extent this is easily intelligible to any one who, with some equipment, reads any considerable quantity of his work; but it would be idle to pretend that the great stumbling-block of all criticism—the attention to matter rather than to form—has had nothing to do with it. Clarendon, at first not a very zealous Royalist, was the only man of decided literary genius who, with contemporary knowledge, wrote the history of the great debate between king and commonwealth. The effect of his history in deciding the question on the Royalist side was felt in England for more than a century; and since popular judgment has somewhat veered round to the other side, its chief exponents have found it necessary either to say as little as possible about Clarendon or to depreciate him. His interesting political history cannot be detailed here. Of a good Cheshire family, but not originally wealthy, he was educated as a lawyer, was early adopted into the "tribe of Ben," and was among the first to take advantage of the opening which the disputes between king and parliament gave to men of his birth, education, and gifts. At first he was a moderate opponent of the king's attempts to dispense with parliament; but the growing evidence that the House of Commons was seeking to increase its own constitutional power at the expense of the prerogative, and especially the anti-Church tendencies of the parliamentary leaders, converted him at first into a moderate and then into a strong Royalist. One of the chief of the king's constitutional advisers, he was after the Restoration the most distinguished by far of those Cavaliers who had parliamentary and

constitutional experience ; and with the title and office of Chancellor, he exercised a practical premiership during the first seven years of the Restoration. But ill-fortune, and it must be confessed some unwisdom, marked his government. He has been often and truly said to have been a statesman of Elizabeth, born three-quarters of a century too late. He was thought by the public to be arbitrary, a courtier, and even to some extent corrupt. He seemed to the king to be a tiresome formalist and censor, who was only scrupulous in resisting the royal will. So he was impeached ; and, being compelled to quit the kingdom, spent the last seven years of his life in France. His great works, begun during his first exile and completed during his second, are the *History of the Rebellion* and his own *Life*, the former being by much the more important though the latter (divided into a "Life" and a "Continuation," the last of which starts from the Restoration) contains much interesting and important biographical and historical matter. The text of these works was conveyed by his heirs to the University of Oxford, and long remained an exception to the general rule of the terminableness of copyright.

Clarendon is a very striking example of the hackneyed remark, that in some cases at any rate men's merits are their own and their faults those of their time. His literary merits are, looked at by themselves, of nearly the highest kind. He is certainly the best English writer (and may challenge any foreigner without much fear of the result) in the great, difficult, and now almost lost art of character- (or, as it was called in his time, portrait-) drawing—that is to say, sketching in words the physical, moral, and mental, but especially the moral and mental, peculiarities of a given person. Not a few of these characters of his are among the well-known "beauties" justified in selection by the endorsement of half a dozen generations. They are all full of life ; and even where it may be thought that prejudice has had something to do with the picture, still the subject lives, and is not a mere bundle of contradictory or even of superficially compatible char-

acteristics. Secondly, Clarendon is at his best an incomparable narrator. Many of his battles, though related with apparent coolness, and without the slightest attempt to be picturesque, may rank as works of art with his portraits, just as the portraits and battle pieces of a great painter may rank together. The sober vivid touches, the little bits of what the French call *reportage* or mere reproduction of the actual words and deeds of the personages, the elaborate and carefully-concealed art of the composition, all deserve the highest praise. Here, for instance, is a fair average passage, showing Clarendon's masterly skill in summary narration and his equally masterly, though, as some hold, rather unscrupulous faculty of insinuating depreciation :—

“ Since there will be often occasion to mention this gentleman, Sir Richard Granvil, in the ensuing discourse, and because many men believed that he was hardly dealt with in the next year, where all the proceedings will be set down at large, it will not be unfit in this place to say somewhat of him, and of the manner and merit of his entering into the king's service some months before the time we are now upon. He was of a very ancient and worthy family in Cornwall which had in several ages produced men of great courage, and very signal in their fidelity to and service of the crown ; and was himself younger brother (though in his nature or humour not of kin to him) to the brave Sir Basil Granvil who so courageously lost his life at the battle of Lansdowne. Being a younger brother and a very young man, he went into the Low Countries to learn the profession of a soldier ; to which he had devoted himself under the greatest general of that age, Prince Maurice, and in the regiment of my Lord Vere, who was general of all the English. In that service he was looked upon as a man of courage and a diligent officer, in the quality of a captain, to which he attained after four years' service. About this time, in the end of the reign of King James, the war broke out between England and Spain ; and in the expedition to Cadiz this gentleman served as a major to a regiment of foot, and continued in the same command in the war that shortly after followed against France ; and at the Isle of Rhé insinuated himself into the very good graces of the Duke of Buckingham, who was the general in that mission ; and after the unfortunate retreat from thence was made colonel of a regiment with general approbation and as an officer that well deserved it.

“ His credit increased every day with the duke : who, out of the generosity of his nature, as a most generous person he was, resolved to raise his fortune ; towards the beginning of which, by his countenance and solicitation, he prevailed with a rich widow to marry him, who had been a lady of extraordinary

beauty, which she had not yet outlived ; and though she had no great dower by her husband, a younger brother of the Earl of Suffolk, yet she inherited a fair fortune of her own near Plymouth, and was besides very rich in a personal estate, and was looked upon as the richest marriage of the West. This lady, by the duke's credit, Sir Richard Granvil (for he was now made a knight and baronet) obtained, and was thereby possessed of a plentiful estate upon the borders of his own country, and where his own family had great credit and authority. The war being now at an end and he deprived of his great patron, [he] had nothing to depend upon but the fortune of his wife : which, though ample enough to have supported the expense a person of his quality ought to have made, was not large enough to satisfy his vanity and ambition, nor so great as he upon common reports had possessed himself by her. By being not enough pleased with her fortune he grew displeased with his wife, who, being a woman of a haughty and imperious nature and of a wit superior to his, quickly resented the disrespect she received from him and in no respect studied to make herself easy to him. After some years spent together in those domestic unsociable contestations, in which he possessed himself of all her estate as the sole master of it, without allowing her out of her own any competency for herself, and indulged to himself all those licenses in her own house which to women are most grievous, she found means to withdraw herself from him ; and was with all kindness received into that family in which she had before been married and was always very much respected."

To superficial observers, or observers who have convinced themselves that high lights and bright colourings are of the essence of the art of the prose writer, Clarendon may seem tame and jejune. He is in reality just the contrary. His wood is tough enough and close-grained enough, but there is plenty of sap coursing through it. In yet a third respect, which is less closely connected with the purely formal aspect of style, Clarendon stands, if not pre-eminent, very high among historians. This is his union of acute penetration and vigorous grasp in the treatment of complicated events. It has been hinted that he seems to have somewhat lost grasp, if not penetration, after the Restoration. But at the time of his earlier participation in public affairs, and of his composition of the greater part of his historical writings, he was in the very vigour and prime of life ; and though it may be that he was "a Janus of one face," and looked rather backward than forward, even then



he was profoundly acquainted with the facts of English history, with the character of his countrymen, and with the relations of events as they happened. It may even be contended by those who care for might-have-beens, that but for the headlong revolt against Puritanism, which inspired the majority of the nation with a kind of carnival madness for many years after 1660, and the strange deficiency of statesmen of even moderately respectable character on both sides (except Clarendon himself, and the fairly upright though time-serving Temple, there is hardly a respectable man to be found on any side of politics for forty years), Clarendon's post-Restoration policy itself would not have been the failure that it was. But it is certain that on the events of his own middle age he looked with the keenest discernment, and with the widest comprehension.

Against these great merits must be set a treble portion of the great defect which, as we have said, vitiates all the English prose work of his time, the unconscious or wilful ignoring of the very fundamental principles of sentence- and paragraph-architecture. His mere syntax, in the most restricted sense of that word, is not very bad; he seldom indulges out of mere *incuria* in false conCORDS or blunders over a relative. But he is the most offending soul alive at any time in English literature in one grave point. No one has put together, or, to adopt a more expressive phrase, heaped together such enormous paragraphs; no one has linked clause on clause, parenthesis on parenthesis, epexegetis on exegesis, in such a bewildering concatenation of inextricable entanglement. Sometimes, of course, the difficulty is more apparent than real, and by simply substituting full stops and capitals for his colons and conjunctions, one may, to some extent, simplify the chaos. But it is seldom that this is really effective: it never produces really well balanced sentences and really well constructed paragraphs; and there are constant instances in which it is not applicable at all. It is not that the jostling and confused relatives are as a rule grammatically wrong, like the common blunder of putting an "and which" where there is no previous "which"

expressed or implied. They, simply, put as they are, bewilder and muddle the reader because the writer has not taken the trouble to break up his sentence into two or three. This is, of course, a very gross abuse, and except when the talents above noticed either fuse his style into something better, or by the interest they excite divert the attention of the reader, it constantly makes Clarendon anything but agreeable reading, and produces an impression of dryness and prolixity with which he is not quite justly chargeable. The plain truth is that, as has been said often before, and may have to be said more than once again, the sense of proportion and order in prose composition was not born. The famous example—the awful example—of Oliver Cromwell's speeches shows the worst-known instance of this; but the best writers of Cromwell's own generation—far better educated than he, professed men of letters after a fashion, and without the excuse of impromptu, or of the scurry of unnoted, speech—sometimes came not far behind him.

Against one great writer of the time, however, no such charge can be justly brought. Although much attention has recently been given to the philosophical opinions of Hobbes, since the unjust prejudice against his religious and political ideas wore away, and since the complete edition of his writings published at last in 1843 by Sir William Molesworth made him accessible, the extraordinary merits of his style have on the whole had rather less than justice done to them. He was in many ways a very singular person. Born at Malmesbury in the year of the Armada, he was educated at Oxford, and early in the seventeenth century was appointed tutor to the eldest son of Lord Hardwick, afterwards Earl of Devonshire. For full seventy years he was on and off in the service of the Cavendish family; but sometimes acted as tutor to others, and both in that capacity and for other reasons lived long abroad. In his earlier manhood he was much in the society of Bacon, Jonson, and the literary folk of the English capital; and later he was equally familiar with the society (rather scientific than literary) of Paris. In 1647 he was appointed

mathematical tutor to the Prince of Wales ; but his mathematics were not his most fortunate acquirement, and they involved him in long and acrimonious disputes with Wallis and others—disputes, it may be said, where Hobbes was quite wrong. The publication of his philosophical treatises, and especially of the *Leviathan*, brought him into very bad odour, not merely on political grounds (which, so long as the Commonwealth lasted, would not have been surprising), but for religious reasons ; and during the last years of his life, and for long afterwards, “Hobbist” was, certainly with very little warrant from his writings, used as a kind of polite equivalent for atheist. He was pensioned after the Restoration, and the protection of the king and the Earl of Devonshire kept him scatheless, if ever there was any real danger. Hobbes, however, was a timid and very much self-centred person, always fancying that plots were being laid against him. He died at the great age of ninety-two.

This long life was wholly taken up with study, but did not produce a very large amount of original composition. It is true that his collected works fill sixteen volumes ; but they are loosely printed, and much space is occupied with diagrams, indices, and such like things, while a very large proportion of the matter appears twice over, in Latin and in English. In the latter case Hobbes usually wrote first in Latin, and was not always his own translator ; but it would appear that he generally revised the work, though he neither succeeded in obliterating nor perhaps attempted to obliterate the marks of the original vehicle. His earliest publication was a singularly vigorous, if not always scholastically exact, translation of Thucydides into English, which appeared in 1629. Thirteen years later he published in Paris the *De Cive*, which was shortly followed by the treatise on *Human Nature* and the *De Corpore Politico*. The latter of these was to a great extent worked up in the famous *Leviathan*, or the *Matter, Power, and Form of a Commonwealth*, which appeared in 1651. The important *De Corpore*, which corresponds to the *Leviathan* on the philosophical side, appeared in Latin in 1655, in English

next year. Besides minor works, Hobbes employed his old age on a translation of Homer into verse, and on a sketch of the Civil Wars called *Behemoth*.

His verse is a mere curiosity, though a considerable curiosity. The chief of it (the translation of Homer written in the quatrain, which his friend Davenant's *Gondibert* had made popular) is completely lacking in poetical quality, of which, perhaps, no man ever had less than Hobbes; and it is written on a bad model. But it has so much of the nervous bull-dog strength which, in literature if not in life, was Hobbes's main characteristic, that it is sometimes both a truer and a better representative of the original than some very mellifluous and elegant renderings. It is as a prose writer, however, that Hobbes made, and that he will keep, his fame. With his principles in the various branches of philosophy we have little or nothing to do. In choosing them he manifested, no doubt, something of the same defiance of authority, and the same self-willed preference for his own not too well-educated opinion, which brought him to grief in his encounter with Wallis. But when he had once left his starting points, his sureness of reasoning, his extreme perspicacity, and the unerring clearness and certainty with which he kept before him, and expressed exactly what he meant, made him at once one of the greatest thinkers and one of the greatest writers of England. Hobbes never "pays himself with words," never evades a difficulty by becoming obscure, never meanders on in the graceful allusive fashion of many philosophers, — a fashion for which the prevalent faults of style were singularly convenient in his time. He has no ornament, he does not seem to aim at anything more than the simplest and most straightforward presentation of his views. But this very aim, assisted by his practice in writing the terse and clear, if not very elegant, Latin which was the universal language of the literary Europe of his time, suffices to preserve him from most of the current sins. Moreover, it is fair to remember that, though the last to die, he was the first to be born of the authors mentioned in this chapter, and that he may be supposed, late as he wrote, to have

formed his style before the period of Jacobean and Caroline luxuriance.

Almost any one of Hobbes's books would suffice to illustrate his style ; but the short and interesting treatise on *Human Nature*, perhaps, shows it at its best. The author's exceptional clearness may be assisted by his lavish use of italics ; but it is not necessary to read far in order to see that it is in reality quite independent of any clumsy mechanical device. The crabbed but sharply outlined style, the terse phrasing, the independence of all after-thoughts and tackings-on, manifest themselves at once to any careful observer. Here for instance is a passage, perhaps his finest, on Love, followed by a political extract from another work :—

“ Of love, by which is to be understood the joy man taketh in the fruition of any present good, hath been spoken already in the first section, chapter seven, under which is contained the love men bear to one another or pleasure they take in one another's company : and by which nature men are said to be sociable. But there is another kind of love which the Greeks call *Ἔρως*, and is that which we mean when we say that a man is in love : forasmuch as this passion cannot be without diversity of sex, it cannot be denied but that it participateth of that indefinite love mentioned in the former section. But there is a great difference betwixt the desire of a man indefinite and the same desire limited *ad hunc* : and this is that love which is the great theme of poets : but, notwithstanding their praises, it must be defined by the word need : for it is a conception a man hath of his need of that one person desired. The cause of this passion is not always nor for the most part beauty, or other quality in the beloved, unless there be withal hope in the person that loveth : which may be gathered from this, that in great difference of persons the greater have often fallen in love with the meaner, but not contrary. And from hence it is that for the most part they have much better fortune in love whose hopes are built on something in their person than those that trust to their expressions and service ; and they that care less than they that care more : which not perceiving, many men cast away their services as one arrow after another, till, in the end, together with their hopes, they lose their wits.”

---

“ There are some who therefore imagine monarchy to be more grievous than democracy, because there is less liberty in that than in this. If by liberty they mean an exemption from that subjection which is due to the laws, that is, the commands of the people ; neither in democracy nor in any other state of

government whatsoever is there any such kind of liberty. If they suppose liberty to consist in this, that there be few laws, few prohibitions, and those too such that, except they were forbidden, there could be no peace; then I deny that there is more liberty in democracy than in monarchy; for the one as truly consisteth with such a liberty as the other. For although the word liberty may in large and ample letters be written over the gates of any city whatsoever, yet it is not meant the subjects' but the city's liberty; neither can that word with better right be inscribed on a city which is governed by the people than that which is ruled by a monarch. But when private men or subjects demand liberty under the name of liberty, they ask not for liberty but domination: which yet for want of understanding they little consider. For if every man would grant the same liberty to another which he desires for himself, as is commanded by the law of nature, that same natural state would return again in which all men may by right do all things; which if they knew they would abhor, as being worse than all kinds of civil subjection whatsoever. But if any man desire to have his single freedom, the rest being bound, what does he else demand but to have the dominion?"

It may be observed that Hobbes's sentences are by no means very short as far as actual length goes. He has some on a scale which in strictness is perhaps hardly justifiable. But what may generally be asserted of them is that the author for the most part is true to that great rule, of logic and of style alike, which ordains that a single sentence shall be as far as possible, the verbal presentation of a single thought, and not the agglomeration and sweeping together of a whole string and tissue of thoughts. It is noticeable, too, that Hobbes is very sparing of the adjective—the great resource and delight of flowery and discursive writers. Sometimes, as in the famous comparison of human life to a race (where, by the way, a slight tendency to conceit manifests itself, and makes him rather force some of his metaphors), his conciseness assumes a distinctly epigrammatic form; and it is constantly visible also in his more consecutive writings.

In the well-known passage on Laughter as "a passion of sudden glory" the writer may be charged with allowing his fancy too free play; though I, for my part, am inclined to consider the explanation the most satisfactory yet given of a difficult phenomenon. But the point is the distinctness with which

Hobbes puts this novel and, at first sight, improbable idea, the apt turns and illustrations (standing at the same time far from the excess of illustration and analogy, by which many writers of his time would have spun it out into a chapter if not into a treatise), the succinct, forcible, economical adjustment of the fewest words to the clearest exposition of thought. Perhaps these things strike the more as they are the more unlike the work in juxtaposition with which one finds them; nor can it be maintained that Hobbes's style is suitable for all purposes. Admirable for argument and exposition, it is apt to become bald in narration, and its abundance of clearness, when translated to less purely intellectual subjects, may even expose it to the charge of being thin. Such a note as that struck in the Love passage above given is rare, and sets one wondering whether the dry-as-dust philosopher of Malmesbury, the man who seems to have had hardly any human frailties except vanity and timidity, had himself felt the bitterness of counting on expressions and services, the madness of throwing away one effort after another to gain the favour of the beloved. But it is very seldom that any such suggestion is provoked by remarks of Hobbes's. His light is almost always dry; and in one sense, though not in another, a little malignant. Yet nowhere is there to be found a style more absolutely suited, not merely to the author's intentions but to his performances—a form more exactly married to matter. Nor anywhere is there to be found a writer who is more independent of others. He may have owed something to his friend Jonson, in whose *Timber* there are resemblances to Hobbes; but he certainly owed nothing, and in all probability lent much, to the Drydens, and Tillotsons, and Temples, who in the last twenty years of his own life reformed English prose.