

ART. I. — CRITICISM.

“THUCYDIDES was the inventor of an art which before him had been almost unknown, the art of *historic criticism*, without being conscious of the infinite value of his invention. For he did not apply it to all branches of knowledge, but only to his subject, because it was a natural consequence of that subject. The historic Muse had made him acquainted with it: no one before or after him has drawn the line more clearly between history and tradition. And what is this but to draw the distinction between the historic culture of the East and West, and — if we recognize how much depended on this historic culture — between the whole scientific culture of the East and West? For, to repeat a remark which has been already cursorily made, the great difference between the two consists in this: in the West, the free spirit of criticism was developed; in the East, never.”

The above well-known passage of Heeren will serve as a suitable introduction to the few remarks we have to make on the same subject; — a subject which, in this short extract, is made to take so imposing a form.

A Review is, or is supposed to be, an embodiment of this important element; exercising itself always with reference to the leading interests of the age, holding a middle place between the buzz of the newspapers and the mature judgment of the historian, less subject to the influences of passion or party than the former, and held to less strict account for severe attention to justice than the latter. Our current literary ideas and forms are of English growth. The violence of party spirit, the universal interest in politics, have in England made the great Reviews into political organs. By this means, political passions have been made a touchstone of literary merit, and a spirit of unfairness has prevailed, of which, though the good sense of the English has lately led them to better things, the effects will long be visible in English literature.

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Our American defect lies in the opposite extreme. Grave men gravely vaunt American productions in a way that, to

an uninterested observer, must seem sadly absurd. We mention these national vices now, only to show the desirableness of principles of criticism; and, though a Review is not the place for a philosophical inquiry, we shall do no harm by endeavoring to make clear to ourselves and others some notion of what this Science of Criticism may be.

We have seen it stated above, that the Greeks were the inventors of criticism. The author goes on to say of Thucydides, in reference to this subject, that "neither his own age nor the following could reach him." If we continue the inquiry down, we shall see that it was not for many ages that this Greek invention came to exert an active influence on human affairs. Considering the literatures of Europe singly in order, we discover easily some one prevailing national characteristic in each, as for instance, in the Greek — invention. Nearly every form in which human thought and activity have since flowed were invented by the Greeks. The Roman characteristic, if we subtract the elegant culture they derived, almost translated, from the Greeks, was patriotism, — the grandeur, the power, the dignity of Rome. Their errand was to make the world Roman. This spirit is visible in every page of the greater Romans. There was satire in Rome, as there had been in Greece; but satire is not criticism.

In the Italians, under circumstances analogous to the Greek in certain respects, we see again inventors both in art and literature. The discovery of the ancient literatures, with their inimitable monuments, acted perhaps unfavorably on the originality of Italian genius, and accounts for the brevity of that list of great authors, whose small number is as remarkable as their wonderful excellence. It is the remark of a sagacious critic, that the burning of the Alexandrian Library was perhaps no such misfortune for the world, since it would have been hard for a modern literature to have sprung up in the face of such an overwhelming mass of ancient books.

In the French we have a literature of social life. The great French problem is Society. It is first in the Germans that we discover a pure tendency towards criticism, so that

we may give this as the universally prevailing characteristic of their literature.

To trace the action of the critical element upon literature in long periods, let us compare some Greek work with a modern. In the "Prometheus" of Æschylus, we see gods, demigods, and personages exalted above humanity, as actors. These personages were the subject of an active religious belief in the audience; so that, whilst they viewed the author as a man, they saw something divine, consecrated, and inspired in his work. They recognized the Divine Spirit in humanity; but, in becoming divine, it ceased to be human, and was clothed to their minds in forms of superhuman grace, beauty, and strength. The actors in the Greek heroic and tragic works were rarely, if ever, mere men. In the early ages of Greece, and even till after the age of Pericles, whilst such unequalled splendor and magnificence of art were lavished on temples and sacred places, we learn that no private man presumed to appropriate such splendors to his own use and convenience.

If we take now a drama of Shakspeare, "Hamlet," for instance, we find all changed. In Greece and Rome, the gods gradually ceased to be divine. No longer inspiring belief, they had existed in literature as ornament, until, worn out even for this use, they were laid aside altogether.

But literature must have an upper element in which to work. A higher religion succeeded the poetical theology of the Greeks. This new religion also revealed a poetic side, which was availed of for the production of great works of art and literature among the Italians and other nations. In the North, it took a more severe, and at the same time more spiritual character, which, whilst rendering it unavailable for the purposes of art and literature, made it too sacred for such profanation, as it was esteemed.

Whilst the divine element was thus removed to a sphere beyond the reach of literature, and skepticism had banished to the vulgar the belief in intermediate powers, a higher element was developed in man himself. The ancient hero was a demigod: the modern is a man.

Accordingly, we find in Hamlet an exalted personage

indeed, a king's son ; but the great interest lies in the character, apart from all mythical interest, all superhuman or unearthly attributes.

The critical character predominates not only in the form, but in the matter, of this, and in part of all Shakspeare's plays, and all his works. The surpassing interest of Hamlet over the other plays lies in the mind of the hero, to whom the whole world, all his relations in life, and his own soul, do but furnish food for a criticism, morbid in its excess ; so that, as he himself says, the current of all enterprise is turned awry, and loses the name of action.

The inventive spirit of the Greeks was nowhere more exhibited than in the distinct forms they gave to every department of literature and art. A great modern critic has shown, that the arts become debased, when they are suffered to run into each other ; as, for instance, when poetry usurps the province of painting, or the latter of sculpture, &c.* In the Greeks, the observance of this law appears almost as a natural instinct, not only in respect to the different arts, but even in the different provinces of the same art. It seems as if the same principle which caused every noun or verb to be so rich in forms of expression, prevailed in making their literature full of varied forms of artistic utterance. Every writing among them had a form, by which it plainly belonged to some one understood class. Among the moderns, on the contrary, every writing tends to the formless. We may trace the tendency to form, growing gradually weaker and more artificial through the Roman literature, and becoming antiquated in the imitative portion of the French. The effort towards a new establishment of literary form on a critical basis, in Germany, is one of the most remarkable literary phenomena of our age.

The literary forms had their origin in the religious and festive observances of a people of primitive manners and high intellectual tendencies, among whom, owing to the absence of books, and the mechanical and other obstacles in the way of communication by writing, the publication or utterance of

* Lessing.

every literary work must seek public occasions of one sort or another. Among such a people, forms acquire a conventional value, depending first on religious respect and awe, and afterwards on habit, and the perception of a propriety and beauty in such natural promptings of the national genius, as no after-thought or higher culture is ever able to improve upon. They have in this respect a strict analogy with architectural forms, which in like manner have their origin in early and prescriptive religious models, gradually reduced to proportion and beauty, without ever leaving the sacred pristine shape. Certain of the arts are the nearly pure emanation and property of national genius; whilst others, in various degrees, become the property of individuals. Among the former we may reckon, first, Language, which, as far as we can judge, was more perfect in times beyond the record of literature than in later days, so that what languages we possess have been called the pieced fragments of antiquity; second, Literary forms, which also carry back their highest perfection nearly to the age of their invention; and, thirdly, Architecture. The other arts, religious and national in their origin, are more the province of individual genius, and less strictly subject to eras and races.

Whilst literature and the arts speak by the mouths and hands of gifted individuals, they are based upon the national genius; and to this they have finally to render account. Cultivated minds may perceive the beauty and perfection of a Greek temple; but they cannot persuade a Christian people of its fitness and appropriateness for their worship. Literary men may believe the epic, or the pure dramatic, to be the most perfect of literary forms; yet, since the people have learned to read to themselves what was formerly read or declaimed to them, these forms have been declared unmanageable. Cowper said he could not imagine a man writing, without the intention of publishing, and the idea of a reading public before him; and, in like manner, we can readily conceive how the idea of a circle of devoted hearers, fired with enthusiasm as they listened to the deeds of their ancestors, should be needful to inspire the bard, and buoy

him up as he floated through oceans of hexameters. How we miss this happy consciousness of the impossibility of satiating a living audience, in Virgil, and all later epic poets! The rigid dramatic laws of the Greeks might easily become a magic inspiration to the poet, who was sure of a rapt audience during the performance of a drama, of which each of the three acts was a whole tragedy in itself.

It is the greater or less certainty of an audience, and the nature of that audience, which rule the forms of literature, and develop or suppress the powers of the poet. It is true, a great work is written for all time, and the artist will always feel that time is necessary to his true appreciation; but still it is the nature of his immediate audience that gives the form and shape to his efforts. In the first or Inventive epoch, a devout and popular audience will demand form as the medium through which thought has always been presented to them. In the second or Imitative, the audience is cultivated, and form is to them the luxury and ornament of literature. In the Critical, the form becomes subservient to the matter; the audience is neither to be enchanted by the beauty, nor charmed by the luxury, of literature; it is neither devout nor cultivated; it demands to be interested and informed. Literature is no longer the business of a festival, or the ornament of elegant culture: it is the thing of every day, and to be criticised by every-day rules. It is perceived that form is not necessary to the transmission of thought by books, and all those modes of writing are adopted where its fetters may be avoided; and whereas, in its origin, form was the means taken by the author to come into contact with his audience, it is now viewed as an obstacle between the writer and his readers. It is like the ceremonious full dress, whereby our ancestors thought to honor themselves and their guests, and to forward the purposes of social intercourse; but which their descendants have criticised out of existence, because it has become in our day a bar, instead of a gate, between man and man.

We have only to consider the almost imperceptible portion of written and printed works, that now make pretension to any stricter form than the facile novel or the flexible essay.

In poetry what multitudes of "pieces" crowd the corners of our newspapers and magazines, and even find their way to a more permanent form, to which it is impossible to give any more generic name than "pieces of poetry;" pieces, indeed, whereof no whole could be constructed! If they happen to be of fourteen lines, they are "sonnets." There are "songs" that could never be sung. There are "lines," and "fragments," "dramatic scenes," "epical fragments;" every device that can be suggested to avoid a matured, preconsidered form.

Yet it may be safely said, that almost every great poetical genius has contemplated, were it only as a day-dream, the undertaking of some great and formal work; and the respect with which such ideas and undertakings are always regarded, when based upon adequate powers, are a proof of a real existence and value in forms, even at this late day. How many epics have been dreamed of by poets, and despaired of! How many have tested their powers by a dramatic effort that could not stand the test! What added splendor and importance have invested even the too pedantic form of the classical French school!

We have spoken of the German as the critical literature. We have also, in the literary history of this nation, the remarkable fact, of a most careful and successful attention to literary forms, existing contemporaneously with the purest development of critical science. The admirers of Goethe would even perhaps go so far as to say, that in him we find a union of the most successful cultivation of literary form in later times, with the greatest critical judgment and skill the world has ever seen applied to literary matters. However this may be, a short consideration of what he accomplished must necessarily have a bearing on our subject.

Taking his works collectively, we are first called upon to remark a plain line of division between those that have a clear, easily understood, and pre-arranged plan or form, and others that are not only destitute to common eyes of any such outward form, but have an incoherence and formlessness, which the admirers of the poet have for the most part

been able to account for only on the hypothesis of an internal form and arrangement, not visible to the outward eye; and this explanation seems plausible enough in an author who professed to regard an inner meaning as a necessary adjunct to a work of art. Still, granting this view of the subject, such internal arrangement is a different thing from the literary form, of which we have been speaking; for, although all form may be said to have a body and a soul, an inward significance as well as an outward appearance, yet this outward appearance is its essential quality. As Goethe is, of all the moderns, the most complete master of form, we must look upon his defiance of it in the one case as being equally premeditated with his strict attention to it in others. It is easy to see, however high value be placed upon form, that those works of the opposite character were the ones that had the strongest hold upon him. "Iphigenia" and "Tasso" were finished and dismissed; but "Faust" and "Wilhelm Meister" seem to have been of perpetual recurrence to his mind. Of each he produced a second part in his old age; and, at a time when we might have looked for greater regularity and symmetry, the reader finds himself perplexed by a more inexplicable incoherence.

We have said above, that we may look upon the German literature as the most complete embodiment the world has seen of the critical element. The inquiry at once suggests itself, whether this side of literature is to follow the example of the preceding phases, and, having received a full development, cease to appear as the predominant idea; giving place in its turn to some new domination, if indeed the German may be considered as giving such full completion to the idea. Leaving this question for the present, shall we be far wrong if we assume that the greatest literary genius Germany has produced owes the peculiar form his development took, to his coincidence with this great national characteristic? If criticism be a real and living thing, and not a dead letter, its essence consists in this, — to see what has taken place in the world under a new point of view; to find a point from which facts *arrange themselves* in a new and unexpected manner, so that circumstances, before isolated, are seen as a part of

a new whole ; and from this principle it results, that there is such a thing as *creative* criticism.

The mind of Goethe was based on this principle. All the facts of his own experience, all knowledge of the characters of others, all the literature of the past, all the history and results of art, all facts of religion and history, were perpetually undergoing this process in his mind. At each successively new point of view, he placed as a milestone a work, a "Dorothea," a "Tasso," a "Natürliche Tochter," a "Götz von Berlichingen." But not in this light are to be viewed the "Faust" and "Wilhelm," which were rather the companions of his journey, other forms of the man's self.

In Goethe we can always perceive at work two separate forms of the principle, — constructive criticism, and destructive. That which the demonic nature of Mephistophiles perpetually pulls apart and disjoins, the human nature of Faust assimilates, and reconstructs into a whole. In the first part, where the object to be constructed is Life, the demonic power is supposed to prevail. In the second part, where the object is Art or creative thought, if the success is never complete, there is a succession of beautiful results ; and Mephistophiles himself becomes the engine by which these are brought about. If we mistake not, the same idea may be traced in the "Meister," though the demonic element of the "Faust" becomes unimpassioned observation in the latter.

Whilst we acknowledge these works as the results of the critical spirit, it may well be asked how the same principles apply in any measure to the other works which we have spoken of as the masterpieces of form, and therefore as divided, *toto cælo*, from these.

The Germanic nations, including the English, are remarkable for a tendency that has no less bearing on political and religious than on literary action ; viz. that, while the critical spirit is always busy in pulling to pieces, the ulterior purpose of reconstruction is never absent for a moment. This may be illustrated by examples from every department of action or achievement. The Reformation of Luther was a national criticism of Catholicism, resulting in the immediate

establishment of a new religion. Compare this with the way in which the destructive element in France, when once aroused against Catholicism, criticised it out of fashion, without dreaming of creating any thing new to supply its place. The French Revolution was a destructive criticism of royal government. When this flame ceased for want of fuel, France could find no alternative but military power.* Compare this with the results of the English Revolution and our own. All ancient nations, relaxing from the simple virtues of heroic ancestors, declined and disappeared, pushed from their stools by new and fresher races. Modern nations would have followed their example, but for the influence of the reconstructive principle in the Germanic race; the same principle which is in literature scientific criticism, is in religion reformation, is in politics reform.

This reconstructive criticism, based upon the profoundest scholarship and strong natural genius, has produced in Germany those works which are esteemed the flower of their literature, in which the mind of the nation is fused into moulds, not of pedantic or even of elegant formality, but of living, significant form. Has the same taken place in England? Certainly not in later times; and, since we have included the English among the Germanic nations with reference to the presence of the critical spirit, it will be interesting to inquire, why not?

From position and circumstance, as from natural character, England has enjoyed a freer and more active political existence than any other modern nation. The basis of this liberty was criticism. England alone has enjoyed freedom of the press; and naturally this criticism has been applied to the absorbing interests of politics, and the representatives of political opinions, — persons. A rigid aristocracy assailable in this way only, and freely to be attacked thus, this liberty has in England always been licentious, simply because it was the only liberty; in other words, the only ground where birth and place had no vantage. Personalities always tend to brutalize and degrade; and it is undeniable, that a brutal

* The course of the new Revolution may serve as a farther illustration.

and savage spirit, not unaccompanied by consummate ability, has prevailed in the English political press; a spirit which would be tolerated nowhere else in the relations of life. As a necessary consequence, such writing has usually been anonymous; — Junius, in all his characteristics, was not an exception, but a type; — and because anonymous, irresponsible. We have in England the singular spectacle of a whole class of writers, many of them possessed of powers that would under other circumstances have insured them fame, content to pass their lives in obscurity, unknown to the world, which daily feeds on the produce of their indefatigable pens. It is useless to speak of exceptions: the tendency of the system is inevitable. This freedom, this license of the press, has been indispensable to England; but its advantages are dearly bought. If the German error be in criticising political action with the same scientific conscientiousness that is applied to literary or abstract questions, so that with them, as with Hamlet, action loses the name of action; the English fault is no less, of applying to literature the same dashing critique that is unscrupulously used with respect to character and opinion. The favorite is he who can stand being knocked, without being knocked down; or, if he be down, can rise again. They show Byron as a proof of the value of the system, as if, had there been no “Edinburgh,” there would have been no Byron. But, though Byron could defend himself, who cannot see that he was sensitive, and that the truculent English criticism, of which the “Edinburgh Review” was but one form, soured the whole milk of his genius; urged him to *tours de force*, to show that he was not to be sneered at; and incited him to every folly in literature and life, lest the world should discover that he had a genial and poetical nature?

The extravagant praise of mediocre celebrities is a necessary, and nearly as injurious, part of the system. The author is placed in a false position: he writes for all men; but he finds he must choose a party, or, giving up the hope of a nation's attention, write for a coterie.

Again, it is doubtful if the licentiousness of the press in England has not been injurious to freedom of thought, para-

doxical as it may seem. The English are free of speech ; but their idea of freedom of thought has been too often comprised in praising and blaming what they choose, and as loudly as they choose. Now, are freedom of thought and freedom of speech identical ? or do they necessarily go together ? What is freedom of thought ? Of course, no outward force can prevent my thinking what I will : it is not even a matter of will. I think what I must, — what I cannot help. I may indeed pin my faith to another man's sleeve, and thus from indolence give up my thought, and become the slave of his ; or I may be the slave of my own prejudices and passions ; I may bow to the "idols of the forum," and "idols of the den." The man of free thought is he whose mind is open to judge every opinion, every work, every man on his own merits.

Is a licentious press even favorable to such a state of mind ? It is simply the machine whereby the rough and hasty instinct of a people is brought efficiently to bear upon the conduct of their rulers ; it is the charter of a people's liberties, not because its judgments are correct, but because, like the geese of the Capitol, it awakens men to discover whether good or evil is being done, lest judgment go against them by default. It is noisy, violent, unfair, having a blind tendency, rather than a steady view, towards right. It asks, "Right or wrong ? guilty or not guilty ?" It applies the same summary process to books, as we daily see, with most remarkable results. For, according to this system, a book that makes any impression at all comes to be regarded as a public enemy or a public idol, according to the politics or the prejudices of the public accuser. There is no medium. It is evident that either of these positions is injurious to an author, but not equally so. He that writes in the assurance of popular applause has at any rate ample room and space to develop his genius. The crowded audience, the eager, expectant eyes, all comfort and inspire the singer. That this is not in vain, the enormous literary successes of the popular writers in France and England, of Scott and Dickens, of Sue and Dumas, loudly attest. But as we sow, we must reap. We do not apply our gold and praise in vain.

We have the best specimens, but if not of the worst class, surely not of the best.

In Germany, speech has been less and thought more free than in England. The popular element has never had an immediately available voice in public matters. Whilst criticism in England has been busy with daily politics; in Germany a doubtful, if not forbidden ground; it has been applied in the latter country to thought, to literature, philosophy, and art. In Germany the best and most cultivated minds have been the critics: in England these have rather been the criticized. The results are before us: of what value, they are perhaps too near to us, as yet, for us to form a definite opinion.

We do not recognize as an original element the conscious, reconstructive, self-restoring principle of criticism in the other European nations. France is indeed hypercritical; but French criticism is skeptical: it destroys the old faith, and leaves no basis upon which to build a new. The German, while he criticises, is never skeptical, but substitutes a living belief for that which had become dead and inert. The French Revolution could find no reconstructive element on which to pause, and rebuild a political fabric. No truth was left but such as could be found in exact science or brute strength. The former was tried by Sieyès and others, and failed, as such attempts always must. The latter prevailed. In Napoleon, they found a strong man; in a European war, necessity of action. Wholesome exercise restored health; but France has since been the sport of fortune, rather than the exemplification of principles. Of its literature, what shall we say? That it goes on, dissecting away the ground whereon the social basis rests, a skepticism of all purity and honor? Its literary men seem to us analogous to the politicians of the Revolution,—men of wonderful talent, of fearless mind, weighing every old institution, and, as it is found wanting, casting it aside; but suggesting in their room nothing practicable, finding in the end nothing real but passion and power. Do we not hear of a great French discovery whereby all society is to be remodelled (within six years, the inventor says) upon the principle of

harmonizing the passions, instead of restraining them? The very Sieyès of this moral revolution.

It is no new theory of Fourier, and of the modern French school, that a greater force is to be derived from the harmonic action of the passions than from their restraint, and that a future society is to depend upon this law. The idea is true and eternal: it is the foundation of all poetry, the dream of youth; it is argued in the first page of man's history, and the lapse of every few centuries sees the argument rehearsed. The human race has passionately clung to the belief. We are so in love with it, that we are always willing to sacrifice ourselves that another may enjoy it. We ask only that some one may enjoy; and that one is our idol. The principle of loyalty is based on it. What millions are willing slaves, that the passions of an Alexander or a Napoleon may meet no check in their superb development! We feel ourselves impersonated in them. There is no true lover that would not die, that the object of his love might be happy. Which is the more sublime object of the two? Are not these vulgar great men, after all? Is man ever sublime but when he renounces?

It is in this point that the French stand in opposition to the critical, no less than the religious, spirit of modern times. The mad belief of the Revolution was, that every man might have this theoretic freedom; the mad career of Napoleon was based on their will, that one man should have it. That which they failed to realize in the political, they now seek in the social world, and by the same process; viz. a destructive criticism of the old, and a theory of a new social state based not on experience or criticism, but upon "exact science" and arithmetic.

The end of our own Revolution was involved in the beginning. The principle of self-government, derived through our Puritan ancestors, was full grown in us. It was a criticism in which the fate of the world was involved; and yet how little was destroyed! It was the construction of a new world on grounds derived from criticism of the old. Only so much struggle was necessary as served to unite us in the effort. The French Revolution was gradual, was blind, not

knowing whither it went: the American was complete in the person of every man who signed the Declaration.

Such is the nature of all true criticism that lies beyond the region of exact science. The old is reviewed, not from a blind fault-finding, or vague dissatisfaction, but from a complete new whole, existing in embryo.

As we recognize two distinct appearances of truth, viz. truths of exact science, and truths of faith; in like manner we must distinguish a different form of criticism for each.

A faith is the sum of the convictions of a man, or a nation, in regard to spiritual things: its form is based on the teachings of the past; and its criticism rests on inward, individual experience. When it criticises facts, it is from an internal point of view, and because they disagree with inward experience: no fact becomes monstrous whilst it is the sign of an inward conviction. Now, not religion alone, but the whole life of man, social and political, rests upon faith; in other words, upon a form of truth commensurate to man's progress, — a relative, not an absolute truth. Exact science, on the other hand, rests on a correct observation of phenomena: its safety lies in admitting nothing which is not capable of demonstration or proof. It is based upon doubt. In the predominance of one or other of these principles, lies the greatest difference between the civilization and the literature of the ancient and modern world. Among the ancients, the domain of exact science was invaded by faith: in more modern times, the region of faith was usurped by exact science. In our day, there are signs of an oscillation in the reverse direction. A critique of the development of this new tendency in the greatest minds of our era would include a Goethe and a Swedenborg in the same category.

In individual character, also, we may observe the presence of the critical element to produce the most remarkable contrast between the ancient man and the modern. The ideal ancient hero is a magnificent child, great, simply from the possession of great gifts; an Achilles, unconscious of any struggle, save with circumstance and the world. The modern idea always includes inward struggle and conquest. We mark the signs of this changed ideal everywhere. The

artistic spirit of the Greeks was bright, cheerful, joyous, indicating facility and grace: the modern tends more to gloomy grandeur, a circumscribed, unconscious grace and perfection, in contrast with a limitless and vague sublimity.

This latter characteristic existed in a degree also among the Jews, and from the same cause to which the moderns owe it, — a more sublime and terrible religious belief, that carried the mind beyond all visible space and power. The Christian revelation has modified this effect, not by rendering the idea of the Supreme more familiar, but by presenting a divine perfection as a model to every man.

The Greek did not criticise himself, because he had no higher standard than the action of creatures like himself. The Christian criticises himself from a standard of ineffable perfection, so that the idea of struggle and difficulty, even of the greatest struggle the powers are capable of, is inseparable from that of the true Christian.

This element being thus in general existence throughout the world, even those who are unmoved by the demands of religion partake of the idea of an indefinitely exalted standard towards whatever excellence they incline; and, as human exertions are limited, instead of resting with that we can easily accomplish, a longing for the indefinite springs up in every ardent breast, and finds a response, as every genuine feeling does, in nature, and demands it of art.

How is it that, while we receive a deeper answer from nature, art has become incapable of adequately responding to it? Instead of producing greater works than of old, we fail of reaching the ancient excellence. Is it that outward nature has become too great to our apprehension, that man has been invested with attributes too internal to be represented by outward form; that thus these outward arts decay; and, if this hypothesis be correct, that we must find in poetry and music what the other arts can no longer represent?

However these things may be, we cannot leave this part of our subject, without recurring once more to "Hamlet," in illustration of what we have been saying. In the Greek works, individual character is subordinate to the general

action of the piece ; when it becomes prominent, its characteristic, like that of their statues, is a charming propriety and harmony ; in other words, beauty. In "Hamlet" the action of the piece is subordinate to the character of the hero ; and this character is more interesting than beautiful or harmonious. The reason of this change, which affects the whole of art, may be traced to the struggle we have spoken of as the characteristic of modern character, and which, by its very nature, possesses more interest than beauty. As a sequel to what we said of Goethe, it may be remarked, that, even in works of carefully observed form like the "Tasso," the presence of struggle and the predominant interest of individual character mark a broad line of distinction between their effect, and that of the more simple elements of the ancients.

The English were the first great nation in which the principle of a practical criticism was admitted as the political basis. There was a nearer approach to this in the polity of Greece and Rome than in any other modern state ; and perhaps the only reason why this principle in those nations did not develop the modern fact of national regeneration may be found in the existence of slavery among them. So long as a person can exist in a state without rights, so long the true and only foundation of political criticism is wanting. Unless the principle is admitted that every man is free, no good reason can be given why any man shall be free. The reason why the detrimental influence of slavery was so long inert in the ancient nations, was that the condition of slavery had never been criticised. No error becomes immediately demoralizing, until it is the subject of criticism. A hundred years ago, a man might get daily drunk, and still retain his self-respect. Now drunkenness is ruin. So, in the ancient states, slavery might exist, and its fatal effects appear only after the lapse of centuries, and then be ascribed to other causes. Our Southern States are an obvious example. Freedom of the press does not exist, criticism does not exist, political or literary. Surely that is a strong faith which believes this state of things can be lasting. We have seen freedom of thought exist in Germany, with a censorship

of the press; but freedom of thought can surely not exist where the whole energies of the mind are exerted in defence of a falsehood. Suppose the energies of the Greek mind to have been turned by circumstances to the defence of their system of servitude, what would the world have known of their after-history?

The philosophy of this state of things is this:—As long as an institution is not criticised, we view it as a fixed fact. It has therefore no prominent place in our thoughts among other questions. When criticism of it begins, every man is called on to make up his mind in relation to it. Supposing, then, the institution to be either false in itself, or worn out and become false, we are reduced to the necessity of either renouncing it, or of living a lie for the sake of our prejudices or our interests; a state, of which a man is always more or less clearly conscious, and which soon proves demoralizing and fatal.

In England the critical principle has lived and flourished among institutions otherwise aristocratic and stringent; or rather we may say, that the English race split, and that the younger half came to work out on a more spacious field that establishment of a free and universal political criticism which, from many causes of outward position, as well as feudal strength, was felt to be alike ineligible and infeasible at home. If England had become a republic after the time of Cromwell, it is doubtful if the strength would not have been dissipated in internal faction, which, concentrated under monarchical rule, has been able to balance the despotic powers of Europe. It is even probable that our own political existence depended on the same cause. If there had been toleration in the mother-country, it would not have been so fiercely fought for here.

In this country, we for the first time see, theoretically at least, a pure critical basis; a constitution, not the growth of time, or the slow and encumbered fruit of the genius of a nation in combination with circumstance and difficulty, but a free critique from the highest point of view of the past history of the world. The theory of all our action, from the school district to the presidency, is, that the act of to-day

criticises the act of yesterday ; the party of conservation, that of progress.

The ideal state of any period would represent the ideal man upon a large scale, exposed to the same temptations, subject to the same weaknesses, subsisting by the same strength. The ancient state, or man unconscious, uncriticised, subsisting by native strength and superiority, is just or unjust, generous or selfish, as natural disposition or his own wild will may prompt. This spirit was the ancient idea of heroism : of such heroic states and heroic men, history gives us many examples. The modern state, like the modern man, has his being, not merely in strength, but also in principles. Of every step he is conscious, always hearing the voice of external or internal criticism. His will and natural impulse have ceased to be a law to himself or others, except so far as they, in fact or belief, square with principles. Baseness is, to be wanting by the test of one's own standard. This standard, in a rude age, is martial virtue : until that is corrupted, the nation may be destroyed, but cannot be demoralized. It is no longer so with us. We are like the man who has professed religion, who has separated himself from the world from principle : he cannot sin, without losing his self-respect.

If all our political safety lies in the certain criticism to which every public action is amenable, to the same principle are to be traced many of the political vices, of which we ought to be on our guard. The source of power criticises itself, reverses its own decisions, yet will not respect the statesman who changes with it. Whoever courts the people to-day is sure to be distrusted by it to-morrow ; yet when can we expect politicians to cease to court the people ? In quiet times, he who will not go out for office, no matter what may be his powers, is left at home. Thus the aspirant is placed in the dilemma of remaining inglorious, or subjecting himself to a criticism that may, as we have so often seen, prove fatal to his independence. And yet it is out of these men, whom we have ruined by not trusting enough, that we make our first magistrates, whom we entrust with all. Our great statesmen — public servants we call them — have their

self-respect destroyed by being watched too closely by their masters. The true statesman, interpreting the wisest will, the best instinct of a people, uses the force delegated to him to constrain the nation in that direction. Our position is often the reverse of this. Our servants have understood and executed our sinister will, and the tardy criticism of our better judgment comes halting after. That it does come inevitably is our safety, and perhaps an adequate recompense for these evils, inseparable from our condition.

In literature also, the good of free criticism is not un-mixed with evil. Our first misfortune is, that there is a reference to a standard from without, viz. from England. As the spirit that dictates this is, from many causes, unfair and depreciating, a natural consequence has been to cause all our own criticism to take the opposite ground, to over-praise that which we felt to be undervalued, or invidiously regarded.

In the second place, although all original literature comes from and refers to the heart of the people, it cannot, except in a rude age, address itself to that people, except through a class capable of receiving it. If great works do not find such a class in their own age, they wait till time and their own influence create it. No one will pretend, that Shakspeare or Milton spoke to their age in the same sense they do to us. But Shakspeare and Milton lived in times that *could* be unconscious of their greatness. It could not be so now. Ours is a conscious age, and every man is made the most of. We believe a conscious greatness inseparable from a critical literature; and such, therefore, we look for in this country; — a literature and art based on thorough criticism, and thorough knowledge of what already exists in the world; in a word, on a higher culture.