

Oh! happy, if to them the one dread hour
Had given its lessons from a brow like thine!
If all their knowledge of the spoiler's power
Came by a look, thus tranquilly divine!
—Let him, who thus hath seen young life depart,
Hold well that image to his thoughtful heart!

But thou, fair slumberer! was there less of woe,
Or love, or terror, in the days of old,
That men pour'd out their gladdening spirit's flow,
Like sunshine, on the desolate and cold?
And gave thy semblance to the shadowy king,
Who for deep souls had then a deeper sting?

In the dark bosom of the earth they laid
Far more than we—for loftier hopes are ours:
Their gems were lost in ashes; yet they made
The grave a place of beauty and of flowers,
With purple wreaths and fragrant boughs array'd,
And lovely sculpture gleaming through the shade.

Is it for us a deeper gloom to shed
O'er its dim precincts?—Do we not intrust
But for a time, its chambers with our Dead,
And strew immortal seed upon the dust?
—Why should we dwell on that which lies beneath,
When living light hath touch'd the brow of Death?

F. H.

THE CLASSICS AND ROMANTICS.

SINCE the celebrated dispute of Perrault no subject has been discussed with more earnestness among the French literati, than that at present pending in respect to the relative merits of the classic and romantic schools, or to be more explicit, respecting the superiority of the style of the age of Louis XIV. which has been denominated the "Classic School" on the one hand; and the followers of a free national style, unshackled by the laws of the ancients, on the other, distinguished by the appellation of "Romantic." In this war of words the combatants have called to their aid every auxiliary power, and it may not be amiss to give the reader an idea of a contest which will, in the end, produce an important change for the better in the literature of the nation. The despotism of the Academy once so perfect, had frequently of late years received severe shocks upon isolated questions, and the Revolution inflicted upon its sovereignty a blow which it was impossible for it to survive. Its use to the Bourbon government, as an instrument of influence on the literature of the country, has now nearly become inert, not by the conversion of the academy to the side of truth and nature, but by the rising of a regenerated school of literature, more in harmony with modern civilization and congenial to national feeling, as is the case in England. The wild and extravagant school of Hardy was supplanted by the genius of Corneille modelled upon the ancients, and Racine eclipsed Corneille in the opinion of his countrymen by the introduction of what may be called the Court style of Louis XIV. Every thing was confined to a servile imitation of the ancients, and so far had the style of Racine, backed by the influence of the court, esta-

blished itself as the model for French tragic writers to follow, that Corneille himself was thrown into the shade in the opinion of most by the *ultra* refinements of his successor, or rather contemporary. The French academy adopted the taste of the court. By so doing, it confined tragedy within very narrow limits, both as respected language and subject; for the natural it substituted the artificial, excluded national subjects almost wholly for foreign, and hampered by fastidiousness and caprice the range of genius, which, regulated by good sense, should ever be a "chartered libertine."

But there were other reasons than those connected with literature which made the example of Racine, and what is since called in France the "classic school,"* more agreeable to the Bourbon despotism and its ministers. By confining the labours of literature, particularly those of the theatre, as nearly as possible to an imitation of the ancients, national topics were avoided; and by this compression of subject, national allusions, which might sometimes be disagreeable to an absolute government, were spared to the public ear. Tragedy exhibited Grecian and Roman manners and Roman and Grecian heroes, and the French audiences were diverted by scenes of antiquity from contemplating those that had passed in their own country. The Richelieus and Mazarines were men of powerful minds, wary, arbitrary, and unprincipled, and it is not giving them credit for too much penetration to suppose they saw the advantage of patronizing this school in preference to any new-fangled theory that might offer. They knew that the school of monks and colleges had preserved, from time immemorial, the wrecks of ancient learning, but that ancient learning had no way in their hands been an instrument of opposition to the powers that were. In patronizing a school of literature that merely imitated the ancients, they neither endangered power nor tempted the public to the discussion of novel doctrines and a search after truth. It is curious that the "classic school," as it is termed, has every where been the child of arbitrary power; the "romantic" of patriotism and liberty. The French are beginning now to feel this, as the English and Germans have long felt before them. They have discovered that the test of literary merit is public opinion alone, and that a strict adherence to rules cannot command success. The Academy, both at its commencement and long afterwards, by uniting in the interest of the crown the majority of men of talents in the nation, held the lesser fry of writers in vassalage. The influence of the members of the Academy had diminished when the Revolution commenced; yet even then few thought of disputing its former decrees, particularly in poetry—there Aristotle and the ancients still remained absolute, though in other studies innovations had stolen in, after Locke had made a breach in the metaphysical dogmas of the stagyrite.

* For fear it should be supposed that by the epithet "classic school" censure is meant upon the unrivalled legacies of the ancients, it is proper to observe that the term is here applied to their servile imitators only, who follow them in every thing, without regard to the difference of mythology, nationality, civilization, or language. These imitators can appreciate nothing since the downfall of the Roman empire. They would establish one literature for all nations, and depress the manly freedom of the minds of men of genius to one insipid level. The beauties of the ancient writers are as much esteemed by the disciples of the "romantic" as of the self-styled "classic school"—perhaps better felt.

Upon a proper consideration of the subject it appears an absurdity, that forty individuals, most of whom were elected by court favour, should be chosen to fix the literature of a nation, lay down laws which future writers were not to infringe upon, and forbid the toleration of works which did not in their view possess particular requisites. To bridle genius in its multiform operations was an attempt worthy the instruments and vanity of the Bourbon dynasty, calculated to do irretrievable injury to the cause it professed to support, and to be only of temporary duration. The Academy was the tool of the minister, and literature was held back and enchained by the Academy. This must ever be the case with literary associations under absolute governments. The empire of literature is a republic, confesses no temporal authority, and if enslaved for a time will ultimately emancipate itself, and bury under the foundations of a more splendid edifice the ruins of its former servitude. On the formation of the Institute by Napoleon almost all the men of distinguished talent in France were included in its list; though the Emperor was less eager to encourage literature than the sciences, it was not forgotten, and when it did not include interference with the objects of his ambition, genius was allowed full play. Though little of note was added to French letters during his reign, the seeds of the present contest were no doubt then planted. Talma, under his sway, laboured to overcome the monotonous drone of French verse, and assimilating his acting as much as possible to the romantic school, infused into his delivery and action a feeling of truth and nature unwitnessed on the French stage before. But it was necessary that the turgid style of the French drama should be altered before farther advances towards what is natural could be made. A feeling favourable to such a change has continued to increase. On the re-establishment of the Bourbons, the Academy has been restored in the plenitude of its absurdities; and Fressinous, a bigoted fanatic, destitute of every qualification, but backed by the interest of a priest-ridden government, has been elected one of the forty, to complete which, according to the old joke of Piron, a cypher was necessary; while men who possessed the strongest claims, in respect to talent, have been passed over. All has been calculated after the era of Louis XIV.; the natural result has ensued. Authors of considerable talents out of the Academy have begun to act for themselves, and have been encouraged by the nation; they have set the Academy at defiance, and have become members of a republic of letters, amenable only to the general opinion of the nation. That the French people have made advances in tolerating works which are no better than heresies in the view of their "classic school," the translation and rapid sale of translations of the German and English dramatists clearly prove. The French are sensible, in the present day, when the court is no longer an object of admiration, that the Academy is but the thing of power, that it is the servile tool of a government opposed in every possible way to the spirit of the age. This will assist the advocates of the "romantic school" in their innovations, and accelerate the progress of the literary emancipation of France.

The "classic school" of France took its tone from the court, while the bulk of the nation was in a state of slavery and ignorance. Paris furnished the tone to the provinces, and the court to Paris. In the fa-

shionable tragedy none but particular words or phrases were to be tolerated, excluding half the language as not possessed of sufficient dignity. The Alexandrine was the legitimate measure; inflation was taken for grandeur, and the pomp of the court was infused into the literature to make it worthy of the *grand monarque* and his courtézans. How Racine, the father of this stilted courtly style, and other writers, succeeded so well, under such ignoble restrictions as they burthened themselves with, can only be accounted for by the capacity of genius for surmounting extraordinary obstacles.* Prior to this change, France had a sort of free cycle; she had her Marots, Jodelles, Bellays, Baifs, Ronsards, &c. &c. Corneille had refined upon them to excess; but in the judgment of the court he did not go far enough:—thus every thing was forced into artificial greatness; bloatedness of bulk seemed to be mistaken for sublimity; and the glitter of Palais Royal paste for the pure splendour of the diamond. It was in this spirit that the land was covered with chateaux to imitate Versailles, and that the nobles ruined their fortunes and ground their tenants in the dust, in imitation of the monarch's waste of his subject's wealth.

The rage for imitating the ancients, it may justly be contended, did little in the way of the introduction of a pure taste. Stage costume was as barbarous as ever. Court wigs were worn in the 17th century by the Alexanders and Cæsars of the buskin, perhaps to assimilate them to Louis *le grand*. Shepherds wore embroidered silks, rivers appeared in red stockings, and Alpheus made love in a fair full-bottomed periwig and a plume of feathers. The refinements of that age, either in poetry or the arts, did not arise from genuine taste; they were the accidental results of fashion. True taste can only prevail and influence a nation where the road to excellence is free, and a generous emulation incites all to strive in overtaking it. The freer spirit of later times, the increase of knowledge, and the more general habit of thinking and reasoning, have created a standard of opinion and a juster taste upon all subjects; and France will shortly be little inclined to submit to the dictation of the court of Louis XIV. on subjects of literature. With us pastorals are no longer written in garrets; or treatises on manners by collegians, who have never passed the bounds of *alma mater*. If our poets describe daybreak, they do not now write about Phœbus harnessing the steeds of day and driving away Nox; Æolus no longer makes our storms, Jupiter our thunder, or Neptune our earthquakes; nor are we sickened to death, as we once were, by lectures on syllogism, and figure, terms, propositions, and predicates—these slumber peacefully in our universities. Our riddance of them we owe to what is called by Madame de Staël *le genre romantique*, but which, in reality, means nothing more than the freedom of adopting what is reconcilable to reason, instead of following custom. Monsieur Jouy has lately written a tragedy, called "Sylla," wholly regardless of precedent, and has met with the most flattering success. The French are eager for works that possess freedom, delineate passion, and create emotion by a close adherence to nature—in short, by an attachment to

* The Editor coincides in general with the sentiments expressed in this article; but he deprecates giving his sanction to the manner in which the writer speaks of Racine, of whose exquisite genius the author of the article seems to be insensible.

the "romantic school": not, however, the *littérature romantique* of Madame de Staël, born of chivalry and christianity, but the simple adherence to the most perfect representation of nature. The Germans have long ago entered into definitions of this term, when in France it would have been heresy. But now, in the latter country, the combatants are engaged in the same argument, and it is no longer heterodox to the people. While the classics follow the rules of Aristotle and the court of Louis, holding that laws made by the ancients should regulate all future writers, cling closely to the unities, reject all words except those that have been legitimized by precedent, severely cut up language, pare every thing to the core, and rob all imagery of its sharpness; they forget that French literature must be identified in time, language, climate, and mythology with the ancient, before the latter can be arranged side by side with it in the contest. The romantics may attack the French classics, and not fire a shot at the ancients through them; the term classic may, therefore, be better understood, as it regards the present dispute, by opposing the style of Dryden's "Tyrannic Love" to the "Macbeth" of Shakspeare.

The romantics insist that their opponents do not paint nature faithfully; that their colours are gaudy, artificial, and forced; that they reject expressions of natural feeling, and substitute the language of the writer instead of that which the supposed speaker would naturally use in his circumstances. That they adhere to the unities, under the idea of rendering the drama perfect to spectators, when impossible things must still remain in every tragedy, even when the unities are carefully preserved. That a tragedy in which the unity of time is preserved agreeably to rule, will be performed in two hours, though it would have occupied eighteen or twenty in reality. Thus, as great an infringement on the unity of time often takes place when the technical law is preserved, as a change of scene for a hundred miles between the acts would be in the unity of place. Furthermore, no audience has ever been deceived into the belief of the truth of what was represented before it on the stage—the very house and audience belie such a deception; it only expects to see an approximation to truth, a semblance of what has occurred before. Here the romantics have far the better of the argument. The hero of a romantic tragedy is made to speak in his situation all he would naturally utter were he the character he represents. The "classic school" gives only the language of the poet, and sinks nature in high-flown phrase and lofty declamation—in the language of actors, and not of those who feel. This arises from the modern classic school being imitators only, for the ancients kept to the truth of nature as it exhibited itself in their day, and wrote agreeably to their customs. Can it be consistent, then, that modern tragedy should possess no national truth, but be merely the reflection of antiquity? The romantics assert that truth and nature must be followed as closely as possible, and that where this is adhered to, the effect must be more perfect, nature being always the same. In describing her emotions in the passion of love, for example, that writer will be most correct whose delineations impress the greatest number of readers with their force and truth; his judges will then comprehend the greatest number of hearers, because all understand what is natural:—while the poet of the classic school will call in Cupid to his aid, or substitute general phrases,

and the fruits of closet learning, for the exquisite developement of the passion itself and a knowledge of its effects on the human heart. Venus and Cupid have no place in our mythology. They are calculated to arouse in a Grecian bosom feelings in which we cannot participate. The "classic school" has adopted not only the mythology but the brief language and peculiarities of ancient feelings and habits, and endeavoured to introduce them into nations with opinions, temperaments, and a mythology totally different, cramping genius and tying down a writer to rules, a breach of which consigned him to the anathemas of the court and the Academy.* Hence the genius of France seemed incapable of any new flight, it was confined in a narrow space, and no one dared venture into a region of literary novelty. It must be confessed, however, that before the Revolution it required transcendent talents to break the thralldom in which genius was entrained.

"La nation Française," says De Staël, "la plus cultivée des nations latines, penche vers la poésie classique imitée des Grecs et des Romains; la nation Anglaise, la plus illustre des nations Germaniques, aime la poésie romantique et chevaleresque, et se glorifie des chefs-d'œuvre qu'elle possède en ce genre." It may be justly doubted, however, whether this definition has much to do with the present question. The French may lean in style towards the ancient writers, but the advocates for disenthralldom from the classic school, neither want a *littérature romanesque* or *chevaleresque*; they demand a literature which, while the characters and incidents it describes may be modern and even national, or barbarous or of remote eras, shall be penned with a fidelity adapted to the universal feeling of truth in every age and nation. They wish to have tragedy which shall be neither Greek nor Roman, but French; in short they desire pictures of nature on the model of Shakspeare, and not of something neither ancient nor modern, a gallico-latin medley, to preserve the servility of which originality and nature must be sacrificed—they want high-wrought passion and fine feeling in simple language. The exclusive character of classic, as an imitation of the ancients, with which the French Academy dignifies such writings, is clearly a misnomer. Those writers alone are the classics of a nation whose works, sanctioned by public approbation, have established a lasting fame. Shakspeare is as much an English classic, in the national sense of the term, as the author of Cato—Burns as Pope. Whether a writer be an imitator of the ancients or be an original, if the labours of his genius obtain for him lasting celebrity, he is a classic of his country. But the French Academy, adopting the style of literature of countries in which the manners and language were different from their own, in place of fostering a literature adapted to the language and feeling of the people, claim to be exclusively classic, while a national literature must be the expression of society.

Great things arise from small beginnings. He must be blind indeed who does not perceive, in the present dispute, the dawn of a new era of literature in France. The writers who have come forth in battle order against the Academy (or *Sorbonne*, as it is now dubbed) are men

* If the French classic school has, in some instances, been more true to nature and feeling than in others, it is because it insensibly leaned at the time toward the principles of its opponents.

of zeal and genius ; they have the public on their side, and the government and Academy against them—this alone helps their cause. The ministry is an object of dislike, and its measures are regarded with just suspicion by the people. The public taste on literary subjects might have been influenced before the Revolution, but that time is gone by. Literature is no longer the tool of the government, but belongs to the nation. The present contest will be decided in the theatres ; the structure of the drama will be changed, and the innovations first introduced will make the impression irresistible.

MM. Stendhal (Beyle), Soumet, Ancelot, Nodier, &c. &c. have openly appeared as advocates of a free national literature, or on the side of the "Romantics;" they possess talent sufficient to keep the subject alive and promote the abrogation of the decrees that have enchained French literature, if not by the peculiar excellence of their writings, yet by their novelty and the interest they excite in the public mind. They are aided by translations from the English and German writers of the "Romantic school;" and other writers will no doubt appear in France, who, giving the rein to imagination, and finding themselves free from their former bondage, will give their country a new and more exalted literature than it has ever yet known.

Horace Walpole says of Lord Chatham, that he not only wished to see his own country free, but also all other nations—a desire in which he probably stood alone among the statesmen of his country. Let us cherish a similar spirit in regard to French literature ; let us rejoice to see it emancipated from the shackles of tyrants and courtiers, and follow the line of truth and nature. In its renovated state it may furnish an object of rivalry to our men of genius, instead of chilling them with its affectation, fatiguing them with its monotony, and disgusting them with its pompous pretensions, notwithstanding brilliant pens have heretofore submitted to its guidance.

Y. I.

SONNET FROM PETRARCH.

"Tutta la mia fiorita e verde etade."

My green and flowery age was passing by,
 And in my heart I felt Love's fire declining.
 And to that downward slope my step drew nigh,
 Where life is to the vale of years inclining.
 Already was my gentle enemy,
 By slow degrees, her doubts and fears resigning,
 And with her mild and sweet security,
 To looks of joy had turned my sad repining.
 And now the time was nigh, when Love can meet
 With chastity and lovers side by side,
 Can fondly sit in converse calmly sweet ;
 But Death such happiness to me denied,
 He like an armed foe beset my way,
 Broke my frail reed, and rent my hopes away.
