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him up at the last day." This prophecy was turned into fact by his own resurrection, the first-fruits of the general harvest of restored and re-vivified humanity. Fuller light, with other circumstances and concomitants, were afterwards added. "Behold! I tell you a mystery (a secret). In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump, the dead shall be raised." Through all the earlier ages, the belief of the soul's immortality had survived, defective and one-sided though it was, — an indestructible sentiment, a part of consciousness, a perpetual and universal tradition — awaiting the happy hour when it should be completed by that of an incorruptible, powerful, and glorious body, and thus the idea of immortal humanity receive its full and perfect form — "life and immortality brought to light by the Gospel."

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## ARTICLE V.

### CAPRICES AND LAWS OF LITERATURE.

BY REV. LEONARD WITHINGTON, D. D., NEWBURYPORT, MASS.

THE tendency of philosophical investigation is to extend the dominion of the laws of nature and to diminish the region of chance, until it dwindles to an unextended point. We behold a chip floating down a stream, or a feather floating on the air, — nothing at first view can be more apparently capricious than their motions; yet it is not more certain that they are passive things than it is that they are subjected to an invariable law, regulating all their movements and never for a moment relaxed or repealed.

When Dr. Paley, in the opening of his work on Natural Theology, was looking round for an antagonist power to his watch, he pitched upon a stone, lying on a heath, as an in-

stance of chance in opposition to design. But every reader feels the illustration to be imperfect because the antithesis is a false one. The stone is *not* a counterpart to a watch; it is only itself one wheel in a still greater watch, that is, the universe. The imperfect sample is felt in the subsequent reasoning. There was no place to be found, no object in creation that could supply an adequate illustration. The author would have had to go back to the original chaos, about which we know so little, to find the shadow of a comparison; and even there another power first permits and then interposes

Hanc Deus, et melior litem Natura diremit.

The Anarch in Milton, the king of chaos and the *nethermost abyss*, complains that the creations of God had invaded the confusion of his realms:

I upon my frontiers here  
 Keep residence; if all I am will serve  
 That little which is left so to defend;  
 Encroached on still thro' our intestine broils,  
 Weakening the sceptre of old Night; first hell  
 Your dungeon, stretching far and wide beneath,  
 Now lately heaven and earth, another world,  
 Hung o'er my realm linked in a golden chain  
 To that side heaven from whence your legions fell.

*Paradise Lost*, B. ii. lines 997-1005.

This is a striking illustration of the results of all our examinations into the laws of nature. The old Anarch is seen to retire and complain, until at last he vanishes into a shadow. "The laws," says bishop Butler, "by which persons, born into the world at such a time and place, are of such capacities, geniuses, tempers; the laws by which thoughts come into our mind, in a multitude of cases; and by which innumerable things happen, of the greatest influence on the affairs and state of the world; these laws are so wholly unknown to us, that we call the events which come to pass by them, accidental; though all men know certainly that there cannot, in reality, be any such thing as chance; and con-

clude that the things which have this appearance, are the result of general laws, and may be reduced into them." <sup>1</sup>

The same principle extends to mind. The will, however free and apparently capricious in its decisions, is still governed by laws, which *are* laws because their influence is universal. It is very true that the coercions of material nature extend not to mind; a ship is turned by a power which the mind of its master never feels. A motive and a natural power are not the same. Yet the mind submits to its own laws, and no man for a moment jumps out of his character.

In the collected world, the same stern uniformity prevails. Nations rise and fall, battles are won and lost; political organizations are made and dissolved by uniform causes which few can foresee and all are compelled to acknowledge when their latency is developed in the effect.

Literature is no doubt eminently a mental development, and therefore exists under two essential conditions: first, apparent caprice; and secondly, behind that caprice, an eternal law. Let us consider, then, the caprices and laws of literature, or rather the invariable laws which latently govern the caprices of literature. A clock sometimes has a dancing figure which comes out at a peculiar hour and seems to be a spontaneous performer; but no one doubts, on the least reflection, that the fantastic figure is guided by the same weights and wheels which move the more regulated hands, and point out the minute and the hour.

In stating the following instances of caprice over law, and law under caprice, we are far from pretending that our register is complete. It is a *specimen*, which demonstrates the track in which observation must walk, in order to verify, or confute.

First, then, in the infancy of literature originality is a cause and a help to universal acceptance; in the second stages of progression, it is an impediment, at least for a season. Homer and Shakspeare were at once acknowledged.

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<sup>1</sup> Analogy, Part II. c. 4.

The thrill of their genius was immediate; but afterwards peculiarities are found to be disagreeable and are pronounced wrong. The more original the writer, the slower his acceptance. The reason is obvious; the world has accommodated itself to its favorite models, and every deviation seems to indicate a bad taste, and of course perverse power.

Secondly, mannerism is at first an impediment and then a help, whenever it is united with strong power. We have by us now an old periodical, the *Monthly Mirror*, in which is a criticism on Cooke, the famous tragedian's first appearance in Covent Garden theatre. The writer says: "Admiration supersedes objection, and such are the insinuating effects of his acting, that the peculiarities which rather offend at first, grow more pleasing by degrees, and before the close of his performance, have lost nearly all their weight in the scale of criticism."<sup>1</sup> It is so with poems, histories, fictions, and sermons; every reader and hearer has felt it. Not one of the passages in Milton, which Bentley has excised with his "desperate hook," could now be spared. They are generally admired.

Thirdly, sometimes one great work of an author obscures and sinks the other works, and sometimes buoys up and preserves its weaker brethren. Milton's versification of the Psalms is always preserved, in the volumes of his poetry, though worse than mediocrity; while Thomson's *Liberty* is seldom published with his *Seasons*. Now we venture to say that Thomson has shown greater poetic art and conquered greater difficulties, in the fine parts of his poem on liberty, than he has in his *Seasons*, though he has not produced so attractive a composition. Yet *Liberty* always sinks, and Milton's Psalms always swim.<sup>2</sup> De Foe's great

<sup>1</sup> *Monthly Mirror*, Nov. 1800.

<sup>2</sup> It is astonishing, however, what stuff some of the good poets wrote. An eagle seldom perches but on a lofty cliff. But genius—how high it soars! how low it sinks! Otway and Lee were geniuses, but who can read—who would not gladly burn their worst works? Dryden himself—how low he can go! How wretched beyond conception! We tried to read his *WILD GALLANT*, his first comedy, sixty times at least, and succeeded at last only by the curiosity to know



autumn; time has swept away the books they read; the helps they enjoyed and all the scaffolding by which they were assisted to erect the fabric of their exclusive reputation. Such was Homer (if he was a personal being), such was Shakspeare; such are all the monarchs in literature who occupy the throne in the early ages. We call them original because all their early helps are forgotten.

Sixthly, a remarkable phenomenon in literature is the temporary popularity of some writers; they go up like meteors, and expire almost as soon, while others of a permanent reputation are of a very slow acceptance.<sup>1</sup> In our own memory, Hervey's *Meditations* were universally read; they called the attention of thousands of sentimentalists to religion, who had never read a page of religious reading before. Hervey in the closet was like Whitefield in the desk, an object of popular attention. Ossian was regarded as a sublime poet by some of the most reputable critics. — Blair, Gray, Hume; and the poetry of the Della Cruscan school was read with rapture in London and imitated in America by Robert Treat Paine and Mrs. Morton, and a host of others. Cowper's reputation was of slow growth; but what a difference now! All this we attribute to caprice. But there is a law. The reading public had been satiated with the imitations of Pope; and in such a state, even the mawkish Della Cruscan folly seemed at first to be original. It was certainly an innovation.

Seventhly, with this is connected another fact: some authors are killed by the first blow of criticism, like a snake under a switch; and from others the critic's censures rebound like a rifle-ball from the hide of a rhinoceros. Thus

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<sup>1</sup> Whoever has read *Don Quixote*, must have noticed how attractive, how fatally sweet, was the reading of books of chivalry in that age, and how *Amadis de Gaul*, in its four folio volumes, is the most tedious detail of incredible nonsense that was ever put into the hands of a lover of fiction. How is it that what was once so sweet has now become so wearisome; and how different its attractions from Homer, or even the *Arabian Nights*. The strong temporary attraction of each of them, and the permanency of the two latter, are remarkable examples of the different gradations of genius, and their different effects on mankind.

Hervey seemed to sink under the first remarks of his contemporaries;<sup>1</sup> his gaudy hexameters were no sooner pointed out than they palled upon the taste of even the vulgar reader. Most of us remember the severe Article in the Edinburgh Review on James Montgomery; it hardly impeded, for a moment, his reputation. The poet will live, when the critic is forgotten. Here, too, is a law too obvious for us to state.

Eighthly, when an author is generally accepted, there is generally a great change in the progress of his reputation. We fancy that the rhapsodist that fortunately got the name of Homer,<sup>2</sup> had not the least foretaste of his future reputation. The progress to immortality is commonly this: a poor shack is found to have some pleasing qualities; he has a brave invention and a spontaneous wit; nobody thinks of making a prodigy of him. He lays indeed strong hold of

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<sup>1</sup> It is more remarkable that Hervey should sink under criticism, inasmuch as some of the strictures on him are obviously unjust. For example, the following passage we remember to have seen subjected to the caustic knife. It is from his *MEDITATIONS AMONG THE TOMBS*, page 38: "Not long ago, I happened to spy a thoughtless Jay. The poor bird was idly busied in dressing her pretty plumes, or hopping carelessly from spray to spray. A sportsman, coming by, observed the feathered rover. Immediately he lifts his tube and levels his blow. Swifter than a whirlwind flies the leaden death; and in a moment lays the silly creature breathless on the ground." What labor! What circumlocution, said the critic, to say that "a gunner shot a bird!" But the object of the author is not merely to say that a gunner shot a bird. The author is musing — meditating — detaining the idea. It is a picture of a meditating mind. We might as well laugh at Pope, who uses the same circumlocution to exhibit the same picture.

He lifts his tube, he levels with his eye;  
 Strait a short thunder breaks the frozen sky.

*Windsor Forest*, lines 128, 129.

<sup>2</sup> Professor Tyler has somewhat weakened his argument for an individual Homer (in the *Bibliotheca Sacra*, Oct. 1857) by making it too strong. He overlooks the fact, which must be true, that if there be one Homer, he must have availed himself of the collected inventions and even songs of all the bards that preceded him. It is contrary to all analogy, for the perfection of the Iliad and Odyssey to be the sole production of one mind. Even Shakspeare, to whom he compares Homer, if he was the greatest inventor, was likewise the greatest thief that ever existed. Perhaps we may compromise the dispute by saying there might be one Homer, but the effects of thousands of intellects appear in his works. It must be so, unless he was a miracle.

the public attention, he is regarded very much as a dancing dog or a climbing monkey. The rich look on him with a kind of protecting, patronizing eye, and learning and reputation stand aloof from his fate. But he delights every one; and finally dies, and the world at last finds, when it has lost, that it once possessed, a Shakspeare, a Cervantes, a Defoe. There is a little poem now known as a specimen of solitary excellence (we allude to Blair's Grave), a poem original in its design, happy in its execution, and restoring the language of elder poetry to an artificial age. It forced its way up from stalls and peddlers' packs to the attention of poets and critics, and utters sentiments which found an echo in the universal heart. That poem has passed as severe a test to prove its merits as the works of any primitive genius. It has commanded the unconscious suffrage of mankind.

Ninthly, the best poets are not always most read. Genius often moves in a line not pleasing, and lavishes its power on subjects not attractive. Yet they stir the memory by a recondite attraction. Dante, Chaucer, Spencer, are poets which one would be content to praise, if he might only be excused from reading them.

Tenthly, there is a law behind caprice illustrated in the fate of the ballad poetry of almost all nations. The ballads of the English went into obscurity and were restored to attention, partly by the criticism of Addison, but surely by a deeper law, by their intrinsic power of forcing their impression on the minds of the common people. Some critics have complained that the Romans suffered their extravagant admiration of Greek models to supersede and destroy their own racy literature. The fact was, it was a necessary law that Greek perfection should crowd out the barren, dry efforts of their own rude and unenlightened countrymen. A cedar on Lebanon is a much more conspicuous object than a shrub in a hole of the rock. This law is very extensive. Whatever has great interest is apt to live. This, to be sure, is limited by the fact that we cannot remember everything, and that sometimes an accidental interest is found in the subject and comes not from the genius of the author. Thus

Homer seized on a splendid theme. War was the passion of the age. The fall of Troy was a blazing event and deeply interesting. His genius, though great, was helped by his subject; his earnestness, his simplicity, his touching a congenial chord, his narrative clearness (that is, it is real poetry, and yet the narrative is so clear that his ornaments flow over events as the lucid waters of the brook flow over the pebbles at the bottom, to shed on them a soft, watery light, and yet by refraction to make them more clearly defined, than if placed in the air itself and sparkling in the light of the sun), the rhapsodist that repeated his battles and the sensitiveness of those that heard them, his good fortune, his real merit, all conspired to make his poem live. We attribute too much to the burning of the Alexandrian library. A library is often a splendid sepulchre. There is a living law which transcends all libraries.

The truth is, the best works are preserved by their own vitality. Before the invention of the art of printing, perhaps the law was still more rigid and self-executing. The best works were oftenest copied and therefore stood the best chance of preservation. History, too, has a similar law. The events that illustrate some GREAT PRINCIPLE of civilization happen late and are recorded. They excite general attention and are preserved; whereas the barbarous battles of savage hordes, create by a happy law their own oblivion. Perhaps we may safely conclude that all the best works are preserved, though some meritorious ones are lost. It is a general law, though somewhat disturbed by causes which to our ignorance still remain as accidents. You see it in the individual. When a person repeats a story or poem to you, the most important points you remember. You remember, too, your own impressions. Some you strongly retain; some you dimly recover. Now the world is a person and has a combinate memory.

It must be conceded that the literary attractions of a piece are not the only cause of its preservation. National pride, national taste, the location of a city, the pride of a peculiar family, the very absurdity of a production, if it is an amus-

ing absurdity, the vitality of the precepts ; various causes may conspire to fix our attention and increase our interest. The wars with the Moors was a perpetual source of interest among the Spaniards ; and a wonderful sympathy with robbers and freebooters was a source of perpetual preservation of certain homely narratives among the English.<sup>1</sup> The laws of comparison often operate. The sparks of genius in the gloomy night of darkness and ignorance would be likely to attract attention. Every nation, in its deepest depression, would have its BEST. In a flat country, a mound passes for a mountain.

Eleventhly, the question may be started whether religion helps or hinders the acceptance of the author who makes it his chosen theme. Was Dr. Watts, for example, helped to reputation by his writing on devotional poetry ? Would any other subject have made him more popular ? Much may be said both ways. Our own decision would be, that religion helps mediocrity, but is the hardest theme for the highest invention. Dr. Blair did well to write sermons ; Dr. Watts, in composing his devotional hymns, conquered great difficulties.

Twelfthly, there are always some that will have a host of imitators ; as Cicero says : sic semper fuisse aliquem, cujus se similes plerique esse vellent (De Oratore, Lib. ii. sect. 23). But this imitated object is not always the greatest genius or the best pattern. Our Webster was not much imitated. Mr. Everett, on his first appearance, set all Cambridge imitating his tones. Dr. Griffin, when at Andover, was greatly imitated ; Professor Stuart, though far more natural, and of course a better model, was not much imitated. Pope was greatly imitated. "Every warbler," as Cowper says, "has his song by heart." Milton and Shakspeare are not often imitated, nor with much success. For half a century Dr.

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<sup>1</sup> The fact was, the regular form of civil society was so unequal and oppressive, the yoke was so heavy, and the Barons so brutal, and some of the robbers. Little John and Robin Hood, were so much more just than the legal robbers whom they pilfered, that the sympathy of the common people was with the professional freebooter. A very significant fact !

Johnson was generally imitated by the English nation; and he shall be our exponent. When an author, with a very considerable merit, has a narrow mannerism, which it is easy to copy and which reminds you of something higher which you cannot copy, such a writer will be imitated. They hope to reach his gait by stealing his slippers.

Thirteenthly, our admiration completes what nature begins in the rating of literary excellence. The inequality of talent is great, but not so great as we suppose. There is a tree near Exeter, N. H., which towers above the trees around it, but not so much as it seems to, to the vessels at sea, who use it as a landmark. We are great idolaters. Our admiration turns the great men into giants. I am a great believer in a literary nobility, but have no devotion to pay at the throne of the emperor. He is an usurper. No doubt there are classes of ability, and no doubt the first class is the smallest in number; but out of this class our exaggerating fancy selects one and turns him into a sample of perfection. It is thus in other things. The first man always stands higher than his proper grade. Greece and Persia out of some strong man made a Hercules and Rustan. In such cases, there is always some merit and always some exaggeration. A great ship may loom up as well as a small one, and it is a deception which lasts, because no one wishes to rectify it.

Fourteenthly, it is a law of literature that language, through all its first progressions, tends to a stand-point, though what fixes it at last it may be hard to say; certainly it is not perfection; for all languages have stopped short of even an attainable perfection.<sup>1</sup> In Dryden's Dialogue on the Drama, "written when he was yet a trembling candidate for reputation," 1668, he says: "Shakspeare's language is a little obsolete." Shakspeare's works were then about half a century old; Dryden's Dialogue, the very dialogue in

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<sup>1</sup> By a stand-point we of course do not mean a point which admits no additional words. All languages are constantly increasing their vocabularies. A stand-point is that permanency in fundamental structure which, after it is fixed, never afterwards becomes obsolete.

which he complains of this obsolescence, is now nearly two centuries old and scarcely a tinge of obsolescence is thrown over its language. It might have been written yesterday for one of our periodicals. What a difference in the degree of innovation in half a century before Dryden and two centuries after him! The same remark is true of the Latin language, half a century before Cicero, and all the innovations which succeeded him. The law by which a language progresses and stops, we cannot stay to discuss.

Fifteenthly, it is a law of literature which seems very much like a caprice, that we should be very much under the influence of traditionary criticism. We are most of us great admirers of *pointed-out* beauties. Indeed this sort of literary popery has been claimed and analyzed by the critics. *Modeste et circumspecto judicio de tantis viris pronuncian- dum est, ne (quod plerisque accidit) damnent quod non intelligunt.*<sup>1</sup> Mr. Addison, though a friend to *civil* liberty, lays down the same law: "If a man would know whether he is possessed of this faculty, I would have him read over the celebrated works of antiquity, which have stood the test of the politer part of our contemporaries. If upon the perusal of such writings, he does not find himself delighted in an extraordinary manner, or if in reading the admired passages in such authors, he finds a coldness and indifference in his thoughts, he ought to conclude, not (as is too usual among tasteless readers) that the author wants the perfections admired in him, but that he himself wants the faculty of discovering them."<sup>2</sup> Such lessons teach abundance of humility, but very little individualism. To be men of taste, we must echo the public sentiment.

No doubt, in some of the departments of taste, there is much truth in similar injunctions. Sir Joshua Reynolds informs us that he saw the works of the first painters in Italy with a feeling of disappointment. It was only by following tradition that he got at nature. Painting and music are eminently recondite departments and demand a taste to

<sup>1</sup> Quintilian's Institutes.

<sup>2</sup> Spectator, No. 469.

which we must be educated. But in eloquence and popular poetry you must be right at first sight, or never. Our noblest pleasure is the surprise of an instant inspiration.

Sixteenthly, how may we know whether, in our admiration and censures, we are under the influence of a traditional criticism? We are all under this influence to a certain degree. But one does not like to be wholly a factitious being. An absurd criticism is better than an everlasting echo. One is a little surprised at the rank given to Æsop's Fables by Luther. But the great reformer showed his independence by his criticism. He showed the character of his mind and taste. He ventured to say (what no doubt was true): "I find more pleasure in reading Æsop's fables than in perusing the Iliad." He had a right to his opinion; and we, no doubt, have a right to say, he was very singular in it. Taste in general is not wholly factitious, nor wholly natural. Your attention has been turned to a particular direction; its slumbering admiration has been called forth, by hearing others admire; and yet it may be a real beauty which you would have found and relished with somewhat less intensity and exclusion. Suppose a rose and lily to grow side by side in the same garden. Both have intrinsic excellence. But your attention has been more devoted to the rose than to the lily; you have seen it oftener, and examined it more. It would not be wonderful if you should exalt the one and depreciate the other; and yet had the rival plant been a homely weed, the comparison would have been clearer and your admiration could not have been so clearly turned from the one to the other. You have a natural taste *diverted*, while you thought you were improving it.

Would you know whether your taste is factitious or not? There is an easy rule, and an obvious way of applying it. Just ask yourself, how you were affected by certain authors *before* you knew there was such a thing as criticism. Did Pilgrim's Progress turn every road into a pathway to the celestial city? Did Robinson Crusoe set you to making a cave and building a boat? Did Don Quixote mount you on a Rosinante and make you twist your felt hat into an

helmet? Did these inebriating volumes shorten your summer days and steal away your winter nights? Did you meet some stray quotation from Shakspeare, music to your boyish ears, and did it chain you to the volume as soon as you could find it, and did you grieve that *all* was not as good as the first gem that was stolen from its setting? Did you ever read the *Spectator*, turning over half the numbers and fixing on the *Vision of Mirza*, as the most thrilling peep into the mystic world you were ever favored with? Particularly were you struck with the close, and did you wonder what became of the Genius with the musical instrument in his hand, and the vision of the arched bridge and the rolling waters? "I turned about to address myself to him a second time, but I found he left me; I then turned again to the vision which I had so long been contemplating; but instead of the rolling tide, the arched bridge, and the happy Islands, I saw nothing but the long hollow valley of Bagdat, with oxen, sheep, and camels grazing upon the side of it." Was there ever such a close? So transcendently beautiful! So mystic! So thrilling! In order to feel its utmost power, you must be an imaginative boy; you must read it, for the first time, when about twelve years old, in order to realize the sweet, visionary world, which the transporting author has presented to your fancy. At any rate, you may be assured that your taste, whatever its erratics may be, is not wholly under the influence of traditionary criticism.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> There is in Miss Burney's *Memoirs* an amusing instance in a monarch, giving his own impressions, and yet trembling before the authority of traditional criticism. His Majesty, George the Third, is represented as saying, in a whisper perhaps: "There is sad stuff in that Shakspeare, though it woud do to say it aloud." The royal critic in giving his individual impressions is, after all, more respectable than Lamb, Coleridge, and Hazlitt, with all their mingled blindness and penetration; blindness which cannot see the surface, and penetration which discovers what none but servile followers can recognize. There is a story in Dr. Moor's travels in Italy, about artificial rapture in criticism, which is pat to our point. "Very early in life," says he, "I resided about a year in Paris, and happened one day to accompany five or six of our countrymen to view the pictures of the Palais Royal. A gentleman who affected an enthusiastic passion for the fine arts, particularly that of painting, and who had the greatest desire to

Lastly. The last law of literature which we shall notice is the frame-work of language, which I think was early

he thought a connoisseur, was of the party. He had read the lives of the painters, and had the *Voyage Pittoresque de Paris* by heart. From the moment we entered the rooms, he began to display all the refinements of his taste; he instructed us what to admire, and drew us away with every sign of disgust when we stopped a moment at an uncelebrated picture. We were afraid of appearing pleased with anything we saw, till he informed us whether or not it was worth looking at. He shook his head at some, tossed up his nose at others; commended a few, and pronounced sentence on every picture as he passed along, with the most imposing tone of sagacity. 'Bad, that Caravaggio is too bad, indeed, devoid of all grace; but here is a Caracci that makes amends; how charming the grief of that Magdalen! The virgin, you'll observe, gentlemen, is only fainting, but the Christ is quite dead. Look at the arm, did you ever see anything so dead? — Aye, here's a Madonna which they tell you is an original, by Guido; but anybody may see it is only a tolerable copy. — Pray, gentlemen, observe this St. Sebastian, how delightfully he expires! Don't you feel the arrow in your hearts? I'm sure I feel it in mine. Do let us move on; I should die with agony, if I looked any longer.'

"We at length came to St. John, by Raphael; and here this man of taste stopped short in an ecstasy of admiration. One of the company had already passed it without minding it, and was looking at another picture; on which the connoisseur bawled out: 'Good heavens, sir, what are you about?' The honest gentleman started and stared around to know what crime he had been guilty of.

"'Have you eyes in your head, sir?' continued the connoisseur; 'don't you know St. John when you see him?' 'St. John!' replied the other, in amazement. 'Aye, sir! St. John the Baptist, *in propria persona*.'

"'I don't know what you mean, sir,' said the gentleman, peevishly.' — 'Don't you?' rejoined the connoisseur; 'then I'll endeavor to explain myself. I mean St. John in the wilderness, by the divine Raffaele Sanzio da Urbino, and there he stands by your side; — Pray, my dear sir, will you be so obliging as to bestow a little attention on that foot? Does it not start from the wall? Is it not perfectly out of the frame? Did you ever see such coloring? They talk of Titian. Can Titian's coloring excel that? What truth, what nature in the head! To the elegance of the antique, here is joined the simplicity of nature.'

"We stood listening in silent admiration, and began to imagine we perceived all the perfections he enumerated; when a person in the Duke of Orlean's service came and informed us that the original, which he presumed was the picture we wished to see, was in another room; the Duke having allowed a painter to copy it. *That* which we had been looking at was a very wretched daubing, done from the original by some obscure painter, and had been thrown with other rubbish into a corner, where the Swiss had accidentally discovered it, and had hung it up merely by way of covering the vacant space till the other should be replaced.

"How the connoisseur looked on this trying occasion I cannot say. It would have been barbarous to have turned an eye on him. I stepped into the next room, fully determined to be cautious in dealing on the merit of painting, perceiving it was not safe in this science to speak even from the book." — *A View of Society and Manners in Italy*, by John Moor, Vol. I.

formed and has been preserved amidst all the improvements and innovations arising from all the wanderings of the people and the accretions of time. The grand peculiarity in the Hebrew language by which it has only two tenses, is preserved in the under-structure of the English; and the affinity is striking and complete. It is true we have a more artificial table in our grammars; but the additional tenses are made by our auxiliary verbs. Strictly speaking, the old fundamental English comports with the Hebrew, and our common people show the impediments and the devices to conquer them, which are found in the Hebrew. I have heard plain people (particularly from Middlesex county in this state) use a language which reminds one of the Hebrew. Thus they throw a general proposition into the future: "You shall go down to the sea; you shall see the flats all covered at high water," etc. Just as the Hebrew says: "A wise son shall make a glad father," etc.<sup>1</sup> Language becomes complex by artificial accretions, but its old elements remain. A plain, colloquial speaker would not be surprised at the limited number of tenses in the Hebrew. Other affinities may be found; and by a knowledge of them a nice perception of these antiquated forms is facilitated and becomes a far easier task. We can explain the grammar by the current language of common life. All this and more has been verified by the late splendid discoveries of the linguistic affinities in all the languages of the civilized world. In Conant's translation of Gesenius's Hebrew grammar, page 3d, is the following sentence: "The Semitic stock, in its grammatical structure, compared with that of other languages, particularly the Indo-Germanic, exhibits many peculiarities which collectively constitute its distinctive character, *although many of them are found singly in other tongues.*" The last qualification is well put in.

Such are some of the laws of literature which underlie its caprices. The subject has some important applications:

First, we find in the Old Testament frequent allusion to

<sup>1</sup> I am aware that this instance is not an exact exemplification of the two original tenses.

books which have perished : THE BOOK OF THE WARS OF THE LORD ; THE BOOK OF JASHER ; THE CHRONICLES OF THE KINGS OF JUDAH ; THE THREE THOUSAND PROVERBS OF SOLOMON ; THE ONE THOUSAND AND FIVE SONGS ; and his works on natural history. We have reason to think that much of Hebrew literature has perished ; and it would be sad to think that it had perished through chance or the capricious conduct of a people who often perversely chose idolatry rather than the worship of Jehovah. Why did these books die, and why did other books live ? Was there a law, and what was it ? It is delightful to find, that God has intrusted this important discrimination to a law as certain as that which makes a bullet sink when dropped into the sea, and a piece of cork swim. The old song of the Children in the Wood, so simple, so very affecting, such cruelty in the uncle, such a piteous fate in the children, the dark woods, the lonely night, the dreadful death, and then the robin-red-breast covering them with leaves, and all this sung to an unworn and unpreoccupied mind — *virginibus puerisque canto* — how could such a song perish ? It was steeped in a thousand tears ; *it was graven with an iron pen and lead in the rock forever.*

But all these laws of discrimination and preservation were increased among the Hebrews. Religion always exercises a powerful influence over taste. The Hebrew government was a theocracy. Their religion was a book-religion ; it depended on the divine authority of certain pages. Therein was their duty, their distinction, their pride, and their glory. Now, of course, their attention must be deeply fastened on the books which stood at such an awful distance from all others. The very absorbing interest of the divine books must draw away their regard for the other class. If, then, the committing of an English lay, about a robber, to an English taste, was sure to preserve it, if it had any *human* inspiration, how much more a Hebrew strain or narrative, committed to a sacred nation, when the inspiration was claimed to be divine ! *If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning.*

This law is so general and so efficacious that one can

hardly agree with Prideaux when he argues that in the reign of Josiah there was no copy left except that found in the rubbish of the temple. "If the king and the high-priest," says he, "who were both men of eminent piety, were without this part of holy Scripture, it can scarce be thought that any one else had it."<sup>1</sup> But surely it *must* have been otherwise. It is hard to blot out the memory of a most popular book. Was there no pious Jew that had survived the ruin of Manasseh and Ammon; no concealed copy; no memory strong enough to preserve its most important parts? We have, too, the special providence of God; his interest in preserving what his goodness had given. At any rate, we know the power of religious principle, how it fires the genius and quickens the memory; and it was impossible that the narratives of Moses or the strains of Isaiah should be blotted out from the recollections of such a people. The indifference of the court and the temple would powerfully tend to produce a reaction in popular life.

The conclusion then is, that the books lost sunk because they had less authority than the books preserved. They died because they were mortal.

Wisdom is not always wise; learning is not always common sense. Some of the German critics, who have lost their brains over their books, have introduced some astonishing rules of judging. Thus Dœderlein says:<sup>2</sup> "Sed cum nemo conjector ausit per breves et obscuros indices efficere ac finire singulorum titulos numerumque universum, et vulgaris opinionis de canone Judeorum, confirmato et probato per Jesum, cui tamen censoris critici provincia vix erat demandata, futilia sint argumenta," etc. It is very true that Christ did not come into the world to be a critic, but for a purpose infinitely higher and nobler, a purpose that swallows up all criticism and supersedes its petty power by hastening to its important end. The sun does not rise to *reflect* its own light. Because Christ was not a critic, was he therefore incompetent to sanction the books of the Old Testament by

<sup>1</sup> Prideaux's Connections, Vol. II. p. 103.    <sup>2</sup> Inst. Theolog. Vol. I. p. 159.

his own infallible word? Such reasoning, on this side the Atlantic, must be beneath contempt; it must derive all its respectability by coming across the water. Rosenmüller, in his preface to the 2d Psalm, has an equally wise law: "Peter, Paul the apostle, he who wrote the epistle to the Hebrews, apply this psalm to Christ. But, says the sublime critic, pluming his wings for one of his highest flights: "A nobis vero hanc, quæ in laude tum esset, docendi et disputandi rationem sine impretatis et arrogantiae culpa deseri nunc posse, persuasum mihi est; neque enim ab istis disciplinæ christianæ doctoribus expectari interpretationes locorum difficilium grammaticæ debent." How much of this nonsense have we had! and how solemnly has it been repeated! Is criticism a means or an end? and is the man who makes it an end, a philosopher, or fool?

The great object of criticism is to find the popular law, and the great wish of piety is to obey it.

A knowledge of some of these laws of literature might lead us to look behind some superficial canons which are misleading from the very circumstance of their being true; for a deceptive truth is worse than a manifest error. Several of the German critics have laid down this rule: that after the restoration of the Jews by Cyrus, it became common among them to refer whatever was great and magnificent in the lays of the prophets to the Messiah, and hence grew up the latent or double sense. It was the triumph of hope over experience; it was the agonies of a mind in which a present dungeón creates the most extravagant visions of future liberty. Now the fact to which they allude (for it is a fact), had a cause, and in that cause we find the true solution of the double sense. They believed their prophets to be inspired; of course, an authorship behind the visible and human author. It is very impressive and instructive to see how the same condition impresses men with the same law. Thus the oracle at Delphi had a recondite or double meaning: the god saw further than the priestess or the consulter; the prophecy was oftentimes revealed only in the event. Men in similar situations will always come to a similar result. It

is a law of their condition. When the commander of a ship directs the helmsman to steer a particular course, the higher mind has a more extensive design than the lower; his direction has a deeper meaning in his own breast than it has in the ear of him who receives it. The sailor wishes to keep on that particular track; he looks to his compass and is satisfied, if the vessel does not deviate; the captain thinks of the whole voyage, perhaps of girdling the whole world. The restoration from the Babylonish captivity was an emblem and prelude to our higher redemption. The double meaning arises from the condition of the prophet, the complicity of his object, the secondary nature of his authorship, the subordination of his office, and the grandeur of his theme. It is often said that the Bible should be interpreted like any other book; yes, like any other book treating of such themes and the writers in such a condition. But surely inspiration brings its own laws; and the natural is modified by the spiritual that shines over it. The double meaning is not arbitrary, not forced, not extravagant, not even uncertain, when men are placed in a condition that demands it.

We may derive from our subject a topic of triumph and consolation both to the successful and unsuccessful candidate for fame. The law is invariable, inevitable, and, in the long run, inflexibly just. It may be a matter of congratulation to a successful writer to know that merit (at least relative merit) sustains him, and to the unsuccessful one that an ETERNAL LAW consigns him to forgetfulness. No doubt this law dooms to darkness much that is respectable, much that is even excellent; and a work may sometimes fasten on the memory by its supreme absurdity. But it must be STRIKING. If you can write a poem, or compose a history, or utter an apophthegm, or even make a blunder which excites attention enough to be repeated and re-echoed, it lives. But if you only repeat a common-place, it cannot be preserved even in the pickling juices of folly or faction. It perishes, not by the caprice of man, but by a decree which no artificial legislation can ever repeal.