CHAPTER V.

THE BEGINNINGS OF THE MODERN NOVEL.

The story of Antæus, who gained fresh strength from each fall to the earth that he suffered, might well be taken to typify the history of prose fiction. Flat on the ground, after the soaring flights of the heroic romance, gaining fresh vigour from the intimate realistic study of daily life and ordinary character, the novel began its career anew, and with the fairest prospect of success. For the seventeenth century, so poor in original prose fiction, had done much to prepare the way for it when it should arise. Literary activity had displayed itself in many new forms; the newspaper and political and religious controversy had trained up a reading public numbering scores of thousands; above all, an instrument had been prepared for the novelist in the shape of a new prose, invented and first practised for purposes of criticism, homiletic, and science, but easily available for vivid narration or realistic description unencumbered by the metaphorical apparatus of earlier prose-writing. The conditions, material and formal, for the success of the novel, were there by the beginning of the eighteenth
century, and awaited only the artist who should perceive them and avail himself of them. The immense and immediate popularity of the novels of Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding, each of whom stumbled, as it were by accident, into the writing of prose fiction, serves to show how ready the public was to welcome and appreciate the new venture. The literary tendencies and developments of the previous century made it certain that that venture should be realistic, dealing with average contemporary life, and no new resuscitation of the thrice-worn themes of old romance; the eighteenth-century school of fiction, that is, was inevitably a school of novelists.

For after the great school of imaginative writers of the golden age of English literature had passed away, the literary tendencies of the seventeenth century were all in favour of the novel. One or two lonely men of genius built the lofty rhyme or wove the brilliant tangles of the old poetic prose, but the general character of a century is to be estimated most truly from its lesser writers, and not from the visions of a Milton, or the fantasies of a Browne. The works of the lesser writers of the seventeenth century show the rise of a new spirit, foreign to the times of Shakespeare,—a spirit of observation, of attention to detail, of stress laid upon matter of fact, of bold analysis of feelings and free argument upon institutions; the microscope of the men of the Restoration, as it were, laying bare the details of daily objects, and superseding the telescope of the Elizabethans that brought the heavens nearer earth. No one word will finally describe it: in its relation to knowledge it is the spirit
of science, to literature it is the spirit of criticism; and science and criticism in England are the creations of the seventeenth century. The positive temper, as opposed to the mystic, is everywhere in the ascendant, in spite of the imaginative aberrations of the more extravagant religious and political theorists. In literature illustrations are many; thus satire, which in the age of Elizabeth was the pastime of very young men, who "railed on Lady Fortune in good terms," became deadly earnest after the Civil Wars, in the hands of men like Cleveland, Oldham, Marvell, Butler, and Dryden, who left Nature and Fortune with their withers unwrung, and aimed at the joints in the harness of their enemies. Thus imaginative works, the good, as well as the bad, were exposed to a running fire of burlesque and parody, and reputations were made on travesties of Homer and Virgil. Thus, too, the drama turned away from the broad treatment of human nature and the search for new emotional situations carried so far by Webster and Ford, to the humbler task of social portraiture and the mimicking of individual foibles. A comparison of two great comedies, one written at the beginning, the other at the end of the century, will illustrate the change of which this is only one aspect. How far a cry is it from Ben Jonson's Volpone to Congreve's Way of the World,—from the heroic villainies proper to no age and clime, drawn by the great master of scorn and humour, to the delicate finesses of social fraud portrayed by the witty man of fashion! And, turning away for a moment from purely artistic literature, it is not hard to find marks of the change, of the new taste for fact and detail, in the historical
labours of Fuller, Dugdale, Rymer, and Rushworth, or in the manifold productions of those lesser scribes who bore, as Cleveland scornfully remarks, the same relation to an historian that the maker of mouse-traps bears to an engineer, the diurnal-makers and writers of Mercuries. The new generation of readers were all for fact, they wished chiefly to inform themselves and take a side: even the court circles of the Restoration, which yielded for a time to the fascinations of Dryden’s heroics, were at least as ready to applaud the Rehearsal and the champion of “prose and sense.”

One class of literary production, almost proper to the seventeenth century, may rank as an ancestor of the novel in the direct line. The Character, a brief descriptive essay on a contemporary type, whether an “Upstart Knight,” an “Old College Butler,” a “Tobacco-seller,” a “Pot-Poet” or a “Pretender to Learning,” enjoyed so great a popularity that Dr. Bliss stated that he had made a list of more than two hundred seventeenth-century collections of Characters in his copy of one of the most famous of these works, Earle’s Micro-cosmography (1628). Among the better known of the writers of Characters are numbered Bishop Hall, the ill-fated Sir Thomas Overbury, John Cleveland, and Samuel Butler, the satirist. Nor was public interest limited to these characters of types, drawn for the most part satirically; biography and autobiography also flourished, and men regaled the world with the account of a life that, but for that account, the world would never have heard of. Not only did Lord Herbert of Cherbury, William Lilly the astrologer, and Margaret Duchess of Newcastle write their own
lives, but highwaymen and keepers of ale-houses followed in their train. George Fox kept his memorable Journal, Pepys immortalized himself in his Diary, Evelyn made for himself a securer title to fame than all his scientific labours could have procured, Bunyan wrote what was virtually an autobiography in the account of his religious experiences, and James Howell popularized the habit of publishing familiar letters, valuable rather for their contents than for the rank or notability of their author or recipient. Material for the study of the life of the time—letters, diaries, and biography—begins to abound, and for the scanty Elizabethan documents, such as the few letters, "witty and familiar," that passed between Spenser and Master Gabriel Harvey, preserved by the egotism of the latter worthy, the student finds a library of similar material belonging to the time of the Restoration, when man had begun, often in the most desolate and remote places, the serious, affectionate, and minute study of himself.

The realistic writing of Defoe and the realistic novel in England were the offspring of these ancestors, the children of a taste for fact. Realistic fiction in this country was first written by way of the direct imitation of truthful record, and not, as in France, by way of burlesque on the high-flown romance. The heroic romance in France found parodists in Scarron and Furetière, whose Roman Comique (1651) and Roman Bourgeois (1666) brought fiction back to scenes of average town and provincial life, and transformed the romance at a blow into the novel. The process in England was longer and slower, but its spirit was the same, and is exactly
described by Furetière in his address to the reader prefixed to the *Roman Bourgeois*. In this he claims a moral purpose for his novel, and excuses himself for passing over the crimes of wicked men to censure the petty faults to which all the world is liable. "To this end it is necessary that the nature of the stories and the characters of the persons should be so closely modelled on our own manners that we should seem to recognize in them the people that we meet every day." And for evidence of his success as a preceptor, Furetière relates how the perusal of the story of a certain Lucretia, contained in his novel, had actually cured a fair *bourgeoise* of her infatuated passion for a marquis.

But satire is perhaps more effective to destroy an old school of romance than to create a new. It is certain that the new was not created in England chiefly by way of satire; even Fielding, whose original intention no doubt was simply to satirize the high-toned *Pamela*, soon forgot Pamela and her creator in the zest of depicting Parson Adams. *Don Quixote*, very early translated into English, bore fruit in the seventeenth century in such works as Beaumont and Fletcher's *Knight of the Burning Pestle* (1611) or Butler's *Hudibras* (1663–1678). Scarron was translated and imitated, but the burlesque method, so admirably applied to the heroic play, left the heroic romance unscathed, and no new fiction sprang out of the ashes of the old.

But in the general literature of the time there are to be found in plenty hints, premonitions, tentative approaches to what was afterwards to be the novel. The work of John Bunyan hardly finds its proper place in a history
of prose fiction; he regarded it as anything but fictitious. Moreover, in form and outline it bears something the same relation to the novel proper that the "Morality" bears to the drama proper. Yet how rich are his works, not only the *Pilgrim’s Progress* (1678), but the *Holy War* (1682), and the *Life and Death of Mr. Badman* (1680), in literary, as well as practical and moral lessons, in demonstrations whereby the novelists might profit to learn character-painting, admirable narrative, and the attainment of the illusion of reality. Where was the professed writer of fiction in the seventeenth century who could enthral the reader’s imagination by his two opening sentences, and hold him spellbound to the end? This is how the *Pilgrim’s Progress* begins:—

“As I walked through the wilderness of this world I lighted on a certain place where there was a den, and I laid me down in that place to sleep, and as I slept I dreamed a dream. I dreamed, and behold I saw a man, a man clothed in rags, standing with his face from his own home, with a book in his hand, and a great burden upon his back.”

This is more than pathetic allegory, it is perfect narrative and vivid picture; that one descriptive phrase, of masterly restraint, “standing with his face from his own home,” which contains Bunyan’s thought upon two worlds, at once stirs the hearts of those who read beneath it, and secures the eager interest of children in the expectance of coming adventures.

It was well for literature that Bunyan learnt his style from the English Bible, and not from Mlle. de Scudéry. His abstractions are more living than the portraits of
other writers. The bathos that was reached by the heroic romance when it laboured under the additional weight of allegory may be well seen in the Bentivolio and Urania (1660) of Nathaniel Ingelo, D.D., wherein the heroic model was employed to set forth the pursuit by Bentivolio, or Good Will, of his mistress Urania or Heavenly Wisdom. In the fourth edition of this romance (1682), "the obscure words throughout the book are interpreted in the margin, which makes this much more delightful to read than the former editions." Some one, therefore, must have read it, let it pass for a book; it marks for the historian of literature the lowest depth to which English romance-writing sank. Its unillumined profundity swarms with low forms of life; polysyllabic abstractions crowd its pages, and deposit their explanatory spawn upon its margin; "the very deep did rot."

The abstractions of Bunyan, on the other hand, are hardly abstractions; they breathe and move in the atmosphere and light of his imagination. Giant Pope and Giant Pagan, Pliable and Mr. Worldly Wiseman, Faithful and Christian himself are additions to the portrait gallery of English fiction. In the Life and Death of Mr. Badman the author gives a singularly minute and realistic biography of a tradesman in a provincial English town, who leads a sordid and successful life, and dies "like a chrisom child, quietly and without fear." The grim and awful reality of the whole sketch is enhanced by numberless matter-of-fact touches, and by the writer's simplicity and freedom from all extravagance. Here is no double-dyed villainy, but a perfectly consistent hard and ugly life, such as Bunyan
had more than once observed, perhaps in Bedford, only projected by him, by implication rather than by direct contrast, against the white background of eternity.

The readers of the *Pilgrim's Progress* doubtless had no literary affectations to unlearn; for them, Bunyan’s style was the style to which they were already best accustomed. But Margaret, Duchess of Newcastle, wrote for the circles that left the *Pilgrim's Progress* severely alone, and in her works there are interesting contributions to the raw material of fiction. In her "*CCXI Sociable Letters*" (1664) she anticipates Richardson in the discovery that letters, to be interesting, need not be really exchanged by living correspondents, and aims at making of them "rather scenes than letters, for I have endeavoured under cover of letters to express the humours of mankind." In the close of her *Nature's Pictures drawn by Fancie's Pencil* (1656) she records her birth and character in statements that had only to be false to ring with the very tones of Defoe: "Neither did I intend this piece for to delight, but to divulge, not to please the fancy, but to tell the truth, lest after ages should mistake in not knowing I was the daughter to one Master Lucas of St. John's, near Colchester in Essex, and second wife to the Lord Marquis of Newcastle; for my lord having had two wives, I might easily have been mistaken, especially if I should die and my lord marry again." This anxiety that the reader should be in no way misinformed, this protest and circumstance of veracity, forcibly recalls the style that Defoe adopted for his greatest fiction, after he had made the discovery that biography loses none of its interest when the life it
records has never been lived. With Defoe the art of fiction came to be the art of grave imperturbable lying, in which art the best instructor is the truth. And it was to no reputed masters of romance, but to recorders of fact, biographers, writers of voyages and travels, historians and annalists, that Defoe served his apprenticeship.

The change that came over English prose style about the time of the Restoration perfected the instrument of the new fiction. This change is commonly attributed to Dryden, but in this, as in other things, Dryden was the exponent of a movement beyond his control. To the sermons of Tillotson Dryden owned his obligations; and another writer, famous in his own time, Thomas Sprat, afterwards Bishop of Rochester, gives in his History of the Royal Society (1667) an instructive account of one of the influences that made for the new prose. Sprat regards the “luxury and redundance of speech” as one of the chief and most inveterate of the evils which the Society has to combat. “Who can behold,” he exclaims, “without indignation, how many mists and uncertainties these specious tropes and figures have brought on our knowledge?” The “beautiful deceit,” from use and education, has come to be esteemed, and a drastic remedy is needed. The Royal Society, therefore, “have exacted from all their members” (Dryden was one) “a close, naked, natural way of speaking; positive expressions, clear senses, a native easiness, bringing all things as near the mathematical plainness as they can; and preferring the language of artisans, countrymen, and merchants before that of wits or scholars.”
The remedy which is here prescribed for style was needed also by fiction in the time of Sprat, and, before the next century was many years old, fiction, too, had bowed under the yoke, had accepted the dictatorship of fact, and adopted the language of humble life.

It is no straining of language to speak of the Tatler (1709–1711) and Spectator (1711–1712) of Steele and Addison as brilliant examples of prose fiction. Here, for the first time, are the methods and subjects of the modern novel; all that is wanting is a greater unity and continuity of scheme to make of the “Coverley Papers” in the Spectator a serial novel of a very high order. Such continuity as there is in the grouping of incidents round the same characters is due to the idea of a Club, consisting of friends of the author, who assist him in editing the paper, and whose humours and adventures he records. This idea had been long popular before it attained its final development in the Spectator. Its original is perhaps to be found in the “Athenian Society” formed by the bookseller, John Dunton, for the production of the Athenian Gazette (1690–1696), the first non-political journal established in England. This society really existed, and included among its few members Samuel Wesley, father of the divine. When Defoe started his Review, in 1704, he adapted the notion of a society in the “Scandal Club,” a fictitious association for the free discussion of those problems of morals, literature, and society which had been treated in the Athenian Gazette by way of direct question and oracular response. In a late number of the Tatler (No. 132) the reader is introduced to the members of Mr. Bickerstaff's
Club, and a series of character-sketches is given, but little use is made of them subsequently. Indeed the author himself alleges that the particular use he finds for this "set of heavy honest men, with whom I have passed many hours with much indolence, though not with great pleasure," is to lull the thinking faculties, and induce a gentle sleep. And he describes Sir Jeffery Notch, the decayed gentleman of ancient family "who calls every thriving man a pitiful upstart;" Major Matchlock, who nightly recounts the battle of Naseby; "honest old Dick Reptile," and the young bencher who "has about ten distichs of Hudibras without book." It was doubtless at the hands of Addison that this society, "too little and too lately known" in the Tatler, received promotion to a place in the forefront of the scheme of the Spectator. The six "gentlemen who are concerned with me in this work" are six types of contemporary society, Sir Roger de Coverley, the bachelor of the Inner Temple, Sir Andrew Freeport, Captain Sentry, Will Honeycomb, and the philosophic clergyman; all of them are introduced in the second number of the Spectator. Their later appearances, especially those of Sir Roger and Will Honeycomb, give occasion to fragments of prose fiction inferior to none in the eighteenth century. The dreary "Character" of the seventeenth century, which would have rendered Sir Roger as "An Old Country Knight," and Will Honeycomb as "A Mere Town Gallant," has received its death-blow in these sketches, drawn by men who loved the individual better than the type, and delighted in precisely those touches of character, eccentricities and surprises, that give life to
a literary portrait. The keen undiscriminating satire of the
generic description has given way to the gentle
atmosphere of humour that envelopes and illuminates the
character of Sir Roger, disarming the dogmatist by show-
ing him that this man's very faults were loveable, and
that his virtues may be smiled at as well as praised.
A century before the date of the Spectator Sir Thomas
Overbury had set himself to describe the "character"
of a country gentleman. "He is a thing," says Over-
bury, "out of whose corruption the generation of a
justice of peace is produced. He speaks statutes and
husbandry well enough to make his neighbours think
him a wise man.... His travel is seldom farther
than the next market town, and his inquisition is about
the price of corn: when he travelleth, he will go ten
mile out of the way to a cousin's house of his to save
charges; and rewards the servants by taking them by
the hand when he departs." After a scornful sketch of
the absurdity of his behaviour when he comes to London,
Overbury concludes, "But this is not his element, he
must home again, being like a dair, that ends his flight
in a dunghill."

Had the Spectator been content with the essay, moral
or satirical, after this kind, the inimitable papers on the
life and character of Sir Roger might have been con-
densed into a single valueless bundle of characteristics,
epigrammatically expressed and opprobriously intended,
somehow thus:—

"An Old Country Squire is a thing that was a fine
gentleman three reigns ago, and is now a mere Justice
of the Peace. He is of opinion that none but men of
fine parts deserve to be hanged; yet he will pretend to wisdom in his own shire, where he can explain the game laws, and determine a knotty point in the law, after grave deliberation, with the opinion 'that there is much might be said on both sides of the question.' At the Assize Courts, to keep up his credit in the county, he will whisper in the judge's ear, 'That he is glad his lordship has met with so much good weather in his circuit.' He is much given to sport, but loves his neighbour's game better than his own; he will go three miles to spare his own partridges, and when the farmers' sons open the gates for him a-hunting he requites them with a nod and an inquiry after their fathers and uncles. In church he is landlord to the whole congregation, and will suffer nobody to sleep in it besides himself. In town all his talk is of how he killed eight fat hogs at Christmas, and has sent a string of hogs' puddings with a pack of cards to every poor family in the parish. When he dies he leaves for mourning, to every man in the parish a great frieze coat, and to every woman a black riding-hood, because it was a cold day when he made his will."

These traits are selected from the Spectator, and, being so selected, cannot even thus be robbed of all their merit. They serve at least to show that the country gentleman was very much the same being in the days of Overbury and of Addison, that the same model sat to both artists. But the invention of the art of portrait-painting had been made meanwhile, and, in place of the coarse and grotesque outlines of the early caricature, the Coverley Papers furnish a living likeness of the man, and endear him to their readers to such a point
that his death has at last to be announced (Spectator, No. 517) with all the circumstance of an overpowering affliction. "I question not," says Addison, "but my readers themselves will be troubled at the hearing of it." In that sentence he makes a claim for his own workmanship higher than any that could justly be advanced by all the prose novelists who had preceded him.

It is impossible, therefore, to omit all mention of the Tatler and Spectator in an account of the rise of the modern English novel. The leaflets composing the Tatler and Spectator are written from the standpoint of a great novelist, and abound in material which might well have been wrought into a great novel. For the great novelist must be essentially a humourist, just as the great romancer must be essentially a poet. And Addison and Steele, party men though they were, are born observers rather than born fighters; even irony, the most formidable of a humourist's weapons, becomes in their hands a pruning-hook rather than a sword. The temper of the Spectator is well defined in that paper (Spectator, No. 10) where the author recommends his writings especially to two classes of persons, to women, and to those who "have no other business with the rest of mankind, but to look upon them; . . . in short, everyone that considers the world as a theatre, and desires to form a right judgment of those who are the actors on it." The detached scenes, merry and pathetic, that are chosen from this theatre to furnish entertainment for "the fraternity of spectators" are so numerous and so exquisitely wrought as almost to suggest some regret
that no novel dealing with the manners of the times of the later Stuarts and William of Orange has been or could be left by the creators of Sir Roger de Coverley. Many of the descriptions and reminiscences to be found in the Spectator serve to show what a wealth of material Addison could have brought to such a work, and what fine use he could have made of it. Some of his most delicate miniatures are drawn from reminiscences that he had doubtless heard in conversation. Of this kind is the account given in the Spectator (No. 57), of the call paid in former days by the author and Will Honeycompt on a lady who was an admirer of Dr. Titus Oates, and had the portrait of the Whig idol graven on her snuff-box lid, stamped on her handkerchiefs, painted on the sticks of her fan, and plentifully hung about the room. Another instance is to be found in the description of the young gentleman who wished to stand for a scholarship at one of the colleges of Oxford or Cambridge—for Addison does not specify—during the protectorate of Cromwell, and went to interview the head of the college, "a famous independent minister" of those times,—not improbably Goodwin of Magdalen, Oxford. Nothing could be better painted than this brief scene, where the youth, after having been ushered in by a gloomy servant and kept waiting in a long gallery, darkened at noonday, with a single candle burning in it, is at length led into a chamber hung with black, and confronted by the head of the college, "with half a dozen night caps upon his head, and religious horror in his countenance." The poor boy, who had expected to be tested in Latin and Greek, was so alarmed by these proceedings and by his
subsequent examination, culminating in the dreadful interrogatory, "Whether he were prepared for death?" that, once safely emerged, he determined wholly to forego an academic education. No one can read this, or the multitude of scenes in the Spectator as vividly conceived and described, without perceiving what a novelist English literature would have had in Addison had the times been ripe for the novel. But the reading public had still to be educated, and the Spectator, with its circulation rising in comparatively few months from three thousand to thirty thousand copies, and with the host of imitators that it brought into being, not only trained the taste of its public in the direction of the novel, but increased the numbers of that public, until a man of letters could find money as well as fame in successful writing.

Such a man of letters was Daniel Defoe. His first great work of fiction, entitled The Life and Strange Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe, of York, Mariner (1719), was written by him at the age of fifty-eight, and is stated, in the preface to the third part, to be an allegoric version of his own history—"of one whole scene of real life of eight and twenty years, spent in the most wandering, desolate, and afflicting circumstances that ever a man went through; and in which I have lived so long a life of wonders, in continual storms; fought with the worst kind of savages and man-eaters, by unaccountable surprising incidents; fed by miracles greater than that of ravens; suffered all manner of violences and oppressions, injuries, reproaches, contempt of men, attacks of devils, corrections from heaven, and oppositions on earth." No one reads Robinson Crusoe for
the allegory, but a brief examination of the career of Defoe will not only lay bare the hidden meaning here claimed for the book, but also serve to demonstrate the way in which it came to be written. For Defoe was above all an occasional writer, by no means "long choosing and beginning late," but pouring from the press a profusion of satires, political pamphlets, verses, and moral treatises, to the number of more than two hundred, inspired by the moment and writing under a pressure that sometimes contorts his syntax.

Daniel Defoe, the son of James Foe citizen and butcher, was born in London in the year 1660 or 1661. After giving up the idea of becoming a Nonconformist minister, for which profession he had been educated, he was apprenticed to a hose-factor, and was very early drawn into the troublous politics of the time. He served under Monmouth, issued pamphlets on the principal questions that agitated the reign of James II., and welcomed William of Orange. During the reign of William he enjoyed some Government favour, and, although he was constantly in monetary troubles, was able to set up brick-kiln works at Tilbury, where he employed over a hundred workmen. It was during the High Church reaction after the death of William that Defoe wrote the pamphlet called The Shortest Way with the Dissenters (1702), which proved the turning-point of his literary career. In this pamphlet, purporting to be written by a Churchman, Defoe recommends that Dissenting preachers be hanged and their congregations banished, and argues that this is, in the end, the least cruel method of dealing with them, for "the poison of
their nature makes it a charity to our neighbours to destroy those creatures . . . that are noxious."

It has become almost a habit with biographers of Defoe, while maintaining that the sentiments of the High Church party were not unjustly represented in this work, at the same time to declaim against the "obtuseness" of the men of both parties who took it for a genuine and serious composition, and missed the "exquisite irony" that it displays. But these positions are mutually destructive. Doubtless the High Churchmen had used strong language, and Sacheverell, in a sermon preached before the University of Oxford only a few months before, had said that every man that wished the welfare of the Church "ought to hang out the bloody flag and banner of defiance" against her enemies. But the real fact is, that Defoe's irony, if it can claim the title at all, is not the irony of a·wit. Acting on his own expressed principle that "Lies are not worth a farthing if they are not calculated for the effectual deceiving of the people they are designed to deceive," Defoe produced a very realistic imitation of the High Church argument, faintly touched, perhaps, with exaggeration at places. It has never been made quite clear that his purpose was ironical at all; he may well have meant to give an expression so clear and emphatic to the views of the extremists of the party as to alienate all moderate men from them, and so strengthen the cause of the Dissenters.

If this were so, he failed; the authorship of his work was discovered, and the rage of his dupes, of both parties, broke upon him. He was condemned to stand in the pillory three times, to pay a fine of two hundred marks,
and to be imprisoned during the Queen's pleasure. He was actually imprisoned for more than a year, during which time his business at Tilbury went to pieces, and his wife and six children were brought face to face with starvation.

From this time onward Defoe had to look mainly to his pen for support, and he played upon a public that had shown itself so ready to be deceived. The "obtuseness" that mistook The Shortest Way for a sincere utterance had ruined his fortunes, but it taught him where his strength as a writer lay. Those who had been the dupes of simulated argument could be made the more remunerative dupes of fictitious narration. And in the True Relation of the Apparition of one Mrs. Veal, the next day after her death, to one Mrs. Bargrave at Canterbury, the 8th of September 1705, which Apparition recommends the perusal of Drelincourt's Book of Consolations against the Fear of Death (1705), Defoe at last found his cue, and inaugurated that series of realistic fictions which was to close only with his death. Tradition has it that this preface to Drelincourt's book was written for a publisher who found himself with many unsaleable copies of the translation of the book on hand; certainly the ponderous original quarto, which inspired Tallemant des Réaux with more terror than the prospect of death itself, stood sadly in need of some such expert recommendation.

Sir Walter Scott, in his admirable analysis of the devices employed in this story to recommend it to the belief of readers, has pointed out the essentials of Defoe's plausible realism. The first of these is that the author himself, on whose veracity the whole structure depends,
should remain out of sight. Accordingly the account given is attributed to "a gentleman, a justice of the peace at Maidstone," and attested by "a very sober and understanding gentlewoman," who lives within a few doors of Mrs. Bargrave, and had the relation from her own lips. Defoe thus invents one character to attest the facts, and another to believe the first incapable of a lie. Further, he invents "a person with the reputation of a notorious liar" to say that Mrs. Bargrave's tale is all a cheat, but he is careful to add that Mrs. Bargrave had no possible interest in telling the story, for she has undergone on account of it much trouble and fatigue, without the gain of a single farthing. It would have required a reader with a hawk's eye and a detective's knowledge of human nature to be suspicious after this of the apparently innocent remark that "Drelincourt's Book of Death is, since this happened, brought up strangely." The ordinary reader becomes so interested in the opinion that Defoe's characters have, of one another's veracity that he forgets to ask whether they exist.

The impartiality of the narrator is another characteristic of the piece. He gives all the circumstantial evidence corroborative of the story, but does not fail to point out flaws in its absolute cogency. The most important piece of evidence, however, is admittedly flawless. Mrs. Veal made her appearance only one day after her death, looking very well, and dressed in a silk gown, which, in the confidences of a two hours' interview, she admitted to be a scoured silk. When Mrs. Bargrave, in telling the story to one Mrs. Watson, came to this point, "You have seen her, indeed," cried Mrs. Watson,
"for none knew but Mrs. Veal and myself that the gown was scoured; for," said she, "I helped her to make it up."

Yet another characteristic of the story would have been regarded, in the present day, as strong evidence of its credibility. The ghost is an uninteresting ghost, a dull, trivial ghost, a lob of spirits, that would have flatly disappointed the expectation of the Duchess of Malfy:—

"O, that it were possible we might
But hold some two days' conference with the dead!
From them I should learn somewhat, I am sure,
I never shall know here."

Mrs. Veal, when she has discharged her real mission by the remark that "Drelincourt had the clearest notions of death, and of the future state, of any who had handled that subject," and when she has added a few perfectly gratuitous advertisements of Mr. Norris's Poem on Friendship, Dr. Sherlock's book, and one or two others, has completely exhausted her inspiration. She thinks "Elysium" a curious name for heaven, but makes no new suggestion; she almost forgets that she is disembodied and must not drink tea; and, for the rest, her conversation is of her own appearance, the trinkets she had left at Dover, and the ten-pound annuity she enjoyed—which things, as Defoe is careful to remark, were so trifling, "and nothing of justice aimed at in their disposal," that Mrs. Bargrave can hardly have invented them. Defoe is thus seen to have appreciated the argument for the reality of a ghost from the folly and triviality of its behaviour.

He certainly appreciated the value of artlessness in
conciliating belief. His language is the language of an uneducated but honest witness in a court of justice who is asked to tell his story in his own way, and the very irrelevancies, repetitions, omissions made up later, and the like, subserve the main purpose—the engaging of belief. Had the thing been a product of art, the critic is apt to say, the writer would surely have spent a little trouble on obtaining some measure of artistic unity. But Defoe's narratives all aim at exhibiting the processes of memory, untouched by the shaping imagination. And unambitious though such an aim may be, it was perhaps a necessary exercise for the modern novel in its infancy.

In Robinson Crusoe, as Mr. Leslie Stephen remarks, artistic unity was imposed on Defoe by the very nature of his subject, while the greatest scope was given him for the effective introduction of realistic detail. In 1715 Defoe withdrew from political controversy, and Robinson Crusoe was the first of that series of tales that occupied his retired leisure at Stoke Newington. The extreme simplicity of the framework of this story was all in favour of Defoe's method. The problem of the story has sometimes been stated thus—Given a man and a remote and desolate island to make an enthralling romance. But this is really an under-statement of the limitations of the story. For besides the limitations imposed by the subject, there were others not less stringent imposed by the hard, shrewd, practical nature of the man. In Robinson Crusoe there are no aesthetic descriptions of scenery, no use is made of the splendours and terrors of the sky and sea as they might affect a man in that overwhelming solitude: to Crusoe the island is his prison and nothing
more, his business is to make it comfortable; he struggles with Nature, but spends no unnecessary time or compliment upon his antagonist. Strangely enough, upon that tropical isle, where Enoch Arden would have watched—

"The sunrise broken into scarlet shafts
Among the palms and ferns and precipices,"

the chief mental preoccupation of Crusoe is morality. The tools and the Bible that have been saved from the wreck represent the two sides of his life, the practical and the religious, and it is only in the Bible that he finds God. Play of the imagination, figurative language, such as tropical nature extorts from the veriest savages, there is none. Robinson Crusoe typifies the spirit of the Anglo-Saxon race, and illustrates in epitome the part it has played in India and America. He keeps his house in order, stores the runlets of rum, and converts Friday, telling him that God is omnipotent, that he "could do everything for us, give everything to us, take everything from us." Poor Friday believed in a Great Spirit, and held that "All things say O to him"—an impractical view that receives no manner of notice from Crusoe, who nevertheless reports their conversations, and honestly admits that he was "run down to the last degree" by some of Friday's theological arguments.

But the very deficiencies in the story of Crusoe, and the imagination of Defoe, only gave the writer fuller scope for the exhibition of his particular talent. On a blank canvas small splashes are striking, and Defoe forces the reader to take the deepest interest in the minutest affairs of the castaway. It is a testimony to
the practical nature of childhood that the book is so widely regarded as the best boy's book in the world. When the story leaves the magic limits of the island, it must be said the interest flags; and at last, in the *Serious Reflections*, subjoined by an afterthought, it positively stagnates. But the main piece of original narrative is a masterpiece, and marks a new era in the writing of prose fiction.

It is a prevalent literary mania to seek for the "origi-nals" of any great work in the quarry whence the stone was dug. Defoe's "original" is to be found in *A Voyage to the South Seas and round the World (1712)*, by Captain Edward Cook. Captain Cook narrates the case of Alexander Selkirk, who was marooned on the island of Juan Fernandez from August 1704 to January 1709, and adds, "To hear of a man's living alone in a desert island seems to some very surprising, and they presently conclude he may afford a very agreeable narration of his life, when in reality it is the most barren subject that nature can afford. . . . We have a downright sailor whose only study was to support himself during his confinement, and all his conversation with goats. It would be no difficult matter to embellish a narrative with many romantic incidents to please the unthinking part of mankind, who swallow everything an artful writer thinks fit to impose upon their credulity, without any regard to truth or probability." Here a romance is suggested, but not the romance that Defoe wrote, for he makes it his rule to embellish nothing, and to avoid giving the reader anything at all to swallow. The actual life of Alexander Selkirk, as related in
Howell’s *Life of Selkirk* (1829), has many romantic incidents that are not to be found in *Robinson Crusoe*, for Selkirk taught cats to dance, and, after his return to his native parish of Largo, eloped with a lady. Defoe limits himself to the simplest facts, and makes the most barren parts of his subject interesting by the very sense of expectation that so unprecedented a monotony awakes.

Defoe’s later works include samples of the picaresque romance, as *Moll Flanders* (1721), *Colonel Jack* (1722), and *Roxana* (1724); of sham history, as the famous *Journal of the Plague Year* (1722); and of treatises on the supernatural, written with all his mathematical detail, as *The Political History of the Devil* (1726), and the *Essay on the History and Reality of Apparitions* (1727). Of the reality of apparitions he is fully convinced. “I must tell you, good people,” he says, “he that is not able to see the Devil, in whatever shape he is pleased to appear in, is not really qualified to live in this world, no, not in the quality of a common inhabitant.” His position is that of Glanvill, the great seventeenth-century opponent of “Sadducism” and “Hobbism,” who makes the subtle remark that the enemy of mankind, “in order to the carrying on the dark and hidden designs he manageth against our happiness and our souls, cannot expect to advantage himself more than by insinuating a belief that there is no such thing as himself.” Or, to put the idea in the statelier form it assumes in an earlier work, the *Pseudodoxia Epidemica*, the devil “contriveth many ways to conceal and indubitate his existency. Wherein, beside that he annihilates the blessed angels and spirits in the rank of his creation, he begets
a security of himself, and a careless eye unto the last remunerations." To the refutation of this scepticism Defoe again and again returns, but his dissertations upon the world of spirits are untouched by any real sense of mystery. The multitude of evil spirits who tempt mankind are little better than a ragged regiment of invisible spies and rogues, the good angels are only a superior kind of police. Defoe selects, in this as in so many other cases, a subject that Nash had treated before him, but the poetic imagination had fled the earth in the mean time; and the other world, described with statistical minuteness, is so like this one, that the reader finds himself wondering why there should be two.

The close simulation of the truth employed by Defoe to gain credence for the story of Robinson Crusoe was imitated by Swift to lend plausibility to the Travels into Several remote Nations of the World by Lemuel Gulliver (1726–1727). Imaginary voyages and travels cannot, for the most part, be regarded as pure romances; they have generally some ulterior purpose in view, political or satirical. Thus Sir Thomas More’s Utopia (1516) pictures an ideal polity; Francis Godwin’s The Man in the Moon, written before 1603, borrows its inspiration from Lucian; Bacon’s fragment called The New Atlantis (1635) sets forth a scheme for the advancement of science; the Duchess of Newcastle’s Description of a New World, called the Blasing World (1666), tells mechanical wonders of a fairy people living at the North Pole; the anonymous Memoirs of Gaudentio di Lucca (1737), by Simon Berington, describe an imaginary State conducted on philanthropic principles under a patriarchal
government; and Swift's great work, after storming the outposts of human policy and human learning, breaks at last in a torrent of contempt and hatred on the last stronghold of humanity itself. The strength of Swift's work as a contribution to the art of fiction lies in the portentous gravity and absolute mathematical consistency with which he develops the consequences of his modest assumptions. In the quality of their realism the voyages to Lilliput and Brobdingnag are much superior to the two later and more violent satires; he was better fitted to ridicule the politics of his time than to attack the "men of Gresham," of whose true aims and methods he knew little or nothing; and the imagination stumbles at many of the details of the last book. But the wealth of illustration whereby he maintains the interest of his original conception of pigmies and giants is eternally surprising and delightful. Defoe could have made of Captain Lemuel Gulliver a living man; he, too, could have recorded with the minutest circumstance of date and place the misadventures and actions of his hero; it may well be doubted whether he could have carried into an unreal world that literalism, accuracy of proportion, and imaginative vividness of detail wherewith Swift endows it. The cat in Brobdingnag makes a noise in purring like "a dozen Stocking-weavers at work;" Gulliver is clad in clothes of the thinnest silk, "not much thicker than an English blanket, very cumbersome, till I was accustomed to them;" the sailing-boat wherein he shows his skill in navigation is taken, when he has done, and hung upon a nail to dry. These are the sources of the pleasure that children take in the book:
the astonishing strokes of savage satire that are its chief attraction for their elders derive most of their force from the imperturbable innocence and quietude of manner that disarms suspicion. Like Iago, Gulliver is a fellow "of exceeding honesty," and he goes about his deadly work the better for his bluntness and scrupulous pretence of veracity. But the design of the book forbids its classification among works of pure fiction; it is enough to remark that in Gulliver realism achieved one of the greatest of its triumphs before its ultimate conquest of the novel.

The novels produced by lesser writers contemporary with Defoe and Swift are belated examples of Restoration literature, and have little infusion of the new spirit. Two women novelists, Mrs. Manley and Mrs. Haywood, may be classed as imitators of Mrs. Aphra Behn. Swift alludes to both, only to call 'Mrs. Haywood a "stupid, infamous, scribbling woman,"' and to record his impression that Mrs. Manley kept about two thousand epithets in a bag, and spilled them at random on her pages. The works by which chiefly they gained notoriety are petty chronicles of scandal, deriving their main interest from the thinly veiled identity of the characters introduced. The New Atalantis (1709) of Mrs. Manley, and the Memoirs of a certain Island adjacent to Utopia (1725) of Mrs. Haywood, can hardly claim to be considered as examples of the art of fiction, for the readers they attracted sought in them a record of fact. Interest in individuals, that interest so much lacking in the "Character" writings of the seventeenth century, is here, no doubt, to be found in full measure, but unillumined by
any semblance of eternity, the gift of art. Mrs. Manley wrote also *The Power of Love, in seven Novels* (1720), and Mrs. Haywood published a whole tribe of short stories, such as *The British Recluse* (1722), *Idalia, or the Unfortunate Mistress* (1723), *Philidore and Placentia* (1727). These short stories are akin to the comedies of the Restoration, but destitute of the glitter and life of the Restoration stage. Mrs. Haywood's best novels, *The History of Miss Betsy Thoughtless* (1751) and *The History of Jemmy and Jenny Jessamy* (1753), were written at a time when the art of the novelist had been new-created by Richardson, Fielding, and Smollett, so that they are separated by more than time from her earlier and briefer efforts. Some faint idea of the magnitude of the revolution that intervened might be gathered from a comparison of Miss Betsy with one of the heroines of the earlier tales, as, for instance, Placentia. Miss Betsy is all of the new world; she is own cousin to Roderick Random, and has been taken for an ancestor of Evelina; Placentia, a quarter of a century older, is a kinswoman of Clelia and Parthenissa, whom she exactly resembles in life, in love, and in epistolary style,—only differing for the better in the brevity and dramatic symmetry of her history. Mrs. Haywood is a good specimen of that third-rate kind of author that multiplies the faint echoes of a literary success, and writes novels, as an oriental tailor makes garments, to a ready-made pattern, with dexterity and despatch. Her pre-Richardsonian work deserves mention, but it could teach nothing at all to the new novel that was so soon to supplant it.
CHAPTER VI.

RICHARDSON AND FIELDING.

In one or other of the various literary forms dealt with in the last chapter, almost all the characteristic features of the modern novel are to be found. Yet the novel was slow to arise. For many years after the appearance of the masterly sketches and tales of the Tatler and Spectator, writers were content to imitate these more or less exactly in the literary journals of the day, and to seek for no more ambitious development. It was not until years after Madame de la Fayette had created a new era in French fiction by her novel La Princesse de Clèves (1678), not until years after Marivaux by his Vie de Marianne (1731) had singularly anticipated Richardson in subject and treatment, although, so far as can be ascertained, without influencing him, that the English Pamela was born in 1740.*

The reason of the delay is not hard to assign. New literary forms, although they are invented by the genius of authors, have a success strictly conditioned by the taste of the public. It is not likely that any professional

* It seems likely that Richardson had read The Life of Marianne, with continuation by Mad. Riccoboni, which appeared in three volumes, 12mo, in 1736.
writer will trouble himself to strike out a new path while the old paths lead to fame and fortune. And the fact is that it was the decline of the theatre during the earlier part of the eighteenth century that made way for the novel. The drama no longer made any pretence of holding the mirror up to Nature, the audiences had no claim to be considered representative of the tastes of the wider literary public. The fashionable ladies of the time, as Fielding says in one of his farces, would "take a stage-box, where they let the footman sit the first two acts, to show his livery, then they come in to show themselves, spread their fans upon the spikes, make curtsies to their acquaintance, and then talk and laugh as loud as they are able." To the upper gallery the footmen and servants of the great had free access, and they imitated their masters in regarding a civil attention to the actors as the last resource of a jaded mind. In the pit were assembled the only serious critics of the play, young templars and city merchants, but their tastes were little likely to redeem the drama from the triviality to which it had sunk.

Nevertheless authors had learnt to regard theatrical success as the crown of literary ambition, and they were slow to unlearn the lesson. Steele and Addison, at the very time when by their literary criticisms they were educating the public to distaste the plays that held the stage, while by their prose sketches of life and manners they were showing themselves true followers of Shakespeare, though at a distance, could not rest content without trying their fortunes also on the stage. Addison's tragedy of Cato (1713) was for factitious reasons a
success; Steele, who had an earlier play “damned for its piety,” persevered in the drama until in the *Conscious Lovers* (1722) he produced a comedy that succeeded indeed, but left no issue. And Fielding himself, in spite of the competition of pantomime, spectacle, and opera, for almost ten years kept himself alive by dramatic authorship until the Licensing Act of 1737 curbed his satirical energies, and the unexampled success of *Pamela* in 1740 directed them into a new channel.

The particular tastes that the novel was to satisfy were now no longer catered for by the drama. A small part only of the new reading public were in the habit of going to the theatre, while, on the other hand, the standard plays of the older dramatists had never before had so many readers. The habit of reading plays is curiously illustrated in Richardson’s *Sir Charles Grandison*, where Miss Byron, writing to Miss Selby, says, “I know, my dear, you love to read plays,” and so excuses herself for writing her narrative in dramatic form with the speakers’ names recorded in the margin. In his two later novels Richardson gives a list of the *dramatis personae* in the beginning, under the heading, “Names of the Principal Persons.” It is as if the novel were merely a play with its framework of stage directions expanded for the ease of the reader. And in this form the novel was bound to supplant the play with the reading public. To read a play with full intelligence is at all times difficult for an untrained reader, and the law of least possible effort can be as effectively illustrated from literature as from language. A new form of literature that had all the interest of the drama, but imposed only the slenderest
tax on the reader’s attention and imagination, was pre-
destined to success.

It was not a professional writer that made the discovery
of such a new form, but a short, stout, prim, pedantic
bookseller and printer, aged fifty-one, whose excursions
into literature had hitherto been of the slightest—a few
prefaces and dedications, contributed at the request of
others. In these, however, he had displayed some
literary facility, and Messrs. Rivington and Osborne,
two booksellers who were his particular friends, pressed
him to write a little book “of familiar letters on the
useful concerns in common life.” It was in the course
of preparing this that Samuel Richardson bethought
him of a story, told him by a friend, of a young girl, the
daughter of honest and pious parents, who had been
taken into the service of a great family, had had snares
laid for her honour by her employer’s son, “a young
gentleman of free principles,” but had subdued him by
her noble resistance, so that at last “he thought fit to
make her his wife.” This incident running in Richar-
dson’s head suggested to him the inclusion of a few letters
giving cautions “to young folks circumstanced as Pamela
was,” and these few letters grew under his hand until
they filled the book and became nothing other than the
first modern novel.

The account Richardson gave to his friend Aaron Hill
of the inception of the book shows that before it was
completed he had become conscious that he was intro-
ducing “a new species of writing.” His hope was, he
says, that it “might possibly turn young people into a
course of reading different from the pomp and parade
of romance writing, and dismissing the improbable and marvellous, with which novels generally abound, might tend to promote the cause of religion and virtue." And so it came about that a book, the original design of which bore about as much relation to literature as the tunes of a piano-organ bear to music, became when completed the ancestor of a literary progeny like the sands of the sea for number.

Richardson's early life had been in some sort a training for the work on which he was to start so late. His father was a joiner, and a friend of Shaftesbury and Monmouth. Probably he was one of the "brisk boys" that ran behind Shaftesbury's coach in London; at any rate, on the failure of Monmouth's attempt on the throne he "was looked on with a jealous eye," and thought proper on the "decollation," as Richardson phrases it, of that unhappy nobleman, "to quit his London business and retire to Derbyshire, though to his great detriment."

In Derbyshire Samuel Richardson was born in 1689, and received a very slight education, learning no language save his own. His schoolfellows, who nicknamed him Serious and Gravity, used to press him to tell them stories. "One of them particularly, I remember, was for putting me to write a history... I now forget what it was, only that it was of a servant-man preferred by a fine young lady (for his goodness) to a lord, who was a libertine. All my stories carried with them, I am bold to say, an useful moral."

The same highly moral tendency is seen in the fact that before he was eleven years old he assumed a censor's duties by writing a letter to a widow lady of fifty,
collecting from the Scripture "texts that made against her," and contrasting her pretensions to religion with her habits of slander and gossip.

His precocity of sentiment was hardly less. "As a bashful and not forward boy," he says, "I was an early favourite with all the young women of taste and reading in the neighbourhood." They would sew while he read aloud to them, and "both mothers and daughters used to be pleased with the observations they put me upon making." When he was only thirteen, three of these young women revealed to him their love secrets, and induced him to write model letters for them to alter as they pleased in copying. "I have been directed to chide, and even repulse, when an offence was either taken or given, at the very time that the heart of the chider or repulser was open before me, overflowing with esteem and affection."

This apprenticeship to the knowledge of the human heart stood Richardson the novelist in good stead. He was intended by his father for the Church, but the necessary education was out of his reach, and in 1706 he was bound apprentice to Mr. John Wilde of Stationers' Hall, whose daughter, after the manner of all good apprentices, he subsequently married. He set up business for himself, at first in Fleet Street, afterwards in Salisbury Court; throve apace, got the printing of the Journals of the House of Commons, and became in 1754 Master of the Stationers' Company. By this time he was a famous man, his novels all were written—for Clarissa Harlowe appeared in 1748 and Sir Charles Grandison in 1753—and his later years, though troubled by failing
health, were spent in the midst of the grateful incense that rose from the circle of admirers with which he surrounded himself. He died in 1761.

The character of Richardson deserves all the praise it has received from his biographer, Mrs. Barbauld. His integrity and industry were unfailing, and in material affairs he was generous, but his extreme vanity made him repellent to all but professed devotees, and the pusillanimity with which Johnson charged him, "the perpetual study to ward off petty inconveniences and to procure petty pleasures," is to be seen in his works in that attention to the infinitely little which is their weakness and their strength. He was formal, passionless, and unsympathetic. When he was young his seniors confided in him, but in his later years his stiffness alienated his juniors; "my girls," he said, "are shy little fools." The famous council that criticized and applauded the drafts of his later novels consisted almost entirely of women, and included Miss Mulso, afterwards Mrs. Chapone, and the sisters of Henry Fielding. At North End, Hammersmith, he lived in "a kind of flower-garden of ladies," and so became a singular example of an author whose heroines speak better and more naturally than his heroes. It may be doubted whether he ever fathomed the secrets of the male heart.

Richardson has left a portrait of himself in the description he wrote for Lady Bradshaigh, who worshipped him from afar—

"Short; rather plump than emaciated, notwithstanding his complaints; about five foot five inches; fair wig; lightish cloth coat, all black besides; one hand generally
in his bosom, the other a cane in it, which he leans upon under the skirts of his coat usually, that it may imperceptibly serve him as a support when attacked by sudden tremors or startings, and dizziness which too frequently attack him, but, thank God, not so often as formerly; looking directly foreright, as passers-by would imagine, but observing all that stirs on either hand of him without moving his short neck; hardly ever turning back; of a light-brown complexion; teeth not yet failing him; smoothish-faced and ruddy-cheeked; at some times looking to be about sixty-five, at other times much younger; a regular even pace, stealing away ground, rather than seeming to rid it; a grey eye, too often overclouded by mistinesses from the head: by chance lively, very lively it will be, if he have hope of seeing a lady whom he loves and honours; his eye always on the ladies; if they have very large hoops he looks down and supercilious, and as if he would be thought wise, but perhaps the sillier for that; as he approaches a lady his eye is never fixed first upon her face, but upon her feet, and thence he raises it up, pretty quickly for a dull eye; and one would think (if we thought him at all worthy of observation) that from her air and (the last beheld) her face, he sets her down in his mind as so or so, and then passes on to the next object he meets."

It is necessary, in passing from the man to his novels, to say something first about the method of telling a story by way of letters—a method that Richardson hit upon almost by accident, but which he continued in his later novels from choice. Of the three ways most in vogue for telling a story, it has been perhaps the least popular,
but it is not hard to see that it suited Richardson's matter and style the best.

The first and most usual way is that the author should tell the story directly. He is invisible and omniscient, a sort of *diable boiteux*, who is able to unroof all houses and unlock all hearts, and who can never be questioned as to how he came to a knowledge of the events he narrates. There are stories that can be told in no other way than this; the favourite way of Fielding, Scott, Dickens, and Thackeray. At a slight sacrifice of dramatic force the events of the story are supplied with a chorus, and at any time that suits him the author can cast off his invisible cloak and show himself fingerling the "helpless pieces of the game he plays."

The second method, the chosen expedient of Marivaux, Goldsmith, and Prévost, is to put the whole story in the mouth of the principal character. The realism of Swift and Defoe adopted this method, which gives at once a dramatic centre and a certain unity to the events narrated, from their bearing on the fortunes of one person. For the intense presentment of the main character, as in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* or *Villette*, this way remains perhaps the best. Yet it has its difficulties and its pitfalls; every incident of the story must be brought within the knowledge of the narrator; and although the single point of view is valuable to evoke sympathy, it takes from the novelist the privilege of killing his hero, who may be condemned to death without awakening in the reader the slightest anxiety as to his safety in the event. Moreover, if the story extend over a number of years, a detailed account of its earlier
parts can only be given by sacrificing the sense of vivid and present reality that attends the hearing of a personal story told by a living voice; the sense of perspective and contrast is lost, the near becomes far and the far near, the narrator is forgotten in the actor. Coleridge, in his *Ancient Mariner*, gives perhaps the most consummate illustration of the artistic value of present circumstances as a frame for past events; Defoe, in the intricate maze of his story, is apt to forget the actual speaker.

In employing a third way, and telling his story by a series of letters, Richardson endeavours to combine the advantages of both these methods, to retain the vividness of personal narration by an eye-witness without sacrificing the freedom and omniscience of the impersonal author. For sentimental analysis, in which he excelled, his device served him well; the microscopic minuteness which he loved seems less unnatural in a letter written an hour after the events described than in a story told perhaps some forty years after. But he takes little advantage of the scope that is afforded by his method, for variety of characters and styles, and he does not succeed in evading the difficulty caused by the fact that the whole of life does not naturally find its way into letters. In order to supply some one to whom the heroine of each of his novels shall communicate her most intimate feelings, he is obliged to revive an old stage device, and Tilburina, in white satin, is attended by her “confidant” in white linen. The worthy Pamela, it is true, writes only to her parents, who take singularly little interest in her misfortunes, but Clarissa has the invaluable and lively
Miss Howe, and Harriet Byron exercises her absurdly exact memory on the long-suffering Miss Selby, writing, according to the computation of Mr. Leslie Stephen, in the space of three days as much as would fill one hundred and forty-four pages of octavo print. And dramatic propriety stands aghast at the confidences that pass between Mr. Robert Lovelace and his friend Mr. John Belford.

And yet these are hardly defects in Richardson, for they are the very foundation of his art. To spend hours in narrating her most trifling experiences, and recording her most casual conversations, may well be said to make a lady appear small-minded, but how shall those who have followed her story with unflagging interest be the first to make the accusation? Richardson has had not a few readers who smiled, perhaps contemptuously, but continued to read. His power of analysis lies chiefly in this, that no detail is beneath his attention. It is the exact function of the microscope; the commonplace becomes interesting, not by its setting, not by the glamour lent to it by the imagination of a poet, but merely because it is magnified and made novel by detail previously unperceived. Nor are there wanting subtle touches, rapid and minute, that lay bare the very hearts of his characters. Thus Pamela, when she has escaped from her master, receives a humble letter from him asking her to come back. For a moment she is inclined to consent, but remembering his repeated perfidies and cruelties, she ponders her impulse and argues against it: 

"Therefore will I not acquit thee yet, O credulous, fluttering, throbbing mischief! that art so ready to believe what thou wishest; and I charge thee to keep better
guard than thou hast lately done, and tempt me not to follow too implicitly thy flattering impulses! Thus foolishly dialogued I with my heart, and yet all the time, that heart was Pamela."

By his power in sentimental analysis it was that Richardson earned the famous eulogy of Diderot, who gives him a place in his esteem beside Moses, Homer, and Euripides. And the main interest of Richardson's persons has never been better expressed than in Diderot's words, "Ils sont communs, dites-vous (ces personnages); c'est ce qu'on voit tous les jours? Vous vous trompez, c'est ce qui se passe tous les jours sous vos yeux et que vous ne voyez jamais." And Johnson laid stress on the same quality when he said that there was more knowledge of the human heart in one letter of Richardson's than in all Tom Jones.

More dissection of the human heart, a fuller display of its processes, there certainly is. But Fielding set before himself models of epic breadth, while Richardson shows the defects of his qualities in the extreme slowness of his dramatic development. The events recorded in the eight volumes of Clarissa occupy eleven months. In Sir Charles Grandison the story is arrested while the characters are displayed, contrasting their thoughts, plans, and sentiments. And there is an incessant doubling back on what has gone before; first a letter is written describing what "has passed," this letter is communicated by its recipient to a third character, who comments on it, while the story waits. This constant repercussion of a theme or event between one or more pairs of correspondents produces a structure of story very like The
House that Jack Built. Each writer is narrating not events alone, but his or her reflections on previous narrations of the same events. And so, on the next-to-nothing that happened there is superimposed the young lady that wrote to her friend describing it, the friend that approved her for the decorum of the manner in which she described it, the admirable baronet that chanced to find the letter approving the decorum of the young lady, the punctilio of honour that prevented the admirable baronet from reading the letter he found, and so on. It is very lifelike, but life can become at times a slow affair, and one of the privileges of the novel-writer is to quicken it. This privilege Richardson foregoes. Any one reading Sir Charles Grandison at a leisurely pace (it cannot be read fast) must be particularly happy in having no history if he has not lived through more events than he has read through by the time he comes to the end of it. As Johnson again said, "If you were to read Richardson for the story, your impatience would be so much fretted that you would hang yourself. But you must read him for the sentiment, and consider the story only as giving occasion to the sentiment."

There remains to be considered the feature of Richardson's work on which he most valued himself, and which attracted the enthusiastic applause of his contemporaries —its morality. He looked on himself as a moral reformer, and in the preface to Pamela he sets forth a portentous list of the "desirable ends" that are "attained within these sheets." By Johnson once more his especial praise is thus summarized: "He has enlarged the knowledge of human nature, and taught the passions to move at the command of virtue."
How his microscope enlarged the knowledge of human
nature has already been shown, but what shall be said
of his success in this loftier exploit? He did not him-
self think it difficult. In speaking of the lady Clemen-
tina, in *Sir Charles Grandison*, a lady who had conceived
a passion for that monster of perfection, whom her
religion forbade her to marry, Richardson excuses him-
self for implying, towards the close of the novel, that
she marries some one else by saying to one of his corre-
spondents, “I want to have young people think that
there is no such mighty business as they are apt to
suppose in conquering a first love.” The passions are
not really very formidable, it seems; virtue has only to
pipe to them, and they dance the most decorous of con-
certed jigs. And yet the reader, who had expected to
see the lion-tamer go into the den and subdue the raging
animals with a glance, is somehow disappointed when
it is shown to be so easy, and begins to entertain
suspicions that the beasts, are stuffed. And the virtue
that subdues them is of no heroic mould. At its worst
and crudest Richardson’s conception of virtue is merely
“tickling commodity,” an injunction to buy in the
cheapest and sell in the dearest market; at its best, in
*Clarissa*, it is far too negative in quality, a sort of show-
man leading his perfectly tamed passions from place to
place. Of a virtue that should inflame the higher, rather
than allay the lower, passions, he had little or no idea.

In *Pamela or Virtue Rewarded* the prudential doctrine
appears in its earliest and most disgusting form. The
main plot has already been indicated; Pamela’s virtue is
rewarded by the success of her scheme to marry the
man who has heaped on her every indignity that sub-
humanity could suggest. But he is wealthy and has
position, and the original story, in two volumes, closes
with a scene of benediction, Pamela's pious parents
thanking Heaven that their daughter has laid to heart
their early precepts. Two more volumes were after-
wards added by Richardson to assuage the fears of those
who were not quite easy about the fate of the heroine.
In these Pamela "reforms" her husband, and shows
herself a model matron in high life.

In *Sir Charles Grandison* there is described Richard-
son's beau-ideal of manly virtue. He was moved to
write the book by the complaints of those who urged on
him that "Mr. B.," Pamela's persecutor, and Lovelace,
the chief male characters of the two earlier novels, were
both villains, and that it was his duty to give to the world
the picture of a true hero, for its admiration and imita-
tion. The vanity of Richardson fell into the trap, and
in *Sir Charles Grandison* he, designed a man of large
fortune, high birth, and perfect breeding, who unites in
himself all possible accomplishments, and all the virtues
hitherto invented. *Sir Charles Grandison's* ready bene-
volence undertakes the most diverse tasks,—setting up
a poor family in life, rescuing a distressed lady from a
man of title who is carrying her off by force, making
considerate alterations in the structure of his own
paternal mansion, and finding a wife for his gouty old
uncle. In his youth he is sent abroad to travel on the
Continent, and meantime his father dies. He hurries
home to console his sisters, and appears,—"a graceful
youth of seventeen with fine curling auburn locks waving
on his shoulders, delicate in complexion, intelligence sparkling in his fine free eyes, and good-humour sweetening his lively features." This is the sort of language he holds,—"’What I think to do, cousin,’ said Sir Charles, ‘is to inter the venerable remains (I must always speak in this dialect, sir), with those of my mother. This I know was his desire. I will have an elegant, but not sumptuous monument erected to the memory of both, with a modest inscription that shall rather be a matter of instruction to the living than a panegyric on the departed. The difference in the expense shall be privately applied to relieve or assist distressed house-keepers, or some of my father’s poor tenants who have large families, and, have not been wanting in their honest endeavours to maintain them. My sisters, I hope, will not think themselves neglected if I spare them the pain of conferring with them on a subject that must afflict them.’"

He keeps his word; throughout the book he speaks in this dialect and maintains this insufferable bearing. He is never subjected to the trials of Job, or of the Vicar of Wakefield. Wealthy, accomplished, universally beloved, with the smoke of devotion and flattery ascending to him from scores of grateful and adoring hearts, he passes through life, bestowing pleasure with a smile, causing pain and remorse with a sigh, improving the occasion at all times, until the reader is seized with a blind desire to enact the part of the adversary, to tear him from place and power and set him to earn his living.

He is more than once challenged to a duel. He
disapproves of duelling, but so skilled is he with the rapier that he can disarm any adversary by a turn of the wrist and let him depart unharmed.

The tribe of women who surround him with adulation attribute his hesitation to marry to his delicate consideration for the hearts that would thus be desolated and deprived of their hope. "He called me his Emily," says his ward, Miss Jervoys, "but all the world is his Emily, I think." "He is in all instances," says Miss Harriet Byron, who is also at his feet, "an imitator of the Almighty; an humbler of the impenitent and encourager of those who repent." In recounting his good deeds Miss Byron says, "Here I laid down my pen and wept for joy, I think it was for joy that there is such a young man in the world, for what else could it be? And now, with a watery eye, twinkle, twinkle, do I resume it."

Sir Charles's matrimonial affairs form the main interest of the story. It is hardly necessary to say that he does no wooing, but he debates with himself for long to which of two ladies he is the better justified, on moral considerations, in throwing the handkerchief. At last he is safely married to Miss Harriet Byron, who has long been receiving letters of condolence from her connection on the hopeless passion for him that, to her own great horror, she both cherishes and divulges, and there follow two more books of dresses and fêtes.

In the effort to construct an ideally perfect character no man can build better than he knows; his own conceptions of honour and virtue are inevitably laid bare. Sir Charles meets with no very terrible temptations, but
his conduct is open more than once to the severest criticisms. When he is interviewing the Signora Clementina on the matter of the religious difficulties that attend their suggested marriage, her father and mother, the Marquis and Marchioness della Porretta, conceal themselves in a cupboard hard by and overhear the conversation. This would hardly have commended itself as an honourable course of action to the workmen in Richardson’s back-shop,—but since in this book Richardson classifies his characters as “men, women, and Italians,” let it be regarded as an eccentricity of Italians, and excused. The interview ended, the marchioness congratulates Sir Charles on the perfectly honourable way in which he has acquitted himself. He feels no indignation, and when he is again to see Clementina, himself suggests to the marchioness that she had better get back into the cupboard. This she does, and the interview takes place, Sir Charles being aware that all that they say is overheard, while the lady is unaware. It would be edifying to have the opinion of Tom Jones on this particular line of conduct. That sturdy youth would not be likely to share the sentiments of Cowper’s Muse, who professes that—

“She cannot reach and would not wrong
That subject for an angel’s song,
The hero and the saint!”

Nevertheless, as a book, Sir Charles Grandison is full of delight. It is more elaborately constructed than either of the other novels, and shows a keen dramatic sense of situation at times. The first appearance of Sir Charles as the deliverer of Miss Byron from the evil Sir
Hargrave Pollexfen, is admirably led up to and contrived. The comedy, which is mainly in the capable hands of Miss Charlotte Grandison, is livelier than might have been expected. And Miss Byron at her best is a charming companion.

Richardson’s three novels form a trilogy of a kind, and deal respectively with humble life, with middle-class life, and with high life. In the second of these, Clarissa Harlowe, he achieved his masterpiece. There are here none of the unrelated digressions, episodes, and by-plots that are to be found in Sir Charles; the story is developed with a leisurely but unrelenting progress from beginning to end. The plot is well known; how Lovelace, having paid his addresses to Clarissa and having been rejected by her family, induces her to escape from the persecution to which she is subjected at home by casting herself into his hands and trusting to his honourable protection. From this point, early in the story, Richardson is at ease in his theme, and deploys his minute method with really marvellous effect. Clarissa’s troubles thicken and darken around her, and through them all, her fortitude and virtue are made to shine brighter and brighter until the end; Clarissa dies, overwhelmed by her sorrows, and Lovelace falls in a duel with Colonel Morden, the avenger of her death. Nothing in fiction is more impressive than the deliberation with which Richardson carries his story forward to its inevitable end. That end is long foreseen by the reader, but he is not permitted to quicken his step to meet the impending doom. With all the circumspect attention to detail that Clarissa shows in the preparations for her own funeral,
without any hurry or any discomposure, the author leads on the story; and in this way chiefly makes his strength and his restraint felt. His restraint is well seen in the description of the death of Lovelace, where inappreciative critics have asked for more horrors, and in his neglect of all appeals to reprieve Clarissa and reform Lovelace. "Virtue Rewarded" he had already treated in *Pamela*; the theme of Clarissa might rather be called "Virtue Triumphant," and in the treatment of this he knew that a happy ending is also a futile ending.

The character of Clarissa, her strength, patience, and gentleness in suffering, is perhaps rather heightened by her weaknesses, her irresolution and want of decision in action. In the earlier part of the story she wails greatly about the "multitude of punctilios and decorums which a young creature must dispense with" in a situation like hers, the inadequacy of her wardrobe oppresses her, and the dread of the indecorous in whatever form prevents her from taking any firm resolve even when she is appealed to by Lovelace,—she weeps and is silent, accepts his protection and calls him a wretch, and so is driven by circumstance from first to last. Her efforts to escape are feeble and seem almost half-hearted. Yet those critics are ill advised who call for the police, asserting that an appeal to the nearest magistrate would have put an end to the heroine's difficulties. Richardson's story and characters would be alike spoilt by the intrusion of probability and realism. He placed himself, says Coleridge, "as it were in a day-dream;" his atmosphere is that of "a sick-room heated by stoves," while Fielding carries
his reader “into an open lawn on a breezy day in May.” Let each be judged after his kind: to break the glass of Richardson’s hothouse and let in the common air would only be to kill the tropical plants that he has grown under those fostering limitations; his characters live in a sick-room, but they would die in the open air. Any one who has once learnt to breathe in those confines must feel the beauty and charm of the sentimental growths that there luxuriate; a detached scene from *Clarissa* may jar on the critical sense, but read through, the book carries the reader clear of daily life, creates its own canons, and compels intent admiration. Lady Mary Wortley Montagu was one of the severest of Richardson’s critics,—she said rightly that he had no idea of the manners of high life. She disliked the voluminous candour of his heroines, and could not forgive him his disrespect for old china,—“which is below nobody’s taste.” Yet she fell under the spell of his sentiment; “I heartily despise him,” she says, “and eagerly read him, nay, sob over his works, in a most scandalous manner.”

It was by his sentiment that Richardson gained an immediate and enduring popularity, and became the founder of a school of novelists. Not in England alone, where “Sentiment” soon became the badge of a tribe of writers, but on the Continent, especially in France, *Pamela* and her sisters exercised a profound influence, the end of which is not very easily assigned. The novels were translated into French (one translation is by the author of *Manon Lescaut*), German, and Dutch; Goldoni in Italy wrote two comedies called *Pamela*...
Nubile and Pamela Maritata; Wieland's tragedy, Clementine von Poretta, and Hermes' novel, Miss Fanny Wilkes, are after the same model, parodied by Musæus in Grandison der Zweite; and the independent works of Rousseau (La Nouvelle Héloïse), Diderot (La Religieuse), Marmontel, and Bernardin de St. Pierre show unmistakable marks either in form or in substance of the sentimental sway exercised by Richardson, which continued in France down to the time when Alfred de Musset called Clarissa "le premier roman du monde." Thus Richardson is to be regarded not only as the founder of the modern novel in England, but also as in some sense the forerunner of all those writers who cultivated "sensibility," well defined by Mrs. Radcliffe as "a dangerous quality which is continually extracting the excess of misery or delight from every surrounding object,"—the inaugurator of a century and a half of hyperæsthesia.

A perfect chorus of applause greeted Pamela on her first appearance. "I can send you no news," wrote Horace Walpole in a juvenile letter; "the late singular novel is the universal, and only theme—Pamela is like snow, she covers everything with her whiteness." Yet there were not lacking a few dissentient voices. The pretentious morality of the book, lauded by Dr. Sherlock from his pulpit, and by Pope from his easy-chair, was of a kind to invite burlesque. As early as 1741, a burlesque appeared, entitled An Apology for the Life of Mrs. Shamela Andrews, by an anonymous writer. And by February, 1742, "a lewd and ungenerous engraftment," as Richardson calls it, on the story of the
virtuous servant-maid was published under the title *The History of the Adventures of Joseph Andrews and his Friend Mr. Abraham Adams*.

This novel, which became the starting-point of a new school of fiction, was written by Henry Fielding, barrister, journalist, and playwright, whose early education and experience of life were little likely to leave him susceptible to serious impression by the vulgar morality of Richardson. Born in 1707 at Sharpham Park, near Glastonbury, the seat of his maternal grandfather, descended through his father, Edmund Fielding, from a younger branch of the Earls of Denbigh, Henry Fielding had seen much of men and manners, and was familiar with all classes of society before he reached the age of thirty-four. He was prepared for Eton by one Mr. Oliver, who, if he was indeed the original of Parson Trulliber, "could have acted the part of Falstaff without stuffing," had a loud and hoarse voice, and "a stateliness in his gait when he walked, not unlike that of a goose, only he stalked slower." About the time of his leaving Eton, while Richardson was accumulating the stock of morality that was to be compounded in that specific against elopements, *Clarissa*, Fielding was meditating an elopement on his own account with a Miss Sarah Andrew, whose guardian complained that he went in fear of his life "owing to the behaviour of Henry Fielding and his attendant or man." Foiled in this project, Fielding passed over to Leyden to study law with "the learned Vitriarius," but his remittances from home failing, he returned to London in 1728, to maintain himself in that city by his wits. His father, who had married a second
time, did not trouble himself to pay the allowance of
two hundred a year, and Fielding, it would appear,
troubled himself even less. He had already at Leyden
laid the plan of a comedy called *Don Quixote in
England*, and he now turned to the stage for his
livelihood.

Fielding's dramatic labours have been almost eclipsed
by his greater novels; yet he was an industrious and
successful dramatic author from the production of his
first comedy, *Love in Several Masques*, in 1728, down to
his abandonment of the stage and admission to the
Middle Temple after the appearance of his satirical play,
*The Historical Register for 1736*, and the passing of the
Licensing Act.

In Fielding the stage had found a great humourist and
comic wit, but it failed to keep him, and the reasons are
not far to seek. The dramatic conventions and fashions
of the time gave him too little scope. Vanbrugh and
Congreve, as he remarks in *Tom Jones*, copied Nature,
the comedy writers of his own time only copied them,
and so produced imitations of manners and satires on
foibles that no longer reigned in the fashionable world.
In one of his most successful plays, *The Tragedy of
Tragedies; or, the Life and Death of Tom Thumb the
Great* (1731), Fielding had parodied the extravagances
of Lee, Rowe, Thomson, and Young. But the theme
was soon exhausted, and he sought more scope for the
representation of contemporary life by plunging into
political satire in *Pasquin* (1736), and *The Historical
Register* (1737), in which candidates for Parliament are
introduced bribing away "with right and left," and Sir
Robert Walpole himself is represented under the guise of Quidam, a fiddler, superintending a ballet of Patriots. In the preface to the latter of these two plays, Fielding promised to continue exerting his talents "in ridiculing vice and imposture . . . while the liberty of the press and stage subsists, that is to say, while we have any liberty left among us."

It was not to be long. The same year a bill limiting the number of theatres, and submitting all plays to the approval of the Lord Chamberlain, became law, and Fielding, who was married by this time, turned to the Bar and journalism for his support. He was called to the Bar in 1740, some four or five months only before the appearance of Pamela gave him, the opportunity for a wider and deeper comedy than could maintain itself on the stage of the time.

In the history of Joseph Andrews, the virtuous serving-man, Fielding probably originally designed no more than a burlesque upon Pamela. He gave the illustrious Pamela a brother Joseph, whom he placed in the service of Lady Booby, an aunt by marriage of Richardson's Mr. B., and there subjected him to a series of attacks upon his virtue which Joseph, remembering his sister's lofty conduct, successfully repelled. But either the original butt of Fielding's satire proved too narrow a mark, or, as is perhaps more likely, the subsidiary characters, Parson Adams and Mrs. Slipslop, who are introduced in the third chapter, coming to life in his hands assumed some control of the story; in any case, the novel soon forgot its original, and from Chapter XL, which deals with "several new matters not expected,"
it becomes a novel of adventure of a type new to English literature. So that when Fielding came to write his preface he found that he too had to defend and explain a kind of writing hitherto unattempted. The preface, although it cannot compare with the longer critical dissertations in Tom Jones, yet sets forth very clearly the aim and character of Fielding's novels. Joseph Andrews, he says, is a comic epic poem in prose, admitting light and ridiculous incidents in the action, and persons of inferior rank and manners among the characters, both of which are excluded by the serious epic, the tragedy, or the serious romance. But burlesque, as he is careful to observe, although it is admitted in the diction for the especial delight of the classical reader, is rigidly excluded from the sentiments and characters, which are strictly copied from Nature. It is unnecessary to seek for the monstrous and unnatural when "life everywhere furnishes an accurate observer with the ridiculous." And the preface goes further yet in pointing out that the only source of the true ridiculous is affectation, whether it springs from vanity or from hypocrisy.

The war against shams, against strong hypocrisy or its feeblener descendant insincerity, that Fielding carried on throughout his life, is here declared. And yet as an account of his own comedy and his own humour his analysis is inadequate. For his broadest, most delicious laughter is not a weapon of offence, he seldom shows his teeth, and for once that he laughs fiercely at human vanity he will laugh ten times sympathetically, gently, irresistibly, at human weaknesses and oddities, at the
incongruity of things. Parson Adams, that compound of oddities, is laughed at most by those who love him best, including his creator. All his traits, his absent-mindedness, his impulsiveness, the wisdom that makes him the best of teachers, the childlike simplicity that made him the plaything of knaves, are developed by touches repeated and fearless, which show how little Fielding cared, in painting this inimitable comic figure, to cater for the mirth of those whose laughter is begotten only by some fancied superiority in themselves. There is something almost paradoxical in the succession of ludicrous plights devised for this most loveable and admirable of men, as if Fielding were insisting that the most ridiculous of his characters should also be the least obnoxious to any breath of scorn. When Adams, having failed to induce Torrowse to accept his manuscript sermons in payment of Joseph’s bill, leans over the rail of the upper story of the inn, smoking his pipe and pondering some new expedient, with his night-cap drawn over his wig and a short great-coat half covering his cassock, he presented, says Fielding, “a figure likely to attract the eyes of those who were not over given to observation.” By the very device of discarding all the stage properties of the virtuous priest, the novelist makes his main character stand forth more conspicuously among the Trullibers, Towwouses, and Slipslops, and gives to the reader profound lessons in wisdom, in understanding, and, it must be, added, in humour. “His wit,” says Thackeray, “is wonderfully wise and detective; it flashes upon a rogue and lightens up a rascal like a policeman’s lantern.” But his work as a novelist is not so entirely
subsidiary as some would have it to his work as a magistrate; his treatment even of so very a rogue as Mr. Peter Pounce is not ungentle or unintelligent, and his illuminating humour is not focussed on vice, but shines like the sun on the evil and on the good.

From the date of Joseph Andrews to the time of his death in 1754, some twelve years later, Fielding's life was spent in his professional duties and in the unremitting and arduous pursuit of literary excellence. His two later novels, The History of Tom Jones, a Foundling (1749), and Amelia (1751), appeared after he had, by the influence of his friend Lyttleton, been appointed Justice of the Peace for Middlesex and Westminster, and the later of the two bears marks of the intrusion of his official duties on his leisured thought. The most important of his other writings is to be found in the third volume of the Miscellanies that he collected and published in 1743, and is entitled the History of the Life of the late Mr. Jonathan Wild the Great. The "fundamental brain-work" necessary for a great work of fiction is not only present but apparent in all Fielding's novels; they can be stripped, as Shakespeare's plays cannot, of their picturesque expression, and something at least of their purport stated in purely intellectual terms. But in Jonathan Wild above all Fielding indulges to the full his taste for clearness and unity of intellectual structure. The life of the original of his hero, who died at Tyburn in 1725, is to be found in Johnson's Lives of Highwaymen (1734), where it is recorded of Wild that, under sentence of death, he contemplated suicide, being "more especially swayed to such Notions, he pretended, from
the Examples of the famous Heroes of Antiquity; who, to avoid dishonourable Treatment, had given themselves a speedy Death.” The hint was enough to suggest that Wild’s career might be celebrated in epic vein—an idea that would have pleased Swift, who, long before the Beggars’ Opera, had suggested a “Newgate pastoral.” Fielding conducts his narrative under the dominant influence of one prevailing purpose, in the service of which he employs all his irony, never suffering the reader for one moment to forget the main thesis, which is stated at the beginning of the story, restated at the close and illustrated with matchless skill throughout. This thesis is in effect that the elements of “greatness,” in the common acceptation of the term, when divorced from that plain goodness of heart which is little likely to foster ambition, are the same in the thief and in men eminent in more reputable professions, as those can testify “who have lived long in cities, courts, gaols, or such places.” In sketching the history of Wild, and showing how his career of selfish villainy might have been marred at innumerable points by the slightest liability to humane feeling, Fielding’s polished irony achieves a triumph, and presents a picture of almost “perfect diabolism.” The humour of the author is at its grimmest in this work, not so much in depicting Wild, the horror of whose character is almost forgotten in its artistic unity, as in sundry subordinate details, such as the conduct of Heartfree’s debtors when he is in prosperity, and of his creditors when he is in prison, or that quiet piece of knavery and inhumanity on the part of the keeper of the prison, who keeps Heartfree’s reprieve a secret until he
has extracted twenty pounds from Friendly as the price of a respite for an hour. The writer whose eyes are thus open to the possible profundities of human wickedness has earned a right to speak of human virtue, and by means of the little group of amiable figures—Heartfree, Mrs. Heartfree, the good magistrate, and Friendly—Fielding relieves the blackness of his picture. But he is careful not to confuse his method or depart from the lines he has marked out for himself; "the low and pitiful behaviour of Heartfree" in lavishing affection on his family and reposing trust in his friends, is duly stigmatized as creating an opinion among those about him in the prison "that he was one of the silliest fellows in the universe." And not only is the interest of the various adventures well sustained, but the points where the narrative is retarded or arrested to allow the author time for the leisurely play of his humour round a single incident are numerous and striking. The two chapters, for instance, which are devoted to Wild's adventures in the open boat, and describe how, having determined on suicide, he leaps into the water and thereupon is miraculously saved by climbing into the boat again, are fine examples of Fielding's characteristic vein. In this book, too, as in Joseph Andrews, is seen that vivifying power which brings to life the veriest walking gentlemen and stage mutes. The Ordinary in Newgate is a character merely incidental, and yet with his opinion that any man who believes in the possible salvation of "a sincere Turk" is himself incapable of grace, with his taste for punch and his justification of that taste by default of Scripture, above all with his sermon, a prophylactic
against the errors of Greek systems of thought, administered to a condemned criminal, he stands distinctly embodied before the reader to whom he has barely been introduced.

In his two later novels Fielding completed that gallery of portraits which transcends for reality and variety the work of all former English narrators, save perhaps Chaucer alone. *Tom Jones*, the work of "some thousands of hours," distributed probably over not a few years, is the Epic of Youth, by a master of comedy. In the prime of his manhood, speaking from a full and ripe experience, but with the zest of youthfulness still easily within the reach of memory and sympathy, Fielding gives in this book his sonorous verdict on human life and human conduct. Whether regarded for its art or for its thought, whether treated as detached scenes of the human comedy, as an example of plot-architecture, or as an attempt at the solution of certain wide problems of life, no truer, saner book has ever been written. Indeed, to borrow the words of the American poet, "this is no book; who touches this touches a man." Through all the motley scenes of life with which its pages are crowded, the reader finds that keener than his delight in the wealth of scenery and character that is displayed before him is his delight in the strength and excellence of the companionship that guides and befriends him. The very qualities that have been foremost in finding Fielding enemies (if those who waste their time in apologizing for him, allowing him the benefit of the age in which he lived, and pitying him, may be so called) have also found him the warmest friends. His splendid candour, his
magnanimity, his tolerance, spring from no ignorance or indifference; he is keenly sensitive to minute traits of character, and merciless to meanness. Under what precise set of conditions, and exactly by what persons, he is to be read, is a question that need trouble no one long. Books are written to be read by those who can understand them; their possible effect on those who cannot is a matter of medical rather than of literary interest. Some literary critics, it is true, with a taste for subdued tones in art, have found some of Fielding’s loudest notes too strident for enfeebled ears, but not to the great musician can the whole range of the orchestra, not to the great painter can the strongest contrast of colours, profitably be denied.

Almost all the great English writers of the eighteenth century, whether theologians, novelists, or poets, are, in their essence, moralists, and Fielding is no exception. To compare his morality with Richardson’s is only to do what his early readers must have done, for the comparison is courted by himself in *Joseph Andrews*; and even *Tom Jones* owes some of its features to that rivalry between these two great novelists of which both were keenly conscious. Moreover, Fielding’s morality has before now attracted censure. Richardson, never behind-hand in condemning his rival, says that “the virtues of his heroes are the vices of a truly good man.” Hawkins, the biographer of Johnson, condemns him as “the inventor of that cant phrase, goodness of heart, which is every day used as a substitute for probity, and means little more than the virtue of a horse or a dog,” and thinks that “he has done more towards corrupting the rising generation
than any writer we know of.” And Mr. Edwards of Turrick, Bucks, the author of *The Canons of Criticism*, whose monument in the parish church of Ellesborough records that he departed this life with “decent unconcern,” displays neither decency nor nonchalance in the eagerness with which he assures Richardson by letter that he has read the *Journal of a Voyage to Lisbon* “with much indignation,” and is convinced by the brave humour of that work that “the fellow had no heart.” These are early voices, but they have found later echoes.

If terms borrowed from literary criticism could be applied to morals, it might truly be said that Richardson is a classic, and Fielding a romantic moralist. Richardson lays most stress on code, conformity to the social standard, and judges by the deed done; Fielding lays most on native impulse, goodness of heart, the individual’s conformity to his better self, and uses a novelist’s privilege in judging his creatures by their motives. The corruption of the classical school in letters springs from a pedantic attention to form and a neglect of inspiration; so in morals corruption appears as pharisaism, the formal righteousness of a man whose good deeds too often spring from bad motives. The virtues of Sir Charles Grandison might all be comprised under the single head of a rigid attention to good form, with much consequent confusion between trivial and important duties.

Against the pedantry of the formal moralist Fielding delights to hurl his satire. He can clear away in a moment all the “splendid rubbish” that covers up a character, and expose its inherent rottenness or meanness. He never tires of showing how a base-minded man may
cover himself with formal righteousness, and how a scapegrace may be good at heart. A good instance of his method occurs early in *Joseph Andrews*, in that scene where Joseph, robbed of his money and stripped of his clothes, is overtaken, groaning in a ditch, by a coach full of passengers. The arguments against taking him into the coach advanced by the lady who "had rather stay in that place to all eternity than ride with a naked man," and by the old gentleman, who fears lest they may be robbed too, are overcome by the contentions of the young lawyer, who advises "to save the poor creature's life for their own sakes," lest they should incur the charge of being accessory to murder. But Joseph will not enter until he is decently clad, and the difficulty would have been insurmountable, for neither the passengers nor the coachman would lend a single garment, "unless the postillion (a lad who hath been since transported for robbing a hen-roost) had voluntarily stripped off a greatcoat, his only garment, at the same time swearing a great oath (for which he was rebuked by all the passengers), 'that he would rather ride in his shirt all his life than suffer a fellow-creature to lie in so miserable a condition.'"

By the insertion of the clauses in brackets Fielding here emphasizes his favourite paradox, which became later the main theme of *Tom Jones*. For with all their variety, his novels throughout exhibit in the strongest light the antithesis between the generous or heedless errors of warm-hearted humanity, and the calculating prudence and rigid propriety of persons formally righteous, but without the least tincture of generous feeling.
A desire to make the contrast as striking as possible is no doubt responsible for some of the incidents in Tom Jones that have found least favour with the critics. Thackeray protested against Mr. Jones's claim to heroic rank, and an earlier critic, Mrs. Honour, maid to Miss Sophia Western, gave voice to a prevalent opinion when, on being begged to whisper, "for that there was a lady dying in the next room," she exclaimed, "A lady! Ay, I suppose one of your ladies.—O, Mr. Jones, there are too many of them in the world."

There are certainly none too few, for Fielding is more careful to keep his hero human than to keep him heroic. But perhaps their number would have been overlooked had not the novelist thought proper, after piloting his hero through twelve books of adventure without any indelible stain on his reputation, to rob him of his honour and exhibit him "spunging for a guinea" by the introduction of the Lady Bellaston episode in the thirteenth book. This much-debated incident, however, only lays a strong emphasis on the main theme of the book, and makes its intellectual framework all the clearer. With something of the same paradoxical intent Walt Whitman proclaims—

"I pick out some low person for my dearest friend, He shall be vulgar, rude, illiterate, he shall be one condemned by others for deeds done."

And just as Fielding was not satisfied with making the warm-hearted postillion swear, but thought it necessary to transport him for theft, so he is not content to win the sympathy of the reader for Mr. Jones without
giving that sympathy the severest obstacles to surmount in the shape of "deeds done."

He would have no countenance extended to Tom Jones on the ground that in spite of all peccadillos he is at least fairly reputable. And so poor Mr. Jones is left with little but his warm heart to plead for him. But if that excused him to Sophia, who else dare refuse him absolution?

The crew of hypocrites that disport themselves in Tom Jones, Blifil, Thwackum, Square, and others, are admirably studied and described. Like Squire Western, they are of a hardier breed than their modern representatives, and do not trouble to deceive themselves so long as they can deceive others. The speech made by young Master Blifil when he has let loose Miss Sophia's bird, wherein he claims humanity as the motive of an action really prompted by spite, is a model of deliberate and cunning hypocrisy. All Fielding's evil characters, it may be remarked, are accomplished hypocrites; on pure vanity or silliness he spends very few of his shafts. If he had ever drawn up a graduated list of moral offences, it would doubtless have corresponded very closely with Dante's, as set forth in the circles of the Inferno. Sins involving both cruelty and deceit would have been ranked as heaviest, the sins of the senses as lightest. Only, the English magistrate, with less austerity than the Italian seer, would perhaps have been content to suffer the inhabitants of the higher circles of the Inferno to remain on earth, or to be saved from the doom of their actions, while to hypocrites of the darker sort he is as pitiless as Dante himself. "It is much
easier,” he says in the dedication of Tom Jones, “to make good men wise than to make bad men good.” And therefore he has laboured, not to reform his villains, but to show that indiscretion is responsible for leading virtue and innocence into the snares laid for them. The whole history of Mr. Jones up to the last chapter is a commentary on the evil effects of such indiscretion, the punishment follows close on the heels of the offence, and only those stern censors who would prefer to see the hero hanged can complain when he is happily married.

By the time that he wrote Amelia, questions of practical rather than poetic justice had the first place in Fielding’s thoughts. The abuses of his time, in connection especially with the administration of the law, the venality of justices and prison officials, the indiscriminate brutality of punishments and their inefficiency in preventing crime, all exercised his mind and energies, and find reflection in the sketches and scenes in Amelia. The novel is written in a graver manner, and the introductory chapter, inspired in Tom Jones by Fielding’s delight in his craft, have no counterpart here. Captain Booth, like the earlier hero, is a man “of consummate good nature,” with a truer and deeper repentance for his faults than the buoyant Mr. Jones ever succeeded in experiencing. And is saved, like his prototype, his wife. Amelia, like his family and the virtues of Charlotte Fielding, is drawn from the life; the novelist’s first struggle and privation were, who, after eight years of errors of Mr. Booth servile, had died in 1743. The only to heighten the effect of
her gentleness and goodness. Tom Jones, "bad as he is," has to serve as hero of the former history, Captain Booth is deposed from that position and reigns only in right of his wife, he exists to be forgiven. But he is forgiven with such grace and delicacy for his faults that it is hard to refuse him forgiveness for his existence. And it may be doubted whether a figure so beautiful and at the same time so perfectly life-like as Amelia has ever been drawn in the whole range of English prose fiction.

To catalogue or appraise Fielding's gallery of portraits would ask for much space. Some of the best of them are still unique in their kind, and have had no copyists. It is more important here, therefore, to set down briefly the advances in the art of novel-writing that he taught to his generation. These were mainly two, the artistic conduct of a complicated plot, and, combined with this, a realism in the characters and events that should be convincing without hampering the freedom of the artist.

Before Fielding's day only short stories had been told well in English prose. Those prose-writers who had chosen to deal with a variety of characters and events in a single narrative, had either jumbled their incidents together in meaningless confusion, or had adopted the simple and monotonous device of Defoe, stringing them on a single thread of consecutive experience without the emphasis that can be obtained from skilful grouping. Congreve, in his single novel, had attempted to introduce dramatic conventions; nobody marked him; Fielding was happier in finding a large public for works that borrowed their structure, although without any slavish imitation, from the classical epic. The influence
of the epic on his work is apparent in his invocations, where his diction becomes poetic, and in mock-heroic scenes, like the battle in the churchyard. But the structure of the story is itself epic, and the relation of the by-plots to the principal theme is everywhere established. Even the digression due to the Man of the Hill is part of the theme of *Tom Jones*, if it is no part of the story. Richardson's handling of his own method is excellent, but he could never become a teacher of method; only his patience and skill could manoeuvre those legions of letters and feed them on chopped straw. On the other hand, there could be no better school for a novelist than is afforded by the study of Fielding's plots.

His realism is no less an advance. It is not laborious and minute, but it is sufficient. He does not, like Defoe, "protest too much," for his object is to create an illusion of reality and not a belief in fact. Sophia comes sailing into his story wafted by a poetic invocation, and has not to undergo an inventory of her apparel. Yet for the purposes of a poet she lives and breathes as Moll Flanders never did. Moreover Fielding's acquaintance with life is fully as wide as Defoe's, while his insight is keener and deeper. His last and most heart-felt invocation in the beginning of the thirteenth book of *Tom Jones* is addressed to Experience, conversant "with every kind of character, from the minister at his levee to the bailiff in his spunging-house; from the duchess at her drum to the landlady behind her bar." It was this catholicity that Richardson censured when he made it a reproach to Fielding that, "his brawls, his jars, his
gaols, his sponging-houses, are all drawn from what he has seen and known.” Others before him had seen and known these things, but in Fielding’s pages for the first time they are introduced, with no loss of reality, to subserve the ends of fiction; common life is the material of the story, but it is handled here for the first time with the freedom and imagination of a great artist.