GEORGE MACDONALD

ENGLAND'S ANTIPHON

George MacDonald

England's Antiphon

http://www.litres.ru/pages/biblio_book/?art=35007665
England's Antiphon:

Содержание

PREFACE 4
ENGLAND'S ANTIPHON. 6
CHAPTER I 10
CHAPTER II 29
GOOD COUNSEL OF CHAUCER 54
CHAPTER III 57
THANK GOD FOR ALL 59
CHAPTER IV 71
GASCOIGNE'S GOOD MORROW 74
THAT EACH THING IS HURT OF ITSELF 77
CHAPTER V 81
AN HYMN OF HEAVENLY LOVE 86
A LONG FAREWELL TO GLITTERING TRIFLES 101
PSALM XCVI 104
PSALM XLIV 106
PSALM LXV 108
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента. 112

George MacDonald
England's Antiphon

PREFACE

In this book I have sought to trace the course of our religious poetry from an early period of our literary history.

This could hardly be done without reference to some of the principal phases of the religious history of the nation. To give anything like a full history of the religious feeling of a single county, would require a large book, and—not to mention sermons—would involve a thorough acquaintance with the hymns of the country,—a very wide subject, which I have not considered of sufficient importance from a literary point of view to come within the scope of the volume.

But if its poetry be the cream of a people's thought, some true indications of the history of its religious feeling must be found in its religious verse, and I hope I have not altogether failed in setting forth these indications.

My chief aim, however, will show itself to have been the mediating towards an intelligent and cordial sympathy betwixt my readers and the writers from whom I have quoted. In this I have some confidence of success.

Heartily do I throw this my small pebble at the head of the

great

Sabbath-breaker *Schism*.

ENGLAND'S ANTIPHON.
INTRODUCTION

If the act of worship be the highest human condition, it follows that the highest human art must find material in the modes of worship. The first poetry of a nation will not be religious poetry: the nation must have a history at least before it can possess any material capable of being cast into the mould of religious utterance; but, the nation once possessed of this material, poetry is the first form religious utterance will assume.

The earliest form of literature is the ballad, which is the germ of all subsequent forms of poetry, for it has in itself all their elements: the *lyric*, for it was first chanted to some stringed instrument; the *epic*, for it tells a tale, often of solemn and ancient report; the *dramatic*, for its actors are ever ready to start forward into life, snatch the word from the mouth of the narrator, and speak in their own persons. All these forms have been used for the utterance of religious thought and feeling. Of the lyrical poems of England, religion possesses the most; of the epic, the best; of the dramatic, the oldest.

Of each of these I shall have occasion to speak; but, as the title of the book implies,—for *Antiphon* means the responsive song of the parted choir,—I shall have chiefly to do with the lyric or song form.

For song is the speech of feeling. Even the prose of emotion always wanders into the rhythmical. Hence, as well as for other reasons belonging to its nature, it is one chief mode in which men unite to praise God; for in thus praising they hold communion with each other, and the praise expands and grows.

The *individual* heart, however, must first have been uplifted into praiseful song, before the common ground and form of feeling, in virtue of which men might thus meet, could be supplied. But the vocal utterance or the bodily presence is not at all necessary for this communion. When we read rejoicingly the true song-speech of one of our singing brethren, we hold song-worship with him and with all who have thus at any time shared in his feelings, even if he have passed centuries ago into the "high countries" of song.

My object is to erect, as it were, in this book, a little auricle, or spot of concentrated hearing, where the hearts of my readers may listen, and join in the song of their country's singing men and singing women.

I will build it, if I may, like a chapel in the great church of England's worship, gathering the sounds of its never-ceasing choir, heart after heart lifting up itself in the music of speech, heart after heart responding across the ages. Hearing, we worship with them.

For we must not forget that, although the individual song springs from the heart of the individual, the song of a country is not merely cumulative: it is vital in its growth, and therefore

composed of historically dependent members. No man could sing as he has sung, had not others sung before him. Deep answereth unto deep, face to face, praise to praise. To the sound of the trumpet the harp returns its own vibrating response—alike, but how different! The religious song of the country, I say again, is a growth, rooted deep in all its story.

Besides the fact that the lyric chiefly will rouse the devotional feeling, there is another reason why I should principally use it: I wish to make my book valuable in its parts as in itself. The value of a thing depends in large measure upon its unity, its wholeness. In a work of these limits, that form of verse alone can be available for its unity which is like the song of the bird—a warble and then a stillness. However valuable an extract may be—and I shall not quite eschew such—an entire lyric, I had almost said *however inferior*, if worthy of a place at all, is of greater value, especially if regarded in relation to the form of setting with which I hope to surround it.

There is a sense in which I may, without presumption, adopt the name of Choragus, or leader of the chorus, in relation to these singers: I must take upon me to order who shall sing, when he shall sing, and which of his songs he shall sing. But I would rather assume the office of master of the hearing, for my aim shall be to cause the song to be truly heard; to set forth worthy points in form, in matter, and in relation; to say with regard to the singer himself, his time, its modes, its beliefs, such things as may help to set the song in its true light—its relation, namely, to the source

whence it sprung, which alone can secure its right reception by the heart of the hearer. For my chief aim will be the heart; seeing that, although there is no dividing of the one from the other, the heart can do far more for the intellect than the intellect can do for the heart.

We must not now attempt to hear the singers of times so old that their language is unintelligible without labour. For this there is not room, even if otherwise it were desirable that such should divide the volume. We must leave Anglo-Saxon behind us. In Early English, I shall give a few valuable lyrics, but they shall not be so far removed from our present speech but that, with a reasonable amount of assistance, the nature and degree of which I shall set forth, they shall not only present themselves to the reader's understanding, but commend themselves to his imagination and judgment.

CHAPTER I

SACRED LYRICS OF THE THIRTEENTH CENTURY.

In the midst of wars and rumours of wars, the strife of king and barons, and persistent efforts to subdue neighbouring countries, the mere effervescence of the life of the nation, let us think for a moment of that to which the poems I am about to present bear good witness—the true life of the people, growing quietly, slowly, unperceived—the leaven hid in the meal. For what is the true life of a nation? That, I answer, in its modes of thought, its manners and habits, which favours the growth within the individual of that kingdom of heaven for the sake only of which the kingdoms of earth exist. The true life of the people, as distinguished from the nation, is simply the growth in its individuals of those eternal principles of truth, in proportion to whose power in them they take rank in the kingdom of heaven, the only kingdom that can endure, all others being but as the mimicries of children playing at government.

Little as they then knew of the relations of the wonderful story on which their faith was built, to everything human, the same truth was at work then which is now—poor as the recognition of these relations yet is—slowly setting men free. In the hardest winter the roots are still alive in the frozen ground.

In the silence of the monastery, unnatural as that life was,

germinated much of this deeper life. As we must not judge of the life of the nation by its kings and mighty men, so we must not judge of the life in the Church by those who are called Rabbi. The very notion of the kingdom of heaven implies a secret growth, secret from no affectation of mystery, but because its goings-on are in the depths of the human nature where it holds communion with the Divine. In the Church, as in society, we often find that that which shows itself uppermost is but the froth, a sign, it may be, of life beneath, but in itself worthless. When the man arises with a servant's heart and a ruler's brain, then is the summer of the Church's content. But whether the men who wrote the following songs moved in some shining orbit of rank, or only knelt in some dim chapel, and walked in some pale cloister, we cannot tell, for they have left no name behind them.

My reader will observe that there is little of theory and much of love in these lyrics. The recognition of a living Master is far more than any notions about him. In the worship of him a thousand truths are working, unknown and yet active, which, embodied in theory, and dissociated from the living mind that was in Christ, will as certainly breed worms as any omer of hoarded manna. Holding the skirt of his garment in one hand, we shall in the other hold the key to all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

I think almost all the earliest religious poetry is about him and his mother. Their longing after his humanity made them idolize his mother. If we forget that only through his humanity

can we approach his divinity, we shall soon forget likewise that his mother is blessed among women.

I take the poems from one of the Percy Society publications, edited by Mr. Wright from a manuscript in the British Museum. He adjudges them to the reign of Edward I. Perhaps we may find in them a sign or two that in cultivating our intellect we have in some measure neglected our heart.

But first as to the mode in which I present them to my readers: I have followed these rules:—

1. Wherever a word differs from the modern word only in spelling, I have, for the sake of readier comprehension, substituted the modern form, with the following exception:—Where the spelling indicates a different pronunciation, necessary for the rhyme or the measure, I retain such part of the older form, marking with an acute accent any vowel now silent which must be sounded.

2. Where the word used is antique in root, I give the modern synonym in the margin. Antique phrases I explain in foot-notes.

It must be borne in mind that our modern pronunciation can hardly fail in other cases as well to injure the melody of the verses.

The modern reader will often find it difficult to get a rhythm out of some of them. This may arise from any of several causes. In the first place many final *e*'s were then sounded which are now silent; and it is not easy to tell which of them to sound. Again, some words were pronounced as dissyllables which we treat as

monosyllables, and others as monosyllables which we treat as dissyllables. I suspect besides, that some of the old writers were content to allow a prolonged syllable to stand for two short ones, a mode not without great beauty when sparingly and judiciously employed. Short supernumerary syllables were likewise allowed considerable freedom to come and go. A good deal must, however, be put down to the carelessness and presumption of the transcribers, who may very well have been incapable of detecting their own blunders. One of these ancient mechanics of literature caused Chaucer endless annoyance with his corruptions, as a humorous little poem, the last in his works, sufficiently indicates. From the same sources no doubt spring as well most of the variations of text in the manuscripts.

The first of the poems is chiefly a conversation between the Lord on the cross and his mother standing at its foot. A few prefatory remarks in explanation of some of its allusions will help my readers to enjoy it.

It was at one time a common belief, and the notion has not yet, I think, altogether vanished, that the dying are held back from repose by the love that is unwilling to yield them up. Hence, in the third stanza, the Lord prays his mother to let him die. In the fifth, he reasons against her overwhelming sorrows on the ground of the deliverance his sufferings will bring to the human race. But she can only feel her own misery.

To understand the seventh and eighth, it is necessary to know that, among other strange things accepted by the early Church,

it was believed that the mother of Jesus had no suffering at his birth. This of course rendered her incapable of perfect sympathy with other mothers. It is a lovely invention, then, that he should thus commend mothers to his mother, telling her to judge of the pains of motherhood by those which she now endured. Still he fails to turn aside her thoughts. She is thinking still only of her own and her son's suffering, while he continues bent on making her think of others, until, at last, forth comes her prayer for all women. This seems to me a tenderness grand as exquisite.

The outburst of the chorus of the Faithful in the last stanza but one,—

When he rose, then fell her sorrow, is as fine as anything I know in the region of the lyric.

> "Stand well, mother, under rood;[1] *the cross.*
> Behold thy son with gladé mood; *cheerful.*
>   Blithe mother mayst thou be."
> "Son, how should I blithé stand?
> I see thy feet, I see thy hand
>   Nailéd to the hard tree."
>
> "Mother, do way thy wepynde: *give over thy weeping.*
> I tholé death for mankind— *suffer.*

[1] The rhymes of the first and second and of the fourth and fifth lines throughout the stanzas, are all, I think, what the French call feminine rhymes, as in the words "sleeping," "weeping." This I think it better not to attempt retaining, because the final unaccented syllable is generally one of those e's which, having first become mute, have since been dropped from our spelling altogether.

For my guilt thole I none."
"Son, I feel the dede stounde; *death-pang.*
The sword is at my heart's ground *bottom.*
That me byhet Simeon." *foreshowed.*

"Mother, mercy! let me die,
For Adam out of hell buy, *for to buy Adam.*
And his kin that is forlore." *lost.*
"Son, what shall me to rede?[2]
My pain paineth me to dede: *death.*
Let me die thee before!"

"Mother, thou rue all of thy bairn; *rue thou*; *all* is only expletive
Thou wash away the bloody tern; *wash thou; tears.*
It doth me worse than my ded." *hurts me more; death.*
"Son, how may I terés werne? *turn aside tears.*
I see the bloody streamés erne *flow.*
From thy heart to my fet." *feet.*

"Mother, now I may thee seye, *say to thee.*
Better is that I one deye *die.*
Than all mankind to hellé go."
"Son, I see thy body byswongen, *lashed.*
Feet and hands throughout stongen: *pierced through and*

[2] For the grammatical interpretation of this line, I am indebted to Mr. Richard Morris. Shall is here used, as it often is, in the sense of must, and rede is a noun; the paraphrase of the whole being, "Son, what must be to me for counsel?" "What counsel must I follow?"

through.
No wonder though me be woe." *woe be to me.*

"Mother, now I shall thee tell,
If I not die, thou goest to hell:
I thole death for thy sake." *endure.*
"Son, thou art so meek and mynde, *thoughtful.*
Ne wyt me not, it is my kind[3]
That I for thee this sorrow make."

"Mother, now thou mayst well leren *learn.*
What sorrow have that children beren, *they have; bear.*
What sorrow it is with childé gon." *to go.*
"Sorrow, I wis! I can thee tell!
But it be the pain of hell *except.*
More sorrow wot I none."

"Mother, rue of mother-care, *take pity upon.*
For now thou wost of mother-fare, *knowest.*
Though thou be clean maiden mon."[4]
"Soné, help at alle need
Allé those that to me grede, *cry.*
Maiden, wife, and full wymmon." *woman with child.*

"Mother, may I no longer dwell;
The time is come I shall to hell;

---

[3] "Do not blame me, it is my nature."

[4] Mon is used for man or woman: human being. It is so used in Lancashire still: they say mon to a woman.

The third day I rise upon."
"Son, I will with thee founden; *set out, go.*
I die, I wis, for thy wounden:
So sorrowful death nes never none." *was not never none.*

When he rose, then fell her sorrow;
Her bliss sprung the third morrow:
Blithe mother wert thou tho! *then.*
Lady, for that ilké bliss, *same.*
Beseech thy son of sunnés lisse: *for sin's release.*
Thou be our shield against our foe. *Be thou.*

Blessed be thou, full of bliss!
Let us never heaven miss,
Through thy sweeté Sonés might!
Loverd, for that ilké blood, *Lord,*
That thou sheddest on the rood,
Thou bring us into heaven's light. AMEN.

I think my readers will not be sorry to have another of a similar character.

I sigh when I sing
For sorrow that I see,
When I with weeping
Behold upon the tree,

And see Jesus the sweet
His heart's blood for-lete *yield quite.*

For the love of me.
His woundés waxen wete, *wet.*
They weepen still and mete:[5]
Mary rueth thee. *pitieth.*

High upon a down, *hill.*
Where all folk it see may,
A mile from each town,
About the mid-day,
The rood is up areared;
His friendés are afearéd,
And clingeth so the clay;[6]
The rood stands in stone,
Mary stands her on,
And saith Welaway!

When I thee behold
With eyen brighté bo, *eyes bright both.*
And thy body cold—
Thy ble waxeth blo, *colour: livid.*
Thou hangest all of blood *bloody.*
So high upon the rood
Between thieves tuo— *two.*
Who may sigh more?
Mary weepeth sore,

---

[5] "They weep quietly and becomingly." I think there must be in this word something of the sense of gently,-uncomplainingly.

[6] "And are shrunken (clung with fear) like the clay." So here is the same as as. For this interpretation I am indebted to Mr. Morris.

And sees all this woe.

The nails be too strong,
The smiths are too sly; *skilful.*
Thou bleedest all too long;
The tree is all too high;
The stones be all wete! *wet.*
Alas, Jesu, the sweet!
For now friend hast thou none,

But Saint John to-mournynde, *mourning greatly.*
And Mary wepynde, *weeping.*
For pain that thee is on.

Oft when I sike *sigh.*
And makie my moan,
Well ill though me like,
Wonder is it none.[7]
When I see hang high
And bitter pains dreye, *dree, endure.*
Jesu, my lemmon! *love.*
His woundés sore smart,
The spear all to his heart
And through his side is gone.

Oft when I syke, *sigh.*
With care I am through-sought; *searched through.*
When I wake I wyke; *languish.*

[7] "It is no wonder though it pleases me very ill."

Of sorrow is all my thought.
Alas! men be wood *mad.*
That swear by the rood *swear by the cross.*
And sell him for nought
That bought us out of sin.
He bring us to wynne, *may he: bliss.*
That hath us dear bought!

I add two stanzas of another of like sort.

Man that is in glory and bliss,
And lieth in shame and sin,
He is more than unwis *unwise.*
That thereof will not blynne. *cease.*
All this world it goeth away,
Me thinketh it nigheth Doomsday;
Now man goes to ground: *perishes.*
Jesus Christ that tholed ded *endured death.*
He may our souls to heaven led *lead.*
Within a little stound. *moment.*

Jesus, that was mild and free,
Was with spear y-stongen; *stung* or *pierced.*
He was nailéd to the tree,
With scourges y-swongen. *lashed.*
All for man he tholed shame, *endured.*
Withouten guilt, withouten blame,

Bothé day and other[8].
Man, full muchel he loved thee, *much.*
When he woldé make thee free,
And become thy brother.

The simplicity, the tenderness, the devotion of these lyrics is to me wonderful. Observe their realism, as, for instance, in the words: "The stones beoth al wete;" a realism as far removed from the coarseness of a Rubens as from the irreverence of too many religious teachers, who will repeat and repeat again the most sacred words for the merest logical ends until the tympanum of the moral ear hears without hearing the sounds that ought to be felt as well as held holiest. They bear strongly, too, upon the outcome of feeling in action, although doubtless there was the same tendency then as there is now to regard the observance of church-ordinances as the service of Christ, instead of as a means of gathering strength wherewith to serve him by being in the world as he was in the world.

From a poem of forty-eight stanzas I choose five, partly in order to manifest that, although there is in it an occasional appearance of what we should consider sentimentality, allied in nature to that worship of the Virgin which is more a sort of French gallantry than a feeling of reverence, the sense of duty to the Master keeps pace with the profession of devotedness to

[8] I think the poet, wisely anxious to keep his last line just what it is, was perplexed for a rhyme, and fell on the odd device of saying, for "both day and night," "both day and the other."

him. There is so little continuity of thought in it, that the stanzas might almost be arranged anyhow.

Jesu, thy love be all my thought;
Of other thing ne reck I nought; *reckon.*
I yearn to have thy will y-wrought,
For thou me hast well dear y-bought.

Jesu, well may mine hearté see
That mild and meek he must be,
All unthews and lustés flee, *bad habits.*
That feelen will the bliss of thee. *feel.*

For sinful folk, sweet Jesus,
Thou lightest from the high house;
Poor and low thou wert for us.
Thine heart's love thou sendest us.

Jesu, therefore beseech I thee
Thy sweet love thou grant me;
That I thereto worthy be,
Make me worthy that art so free. *thou that art.*

Jesu, thine help at my ending!
And in that dreadful out-wending, *going forth of the spirit.*
Send my soul good weryyng, *guard.*
That I ne dread none evil thing.

I shall next present a short lyric, displaying more of art than

this last, giving it now in the old form, and afterwards in a new one, that my reader may see both how it looks in its original dress, and what it means.

Wynter wakeneth al my care,
Nou this leves waxeth bare,
Ofte y sike ant mourne sare, *sigh; sore.*
  When hit cometh in my thoht
  Of this worldes joie, how hit goth al to noht.

Now hit is, ant now hit nys, *it is not.*
Also hit ner nere y-wys,[9]
That moni mon seith soth hit ys,[10]
  Al goth bote Godes wille,
  Alle we shule deye, thah us like ylle. *though it pleases us ill.*

Al that gren me graueth grene,[11]
Nou hit faleweth al by-dene; *grows yellow: speedily.*
Jhesu, help that hit be sene, *seen.*
  Ant shild us from helle;
  For y not whider y shal, ne hou longe her duelle.[12]

I will now give a modern version of it, in which I have spoiled

---

[9] "All as if it were not never, I wis."

[10] "So that many men say—True it is, all goeth but God's will."

[11] I conjecture "All that grain (me) groweth green."

[12] Not is a contraction for ne wat, know not. "For I know not whither I must go, nor how long here I dwell." I think y is omitted by mistake before duelle.

the original of course, but I hope as little as well may be.

Winter wakeneth all my care;
Now the trees are waxing bare;
Oft my sighs my grief declare[13]
    When it comes into my thought
    Of this world's joy, how it goes all to nought.

Now it is, and now 'tis not—
As it ne'er had been, I wot.
Hence many say—it is man's lot:
  All goeth but God's will;
  We all die, though we like it ill.

Green about me grows the grain;
Now it yelloweth all again:
Jesus, give us help amain,
  And shield us from hell;
  For when or whither I go I cannot tell

There were no doubt many religious poems in a certain amount of circulation of a different cast from these; some a metrical recounting of portions of the Bible history—a kind unsuited to our ends; others a setting forth of the doctrines and duties then believed and taught. Of the former class is one of the oldest Anglo-Saxon poems we have, that of Caedmon, and there are many specimens to be found in the fourteenth and

---

[13] This is very poor compared with the original.

fifteenth centuries. They could, however, have been of little service to the people, so few of whom could read, or could have procured manuscripts if they had been able to use them. A long and elaborate composition of the latter class was written in the reign of Edward II. by William de Shoreham, vicar of Chart-Sutton in Kent. He probably taught his own verses to the people at his catechisings. The intention was, no doubt, by the aid of measure and rhyme to facilitate the remembrance of the facts and doctrines. It consists of a long poem on the Seven Sacraments; of a shorter, associating the Canonical Hours with the principal events of the close of our Lord's life; of an exposition of the Ten Commandments, followed by a kind of treatise on the Seven Cardinal Sins: the fifth part describes the different joys of the Virgin; the sixth, in praise of the Virgin, is perhaps the most poetic; the last is less easy to characterize. The poem is written in the Kentish dialect, and is difficult.

I shall now turn into modern verse a part of "The Canonical Hours," giving its represented foundation of the various acts of worship in the Romish Church throughout the day, from early in the morning to the last service at night. After every fact concerning our Lord, follows an apostrophe to his mother, which I omit, being compelled to choose.

Father's wisdom lifted high,
  Lord of us aright—
God and man taken was,
  At matin-time by night.

The disciples that were his,
  Anon they him forsook;
Sold to Jews and betrayed,
  To torture him took.

At the prime Jesus was led
  In presence of Pilate,
Where witnesses, false and fell,
  Laughed at him for hate.
In the neck they him smote,
  Bound his hands of might;
Spit upon that sweet face
  That heaven and earth did light.

"Crucify him! crucify!"
  They cried at nine o'clock;
A purple cloth they put on him—
  To stare at him and mock.
They upon his sweet head
  Stuck a thorny crown;
To Calvary his cross he bears.
  Pitiful, from the town

Jesus was nailed on the cross
  At the noon-tide;
Strong thieves they hanged up,
  One on either side.
In his pain, his strong thirst
  Quenched they with gall;

So that God's holy Lamb
  From sin washed us all.

At the nones Jesus Christ
  Felt the hard death;
He to his father "Eloi!" cried,
  Gan up yield his breath.
A soldier with a sharp spear
  Pierced his right side;
The earth shook, the sun grew dim,
  The moment that he died.

He was taken off the cross
  At even-song's hour;
The strength left and hid in God
  Of our Saviour.
Such death he underwent,
  Of life the medicine!
Alas! he was laid adown—
  The crown of bliss in pine!

At complines, it was borne away
  To the burying,
That noble corpse of Jesus Christ,
  Hope of life's coming.
Anointed richly it was,
  Fulfilled his holy book:
I pray, Lord, thy passion
  In my mind lock.

Childlike simplicity, realism, and tenderness will be evident in this, as in preceding poems, especially in the choice of adjectives. But indeed the combination of certain words had become conventional; as "The hard tree," "The nails great and strong," and such like.

I know I have spoiled the poem in half-translating it thus; but I have rendered it intelligible to all my readers, have not wandered from the original, and have retained a degree of antiqueness both in the tone and the expression.

CHAPTER II

THE MIRACLE PLAYS AND OTHER POEMS OF THE FOURTEENTH CENTURY.

The oldest form of regular dramatic representation in England was the Miracle Plays, improperly called Mysteries, after the French. To these plays the people of England, in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, owed a very large portion of what religious knowledge they possessed, for the prayers were in an unknown tongue, the sermons were very few, and printing was uninvented. The plays themselves, introduced into the country by the Normans, were, in the foolish endeavour to make Normans of Anglo-Saxons, represented in Norman French[14] until the year 1338, when permission was obtained from the Pope to represent them in English.

The word *Miracle*, in their case, means anything recorded in Scripture. The Miracle Plays had for their subjects the chief incidents of Old and New Testament history; not merely, however, of this history as accepted by the Reformed Church, but of that contained in the Apocryphal Gospels as well. An entire series of these *Miracles* consisted of short dramatic representations of many single passages of the sacred story. The whole would occupy about three days. It began with the

---

[14] I owe almost all my information on the history of these plays to Mr.Collier's well-known work on English Dramatic Poetry.

Creation, and ended with the Judgment. That for which the city of Coventry was famous consists of forty-two subjects, with a long prologue. Composed by ecclesiastics, the plays would seem to have been first represented by them only, although afterwards it was not always considered right for the clergy to be concerned with them. The hypocritical Franciscan friar, in "Piers Ploughman's Creed," a poem of the close of the same century, claims as a virtue for his order—

At markets and miracles we meddleth us never.

They would seem likewise to have been first represented in churches and chapels, sometimes in churchyards. Later, when the actors chiefly belonged to city-guilds, they were generally represented in the streets and squares.

It must be borne in mind by any who would understand the influence of these plays upon the people, that much in them appearing to us grotesque, childish, absurd, and even irreverent, had no such appearance in the eyes of the spectators. A certain amount of the impression of absurdity is simply the consequence of antiquity; and even that which is rightly regarded as absurd in the present age, will not at least have produced the discomposing effects of absurdity upon the less developed beholders of that age; just as the quaint pictures with which their churches were decorated may make us smile, but were by them regarded with awe and reverence from their infancy.

It must be confessed that there is in them even occasional coarseness; but that the devil for instance should always be

represented as a baffled fool, and made to play the buffoon sometimes after a disgusting fashion, was to them only the treatment he deserved: it was their notion of "poetic justice;" while most of them were too childish to be shocked at the discord thus introduced, and many, we may well hope, too childlike to lose their reverence for the holy because of the proximity of the ridiculous.

There seems to me considerably more of poetic worth scattered through these plays than is generally recognized; and I am glad to be able to do a little to set forth the fact. I cannot doubt that my readers will be interested in such fragments as the scope and design of my book will allow me to offer. Had there been no such passages, I might have regarded the plays as but remotely connected with my purpose, and mentioned them merely as a dramatic form of religious versification. I quote from the *Coventry Miracles*, better known than either of the other two sets in existence, the Chester Plays and those of Widkirk Abbey. The manuscript from which they have been edited by Mr. Halliwell, one of those students of our early literature to whom we are endlessly indebted for putting valuable things within our reach, is by no means so old as the plays themselves; it bears date 1468, a hundred and thirty years after they appeared in their English dress. Their language is considerably modernized, a process constantly going on where transcription is the means of transmission—not to mention that the actors would of course make many changes to the speech of their own time. I shall

modernize it a little further, but only as far as change of spelling will go.

The first of the course is *The Creation*. God, and angels, and Lucifer appear. That God should here utter, I cannot say announce, the doctrine of the Trinity, may be defended on the ground that he does so in a soliloquy; but when we find afterwards that the same doctrine is one of the subjects upon which the boy Jesus converses with the doctors in the Temple, we cannot help remarking the strange anachronism. Two remarkable lines in the said soliloquy are these:

> And all that ever shall have being
> It is closed in my mind.

The next scene is the *Fall of Man*, which is full of poetic feeling and expression both. I must content myself with a few passages.

Here is part of Eve's lamentation, when she is conscious of the death that has laid hold upon her.

> Alas that ever that speech was spoken
> That the false angel said unto me!
> Alas! our Maker's bidding is broken,
> For I have touched his own dear tree.
> Our fleshly eyes are all unlokyn, *unlocked.*
> Naked for sin ourself we see;
> That sorry apple that we have sokyn *sucked.*

To death hath brought my spouse and me.

When the voice of God is heard, saying,

Adam, that with my hands I made,
Where art thou now? what hast thou wrought?

Adam replies, in two lines, containing the whole truth of man's spiritual condition ever since:

Ah, Lord! for sin our flowers do fade:
I hear thy voice, but I see thee nought.

The vision had vanished, but the voice remained; for they that hear shall live, and to the pure in heart one day the vision shall be restored, for "they shall see God." There is something wonderfully touching in the quaint simplicity of the following words of God to the woman:

Unwise woman, say me why
That thou hast done this foul folly,
And I made thee a great lady,
In Paradise for to play?

As they leave the gates, the angel with the flaming sword ends his speech thus:

This bliss I spere from you right fast; *bar*.

Herein come ye no more,
Till a child of a maid be born,
And upon the rood rent and torn,
To save all that ye have forlorn, *lost.*
Your wealth for to restore.

Eve laments bitterly, and at length offers her throat to her husband, praying him to strangle her:

Now stumble we on stalk and stone;
My wit away from me is gone;
Writhe on to my neck-bone
With hardness of thine hand.

Adam replies—not over politely—

Wife, thy wit is not worth a rush;

and goes on to make what excuse for themselves he can in a very simple and touching manner:

Our hap was hard, our wit was nesche, *soft, weak,* still in use in
To Paradise when we were brought: [some provinces.
My weeping shall be long fresh;
Short liking shall be long bought. *pleasure.*

The scene ends with these words from Eve:

Alas, that ever we wrought this sin!
Our bodily sustenance for to win,
Ye must delve and I shall spin,
  In care to lead our life.

Cain and Abel follows; then *Noah's Flood*, in which God says,

They shall not dread the flood's flow;

then *Abraham's Sacrifice*; then *Moses and the Two Tables*; then *The Prophets*, each of whom prophesies of the coming Saviour; after which we find ourselves in the Apocryphal Gospels, in the midst of much nonsense about Anna and Joachim, the parents of Mary, about Joseph and Mary and the birth of Jesus, till we arrive at *The Shepherds* and *The Magi, The Purification, The Slaughter of the Innocents, The Disputing in the Temple, The Baptism, The Temptation*, and *The Woman taken in Adultery*, at which point I pause for the sake of the remarkable tradition embodied in the scene—that each of the woman's accusers thought Jesus was writing his individual sins on the ground. While he is writing the second time, the Pharisee, the Accuser, and the Scribe, who have chiefly sustained the dialogue hitherto, separate, each going into a different part of the Temple, and soliloquize thus:

Pharisee. Alas! alas! I am ashamed!

I am afeared that I shall die;
All my sins even properly named
Yon prophet did write before mine eye.
If that my fellows that did espy,
They will tell it both far and wide;
My sinful living if they outcry,
I wot not where my head to hide.

Accuser. Alas! for sorrow mine heart doth bleed,
All my sins yon man did write;
If that my fellows to them took heed,
I cannot me from death acquite.
I would I were hid somewhere out of sight,
That men should me nowhere see nor know;
If I be taken I am aflyght *afraid.*
In mekyl shame I shall be throwe. *much.*

Scribe. Alas the time that this betyd! *happened.*
Right bitter care doth me embrace.
All my sins be now unhid,
Yon man before me them all doth trace.
If I were once out of this place,
To suffer death great and vengeance able,[15]
I will never come before his face,
Though I should die in a stable.

Upon this follows *The Raising of Lazarus*; next *The Council*

[15] Able to suffer, deserving, subject to, obnoxious to, liable to death and vengeance.

of the Jews, to which the devil appears as a Prologue, dressed in the extreme of the fashion of the day, which he sets forth minutely enough in his speech also. *The Entry into Jerusalem; The Last Supper; The Betrayal; King Herod; The Trial of Christ; Pilate's Wife's Dream* come next; to the subject of the last of which the curious but generally accepted origin is given, that it was inspired by Satan, anxious that Jesus should not be slain, because he dreaded the mischief he would work when he entered Hades or Hell, for there is no distinction between them either here or in the Apocryphal Gospel whence the *Descent into Hell* is taken. Then follow *The Crucifixion* and *The Descent into Hell*—often called the *Harrowing of Hell*—that is, the *making war upon* or *despoiling of hell*,[16] for which the authority is a passage in the Gospel of Nicodemus, full of a certain florid Eastern grandeur. I need hardly remind my readers that the Apostles' Creed, as it now stands, contains the same legend in the form of an article of faith. The allusions to it are frequent in the early literature of Christendom.

The soul of Christ comes to the gates of hell, and says:
Undo your gates of sorwatorie; *place of sorrow.*
On man's soul I have memorie;
There cometh now the king of glory,
These gates for to breke!
Ye devils that are here within,
Hell gates ye shall unpin;

[16] The word harry is still used in Scotland, but only in regard to a bird's nest.

I shall deliver man's kin—
From woe I will them wreke. *avenge.*
* * * * *
Against me it were but waste
To holdyn or to standyn fast;
Hell-lodge may not last
Against the king of glory.
Thy dark door down I throw;
My fair friends now well I know;
I shall them bring, reckoned by row,
Out of their purgatory!

The Burial; The Resurrection; The Three Maries; Christ appearing to Mary; The Pilgrim of Emmaus; The Ascension; The Descent of the Holy Ghost; The Assumption of the Virgin; and *Doomsday*, close the series. I have quoted enough to show that these plays must, in the condition of the people to whom they were presented, have had much to do with their religious education.

This fourteenth century was a wonderful time of outbursting life. Although we cannot claim the *Miracles* as entirely English products, being in all probability translations from the Norman-French, yet the fact that they were thus translated is one remarkable amongst many in this dawn of the victory of England over her conquerors. From this time, English prospered and French decayed. Their own language was now, so far, authorized as the medium of religious instruction to the people, while a

similar change had passed upon processes at law; and, most significant of all, the greatest poet of the time, and one of the three greatest poets as yet of all English time, wrote, although a courtier, in the language of the people. Before selecting some of Chaucer's religious verses, however, I must speak of two or three poems by other writers.

The first of these is *The Vision of William concerning Piers Plowman*,—a poem of great influence in the same direction as the writings of Wycliffe. It is a vision and an allegory, wherein the vices of the time, especially those of the clergy, are unsparingly dealt with. Towards the close it loses itself in a metaphysical allegory concerning Dowel, Dobet, and Dobest.[17] I do not find much poetry in it. There is more, to my mind, in another poem, written some thirty or forty years later, the author of which is unknown, perhaps because he was an imitator of William Langland, the author of the *Vision*. It is called *Pierce the Ploughman's Crede*. Both are written after the fashion of the Anglo-Saxon poetry, and not after the fashion of the Anglo-Norman, of which distinction a little more presently. Its object is to contrast the life and character of the four orders of friars with those of a simple Christian. There is considerable humour in the working plan of the poem.

A certain poor man says he has succeeded in learning his A B C, his Paternoster, and his Ave Mary, but he cannot, do what he will, learn his Creed. He sets out, therefore, to find some one

---

[17] Do-well, Do-better, and Do-best.

whose life, according with his profession, may give him a hope that he will teach him his creed aright. He applies to the friars. One after another, every order abuses the other; nor this only, but for money offers either to teach him his creed, or to absolve him for ignorance of the same. He finds no helper until he falls in with Pierce the Ploughman, of whose poverty he gives a most touching description. I shall, however, only quote some lines of *The Believe* as taught by the Ploughman, and this principally to show the nature of the versification:

> Leve thou on our Lord God, that all the world wroughté; *believe.*
> Holy heaven upon high wholly he formed;
> And is almighty himself over all his workés;
> And wrought as his will was, the world and the heaven;
> And on gentle Jesus Christ, engendered of himselven,
> His own only Son, Lord over all y-knowen.
> * * * * *
> With thorn y-crowned, crucified, and on the cross diéd;
> And sythen his blessed body was in a stone buried; *after that.*
> And descended adown to the dark hellé,
> And fetched out our forefathers; and they full fain weren. *glad.*
> The third day readily, himself rose from death,
> And on a stone there he stood, he stey up to heaven. *where: ascended.*

Here there is no rhyme. There is measure—a dance-

movement in the verse; and likewise, in most of the lines, what was essential to Anglo-Saxon verse—three or more words beginning with the same sound. This is somewhat of the nature of rhyme, and was all our Anglo-Saxon forefathers had of the kind. Their Norman conquerors brought in rhyme, regularity of measure, and division into stanzas, with many refinements of versification now regarded, with some justice and a little more injustice, as peurilities. Strange as it may seem, the peculiar rhythmic movement of the Anglo-Saxon verse is even yet the most popular of all measures. Its representative is now that kind of verse which is measured not by the number of syllables, but by the number of *accented* syllables. The bulk of the nation is yet Anglo-Saxon in its blind poetic tastes.

Before taking my leave of this mode, I would give one fine specimen from another poem, lately printed, for the first time in full, from Bishop Percy's manuscript. It may chronologically belong to the beginning of the next century: its proper place in my volume is here. It is called *Death and Liffe*. Like Langland's poem, it is a vision; but, short as it is in comparison, there is far more poetry in it than in *Piers Plowman*. Life is thus described:

> She was brighter of her blee[18] than was the bright sun;
> Her rudd[19] redder than the rose that on the rise[20] hangeth;

---

[18] Complexion.

[19] Ruddiness—complexion.

[20] Twig.

Meekly smiling with her mouth, and merry in her looks;
Ever laughing for love, as she like would.

Everything bursts into life and blossom at her presence,

And the grass that was grey greened belive. *forthwith.*

But the finest passage is part of Life's answer to Death, who has been triumphing over her:

How didst thou joust at Jerusalem, with Jesu, my Lord,
Where thou deemedst his death in one day's time! *judgedst.*
There wast thou shamed and shent and stripped for aye! *rebuked.*
When thou saw the king come with the cross on his shoulder,
On the top of Calvary thou camest him against;
Like a traitor untrue, treason thou thought;
Thou laid upon my liege lord loathful hands,
Sithen beat him on his body, and buffeted him rightly, *then.*
Till the railing red blood ran from his sides; *pouring down.*

Sith rent him on the rood with full red wounds: *then.*
To all the woes that him wasted, I wot not few,
Then deemedst (him) to have been dead, and dressed for ever.
But, Death, how didst thou then, with all thy derffe words, *fierce.*
When thou pricked at his pap with the point of a spear,
And touched the tabernacle of his true heart,

Where my bower was bigged to abide for ever? *built.*
When the glory of his Godhead glinted in thy face,
Then wast thou feared of this fare in thy false heart; *affair.*
Then thou hied into hell-hole to hide thee belive; *at once.*
Thy falchion flew out of thy fist, so fast thou thee hied;
Thou durst not blush once back, for better or worse, *look.*
But drew thee down full in that deep hell,
And bade them bar bigly Belzebub his gates. *greatly, strongly.*
Then thou told them tidings, that teened them sore; *grieved.*
How that king came to kithen his strength, *show.*
And how she[21] had beaten thee on thy bent,[22]
and thy brand taken,
With everlasting life that longed him till. *belonged to him.*

When Life has ended her speech to Death, she turns to her own followers and says:—

Therefore be not abashed, my barnes so dear, *children.*
Of her falchion so fierce, nor of her fell words.
She hath no might, nay, no means, no more you to grieve,
Nor on your comely corses to clap once her hands.
I shall look you full lively, and latch full well, *search for:*
And keere ye further of this kithe[23] above [lay hold of.
the clear skies.

---

[21] Life (?).—I think she should be he.

[22] Field.

[23] "Carry you beyond this region."

I now turn from those poems of national scope and wide social interest, bearing their share, doubtless, in the growth of the great changes that showed themselves at length more than a century after, and from the poem I have just quoted of a yet wider human interest, to one of another tone, springing from the grief that attends love, and the aspiration born of the grief. It is, nevertheless, wide in its scope as the conflict between Death and Life, although dealing with the individual and not with the race. The former poems named of Pierce Ploughman are the cry of John the Baptist in the English wilderness; this is the longing of Hannah at home, having left her little son in the temple. The latter *seems* a poorer matter; but it is an easier thing to utter grand words of just condemnation, than, in the silence of the chamber, or with the well-known household-life around, forcing upon the consciousness only the law of things seen, to regard with steadfastness the blank left by a beloved form, and believe in the unseen, the marvellous, the eternal. In the midst of "the light of common day," with all the persistently common things pressing upon the despairing heart, to hold fast, after what fashion may be possible, the vanishing song that has changed its key, is indeed a victory over the flesh, however childish the forms in which the faith may embody itself, however weak the logic with which it may defend its intrenchments.

The poem which has led me to make these remarks is in many respects noteworthy. It is very different in style and language

from any I have yet given. There was little communication to blend the different modes of speech prevailing in different parts of the country. It belongs,[24] according to students of English, to the Midland dialect of the fourteenth century. The author is beyond conjecture.

It is not merely the antiquity of the language that causes its difficulty, but the accumulated weight of artistically fantastic and puzzling requirements which the writer had laid upon himself in its composition. The nature of these I shall be enabled to show by printing the first twelve lines almost as they stand in the manuscript.

> Perle plesaunte to prynces paye,
> To clanly clos in golde so clere!
> Oute of oryent I hardyly saye,
> Ne proued I neuer her precios pere;
> So rounde, so reken in vche araye,
> So smal, so smothe her sydes were!
> Quere-so-euer I iugged gemmes gaye,
> I sette hyr sengeley in synglure:
> Allas! I leste hyr in on erbere,
> Thurh gresse to grounde hit fro me yot;
> I dewyne for-dolked of luf daungere,
> Of that pryuy perle with-outen spot.

---

[24] For the knowledge of this poem I am indebted to the Early English Text Society, now printing so many valuable manuscripts.

Here it will be observed that the Norman mode—that of rhymes—is employed, and that there is a far more careful measure in the line that is found in the poem last quoted. But the rhyming is carried to such an excess as to involve the necessity of constant invention of phrase to meet its requirements—a fertile source of obscurity. The most difficult form of stanza in respect of rhyme now in use is the Spenserian, in which, consisting of nine lines, four words rhyme together, three words, and two words. But the stanza in the poem before us consists of twelve lines, six of which, two of which, four of which, rhyme together. This we should count hard enough; but it does not nearly exhaust the tyranny of the problem the author has undertaken. I have already said that one of the essentials of the poetic form in Anglo-Saxon was the commencement of three or more words in the line with the same sound: this peculiarity he has exaggerated: every line has as many words as possible commencing with the same sound. In the first line, for instance,—and it must be remembered that the author's line is much shorter than the Anglo-Saxon line,—there are four words beginning with *p*; in the second, three beginning with *cl*, and so on. This, of course, necessitates much not merely of circumlocution, but of contrivance, involving endless obscurity.

He has gone on to exaggerate the peculiarities of Norman verse as well; but I think it better not to run the risk of wearying my reader by pointing out more of his oddities. I will now betake myself to what is far more interesting as well as valuable.

The poem sets forth the grief and consolation of a father who has lost his daughter. It is called *The Pearl*. Here is a literal rendering, line for line, into modern English words, not modern English speech, of the stanza which I have already given in its original form:

> Pearl pleasant to prince's pleasure,
> Most cleanly closed in gold so clear!
> Out of the Orient, I boldly say,
> I never proved her precious equal;
> So round, so beautiful in every point!
> So small, so smooth, her sides were!
>
> Wheresoever I judged gemmes gay
> I set her singly in singleness.
> Alas! I lost her in an arbour;
> Through the grass to the ground it from me went.
> I pine, sorely wounded by dangerous love
> Of that especial pearl without spot.

The father calls himself a jeweller; the pearl is his daughter. He has lost the pearl in the grass; it has gone to the ground, and he cannot find it; that is, his daughter is dead and buried. Perhaps the most touching line is one in which he says to the grave:

> O moul, thou marrez a myry mele.
> (O mould, thou marrest a merry talk.)

The poet, who is surely the father himself, cannot always keep up the allegory; his heart burns holes in it constantly; at one time he says *she*, at another *it*, and, between the girl and the pearl, the poem is bewildered. But the allegory helps him out with what he means notwithstanding; for although the highest aim of poetry is to say the deepest things in the simplest manner, humanity must turn from mode to mode, and try a thousand, ere it finds the best. The individual, in his new endeavour to make "the word cousin to the deed," must take up the forms his fathers have left him, and add to them, if he may, new forms of his own. In both the great revivals of literature, the very material of poetry was allegory.

The father falls asleep on his child's grave, and has a dream, or rather a vision, of a country where everything—after the childish imagination which invents differences instead of discovering harmonies—is super-naturally beautiful: rich rocks with a gleaming glory, crystal cliffs, woods with blue trunks and leaves of burnished silver, gravel of precious Orient pearls, form the landscape, in which are delicious fruits, and birds of flaming colours and sweet songs: its loveliness no man with a tongue is worthy to describe. He comes to the bank of a river:

> Swinging sweet the water did sweep
> With a whispering speech flowing adown;
> (Wyth a rownande rourde raykande aryght)

and the stones at the bottom were shining like stars. It is a noteworthy specimen of the mode in which the imagination

works when invention is dissociated from observation and faith. But the sort of way in which some would improve the world now, if they might, is not so very far in advance of this would-be glorification of Nature. The barest heath and sky have lovelinesses infinitely beyond the most gorgeous of such phantasmagoric idealization of her beauties; and the most wretched condition of humanity struggling for existence contains elements of worth and future development inappreciable by the philanthropy that would elevate them by cultivating their self-love.

At the foot of a crystal cliff, on the opposite side of the river, which he cannot cross, he sees a maiden sitting, clothed and crowned with pearls, and wearing one pearl of surpassing wonder and spotlessness upon her breast. I now make the spelling and forms of the words as modern as I may, altering the text no further.

"O pearl," quoth I, "in perlés pight, *pitched, dressed.*
Art thou my pearl that I have plained? *mourned.*
Regretted by myn one, on night? *by myself.*
Much longing have I for thee layned *hidden.*
Since into grass thou me a-glyghte; *didst glide from me.*
Pensive, payred, I am for-pained,[25] *pined away.*
And thou in a life of liking light *bright pleasure.*
In Paradise-earth, of strife unstrained! *untortured with strife.*
What wyrde hath hither my jewel vayned, *destiny: carried*

[25] The for here is only an intensive.

off.

And done me in this del and great danger? *sorrow.*

Fro we in twain were towen and twayned, *since: pulled: divided.*

I have been a joyless jeweller."

That jewel then in gemmés gente, *gracious.*
Vered up her vyse with even gray, *turned: face.*
Set on her crown of pearl orient,
And soberly after then gan she say:

"Sir, ye have your tale myse-tente, *mistaken.*
To say your pearl is all away,
That is in coffer so comely clente *clenched.*
As in this garden gracious gay,
Herein to lenge for ever and play, *abide.*
There mys nor mourning come never—here, *where: wrong.*
Here was a forser for thee in faye, *strong-box: faith.*
If thou wert a gentle jeweller.

"But jeweller gente, if thou shalt lose
Thy joy for a gem that thee was lef, *had left thee.*
Me thinks thee put in a mad purpose,
And busiest thee about a reason bref. *poor object.*
For that thou lostest was but a rose,
That flowered and failed as kynd hit gef. *nature gave it.*
Now through kind of the chest that it gan close, *nature.*
To a pearl of price it is put in pref;[26]

[26] Pref is proof. Put in pref seems to stand for something more than being tested.

And thou hast called thy wyrde a thef, *doom, fate: theft.*
That ought of nought has made thee, clear! *something of nothing.*
Thou blamest the bote of thy mischef: *remedy: hurt.*
Thou art no kyndé jeweller." *natural, reasonable.*

When the father pours out his gladness at the sight of her, she rejoins in these words:

"I hold that jeweller little to praise
That loves well that he sees with eye;
And much to blame, and uncortoyse, *uncourteous.*
That leves our Lord would make a lie, *believes.*
That lelly hyghte your life to raise *who truly promised.*
Though fortune did your flesh to die; *caused.*
To set his words full westernays[27]
That love no thing but ye it syghe! *see.*
And that is a point of surquedrie, *presumption.*
That each good man may evil beseem, *ill become.*
To leve no tale be true to tryghe, *trust in.*
But that his one skill may deme."[28]

Much conversation follows, the glorified daughter rebuking and instructing her father. He prays for a sight of the heavenly

Might it not mean proved to be a pearl of price?

[27] A word acknowledged to be obscure. Mr. Morris suggests on the left hand, as unbelieved.

[28] "Except that which his sole wit may judge."

city of which she has been speaking, and she tells him to walk along the bank until he comes to a hill. In recording what he saw from the hill, he follows the description of the New Jerusalem given in the Book of the Revelation. He sees the Lamb and all his company, and with them again his lost Pearl. But it was not his prince's pleasure that he should cross the stream; for when his eyes and ears were so filled with delight that he could no longer restrain the attempt, he awoke out of his dream.

> My head upon that hill was laid
> There where my pearl to groundé strayed.
> I wrestled and fell in great affray, *fear.*
> And sighing to myself I said,
> "Now all be to that prince's paye." *pleasure.*

After this, he holds him to that prince's will, and yearns after no more than he grants him.

> "As in water face is to face, so the heart of man." Out of the far past comes the cry of bereavement mingled with the prayer for hope: we hear, and lo! it is the cry and the prayer of a man like ourselves.

From the words of the greatest man of his age, let me now gather two rich blossoms of utterance, presenting an embodiment of religious duty and aspiration, after a very practical fashion. I refer to two short lyrics, little noted, although full of wisdom and truth. They must be accepted as the conclusions of as large a knowledge of life in diversified mode

as ever fell to the lot of man.

GOOD COUNSEL OF CHAUCER

Fly from the press, and dwell with soothfastness; *truthfulness.*
Suffice[29] unto thy good, though it be small;
For hoard hath hate, and climbing tickleness;[30]
Praise hath envy, and weal is blent over all.[31]
Savour[32] no more than thee behové shall.
Rede well thyself that other folk shall rede; *counsel.*
And truth thee shall deliver—it is no drede. *there is no doubt.*

Paine thee not each crooked to redress, *every crooked thing.*
In trust of her that turneth as a ball: Fortune.
Great rest standeth in little busi-ness.
Beware also to spurn against a nail; *nail—to kick against*
Strive not as doth a crocké with a wall. [the pricks.
Demé thyself that demest others' deed; *judge.*
And truth thee shall deliver—it is no drede.

That thee is sent receive in buxomness: *submission*
The wrestling of this world asketh a fall. *tempts destruction*
Here is no home, here is but wilderness:

---

[29] "Be equal to thy possessions:" "fit thy desires to thy means."

[30] "Ambition has uncertainty." We use the word ticklish still.

[31] "Is mingled everywhere."

[32] To relish, to like. "Desire no more than is fitting for thee."

Forth, pilgrim, forth!—beast, out of thy stall!
Look up on high, and thanké God of[33] all.
Waivé thy lusts, and let thy ghost[34] thee lead,
And truth thee shall deliver—it is no drede.

This needs no comment. Even the remark that every line is worth meditation may well appear superfluous. One little fact only with regard to the rhymes, common to this and the next poem, and usual enough in Norman verse, may be pointed out, namely, that every line in the stanza ends with the same rhyme-sound as the corresponding line in each of the other stanzas. A reference to either of the poems will at once show what I mean.

The second is superior, inasmuch as it carries one thought through the three stanzas. It is entitled *A Balade made by Chaucer, teaching what is gentilnesse, or whom is worthy to be called gentill.*

The first stock-father of gentleness— *ancestor of the race*
What man desireth gentle for to be [of the gentle.
Must follow his trace, and all his wittés dress *track, footsteps:*
Virtue to love and vices for to flee; [apply.
For unto virtue longeth dignity, *belongeth.*
And not the reverse falsely dare I deem,[35]
All wear he mitre, crown, or diadem. *although he wear.*

---

[33] For.

[34] "Let thy spiritual and not thine animal nature guide thee."

[35] "And I dare not falsely judge the reverse."

The first stock was full of righteousness; *the progenitor.*
  True of his word, sober, piteous, and free;
Clean of his ghost, and loved busi-ness, *pure in his spirit.*
Against the vice of sloth in honesty;

  And but his heir love virtue as did he, *except.*
He is not gentle, though he rich seem,
All wear he mitre, crown, or diadem.

Vicesse may well be heir to old Richesse, *Vice: Riches.*
  But there may no man, as men may well see,
Bequeath his heir his virtue's nobleness;
  That is appropried unto no degree, *rank.*
  But to the first father in majesty,
That maketh his heirés them that him queme, *please him.*
All wear he mitre, crown, or diadem.

I can come to no other conclusion than that by *the first stock-father*
Chaucer means our Lord Jesus.

CHAPTER III

THE FIFTEENTH CENTURY.

After the birth of a Chaucer, a Shakspere, or a Milton, it is long before the genial force of a nation can again culminate in such a triumph: time is required for the growth of the conditions. Between the birth of Chaucer and the birth of Shakspere, his sole equal, a period of more than two centuries had to elapse. It is but small compensation for this, that the more original, that is simple, natural, and true to his own nature a man is, the more certain is he to have a crowd of imitators. I do not say that such are of no use in the world. They do not indeed advance art, but they widen the sphere of its operation; for many will talk with the man who know nothing of the master. Too often intending but their own glory, they point the way to the source of it, and are straightway themselves forgotten.

Very little of the poetry of the fifteenth century is worthy of a different fate from that which has befallen it. Possibly the Wars of the Roses may in some measure account for the barrenness of the time; but I do not think they will explain it. In the midst of the commotions of the seventeenth century we find Milton, the only English poet of whom we are yet sure as worthy of being named with Chaucer and Shakspere.

It is in quality, however, and not in quantity that the period is deficient. It had a good many writers of poetry, some of them

prolific. John Lydgate, the monk of Bury, a great imitator of Chaucer, was the principal of these, and wrote an enormous quantity of verse. We shall find for our use enough as it were to keep us alive in passing through this desert to the Paradise of the sixteenth century—a land indeed flowing with milk and honey. For even in the desert of the fifteenth are spots luxuriant with the rich grass of language, although they greet the eye with few flowers of individual thought or graphic speech.

Rather than give portions of several of Lydgate's poems, I will give one entire—the best I know. It is entitled, *Thonke God of alle*.[36]

[36] A poem so like this that it may have been written immediately after reading it, is attributed to Robert Henryson, the Scotch poet. It has the same refrain to every verse as Lydgate's.

THANK GOD FOR ALL

By a way wandering as I went,
  Well sore I sorrowed, for sighing sad;
Of hard haps that I had hent
  Mourning me made almost mad;[37]

  Till a letter all one me lad[38],
That well was written on a wall,
  A blissful word that on I rad[39],
That alway said, 'Thank God for[40] all.'

And yet I read furthermore[41]—
  Full good intent I took there till[42]:
Christ may well your state restore;
  Nought is to strive against his will; *it is useless.*
  He may us spare and also spill:
Think right well we be his thrall. *slaves.*
  What sorrow we suffer, loud or still,
Alway thank God for all.

---

37 "Mourning for mishaps that I had caught made me almost mad."

38 "Led me all one:" "brought me back to peace, unity, harmony." (?)

39 "That I read on (it)."

40 Of in the original, as in the title.

41 Does this mean by contemplation on it?

42 "I paid good attention to it."

Though thou be both blind and lame,
  Or any sickness be on thee set,
Thou think right well it is no shame— *think thou.*
  The grace of God it hath thee gret[43].
  In sorrow or care though ye be knit, *snared.*
And worldés weal be from thee fall, *fallen.*
  I cannot say thou mayst do bet, *better.*
But alway thank God for all.

Though thou wield this world's good,
  And royally lead thy life in rest,
Well shaped of bone and blood,
  None the like by east nor west;
  Think God thee sent as him lest; *as it pleased him.*
Riches turneth as a ball;
  In all manner it is the best *in every condition.*
Alway to thank God for all.

If thy good beginneth to pass,
  And thou wax a poor man,
Take good comfort and bear good face,
  And think on him that all good wan; *did win.*

  Christ himself forsooth began—
He may renew both bower and hall:
  No better counsel I ne kan *am capable of.*
But alway thank God for all.

---

[43] "Greeted thee"—in the very affliction.

Think on Job that was so rich;
  He waxed poor from day to day;
His beastés died in each ditch;
  His cattle vanished all away;
He was put in poor array,
  Neither in purple nor in pall,
But in simple weed, as clerkes say, *clothes: learned men.*
  And alway he thanked God for all.

For Christés love so do we;[44]
  He may both give and take;
In what mischief that we in be, *whatever trouble we*
  He is mighty enough our sorrow to slake. [be in.
Full good amends he will us make,
  And we to him cry or call: *if.*
What grief or woe that do thee thrall,[45]
  Yet alway thank God for all.

Though thou be in prison cast,
  Or any distress men do thee bede, *offer.*
For Christés love yet be steadfast,
  And ever have mind on thy creed;
Think he faileth us never at need,
  The dearworth duke that deem us shall;[46]

---

[44] "For Christ's love let us do the same."

[45] "Whatever grief or woe enslaves thee." But thrall is a blunder, for the word ought to have rhymed with make.

[46] "The precious leader that shall judge us."

When thou art sorry, thereof take heed,[47]
  And alway thank God for all.

Though thy friendes from thee fail,
  And death by rene hend[48] their life,
Why shouldest thou then weep or wail?
  It is nought against God to strive: *it is useless.*

Himself maked both man and wife—
To his bliss he bring us all: *may he bring.*
However thou thole or thrive, *suffer.*
Alway thank God for all.

What diverse sonde[49] that God thee send,
Here or in any other place,
Take it with good intent;
The sooner God will send his grace.
Though thy body be brought full base, *low.*
Let not thy heart adown fall,
But think that God is where he was,
And alway thank God for all.

Though thy neighbour have world at will,
And thou far'st not so well as he,
Be not so mad to think him ill, *wish.* (?)

---

[47] "When thou art in sorry plight, think of this."

[48] "And death, beyond renewal, lay hold upon their life."

[49] Sending, message: "whatever varying decree God sends thee."

For his wealth envious to be:
The king of heaven himself can see
Who takes his sonde,[50] great or small;
Thus each man in his degree,
I rede thanké God for all. *counsel.*

For Cristés love, be not so wild,
But rule thee by reason within and without;
And take in good heart and mind
The sonde that God sent all about; *the gospel.* (?)
Then dare I say withouten doubt,
That in heaven is made thy stall. *place, seat, room.*
Rich and poor that low will lowte, *bow.*
Alway thank God for all.

I cannot say there is much poetry in this, but there is much truth and wisdom. There is the finest poetry, however, too, in the line—I give it now letter for letter:—

But think that God ys ther he was.

There is poetry too in the line, if I interpret it rightly as intending the gospel—

The sonde that God sent al abowte.

I shall now make a few extracts from poems of the same century whose authors are unknown.[51] A good many such are extant. With regard to the similarity of those I choose, I

---

[50] "Receives his message;" "accepts his will."

[51] Recently published by the Early English Text Society. S.L. IV.

would remark, that not only will the poems of the same period necessarily resemble each other, but, where the preservation of any has depended upon the choice and transcription of one person, these will in all probability resemble each other yet more. Here are a few verses from a hymn headed *The Sweetness of Jesus*:—

If I for kindness should love my kin, *for natural reasons.*
Then me thinketh in my thought [Kind is nature,
By kindly skill I should begin *by natural judgment.*
At him that hath me made of nought;
His likeness he set my soul within,
And all this world for me hath wrought;
As father he fondid my love to win, *set about.*
For to heaven he hath me brought.

Our brother and sister he is by skill, *reason.*
For he so said, and lerid us that lore, *taught.*
That whoso wrought his Father's will,
Brethren and sisters to him they wore. *were.*
My kind also he took ther-tille; *my nature also he took*
Full truly trust I him therefore [for that purpose.
That he will never let me spill, *perish.*
But with his mercy salve my sore.

With lovely lore his works to fill, *fulfil.*
Well ought I, wretch, if I were kind— *natural.*
Night and day to work his will,

And ever have that Lord in mind.
But ghostly foes grieve me ill, *spiritual.*
And my frail flesh maketh me blind;
Therefore his mercy I take me till, *betake me to.*
For better bote can I none find. *aid.*

In my choice of stanzas I have to keep in view some measure of completeness in the result. These poems, however, are mostly very loose in structure. This, while it renders choice easy, renders closeness of unity impossible.

From a poem headed—again from the last line of each stanza—*Be my comfort, Christ Jesus,* I choose the following four, each possessing some remarkable flavour, tone, or single touch. Note the alliteration in the lovely line, beginning "Bairn y-born." The whole of the stanza in which we find it, sounds so strangely fresh in the midst of its antiquated tones, that we can hardly help asking whether it can be only the quaintness of the expression that makes the feeling appear more real, or whether in very truth men were not in those days nearer in heart, as well as in time, to the marvel of the Nativity.

In the next stanza, how oddly the writer forgets that Jesus himself was a Jew, when, embodying the detestation of Christian centuries in one line, he says, And tormented with many a Jew!

In the third stanza, I consider the middle quatrain, that is, the four lines beginning "Out of this world," perfectly grand.

The oddness of the last line but one of the fourth stanza is redeemed by the wonderful reality it gives to the faith of the

speaker: "See my sorrow, and say Ho!" stopping it as one would call after a man and stop him.

Jesus, thou art wisdom of wit, *understanding.*
  Of thy Father full of might!
Man's soul—to save it,
  In poor apparel thou wert pight. *pitched, placed,*
Jesus, thou wert in cradle knit, [dressed.
  In weed wrapped both day and night; originally, *dress of*
In Bethlehem born, as the gospel writ, [any kind.
  With angels' song, and heaven-light.
Bairn y-born of a beerde bright,[52]
  Full courteous was thy comely cus: *kiss.*
Through virtue of that sweet light,
  So be my comfort, Christ Jesus.

Jesus, that wert of yearis young,
  Fair and fresh of hide and hue,
When thou wert in thraldom throng, *driven.*
  And tormented with many a Jew,
When blood and water were out-wrung,
  For beating was thy body blue;
As a clot of clay thou wert for-clong, *shrunk.*
  So dead in trough then men thee threw. *coffin.*
But grace from thy grave grew:
  Thou rose up quick comfort to us. *living.*

---

[52] "Child born of a bright lady." Bird, berd, brid, burd, means lady originally: thence comes our bride.

For her love that this counsel knew,
  So be my comfort, Christ Jesus.

Jesus, soothfast God and man,
  Two kinds knit in one person,
The wonder-work that thou began
  Thou hast fulfilled in flesh and bone.

Out of this world wightly thou wan, *thou didst win, or make*
  Lifting up thyself alone; [thy way, powerfully.
For mightily thou rose and ran
  Straight unto thy Father on throne.
Now dare man make no more moan—
  For man it is thou wroughtest thus,
And God with man is made at one;
  So be my comfort, Christ Jesus.

Jesu, my sovereign Saviour,
  Almighty God, there ben no mo: *there are no more—thou*
Christ, thou be my governor; [art all in all.(?)
  Thy faith let me not fallen fro. *from*
Jesu, my joy and my succour,
  In my body and soul also,
God, thou be my strongest food, the rhyme fails here.
  And wisse thou me when me is woe. *think on me.*
Lord, thou makest friend of foe,
  Let me not live in languor thus,
But see my sorrow, and say now "Ho,"
  And be my comfort, Christ Jesus.

Of fourteen stanzas called *Richard de Castre's Prayer to Jesus*, I choose five from the latter half, where the prayer passes from his own spiritual necessities, very tenderly embodied, to those of others. It does our hearts good to see the clouded sun of prayer for oneself break forth in the gladness of blessed entreaty for all men, for them that make Him angry, for saints in trouble, for the country torn by war, for the whole body of Christ and its unity. After the stanza—

> Jesus, for the deadly tears
>   That thou sheddest for my guilt,
> Hear and speed my prayérs
>   And spare me that I be not spilt;

the best that is in the suppliant shines out thus

> Jesu, for them I thee beseech
>   That wrathen thee in any wise;
> Withhold from them thy hand of wreche, *vengeance.*
>   And let them live in thy service.

> Jesu, most comfort for to see
>   Of thy saintis every one,
> Comfort them that careful be,
>   And help them that be woe-begone.

> Jesu, keep them that be good,

And amend them that have grieved thee;
And send them fruits of earthly food,
As each man needeth in his degree.

Jesu, that art, withouten lees, *lies.*
Almighty God in trinity,
Cease these wars, and send us peace,
With lasting love and charity.

Jesu, that art the ghostly stone *spiritual.*
Of all holy church in middle-erde, *the world.*
Bring thy folds and flocks in one,
And rule them rightly with one herd.

We now approach the second revival of literature, preceded in England by the arrival of the art of printing; after which we find ourselves walking in a morning twilight, knowing something of the authors as well as of their work.

I have little more to offer from this century. There are a few religious poems by John Skelton, who was tutor to Henry VIII. But such poetry, though he was a clergyman, was not much in Skelton's manner of mind. We have far better of a similar sort already.

A new sort of dramatic representation had by this time greatly encroached upon the old Miracle Plays. The fresh growth was called Morals or Moral Plays. In them we see the losing victory of invention over the imagination that works with given facts. No

doubt in the Moral Plays there is more exercise of intellect as well as of ingenuity; for they consist of metaphysical facts turned into individual existences by personification, and their relations then dramatized by allegory. But their poetry is greatly inferior both in character and execution to that of the Miracles. They have a religious tendency, as everything moral must have, and sometimes they go even farther, as in one, for instance, called *The Castle of Perseverance*, in which we have all the cardinal virtues and all the cardinal sins contending for the possession of *Humanum Genus*, the *Human Race* being presented as a new-born child, who grows old and dies in the course of the play; but it was a great stride in art when human nature and human history began again to be exemplified after a simple human fashion, in the story, that is, of real men and women, instead of by allegorical personifications of the analysed and abstracted constituents of them. Allegory has her place, and a lofty one, in literature; but when her plants cover the garden and run to seed, Allegory herself is ashamed of her children: the loveliest among them are despised for the general obtrusiveness of the family. Imitation not only brings the thing imitated into disrepute, but tends to destroy what original faculty the imitator may have possessed.

CHAPTER IV

INTRODUCTION TO THE ELIZABETHAN ERA.

Poets now began to write more smoothly—not a great virtue, but indicative of a growing desire for finish, which, in any art, is a great virtue. No doubt smoothness is often confounded with, and mistaken for finish; but you might have a mirror-like polish on the surface of a statue, for instance, and yet the marble be full of inanity, or vagueness, or even vulgarity of result—irrespective altogether of its idea. The influence of Italian poetry reviving once more in the country, roused such men as Wyat and Surrey to polish the sound of their verses; but smoothness, I repeat, is not melody, and where the attention paid to the outside of the form results in flatness, and, still worse, in obscurity, as is the case with both of these poets, little is gained and much is lost.

Each has paraphrased portions of Scripture, but with results of little value; and there is nothing of a religious nature I care to quote from either, except these five lines from an epistle of Sir Thomas Wyat's:

> Thyself content with that is thee assigned,
> And use it well that is to thee allotted;
>
> Then seek no more out of thyself to find
> The thing that thou hast sought so long before,

For thou shalt feel it sticking in thy mind.

Students of versification will allow me to remark that Sir Thomas was the first English poet, so far as I know, who used the *terza rima*, Dante's chief mode of rhyming: the above is too small a fragment to show that it belongs to a poem in that manner. It has never been popular in England, although to my mind it is the finest form of continuous rhyme in any language. Again, we owe his friend Surrey far more for being the first to write English blank verse, whether invented by himself or not, than for any matter he has left us in poetic shape.

This period is somewhat barren of such poetry as we want. Here is a portion of the Fifty-first Psalm, translated amongst others into English verse by John Croke, Master in Chancery, in the reign of Henry VIII.

Open my lips first to confess
  My sin conceived inwardly;
And my mouth after shall express
  Thy laud and praises outwardly.

If I should offer for my sin,
  Or sacrifice do unto thee
Of beast or fowl, I should begin
  To stir thy wrath more towards me.

Offer we must for sacrifice
  A troubled mind with sorrow's smart:

Canst thou refuse? Nay, nor despise
  The humble and the contrite heart.

To us of Sion that be born,
  If thou thy favour wilt renew,
The broken sowle, the temple torn, *threshold.*
  The walls and all shall be made new.

The sacrifice then shall we make
  Of justice and of pure intent;
And all things else thou wilt well take
  That we shall offer or present.

In the works of George Gascoigne I find one poem fit for quoting here. He is not an interesting writer, and, although his verse is very good, there is little likelihood of its ever being read more than it is now. The date of his birth is unknown, but probably he was in his teens when Surrey was beheaded in the year 1547. He is the only poet whose style reminds me of his, although the *wherefore* will hardly be evident from my quotation. It is equally flat, but more articulate. I need not detain my reader with remarks upon him. The fact is, I am glad to have something, if not "a cart-load of wholesome instructions," to cast into this Slough of Despond, should it be only to see it vanish. The poem is called

GASCOIGNE'S GOOD MORROW

You that have spent the silent night
  In sleep and quiet rest,
And joy to see the cheerful light
  That riseth in the east;
Now clear your voice, now cheer your heart;
  Come help me now to sing;
Each willing wight come bear a part,
  To praise the heavenly King.

And you whom care in prison keeps,
  Or sickness doth suppress,
Or secret sorrow breaks your sleeps,
  Or dolours do distress;
Yet bear a part in doleful wise;
  Yea, think it good accord,
And acceptable sacrifice,
  Each sprite to praise the Lord.

The dreadful night with darksomeness
  Had overspread the light,
And sluggish sleep with drowsiness
  Had overpressed our might:
A glass wherein you may behold
  Each storm that stops our breath,
Our bed the grave, our clothes like mould,

And sleep like dreadful death.

Yet as this deadly night did last
But for a little space,
And heavenly day, now night is past,
Doth shew his pleasant face;
So must we hope to see God's face
At last in heaven on high,
When we have changed this mortal place
For immortality.

This is not so bad, but it is enough. There are six stanzas more of it. I transcribe yet another, that my reader may enjoy a smile in passing. He is "moralizing" the aspects of morning:

The carrion crow, that loathsome beast,
Which cries against the rain,
Both for his hue and for the rest,
The Devil resembleth plain;
And as with guns we kill the crow,
For spoiling our relief,
The Devil so must we overthrow,
With gunshot of belief.

So fares the wit, when it walks abroad to do its business without the heart that should inspire it.

Here is one good stanza from his *De Profundis:*

But thou art good, and hast of mercy store;
  Thou not delight'st to see a sinner fall;
  Thou hearkenest first, before we come to call;
Thine ears are set wide open evermore;
Before we knock thou comest to the door.
  Thou art more prest to hear a sinner cry, *ready.*
  Than he is quick to climb to thee on high.
Thy mighty name be praised then alway:
    Let faith and fear
    True witness bear
How fast they stand which on thy mercy stay.

Here follow two of unknown authorship, belonging apparently to the same period.

THAT EACH THING IS HURT OF ITSELF

Why fearest thou the outward foe,
  When thou thyself thy harm dost feed?
Of grief or hurt, of pain or woe,
  Within each thing is sown the seed.
So fine was never yet the cloth,
  No smith so hard his iron did beat,
But th' one consuméd was with moth,
  Th' other with canker all to-freate. *fretted away.*

The knotty oak and wainscot old
  Within doth eat the silly worm;[53]
Even so a mind in envy rolled
  Always within it self doth burn.
Thus every thing that nature wrought,
  Within itself his hurt doth bear!
No outward harm need to be sought,
  Where enemies be within so near.

Lest this poem should appear to any one hardly religious enough for the purpose of this book, I would remark that it

[53] In Chalmers' English Poets, from which I quote, it is selly-worme; but I think this must be a mistake. Silly would here mean weak.

reminds me of what our Lord says about the true source of defilement: it is what is bred in the man that denies him. Our Lord himself taught a divine morality, which is as it were the body of love, and is as different from mere morality as«the living body is from the dead.

TOTUS MUNDUS IN MALIGNO POSITUS.

The whole world lieth in the Evil One.

Complain we may; much is amiss;
  Hope is nigh gone to have redress;
These days are ill, nothing sure is;
  Kind heart is wrapt in heaviness.

The stern is broke, the sail is rent, *helm or rudder—the*
  The ship is given to wind and wave; [thing to steer with.
All help is gone, the rock present,
 That will be lost, what man can save? *that which will be lost.*

When power lacks care and forceth not, *careth.*
  When care is feeble and may not, *is not able.*
When might is slothful and will not,
  Weeds may grow where good herbs cannot.

Wily is witty, brainsick is wise; *wiliness is counted*
  Truth is folly, and might is right; [prudence.
Words are reason, and reason is lies;
  The bad is good, darkness is light.

Order is broke in things of weight:
  Measure and mean who doth nor flee? *who does not avoid*
Two things prevail, money and sleight; [moderation?
  To seem is better than to be.

Folly and falsehood prate apace;
  Truth under bushel is fain to creep;
Flattery is treble, pride sings the bass,
  The mean, the best part, scant doth peep.

With floods and storms thus be we tost:
  Awake, good Lord, to thee we cry;
Our ship is almost sunk and lost;
  Thy mercy help our misery.

Man's strength is weak; man's wit is dull;
  Man's reason is blind these things t'amend:
Thy hand, O Lord, of might is full—
  Awake betimes, and help us send.

In thee we trust, and in no wight;
  Save us, as chickens under the hen;
Our crookedness thou canst make right—
  Glory to thee for aye. Amen.

The apprehensions of the wiser part of the nation have generally been ahead of its hopes. Every age is born with an ideal; but instead of beholding that ideal in the future where it lies, it throws it into the past. Hence the lapse of the nation must appear

tremendous, even when she is making her best progress.

CHAPTER V

SPENSER AND HIS FRIENDS.

We have now arrived at the period of English history in every way fullest of marvel—the period of Elizabeth. As in a northern summer the whole region bursts into blossom at once, so with the thought and feeling of England in this glorious era.

The special development of the national mind with which we are now concerned, however, did not by any means arrive at its largest and clearest result until the following century. Still its progress is sufficiently remarkable. For, while everything that bore upon the mental development of the nation must bear upon its poetry, the fresh vigour given by the doctrines of the Reformation to the sense of personal responsibility, and of immediate relation to God, with the grand influences, both literary and spiritual, of the translated, printed, and studied Bible, operated more immediately upon its devotional utterance.

Towards the close of the sixteenth century, we begin to find such verse as I shall now present to my readers. Only I must first make a few remarks upon the great poem of the period: I mean, of course, *The Faerie Queen*.

I dare not begin to set forth after any fashion the profound religious truth contained in this poem; for it would require a volume larger than this to set forth even that of the first book adequately. In this case it is well to remember that the beginning

of comment, as well as of strife, is like the letting out of water.

The direction in which the wonderful allegory of the latter moves may be gathered from the following stanza, the first of the eighth canto:

Ay me! how many perils do enfold
  The righteous man to make him daily fail;
Were not that heavenly grace doth him uphold, *it* understood.
  And steadfast Truth acquit him out of all!
  Her love is firm, her care continual,
So oft as he, through his own foolish pride
  Or weakness, is to sinful bands made thrall:
Else should this Redcross Knight in bands have died,
For whose deliverance she this Prince doth thither guide.

Nor do I judge it good to spend much of my space upon remarks personal to those who have not been especially writers of sacred verse. When we come to the masters of such song, we cannot speak of their words without speaking of themselves; but when in the midst of many words those of the kind we seek are few, the life of the writer does not justify more than a passing notice here.

We know but little of Spenser's history: if we might know all, I do not fear that we should find anything to destroy the impression made by his verse—that he was a Christian gentleman, a noble and pure-minded man, of highest purposes and aims.

His style is injured by the artistic falsehood of producing

antique effects in the midst of modern feeling.[54] It was scarcely more justifiable, for instance, in Spenser's time than it would be in ours to use *glitterand* for *glittering*; or to return to a large use of alliteration, three, four, sometimes even five words in the same line beginning with the same consonant sound. Everything should look like what it is: prose or verse should be written in the language of its own era. No doubt the wide-spreading roots of poetry gather to it more variety of expression than prose can employ; and the very nature of verse will make it free of times and seasons, harmonizing many opposites. Hence, through its mediation, without discord, many fine old words, by the loss of which the language has grown poorer and feebler, might be honourably enticed to return even into our prose. But nothing ought to be brought back *because* it is old. That it is out of use is a presumptive argument that it ought to remain out of use: good reasons must be at hand to support its reappearance. I must not, however, enlarge upon this wide-reaching question; for of the two portions of Spenser's verse which I shall quote, one of them is not at all, the other not so much as his great poem, affected with this whim.

The first I give is a sonnet, one of eighty-eight which he wrote to his wife before their marriage. Apparently disappointed in early youth, he did not fall in love again,—at least there is no

---

[54] The first poem he wrote, a very fine one, The Shepheard's Calender, is so full of old and provincial words, that the educated people of his own time required a glossary to assist them in the reading of it.

sign of it that I know,—till he was middle-aged. But then—woman was never more grandly wooed than was his Elizabeth. I know of no marriage-present worthy to be compared with the Epithalamion which he gave her "in lieu of many ornaments,"—one of the most stately, melodious, and tender poems in the world, I fully believe.

But now for the sonnet—the sixty-eighth of the *Amoretti*:

> Most glorious Lord of Life! that, on this day,
> Didst make thy triumph over death and sin,
> And having harrowed hell, didst bring away
> Captivity thence captive, us to win:
> This joyous day, dear Lord, with joy begin;
> And grant that we, for whom thou diddest die,
> Being with thy dear blood clean washed from sin,
> May live for ever in felicity!
> And that thy love we weighing worthily,
> May likewise love thee for the same again;
> And for thy sake, that all like dear didst buy,
> With love may one another entertain.
>   So let us love, dear love, like as we ought:
>   Love is the lesson which the Lord us taught.

Those who have never felt the need of the divine, entering by the channel of will and choice and prayer, for the upholding, purifying, and glorifying of that which itself first created human, will consider this poem untrue, having its origin in religious affectation. Others will think otherwise.

The greater part of what I shall next quote is tolerably known even to those who have made little study of our earlier literature, yet it may not be omitted here. It is from *An Hymne of Heavenly Love*, consisting of forty-one stanzas, written in what was called *Rime Royal*—a favourite with Milton, and, next to the Spenserian, in my opinion the finest of stanzas. Its construction will reveal itself. I take two stanzas from the beginning of the hymn, then one from the heart of it, and the rest from the close. It gives no feeling of an outburst of song, but rather of a brooding chant, most quiet in virtue of the depth of its thoughtfulness. Indeed, all his rhythm is like the melodies of water, and I could quote at least three passages in which he speaks of rhythmic movements and watery progressions together. His thoughts, and hence his words, flow like a full, peaceful stream, diffuse, with plenteousness unrestrained.

AN HYMN OF HEAVENLY LOVE

Before this world's great frame, in which all things
  Are now contained, found any being place,
Ere flitting Time could wag his eyas[55] wings
  About that mighty bound which doth embrace
  The rolling spheres, and parts their hours by space,
That high eternal power, which now doth move
In all these things, moved in itself by love.

It loved itself, because itself was fair,
  For fair is loved; and of itself begot
Like to itself his eldest son and heir,
  Eternal, pure, and void of sinful blot,

The firstling of his joy, in whom no jot
Of love's dislike or pride was to be found,
Whom he therefore with equal honour crowned.
* * * * *
Out of the bosom of eternal bliss,
  In which he reignéd with his glorious Sire,
He down descended, like a most demisse *humble.*
  And abject thrall, in flesh's frail attire,
  That he for him might pay sin's deadly hire,
And him restore unto that happy state

---

[55] Eyas is a young hawk, whose wings are not fully fledged.

In which he stood before his hapless fate.

* * * * *

O blessed well of love! O flower of grace!
O glorious Morning-Star! O Lamp of Light!
Most lively image of thy Father's face!
Eternal King of Glory, Lord of might!
Meek Lamb of God, before all worlds behight! *promised.*
How can we thee requite for all this good?
Or what can prize that thy most precious blood? *equal in value.*

Yet nought thou ask'st in lieu of all this love
But love of us for guerdon of thy pain:
Ay me! what can us less than that behove?[56]
Had he required life of[57] us again,
Had it been wrong to ask his own with gain?
He gave us life, he it restored lost;
Then life were least, that us so little cost.

But he our life hath left unto us free—
Free that was thrall, and blessed that was banned; *enslaved; cursed.*
Nor aught demands but that we loving be,
As he himself hath loved us aforehand,
And bound thereto with an eternal band—

[56] "What less than that is fitting?"

[57] For, even in Collier's edition, but certainly a blunder.

Him first to love that us[58] so dearly bought,
And next our brethren, to his image wrought.

Him first to love great right and reason is,
Who first to us our life and being gave,
And after, when we faréd had amiss,
Us wretches from the second death did save;
And last, the food of life, which now we have,
Even he himself, in his dear sacrament,
To feed our hungry souls, unto us lent.

Then next, to love our brethren that were made
Of that self mould, and that self Maker's hand,
That[59] we, and to the same again shall fade,
Where they shall have like heritage of land, *the same grave-room.*
However here on higher steps we stand;
Which also were with selfsame price redeemed,
That we, however, of us light esteemed. *as.*

And were they not, yet since that loving Lord
Commanded us to love them for his sake,
Even for his sake, and for his sacred word,
Which in his last bequest he to us spake,
We should them love, and with their needs partake; *share their*
Knowing that, whatsoe'er to them we give, [needs.

---

[58] Was, in the editions; clearly wrong.

[59] "Of the same mould and hand as we."

We give to him by whom we all do live.

Such mercy he by his most holy rede *instruction.*
  Unto us taught, and to approve it true,
Ensampled it by his most righteous deed,
  Shewing us mercy, miserable crew!
  That we the like should to the wretches[60] shew,
And love our brethren; thereby to approve
How much himself that loved us we love.

Then rouse thyself, O earth! out of thy soil,
  In which thou wallowest like to filthy swine,
And dost thy mind in dirty pleasures moyle, *defile.*
  Unmindful of that dearest Lord of thine;
  Lift up to him thy heavy clouded eyne,
That thou this sovereign bounty mayst behold,
And read through love his mercies manifold.

Begin from first, where he encradled was
  In simple cratch, wrapt in a wad of hay, *a rack or crib.*
Between the toilful ox and humble ass;
  And in what rags, and in what base array
  The glory of our heavenly riches lay,
When him the silly[61] shepherds came to see,
Whom greatest princes sought on lowest knee.

From thence read on the story of his life,

---

[60] There was no contempt in the use of this word then.

[61] Simple-hearted, therefore blessed; like the German selig.

His humble carriage, his unfaulty ways,
His cankered foes, his fights, his toil, his strife,
His pains, his poverty, his sharp assays, *temptations* or *trials.*
Through which he passed his miserable days,
Offending none, and doing good to all,
Yet being maliced both by great and small.

And look at last, how of most wretched wights
He taken was, betrayed, and false accused;
How with most scornful taunts and fell despites
He was reviled, disgraced, and foul abused;
How scourged, how crowned, how buffeted, how bruised;
And, lastly, how 'twixt robbers crucified,
With bitter wounds through hands, through feet, and side!
* * * * *
With sense whereof whilst so thy softened spirit
Is inly touched, and humbled with meek zeal
Through meditation of his endless merit,
Lift up thy mind to th' author of thy weal,
And to his sovereign mercy do appeal;
Learn him to love that lovéd thee so dear,
And in thy breast his blessed image bear.

With all thy heart, with all thy soul and mind,
Thou must him love, and his behests embrace; *commands.*
All other loves with which the world doth blind
Weak fancies, and stir up affections base,
Thou must renounce and utterly displace,
And give thyself unto him full and free,

That full and freely gave himself to thee.

* * * * *

Thenceforth all world's desire will in thee die,
  And all earth's glory, on which men do gaze,
Seem dust and dross in thy pure-sighted eye,
  Compared to that celestial beauty's blaze,
Whose glorious beams all fleshly sense do daze
  With admiration of their passing light,
Blinding the eyes and lumining the sprite.

Then shalt thy ravished soul inspiréd be
  With heavenly thoughts far above human skill, *reason.*
And thy bright radiant eyes shall plainly see
  The Idea of his pure glory present still
  Before thy face, that all thy spirits shall fill
With sweet enragement of celestial love,
Kindled through sight of those fair things above.

There is a companion to the poem of which these verses are a portion, called *An Hymne of Heavenly Beautie*, filled like this, and like two others on Beauty and Love, with Platonic forms both of thought and expression; but I have preferred quoting a longer part of the former to giving portions of both. My reader will recognize in the extract a fuller force of intellect brought to bear on duty; although it would be unwise to take a mind like Spenser's for a type of more than the highest class of the age. Doubtless the division in the country with regard to many of the Church's doctrines had its part in bringing out and

strengthening this tendency to reasoning which is so essential to progress. Where religion itself is not the most important thing with the individual, all reasoning upon it must indeed degenerate into strifes of words, *vermiculate* questions, as Lord Bacon calls them—such, namely, as like the hoarded manna reveal the character of the owner by breeding of worms—yet on no questions may the light of the candle of the Lord, that is, the human understanding, be cast with greater hope of discovery than on those of religion, those, namely, that bear upon man's relation to God and to his fellow. The most partial illumination of this region, the very cause of whose mystery is the height and depth of its *truth*, is of more awful value to the human being than perfect knowledge, if such were possible, concerning everything else in the universe; while, in fact, in this very region, discovery may bring with it a higher kind of conviction than can accompany the results of investigation in any other direction. In these grandest of all thinkings, the great men of this time showed a grandeur of thought worthy of their surpassing excellence in other noblest fields of human labour. They thought greatly because they aspired greatly.

Sir Walter Raleigh was a personal friend of Edmund Spenser. They were almost of the same age, the former born in 1552, the latter in the following year. A writer of magnificent prose, itself full of religion and poetry both in thought and expression, he has not distinguished himself greatly in verse. There is, however, one remarkable poem fit for my purpose, which I can hardly

doubt to be his. It is called *Sir Walter Raleigh's Pilgrimage*. The probability is that it was written just after his condemnation in 1603—although many years passed before his sentence was carried into execution.

Give me my scallop-shell[62] of Quiet;
My staff of Faith to walk upon;
My scrip of Joy, immortal diet;
My bottle of Salvation;
My gown of Glory, hope's true gage;
And thus I'll take my pilgrimage.
Blood must be my body's balmer,—
No other balm will there be given—
Whilst my soul, like quiet palmer,
Travelleth towards the land of Heaven;
Over the silver mountains,
Where spring the nectar fountains—
There will I kiss
The bowl of Bliss,
And drink mine everlasting fill
Upon every milken hill:
My soul will be a-dry before,
But after, it will thirst no more.
Then by that happy blissful day,
More peaceful pilgrims I shall see,
That have cast off their rags of clay,

[62] A shell plentiful on the coast of Palestine, and worn by pilgrims to show that they had visited that country.

And walk apparelled fresh like me:
I'll take them first,
To quench their thirst,
And taste of nectar's suckets, *sweet things—things to suck.*
    At those clear wells
    Where sweetness dwells,
Drawn up by saints in crystal buckets.
And when our bottles and all we
Are filled with immortality,
Then the blessed paths we'll travel,
Strowed with rubies thick as gravel.
Ceilings of diamonds! sapphire floors!
High walls of coral, and pearly bowers!—
From thence to Heaven's bribeless hall,
Where no corrupted voices brawl;
No conscience molten into gold;
No forged accuser bought or sold;
No cause deferred; no vain-spent journey;
For there Christ is the King's Attorney,
Who pleads for all without degrees, *irrespective of rank.*
And he hath angels, but no fees.
And when the grand twelve million jury
Of our sins, with direful fury,
'Gainst our souls black verdicts give,
Christ pleads his death, and then we live.
Be thou my speaker, taintless Pleader,
Unblotted Lawyer, true Proceeder!
Thou giv'st salvation even for alms,—
Not with a bribéd lawyer's palms.

And this is my eternal plea
To him that made heaven, earth, and sea,
That, since my flesh must die so soon,
And want a head to dine next noon,—
Just at the stroke, when my veins start and spread,
Set on my soul an everlasting head:
Then am I ready, like a palmer fit,
To tread those blest paths which before I writ.
Of death and judgment, heaven and hell
Who oft doth think, must needs die well.

This poem is a somewhat strange medley, with a confusion of figure, and a repeated failure in dignity, which is very far indeed from being worthy of Raleigh's prose. But it is very remarkable how wretchedly some men will show, who, doing their own work well, attempt that for which practice has not—to use a word of the time—*enabled* them. There is real power in the poem, however, and the confusion is far more indicative of the pleased success of an unaccustomed hand than of incapacity for harmonious work. Some of the imagery, especially the "crystal buckets," will suggest those grotesque drawings called *Emblems*, which were much in use before and after this period, and, indeed, were only a putting into visible shape of such metaphors and similes as some of the most popular poets of the time, especially Doctor Donne, indulged in; while the profusion of earthly riches attributed to the heavenly paths and the places of repose on the journey, may well recall Raleigh's own descriptions of South

American glories. Englishmen of that era believed in an earthly Paradise beyond the Atlantic, the wonderful reports of whose magnificence had no doubt a share in lifting the imaginations and hopes of the people to the height at which they now stood.

There may be an appearance of irreverence in the way in which he contrasts the bribeless Hall of Heaven with the proceedings at his own trial, where he was browbeaten, abused, and, from the very commencement, treated as a guilty man by Sir Edward Coke, the king's attorney. He even puns with the words *angels* and *fees*. Burning from a sense of injustice, however, and with the solemnity of death before him, he could not be guilty of *conscious* irreverence, at least. But there is another remark I have to make with regard to the matter, which will bear upon much of the literature of the time: even the great writers of that period had such a delight in words, and such a command over them, that like their skilful horsemen, who enjoyed making their steeds show off the fantastic paces they had taught them, they played with the words as they passed through their hands, tossing them about as a juggler might his balls. But even herein the true master of speech showed his masterdom: his play must not be by-play; it must contribute to the truth of the idea which was taking form in those words. We shall see this more plainly when we come to transcribe some of Sir Philip Sidney's work. There is no irreverence in it. Nor can I take it as any sign of hardness that Raleigh should treat the visual image of his own anticipated death with so much coolness, if the writer of a little elegy on

his execution, when Raleigh was fourteen years older than at the presumed date of the foregoing verses, describes him truly when he says:

> I saw in every stander-by
> Pale death, life only in thy eye.

The following hymn is also attributed to Raleigh. If it has less brilliance of fancy, it has none of the faults of the preceding, and is far more artistic in construction and finish, notwithstanding a degree of irregularity.

> Rise, oh my soul, with thy desires to heaven;
>   And with divinest contemplation use
> Thy time, where time's eternity is given;
>   And let vain thoughts no more thy thoughts abuse,
>   But down in darkness let them lie:
>   So live thy better, let thy worse thoughts die!
>
> And thou, my soul, inspired with holy flame,
>   View and review, with most regardful eye,
> That holy cross, whence thy salvation came,
>   On which thy Saviour and thy sin did die!
>   For in that sacred object is much pleasure,
>   And in that Saviour is my life, my treasure.
>
> To thee, O Jesus, I direct my eyes;
>   To thee my hands, to thee my humble knees,

To thee my heart shall offer sacrifice;
To thee my thoughts, who my thoughts only sees—
To thee myself,—myself and all I give;
To thee I die; to thee I only live!

See what an effect of stately composure quiet artistic care produces, and how it leaves the ear of the mind in a satisfied peace!

There are a few fine lines in the poem. The last two lines of the first stanza are admirable; the last two of the second very weak. The last stanza is good throughout.

But it would be very unfair to judge Sir Walter by his verse. His prose is infinitely better, and equally displays the devout tendency of his mind—a tendency common to all the great men of that age. The worst I know of him is the selfishly prudent advice he left behind for his son. No doubt he had his faults, but we must not judge a man even by what he says in an over-anxiety for the prosperity of his child.

Another remarkable fact in the history of those great men is that they were all men of affairs. Raleigh was a soldier, a sailor, a discoverer, a politician, as well as an author. His friend Spenser was first secretary to Lord Grey when he was Governor of Ireland, and afterwards Sheriff of Cork. He has written a large treatise on the state of Ireland. But of all the men of the age no one was more variously gifted, or exercised those gifts in more differing directions, than the man who of them all was most in favour with queen, court, and people—Philip Sidney. I could

write much to set forth the greatness, culture, balance, and scope of this wonderful man. Renowned over Europe for his person, for his dress, for his carriage, for his speech, for his skill in arms, for his horsemanship, for his soldiership, for his statesmanship, for his learning, he was beloved for his friendship, his generosity, his steadfastness, his simplicity, his conscientiousness, his religion. Amongst the lamentations over his death printed in Spenser's works, there is one poem by Matthew Roydon, a few verses of which I shall quote, being no vain eulogy. Describing his personal appearance, he says:

> A sweet, attractive kind of grace,
>   A full assurance given by looks,
> Continual comfort in a face,
>   The lineaments of Gospel books!—
>   I trow, that countenance cannot lie
>   Whose thoughts are legible in the eye.
>
> Was ever eye did see that face,
>   Was ever ear did hear that tongue,
> Was ever mind did mind his grace
>   That ever thought the travel long?
>   But eyes and ears, and every thought,
>   Were with his sweet perfections caught.

His *Arcadia* is a book full of wisdom and beauty. None of his writings were printed in his lifetime; but the *Arcadia* was for many years after his death one of the most popular books in the

country. His prose, as prose, is not equal to his friend Raleigh's, being less condensed and stately. It is too full of fancy in thought and freak in rhetoric to find now-a-days more than a very limited number of readers; and a good deal of the verse that is set in it, is obscure and uninteresting, partly from some false notions of poetic composition which he and his friend Spenser entertained when young; but there is often an exquisite art in his other poems.

The first I shall transcribe is a sonnet, to which the Latin words printed below it might be prefixed as a title: *Splendidis longum valedico nugis.*

A LONG FAREWELL TO GLITTERING TRIFLES

Leave me, O love, which reachest but to dust;
  And thou, my mind, aspire to higher things;
Grow rich in that which never taketh rust:
  What ever fades but fading pleasure brings.
Draw in thy beams, and humble all thy might
  To that sweet yoke where lasting freedoms be;
Which breaks the clouds, and opens forth the light
  That doth both shine and give us sight to see.
Oh take fast hold; let that light be thy guide,
  In this small course which birth draws out to death;
And think how evil[63] becometh him to slide
  Who seeketh heaven, and comes of heavenly breath.
    Then farewell, world; thy uttermost I see:
    Eternal love, maintain thy life in me.

Before turning to the treasury of his noblest verse, I shall give six lines from a poem in the *Arcadia*—chiefly for the sake of instancing what great questions those mighty men delighted in:

What essence destiny hath; if fortune be or no;

[63] Evil was pronounced almost as a monosyllable, and was at last contracted to ill.

Whence our immortal souls to mortal earth do stow[64]:

What life it is, and how that all these lives do gather,
With outward maker's force, or like an inward father.
Such thoughts, me thought, I thought, and strained my single mind,
Then void of nearer cares, the depth of things to find.

Lord Bacon was not the only one, in such an age, to think upon the mighty relations of physics and metaphysics, or, as Sidney would say, "of naturall and supernaturall philosophic." For a man to do his best, he must be upheld, even in his speculations, by those around him.

In the specimen just given, we find that our religious poetry has gone down into the deeps. There are indications of such a tendency in the older times, but neither then were the questions so articulate, nor were the questioners so troubled for an answer. The alternative expressed in the middle couplet seems to me the most imperative of all questions—both for the individual and for the church: Is man fashioned by the hands of God, as a potter fashioneth his vessel; or do we indeed come forth from his heart? Is power or love the making might of the universe? He who answers this question aright possesses the key to all righteous questions.

Sir Philip and his sister Mary, Countess of Pembroke, made

[64] "Come to find a place." The transitive verb stow means to put in a place: here it is used intransitively.

between them a metrical translation of the Psalms of David. It cannot be determined which are hers and which are his; but if I may conclude anything from a poem by the sister, to which I shall by and by refer, I take those I now give for the brother's work.

The souls of the following psalms have, in the version I present, transmigrated into fairer forms than I have found them occupy elsewhere. Here is a grand hymn for the whole world: *Sing unto the Lord.*

PSALM XCVI

Sing, and let your song be new,
  Unto him that never endeth;
Sing all earth, and all in you—
Sing to God, and bless his name.
  Of the help, the health he sendeth,
Day by day new ditties frame.

Make each country know his worth:
  Of his acts the wondered story
Paint unto each people forth.
For Jehovah great alone,
  All the gods, for awe and glory,
Far above doth hold his throne.

For but idols, what are they
  Whom besides mad earth adoreth?
He the skies in frame did lay.
Grace and honour are his guides;
  Majesty his temple storeth;
Might in guard about him bides.

Kindreds come! Jehovah give—
  O give Jehovah all together,
Force and fame whereso you live.
Give his name the glory fit:

Take your off'rings, get you thither,
Where he doth enshrined sit.

Go, adore him in the place
Where his pomp is most displayed.
Earth, O go with quaking pace,
Go proclaim Jehovah king:
Stayless world shall now be stayed;
Righteous doom his rule shall bring.

Starry roof and earthy floor,
Sea, and all thy wideness yieldeth,
Now rejoice, and leap, and roar.
Leafy infants of the wood,
Fields, and all that on you feedeth,
Dance, O dance, at such a good!

For Jehovah cometh, lo!
Lo to reign Jehovah cometh!
Under whom you all shall go.
He the world shall rightly guide—
Truly, as a king becometh,
For the people's weal provide.

Attempting to give an ascending scale of excellence—I do not mean in subject but in execution—I now turn to the national hymn, *God is our Refuge.*

PSALM XLIV

God gives us strength, and keeps us sound—
  A present help when dangers call;
Then fear not we, let quake the ground,
  And into seas let mountains fall;
  Yea so let seas withal
In watery hills arise,
  As may the earthly hills appal
With dread and dashing cries.

For lo, a river, streaming joy,
  With purling murmur safely slides,
That city washing from annoy,
  In holy shrine where God resides.
  God in her centre bides:
What can this city shake?
  God early aids and ever guides:
Who can this city take?

When nations go against her bent,
  And kings with siege her walls enround;
The void of air his voice doth rent,
  Earth fails their feet with melting ground.
  To strength and keep us sound,
The God of armies arms;
  Our rock on Jacob's God we found,

Above the reach of harms.

O come with me, O come, and view
  The trophies of Jehovah's hand!
What wrecks from him our foes pursue!
  How clearly he hath purged our land!
  By him wars silent stand:
He brake the archer's bow,
  Made chariot's wheel a fiery brand,
And spear to shivers go.

Be still, saith he; know, God am I;
  Know I will be with conquest crowned
Above all nations—raiséd high,
  High raised above this earthly round.
  To strength and keep us sound,
The God of armies arms;
  Our rock on Jacob's God we found,
Above the reach of harms.

"The God of armies arms" is a grand line.

Now let us have a hymn of Nature—a far finer, I think, than either of the preceding: *Praise waiteth for thee.*

PSALM LXV

Sion it is where thou art praiséd,
  Sion, O God, where vows they pay thee:
There all men's prayers to thee raiséd,
  Return possessed of what they pray thee.
There thou my sins, prevailing to my shame,
Dost turn to smoke of sacrificing flame.

Oh! he of bliss is not deceivéd, *disappointed.*
  Whom chosen thou unto thee takest;
And whom into thy court receivéd,
  Thou of thy checkrole[65] number makest:
The dainty viands of thy sacred store
Shall feed him so he shall not hunger more.

From thence it is thy threat'ning thunder—
  Lest we by wrong should be disgracéd—
Doth strike our foes with fear and wonder,
  O thou on whom their hopes are placéd,
Whom either earth doth stedfastly sustain,
Or cradle rocks the restless wavy plain.

Thy virtue stays the mighty mountains, *power.*

---

[65] The list of servants then kept in large houses, the number of such being far greater than it is now.

Girded with power, with strength abounding.
The roaring dam of watery fountains *the "dam of fountains"*
Thy beck doth make surcease her sounding. [is the ocean.
When stormy uproars toss the people's brain,
That civil sea to calm thou bring'st again. *political, as opposed*
[to natural.

Where earth doth end with endless ending,
All such as dwell, thy signs affright them;
And in thy praise their voices spending,
Both houses of the sun delight them–
Both whence he comes, when early he awakes,
And where he goes, when evening rest he takes.

Thy eye from heaven this land beholdeth,
Such fruitful dews down on it raining,
That storehouse-like her lap enfoldeth
Assuréd hope of ploughman's gaining:
Thy flowing streams her drought doth temper so,
That buried seed through yielding grave doth grow.

Drunk is each ridge of thy cup drinking;
Each clod relenteth at thy dressing; *groweth soft.*
Thy cloud-borne waters inly sinking,
Fair spring sprouts forth, blest with thy blessing.
The fertile year is with thy bounty crowned;
And where thou go'st, thy goings fat the ground.

Plenty bedews the desert places;
  A hedge of mirth the hills encloseth;
The fields with flocks have hid their faces;
  A robe of corn the valleys clotheth.
Deserts, and hills, and fields, and valleys all,
Rejoice, shout, sing, and on thy name do call.

The first stanza seems to me very fine, especially the verse, "Return possessed of what they pray thee." The third stanza might have been written after the Spanish Philip's Armada, but both King David and Sir Philip Sidney were dead before God brake that archer's bow.[66] The fourth line of the next stanza is a noteworthy instance of the sense gathering to itself the sound, and is in lovely contrast with the closing line of the same stanza.

One of the most remarkable specimens I know of the play with words of which I have already spoken as common even in the serious writings of this century, is to be found in the next line: "Where earth doth end with endless ending." David, regarding the world as a flat disc, speaks of the *ends* of the earth: Sidney, knowing it to be a globe, uses the word of the Psalmist, but remoulds and changes the form of it, with a power fantastic, almost capricious in its wilfulness, yet causing it to express the fact with a marvel of precision. We *see* that the earth ends; we cannot

---

[66] There has been some blundering in the transcription of the last two lines of this stanza. In the former of the two I have substituted doth for dost, evidently wrong. In the latter, the word cradle is doubtful. I suggest cradled, but am not satisfied with it. The meaning is, however, plain enough.

reach the end we see; therefore the "earth doth end with endless ending." It is a case of that contradiction in the form of the words used, which brings out a truth in another plane as it were;—a paradox in words, not in meaning, for the words can bear no meaning but the one which reveals its own reality.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

Текст предоставлен ООО «ЛитРес».

Прочитайте эту книгу целиком, купив полную легальную версию на ЛитРес.

Безопасно оплатить книгу можно банковской картой Visa, MasterCard, Maestro, со счета мобильного телефона, с платежного терминала, в салоне МТС или Связной, через PayPal, WebMoney, Яндекс.Деньги, QIWI Кошелек, бонусными картами или другим удобным Вам способом.