

Saintsbury George

# A History of Elizabethan Literature



George Saintsbury

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### CHAPTER I

#### FROM TOTTEL'S "MISCELLANY" TO SPENSER

In a work like the present, forming part of a larger whole and preceded by another part, the writer has the advantage of being almost wholly free from a difficulty which often presses on historians of a limited and definite period, whether of literary or of any other history. That difficulty lies in the discussion and decision of the question of origins – in the allotment of sufficient, and not more than sufficient, space to a preliminary recapitulation of the causes and circumstances of the actual events to be related. Here there is no need for any but the very briefest references of the kind to connect the present volume with its forerunner, or rather to indicate the connection of the two.

There has been little difference of opinion as to the long dead-season of English poetry, broken chiefly, if not wholly, by poets Scottish rather than English, which lasted through almost the whole of the fifteenth and the first half of the sixteenth centuries. There has also been little difference in regarding the remarkable work (known as Tottel's *Miscellany*, but more properly called *Songs and Sonnets, written by the Right Honourable Lord Henry Howard, late Earl of Surrey, and other*) which was published by Richard Tottel in 1557, and which went through two editions in the summer of that year, as marking the dawn of the new period. The book is, indeed, remarkable in many ways. The first thing, probably, which strikes the modern reader about it is the fact that great part of its contents is anonymous and only conjecturally to be attributed, while as to the part which is more certainly known to be the work of several authors, most of those authors were either dead or had written long before. Mr. Arber's remarks in his introduction (which, though I have rather an objection to putting mere citations before the public, I am glad here to quote as a testimony in the forefront of this book to the excellent deserts of one who by himself has done as much as any living man to facilitate the study of Elizabethan literature) are entirely to the point – how entirely to the point only students of foreign as well as of English literature know. "The poets of that age," says Mr. Arber, "wrote for their own delectation and for that of their friends, and not for the general public. They generally had the greatest aversion to their works appearing in print." This aversion, which continued in France till the end of the seventeenth century, if not later, had been somewhat broken down in England by the middle of the sixteenth, though vestiges of it long survived, and in the form of a reluctance to be known to write for money, may be found even within the confines of the nineteenth. The humbler means and lesser public of the English booksellers have saved English literature from the bewildering multitude of pirated editions, printed from private and not always faithful manuscript copies, which were for so long the despair of the editors of many French classics. But the manuscript copies themselves survive to a certain extent, and in the more sumptuous and elaborate editions of our poets (such as, for instance, Dr. Grosart's *Donne*) what they have yielded may be studied with some interest. Moreover, they have occasionally preserved for us work nowhere else to be obtained, as, for instance, in the remarkable folio which has supplied Mr. Bullen with so much of his invaluable collection of Old Plays. At the early period of Tottel's *Miscellany* it would appear that the very idea of publication in print had hardly occurred to many writers' minds. When the book appeared, both its main contributors, Surrey and Wyatt, had been long dead, as well as others (Sir Francis Bryan and Anne Boleyn's unlucky brother, George Lord Rochford) who are supposed to be represented. The short Printer's Address to the Reader gives absolutely no intelligence as to the circumstances of the publication, the person responsible for the editing, or the authority which

the editor and printer may have had for their inclusion of different authors' work. It is only a theory, though a sufficiently plausible one, that the editor was Nicholas Grimald, chaplain to Bishop Thirlby of Ely, a Cambridge man who some ten years before had been incorporated at Oxford and had been elected to a Fellowship at Merton College. In Grimald's or Grimoald's connection with the book there was certainly something peculiar, for the first edition contains forty poems contributed by him and signed with his name, while in the second the full name is replaced by "N. G.," and a considerable number of his poems give way to others. More than one construction might, no doubt, be placed on this curious fact; but hardly any construction can be placed on it which does not in some way connect Grimald with the publication. It may be added that, while his, Surrey's, and Wyatt's contributions are substantive and known – the numbers of separate poems contributed being respectively forty for Surrey, the same for Grimald, and ninety-six for Wyatt – no less than one hundred and thirty-four poems, reckoning the contents of the first and second editions together, are attributed to "other" or "uncertain" authors. And of these, though it is pretty positively known that certain writers did contribute to the book, only four poems have been even conjecturally traced to particular authors. The most interesting of these by far is the poem attributed, with that which immediately precedes it, to Lord Vaux, and containing the verses "For age with stealing steps," known to every one from the gravedigger in *Hamlet*. Nor is this the only connection of Tottel's *Miscellany* with Shakespere, for there is no reasonable doubt that the "Book of Songs and Sonnets," to the absence of which Slender so pathetically refers in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, is Tottel's, which, as the first to use the title, long retained it by right of precedence. Indeed, one of its authors, Churchyard, who, though not in his first youth at its appearance, survived into the reign of James, quotes it as such, and so does Drayton even later. No sonnets had been seen in England before, nor was the whole style of the verse which it contained less novel than this particular form.

As is the case with many if not most of the authors of our period, a rather unnecessary amount of ink has been spilt on questions very distantly connected with the question of the absolute and relative merit of Surrey and Wyatt in English poetry. In particular, the influence of the one poet on the other, and the consequent degree of originality to be assigned to each, have been much discussed. A very few dates and facts will supply most of the information necessary to enable the reader to decide this and other questions for himself. Sir Thomas Wyatt, son of Sir Henry Wyatt of Allington, Kent, was born in 1503, entered St. John's College, Cambridge, in 1515, became a favourite of Henry VIII., received important diplomatic appointments, and died in 1542. Lord Henry Howard was born (as is supposed) in 1517, and became Earl of Surrey by courtesy (he was not, the account of his judicial murder says, a lord of Parliament) at eight years old. Very little is really known of his life, and his love for "Geraldine" was made the basis of a series of fictions by Nash half a century after his death. He cannot have been more than thirty when, in the Reign of Terror towards the close of Henry VIII.'s life, he was arrested on frivolous charges, the gravest being the assumption of the royal arms, found guilty of treason, and beheaded on Tower Hill on 19th January 1547. Thus it will be seen that Wyatt was at Cambridge before Surrey was born, and died five years before him; to which it need only be added that Surrey has an epitaph on Wyatt which clearly expresses the relation of disciple to master. Yet despite this relation and the community of influences which acted on both, their characteristics are markedly different, and each is of the greatest importance in English poetical history.

In order to appreciate exactly what this importance is we must remember in what state Wyatt and Surrey found the art which they practised and in which they made a new start. Speaking roughly but with sufficient accuracy for the purpose, that state is typically exhibited in two writers, Hawes and Skelton. The former represents the last phase of the Chaucerian school, weakened not merely by the absence of men of great talent during more than a century, but by the continual imitation during that period of weaker and ever weaker French models – the last faint echoes of the *Roman de la Rose* and the first extravagances of the *Rhétoriqueurs*. Skelton, on the other hand, with all his vigour, represents the English tendency to prosaic doggerel. Whether Wyatt and his younger companion deliberately

had recourse to Italian example in order to avoid these two dangers it would be impossible to say. But the example was evidently before them, and the result is certainly such an avoidance. Nevertheless both, and especially Wyatt, had a great deal to learn. It is perfectly evident that neither had any theory of English prosody before him. Wyatt's first sonnet displays the completest indifference to quantity, not merely scanning "harber," "banner," and "suffer" as iambs (which might admit of some defence), but making a rhyme of "feareth" and "appeareth," not on the penultimates, but on the mere "eth." In the following poems even worse liberties are found, and the strange turns and twists which the poet gives to his decasyllables suggest either a total want of ear or such a study in foreign languages that the student had actually forgotten the intonation and cadences of his own tongue. So stumbling and knock-kneed is his verse that any one who remembers the admirable versification of Chaucer may now and then be inclined to think that Wyatt had much better have left his innovations alone. But this petulance is soon rebuked by the appearance of such a sonnet as this: —

**(The lover having dreamed enjoying of his love  
complaineth that the dream is not either longer or truer.)**

"Unstable dream, according to the place  
Be steadfast once, or else at least be true.  
By tasted sweetness, make me not to rue  
The sudden loss of thy false feigned grace.  
By good respect in such a dangerous case  
Thou brought'st not her into these tossing seas  
But mad'st my sprite to live, my care to increase,<sup>1</sup>  
My body in tempest her delight to embrace.  
The body dead, the sprite had his desire:  
Painless was th' one, the other in delight.  
Why then, alas! did it not keep it right,  
But thus return to leap into the fire?  
And where it was at wish, could not remain?  
Such mocks of dreams do turn to deadly pain."

Wyatt's awkwardness is not limited to the decasyllable, but some of his short poems in short lines recover rhythmical grace very remarkably, and set a great example.

Surrey is a far superior metrist. Neither in his sonnets, nor in his various stanzas composed of heroics, nor in what may be called his doggerel metres – the fatally fluent Alexandrines, fourteeners, and admixtures of both, which dominated English poetry from his time to Spenser's, and were never quite rejected during the Elizabethan period – do we find evidence of the want of ear, or the want of command of language, which makes Wyatt's versification frequently disgusting. Surrey has even no small mastery of what may be called the architecture of verse, the valuing of cadence in successive lines so as to produce a concerted piece and not a mere reduplication of the same notes. And in his translations of the *Aeneid* (not published in Tottel's *Miscellany*) he has the great honour of being the originator of blank verse, and blank verse of by no means a bad pattern. The following sonnet, combined Alexandrine and fourteener, and blank verse extract, may be useful: —

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<sup>1</sup> In original "tencrease," and below "timbrace." This substitution of elision for slur or hiatus (found in Chaucerian MSS.) passed later into the 't' and th' of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

**(Complaint that his lady after she knew of his  
love kept her face alway hidden from him.)**

"I never saw my lady lay apart  
Her cornet black, in cold nor yet in heat,  
Sith first she knew my grief was grown so great;  
Which other fancies driveth from my heart,  
That to myself I do the thought reserve,  
The which unwares did wound my woeful breast.  
But on her face mine eyes mought never rest  
Yet, since she knew I did her love, and serve  
Her golden tresses clad alway with black,  
Her smiling looks that hid[es] thus evermore  
And that restrains which I desire so sore.  
So doth this cornet govern me, alack!  
In summer sun, in winter's breath, a frost  
Whereby the lights of her fair looks I lost."<sup>2</sup>

*(Complaint of the absence of her lover being upon the sea.)*

"Good ladies, ye that have your pleasures in exile,  
Step in your foot, come take a place, and mourn with me a while.  
And such as by their lords do set but little price,  
Let them sit still: it skills them not what chance come on the dice.  
But ye whom love hath bound by order of desire,  
To love your lords whose good deserts none other would require,  
Come ye yet once again and set your foot by mine,  
Whose woeful plight and sorrows great, no tongue can well define."<sup>3</sup>

"It was the(n)<sup>4</sup> night; the sound and quiet sleep  
Had through the earth the weary bodies caught,  
The woods, the raging seas, were fallen to rest,  
When that the stars had half their course declined.  
The fields whist: beasts and fowls of divers hue,  
And what so that in the broad lakes remained,  
Or yet among the bushy thicks<sup>5</sup> of briar,

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<sup>2</sup> As printed exactly in both first and second editions this sonnet is evidently corrupt, and the variations between the two are additional evidence of this. I have ventured to change "hid" to "hides" in line 10, and to alter the punctuation in line 13. If the reader takes "that" in line 5 as = "so that," "that" in line 10 as = "which" (*i. e.* "black"), and "that" in line 11 with "which," he will now, I think, find it intelligible. Line 13 is usually printed: "In summer, sun: in winter's breath, a frost." Now no one would compare a black silk hood to the sun, and a reference to line 2 will show the real meaning. The hood is a frost which lasts through summer and winter alike.

<sup>3</sup> In reading these combinations it must be remembered that there is always a strong cæsura in the midst of the first and Alexandrine line. It is the Alexandrine which Mr. Browning has imitated in *Fifine*, not that of Drayton, or of the various practitioners of the Spenserian stanza from Spenser himself downwards.

<sup>4</sup> In these extracts () signifies that something found in text seems better away; [] that something wanting in text has been conjecturally supplied.

<sup>5</sup> Thickets.

Laid down to sleep by silence of the night,  
'Gan swage their cares, mindless of travails past.  
Not so the spirit of this Phenician.  
Unhappy she that on no sleep could chance,  
Nor yet night's rest enter in eye or breast.  
Her cares redouble: love doth rise and rage again,<sup>6</sup>  
And overflows with swelling storms of wrath."

The "other" or "uncertain" authors, though interesting enough for purposes of literary comparison, are very inferior to Wyatt and Surrey. Grimald, the supposed editor, though his verse must not, of course, be judged with reference to a more advanced state of things than his own, is but a journeyman verse-smith.

"Sith, Blackwood, you have mind to take a wife,  
I pray you tell wherefore you like that life,"

is a kind of foretaste of Crabbe in its bland ignoring of the formal graces of poetry. He acquits himself tolerably in the combinations of Alexandrines and fourteeners noticed above (the "poulter's measure," as Gascoigne was to call it later), nor does he ever fall into the worst kind of jog-trot. His epitaphs and elegies are his best work, and the best of them is that on his mother. Very much the same may be said of the strictly miscellaneous part of the *Miscellany*. The greater part of the Uncertain Authors are less ambitious, but also less irregular than Wyatt, while they fall far short of Surrey in every respect. Sometimes, as in the famous "I loath that I did love," both syntax and prosody hardly show the reform at all; they recall the ruder snatches of an earlier time. But, on the whole, the characteristics of these poets, both in matter and form, are sufficiently uniform and sufficiently interesting. Metrically, they show, on the one side, a desire to use a rejuvenated heroic, either in couplets or in various combined forms, the simplest of which is the elegiac quatrain of alternately rhyming lines, and the most complicated the sonnet; while between them various stanzas more or less suggested by Italian are to be ranked. Of this thing there has been and will be no end as long as English poetry lasts. The attempt to arrange the old and apparently almost indigenous "eights and sixes" into fourteen lines and into alternate fourteeners and Alexandrines, seems to have commended itself even more to contemporary taste, and, as we have seen and shall see, it was eagerly followed for more than half a century. But it was not destined to succeed. These long lines, unless very sparingly used, or with the ground-foot changed from the iambus to the anapæst or the trochee, are not in keeping with the genius of English poetry, as even the great examples of Chapman's *Homer* and the *Polyolbion* may be said to have shown once for all. In the hands, moreover, of the poets of this particular time, whether they were printed at length or cut up into eights and sixes, they had an almost irresistible tendency to degenerate into a kind of lolling amble which is inexpressibly monotonous. Even when the spur of a really poetical inspiration excites this amble into something more fiery (the best example existing is probably Southwell's wonderful "Burning Babe"), the sensitive ear feels that there is constant danger of a relapse, and at the worst the thing becomes mere doggerel. Yet for about a quarter of a century these overgrown lines held the field in verse and drama alike, and the encouragement of them must be counted as a certain drawback to the benefits which Surrey, Wyatt, and the other contributors of the *Miscellany* conferred on English literature by their exercises, here and elsewhere, in the blank verse decasyllable, the couplet, the stanza, and, above all, the sonnet.

It remains to say something of the matter as distinguished from the form of this poetry, and for once the form is of hardly superior importance to the matter. It is a question of some interest,

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<sup>6</sup> This Alexandrine is not common, and is probably a mere oversight.

though unfortunately one wholly incapable of solution, whether the change in the character of poetical thought and theme which Wyatt and Surrey wrought was accidental, and consequent merely on their choice of models, and especially of Petrarch, or essential and deliberate. If it was accidental, there is no greater accident in the history of literature. The absence of the personal note in mediæval poetry is a commonplace, and nowhere had that absence been more marked than in England. With Wyatt and Surrey English poetry became at a bound the most personal (and in a rather bad but unavoidable word) the most "introspective" in Europe. There had of course been love poetry before, but its convention had been a convention of impersonality. It now became exactly the reverse. The lover sang less his joys than his sorrows, and he tried to express those sorrows and their effect on him in the most personal way he could. Although allegory still retained a strong hold on the national taste, and was yet to receive its greatest poetical expression in *The Faërie Queene*, it was allegory of quite a different kind from that which in the *Roman de la Rose* had taken Europe captive, and had since dominated European poetry in all departments, and especially in the department of love-making. "Dangier" and his fellow-phantoms fled before the dawn of the new poetry in England, and the depressing influences of a common form – a conventional stock of images, personages, and almost language – disappeared. No doubt there was conventionality enough in the following of the Petrarchian model, but it was a less stiff and uniform conventionality; it allowed and indeed invited the individual to wear his rue with a difference, and to avail himself at least of the almost infinite diversity of circumstance and feeling which the life of the actual man affords, instead of reducing everything to the moods and forms of an already generalised and allegorised experience. With the new theme to handle and the new forms ready as tools for the handler, with the general ferment of European spirits, it might readily have been supposed that a remarkable out-turn of work would be the certain and immediate result.

The result in fact may have been certain but it was not immediate, being delayed for nearly a quarter of a century; and the next remarkable piece of work done in English poetry after Tottel's *Miscellany* – a piece of work of greater actual poetical merit than anything in that *Miscellany* itself – was in the old forms, and showed little if any influence of the new poetical learning. This was the famous *Mirror for Magistrates*, or rather that part of it contributed by Thomas Sackville, Lord Buckhurst. *The Mirror* as a whole has bibliographical and prosodic rather than literary interest. It was certainly planned as early as 1555 by way of a supplement to Lydgate's translation of Boccaccio's *Fall of Princes*. It was at first edited by a certain William Baldwin, and for nearly half a century it received additions and alterations from various respectable hacks of letters; but the "Induction" and the "Complaint of Buckingham" which Sackville furnished to it in 1559, though they were not published till four years later, completely outweigh all the rest in value. To my own fancy the fact that Sackville was (in what proportion is disputed) also author of *Gorboduc* (see Chapter III.) adds but little to its interest. His contributions to *The Mirror for Magistrates* contain the best poetry written in the English language between Chaucer and Spenser, and are most certainly the originals or at least the models of some of Spenser's finest work. He has had but faint praise of late years. According to the late Professor Minto, he "affords abundant traces of the influence of Wyatt and Surrey." I do not know what the traces are, and I should say myself that few contemporary or nearly contemporary efforts are more distinct. Dean Church says that we see in him a faint anticipation of Spenser. My estimate of Spenser, as I hope to show, is not below that of any living critic; but considerations of bulk being allowed, and it being fully granted that Sackville had nothing like Spenser's magnificent range, I cannot see any "faintness" in the case. If the "Induction" had not been written it is at least possible that the "Cave of Despair" would never have enriched English poetry.

Thomas Sackville was born at Buckhurst in Sussex, in the year 1536, of a family which was of the most ancient extraction and the most honourable standing. He was educated at Oxford, at the now extinct Hart Hall, whence, according to a practice as common then as it is uncommon now (except in the cases of royal princes and a few persons of difficult and inconstant taste), he moved to Cambridge. Then he entered the Inner Temple, married early, travelled, became noted in literature, was made

Lord Buckhurst at the age of thirty-one, was for many years one of Elizabeth's chief councillors and officers, was promoted to the Earldom of Dorset at the accession of James I., and died, it is said, at the Council table on the 19th of April 1608.

We shall deal with *Gorboduc* hereafter: the two contributions to *The Mirror for Magistrates* concern us here. And I have little hesitation in saying that no more astonishing contribution to English poetry, when the due reservations of that historical criticism which is the life of all criticism are made, is to be found anywhere. The bulk is not great: twelve or fifteen hundred lines must cover the whole of it. The form is not new, being merely the seven-line stanza already familiar in Chaucer. The arrangement is in no way novel, combining as it does the allegorical presentment of embodied virtues, vices, and qualities with the melancholy narrative common in poets for many years before. But the poetical value of the whole is extraordinary. The two constituents of that value, the formal and the material, are represented with a singular equality of development. There is nothing here of Wyatt's floundering prosody, nothing of the well-intentioned doggerel in which Surrey himself indulges and in which his pupils simply revel. The cadences of the verse are perfect, the imagery fresh and sharp, the presentation of nature singularly original, when it is compared with the battered copies of the poets with whom Sackville must have been most familiar, the followers of Chaucer from Occleve to Hawes. Even the general plan of the poem – the weakest part of nearly all poems of this time – is extraordinarily effective and makes one sincerely sorry that Sackville's taste, or his other occupations, did not permit him to carry out the whole scheme on his own account. The "Induction," in which the author is brought face to face with Sorrow, and the central passages of the "Complaint of Buckingham," have a depth and fulness of poetical sound and sense for which we must look backwards a hundred and fifty years, or forwards nearly five and twenty. Take, for instance, these stanzas: —

"Thence come we to the horror and the hell,  
The large great kingdoms, and the dreadful reign  
Of Pluto in his throne where he did dwell,  
The wide waste places, and the hugy plain,  
The wailings, shrieks, and sundry sorts of pain,  
The sighs, the sobs, the deep and deadly groan;  
Earth, air, and all, resounding plaint and moan.  
"Here puled the babes, and here the maids unwed  
With folded hands their sorry chance bewailed,  
Here wept the guiltless slain, and lovers dead,  
That slew themselves when nothing else availed;  
A thousand sorts of sorrows here, that wailed  
With sighs and tears, sobs, shrieks, and all yfere  
That oh, alas! it was a hell to hear.

"Lo here, quoth Sorrow, princes of renown,  
That whilom sat on top of fortune's wheel,  
Now laid full low; like wretches whirled down,  
Ev'n with one frown, that stayed but with a smile;  
And now behold the thing that thou, erewhile,  
Saw only in thought: and what thou now shalt hear,  
Recount the same to kesar, king, and peer."<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> The precedent descriptions of Sorrow herself, of Misery, and of Old Age, are even finer than the above, which, however, I have

It is perhaps well, in an early passage of a book which will have much to do with the criticism of poetry, to dwell a little on what seems to the critic to be the root of that matter. In the first place, I must entirely differ with those persons who have sought to create an independent prosody for English verse under the head of "beats" or "accents" or something of that sort. *Every English metre since Chaucer at least can be scanned, within the proper limits, according to the strictest rules of classical prosody: and while all good English metre comes out scatheless from the application of those rules, nothing exhibits the badness of bad English metre so well as that application.* It is, alongside of their great merits, the distinguishing fault of Wyatt eminently, of Surrey to a less degree, and of all the new school up to Spenser more or less, that they neglect the quantity test too freely; it is the merit of Sackville that, holding on in this respect to the good school of Chaucer, he observes it. You will find no "jawbreakers" in Sackville, no attempts to adjust English words on a Procrustean bed of independent quantification. He has not indeed the manifold music of Spenser – it would be unreasonable to expect that he should have it. But his stanzas, as the foregoing examples will show, are of remarkable melody, and they have about them a command, a completeness of accomplishment within the writer's intentions, which is very noteworthy in so young a man. The extraordinary richness and stateliness of the measure has escaped no critic. There is indeed a certain one-sidedness about it, and a devil's advocate might urge that a long poem couched in verse (let alone the subject) of such unbroken gloom would be intolerable. But Sackville did not write a long poem, and his complete command within his limits of the effect at which he evidently aimed is most remarkable.

The second thing to note about the poem is the extraordinary freshness and truth of its imagery. From a young poet we always expect second-hand presentations of nature, and in Sackville's day second-hand presentation of nature had been elevated to the rank of a science. Here the new school – Surrey, Wyatt, and their followers – even if he had studied them, could have given him little or no help, for great as are the merits of Tottel's *Miscellany*, no one would go to it for representations of nature. Among his predecessors in his own style he had to go back to Chaucer (putting the Scotch school out of the question) before he could find anything original. Yet it may be questioned whether the sketches of external scenery in these brief essays of his, or the embodiments of internal thought in the pictures of Sorrow and the other allegorical wights, are most striking. It is perfectly clear that Thomas Sackville had, in the first place, a poetical eye to see, within as well as without, the objects of poetical presentment; in the second place, a poetical vocabulary in which to clothe the results of his seeing; and in the third place, a poetical ear by aid of which to arrange his language in the musical co-ordination necessary to poetry. Wyatt had been too much to seek in the last; Surrey had not been very obviously furnished with the first; and all three were not to be possessed by any one else till Edmund Spenser arose to put Sackville's lessons in practice on a wider scale, and with a less monotonous lyre. It is possible that Sackville's claims in drama may have been exaggerated – they have of late years rather been undervalued: but his claims in poetry proper can only be overlooked by those who decline to consider the most important part of poetry. In the subject of even his part of *The Mirror* there is nothing new: there is only a following of Chaucer, and Gower, and Occleve, and Lydgate, and Hawes, and many others. But in the handling there is one novelty which makes all others of no effect or interest. It is the novelty of a new poetry.

It has already been remarked that these two important books were not immediately followed by any others in poetry corresponding to their importance. The poetry of the first half of Elizabeth's reign is as mediocre as the poetry of the last half of her reign is magnificent. Although it had taken some hints from Wyatt and Surrey it had not taken the best; and the inexplicable devotion of most of the versifiers of the time to the doggerel metres already referred to seems to have prevented them

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preferred for three reasons. First, it has been less often quoted; secondly, its subject is a kind of commonplace, and, therefore, shows the poet's strength of handling; thirdly, because of the singular and characteristic majesty of the opening lines.

from cultivating anything better. Yet the pains which were spent upon translation during this time were considerable, and undoubtedly had much to do with strengthening and improving the language. The formal part of poetry became for the first time a subject of study resulting in the *Instructions* of Gascoigne, and in the noteworthy critical works which will be mentioned in the next chapter; while the popularity of poetical miscellanies showed the audience that existed for verse. The translators and the miscellanists will each call for some brief notice; but first it is necessary to mention some individual, and in their way, original writers who, though not possessing merit at all equal to that of Wyatt, Surrey, and Sackville, yet deserve to be singled from the crowd. These are Gascoigne, Churchyard, Turberville, Googe, and Tusser.

The poetaster and literary hack, Whetstone, who wrote a poetical memoir of George Gascoigne after his death, entitles it a remembrance of "the well employed life and godly end" of his hero. It is not necessary to dispute that Gascoigne's end was godly; but except for the fact that he was for some years a diligent and not unmeritorious writer, it is not so certain that his life was well employed. At any rate he does not seem to have thought so himself. The date of his birth has been put as early as 1525 and as late as 1536: he certainly died in 1577. His father, a knight of good family and estate in Essex, disinherited him; but he was educated at Cambridge, if not at both universities, was twice elected to Parliament, travelled and fought abroad, and took part in the famous festival at Kenilworth. His work is, as has been said, considerable, and is remarkable for the number of first attempts in English which it contains. It has at least been claimed for him (though careful students of literary history know that these attributions are always rather hazardous) that he wrote the first English prose comedy (*The Supposes*, a version of Ariosto), the first regular verse satire (*The Steel Glass*), the first prose tale (a version from Bandello), the first translation from Greek tragedy (*Jocasta*), and the first critical essay (the above-mentioned *Notes of Instruction*). Most of these things, it will be seen, were merely adaptations of foreign originals; but they certainly make up a remarkable budget for one man. In addition to them, and to a good number of shorter and miscellaneous poems, must be mentioned the *Glass of Government* (a kind of morality or serious comedy, moulded, it would seem, on German originals), and the rather prettily, if fantastically termed *Flowers, Herbs, and Weeds*. Gascoigne has a very fair command of metre: he is not a great sinner in the childish alliteration which, surviving from the older English poetry, helps to convert so much of his contemporaries' work into doggerel. The pretty "Lullaby of a Lover," and "Gascoigne's Good Morrow" may be mentioned, and part of one of them may be quoted, as a fair specimen of his work, which is always tolerable if never first-rate.

"Sing lullaby, as women do,  
Wherewith they bring their babes to rest,  
And lullaby can I sing too,  
As womanly as can the best.  
With lullaby they still the child;  
And if I be not much beguiled,  
Full many wanton babes have I  
Which must be stilled with lullaby.

"First lullaby, my youthful years.  
It is now time to go to bed,  
For crooked age and hoary hairs  
Have won the hav'n within my head:  
With lullaby then, youth, be still,  
With lullaby content thy will,  
Since courage quails and comes behind,  
Go sleep and so beguile thy mind.

"Next lullaby, my gazing eyes,  
Which wanton were to glance apace,  
For every glass may now suffice  
To show the furrows in my face.  
With lullaby then wink awhile,  
With lullaby your looks beguile;  
Let no fair face, nor beauty bright,  
Entice you oft with vain delight.

"And lullaby, my wanton will,  
Let reason(s) rule now rein thy thought,  
Since all too late I find by skill  
How dear I have thy fancies bought:  
With lullaby now take thine ease,  
With lullaby thy doubts appease,  
For trust to this, if thou be still  
My body shall obey thy will."

Thomas Churchyard was an inferior sort of Gascoigne, who led a much longer if less eventful life. He was about the Court for the greater part of the century, and had a habit of calling his little books, which were numerous, and written both in verse and prose, by alliterative titles playing on his own name, such as *Churchyard's Chips*, *Churchyard's Choice*, and so forth. He was a person of no great literary power, and chiefly noteworthy because of his long life after contributing to Tottel's *Miscellany*, which makes him a link between the old literature and the new.

The literary interests and tentative character of the time, together with its absence of original genius, and the constant symptoms of not having "found its way," are also very noteworthy in George Turberville and Barnabe Googe, who were friends and verse writers of not dissimilar character. Turberville, of whom not much is known, was a Dorsetshire man of good family, and was educated at Winchester and Oxford. His birth and death dates are both extremely uncertain. Besides a book on Falconry and numerous translations (to which, like all the men of his school and day, he was much addicted), he wrote a good many occasional poems, trying even blank verse. Barnabe Googe, a Lincolnshire man, and a member of both universities, appears to have been born in 1540, was employed in Ireland, and died in 1594. He was kin to the Cecils, and Mr. Arber has recovered some rather interesting details about his love affairs, in which he was assisted by Lord Burghley. He, too, was an indefatigable translator, and wrote some original poems. Both poets affected the combination of Alexandrine and fourteenner (split up or not, as the printer chose, into six, six, eight, six), the popularity of which has been noted, and both succumbed too often to its capacities of doggerel. Turberville's best work is the following song in a pretty metre well kept up: —

"The green that you did wish me wear  
Aye for your love,  
And on my helm a branch to bear  
Not to remove,  
Was ever you to have in mind  
Whom Cupid hath my feire assigned.

"As I in this have done your will  
And mind to do,

So I request you to fulfil  
My fancy too;  
A green and loving heart to have,  
And this is all that I do crave.

"For if your flowering heart should change  
His colour green,  
Or you at length a lady strange  
Of me be seen,  
Then will my branch against his use  
His colour change for your refuse.<sup>8</sup>

"As winter's force cannot deface  
This branch his hue,  
So let no change of love disgrace  
Your friendship true;  
You were mine own, and so be still,  
So shall we live and love our fill.  
"Then I may think myself to be  
Well recompensed,  
For wearing of the tree that is  
So well defended  
Against all weather that doth fall  
When wayward winter spits his gall.

"And when we meet, to try me true,  
Look on my head,  
And I will crave an oath of you  
Whe'r<sup>9</sup> Faith be fled;  
So shall we both answered be,  
Both I of you, and you of me."

The most considerable and the most interesting part of Googe's work is a set of eight eclogues which may not have been without influence on *The Shepherd's Calendar*, and a poem of some length entitled *Cupido Conquered*, which Spenser may also have seen. Googe has more sustained power than Turberville, but is much inferior to him in command of metre and in lyrical swing. In him, or at least in his printer, the mania for cutting up long verses reaches its height, and his very decasyllables are found arranged in the strange fashion of four and six as thus: —

"Good aged Bale:  
That with thy hoary hairs  
Dost still persist  
To turn the painful book,  
O happy man,  
That hast obtained such years,  
And leav'st not yet

---

<sup>8</sup> Refusal.

<sup>9</sup> Short for "whether."

On papers pale to look.  
Give over now  
To beat thy wearied brain,  
And rest thy pen,  
That long hath laboured sore."

Thomas Tusser (1524? -1580) has often been regarded as merely a writer of doggerel, which is assuredly not lacking in his *Hundred* (later *Five Hundred*) *Points of Husbandry* (1557-1573). But he has some piquancy of phrase, and is particularly noticeable for the variety, and to a certain extent the accomplishment, of his prosodic experiments – a point of much importance for the time.

To these five, of whom some substantive notice has been given, many shadowy names might be added if the catalogue were of any use: such as those of Kinwelmersh, Whetstone, Phaer, Neville, Blundeston, Edwards, Golding, and many others. They seem to have been for the most part personally acquainted with one another; the literary energies of England being almost confined to the universities and the Inns of Court, so that most of those who devoted themselves to literature came into contact and formed what is sometimes called a clique. They were all studiously and rather indiscriminately given to translation (the body of foreign work, ancient and modern, which was turned into English during this quarter of a century being very large indeed), and all or many of them were contributors of commendatory verses to each other's work and of pieces of different descriptions to the poetical miscellanies of the time. Of these miscellanies and of the chief translations from the classics some little notice may be taken because of the great part which both played in the poetical education of England. It has been said that almost all the original poets were also translators. Thus Googe Englished, among other things, the *Zodiacus Vitæ* of Marcellus Palingenius, the *Regnum Papisticum* of Kirchmayer, the *Four Books of Husbandry* of Conrad Heresbach, and the *Proverbs* of the Marquis of Santillana; but some of the translators were not distinguished by any original work. Thus Jasper Heywood, followed by Neville above mentioned, by Studley, and others, translated between 1560 and 1580 those tragedies of Seneca which had such a vast influence on foreign literature and, fortunately, so small an influence on English. Arthur Golding gave in 1567 a version, by no means destitute of merit, of the *Metamorphoses* which had a great influence on English poetry. We have already mentioned Surrey's blank-verse translation of Virgil. This was followed up, in 1555-60, by Thomas Phaer, who, like most of the persons mentioned in this paragraph, used the fourteener, broken up or not, as accident or the necessities of the printer brought it about.

It was beyond doubt this abundant translation, and perhaps also the manifest deficiencies of the fourteener thus used, which brought about at the close of the present period and the beginning of the next the extraordinary attempt to reproduce classical metres in English verse, which for a time seduced even Spenser, which was not a little countenanced by most of the critical writers of the period, which led Gabriel Harvey and others into such absurdities, and which was scarcely slain even by Daniel's famous and capital *Defence of Rhyme*. The discussion of this absurd attempt (for which rules, not now extant, came from Drant of Cambridge) in the correspondence of Spenser and Harvey, and the sensible fashion in which Nash laughed at it, are among the best known things in the gossiping history of English Letters. But the coxcombrity of Harvey and the felicitous impertinence of Nash have sometimes diverted attention from the actual state of the case. William Webbe (a very sober-minded person with taste enough to admire the "new poet," as he calls Spenser) makes elaborate attempts not merely at hexameters, which, though only a curiosity, are a possible curiosity in English, but at Sapphics which could never (except as burlesque) be tolerable. Sidney, Spenser, and others gave serious heed to the scheme of substituting classical metres without rhyme for indigenous metres with rhyme. And unless the two causes which brought this about are constantly kept in mind, the reason of it will not be understood. It was undoubtedly the weakness of contemporary English verse which reinforced the general Renaissance admiration for the classics; nor must it be forgotten that Wyatt

takes, in vernacular metres and with rhyme, nearly as great liberties with the intonation and prosody of the language as any of the classicists in their unlucky hexameters and elegiacs. The majesty and grace of the learned tongues, contrasting with the poverty of their own language, impressed, and to a great extent rightly impressed, the early Elizabethans, so that they naturally enough cast about for any means to improve the one, and hesitated at any peculiarity which was not found in the other. It was unpardonable in Milton to sneer at rhyme after the fifty years of magnificent production which had put English on a level with Greek and above Latin as a literary instrument. But for Harvey and Spenser, Sidney and Webbe, with those fifty years still to come, the state of the case was very different.

The translation mania and the classicising mania together led to the production of perhaps the most absurd book in all literature – a book which deserves extended notice here, partly because it has only recently become accessible to the general reader in its original form, and partly because it is, though a caricature, yet a very instructive caricature of the tendencies and literary ideas of the time. This is Richard Stanyhurst's translation of the first four books of the *Aeneid*, first printed at Leyden in the summer of 1582, and reprinted in London a year later. This wonderful book (in which the spelling is only less marvellous than the phraseology and verse) shows more than anything else the active throes which English literature was undergoing, and though the result was but a false birth it is none the less interesting.

Stanyhurst was not, as might be hastily imagined, a person of insufficient culture or insufficient brains. He was an Irish Roman Catholic gentleman, brother-in-law to Lord Dunsany, and uncle to Archbishop Usher, and though he was author of the Irish part of Holinshed's *History*, he has always been regarded by the madder sort of Hibernians as a traitor to the nation. His father was Recorder of Dublin, and he himself, having been born about 1547, was educated at University College, Oxford, and went thence, if not to the Inns of Court, at any rate to those of Chancery, and became a student of Furnival's Inn. He died at Brussels in 1618. Here is an example of his prose, the latter part of which is profitable for matter as well as for form: —

"How beyt<sup>10</sup> I haue heere haulf a guesh, that two sorts of carpers wyl seeme too spurne at this myne enterprise. Thee one vtterlie ignorant, the oother meanlye letterd. Thee ignorant wyl imagin, that thee passage was nothing craggie, in as much as M. Phaere hath broken thee ice before me: Thee meaner clarcks wyl suppose my trauail in these heroical verses too carrye no great difficultie, in that yt lay in my choice too make what word I would short or long, hauing no English writer beefore mee in this kind of poëtrye with whose squire I should leauel my syllables.

Haue not these men made a fayre speake? If they had put in *Mightye Joue*, and *gods* in thee plural number, and *Venus* with *Cupide thee blynd Boy*, al had beene in thee nick, thee rythme had been of a right stamp. For a few such stiches boch vp oure newe fashion makers. Prouyded not wythstanding alwayes that *Artaxerxes*, al be yt hee bee spurgalde, beeing so much gallop, bee placed in thee dedicatory epistle receauing a cuppe of water of a swayne, or elles al is not wurch a beane. Good God what a frye of *wooden rythmours* dooth swarme in stacioners shops, who neuer enstructed in any grammar schoole, not ataying too thee paaringes of thee Latin or Greeke tongue, yeet like blind bayards rush on forward, fostring theyre vayne conceits wyth such ouerweening silly follyes, as they reck not too bee condemned of thee learned for ignorant, so they bee commended of thee ignorant for learned. Thee reddyest way, therefore, too flap these droanes from the sweete senting hiues of Poëtrye, is for thee learned too applye theym selues wholye (yf they be delighted wyth that veyne) too thee true making of verses in such wise as thee

<sup>10</sup> This and the next extract are given *literatim* to show Stanyhurst's marvellous spelling.

*Greekes and Latins*, thee fathurs of knowledge, haue doone; and too leaue too theese doltish coystrels theyre rude rythming and balducktoom ballads."

Given a person capable of this lingo, given the prevalent mania for English hexameters, and even what follows may not seem too impossible.

"This sayd, with darcksoom night shade quite clowdye she vannisht.  
Grislye faces frouncing, eke against Troy leaged in hatred  
Of Saints soure deities dyd I see.  
Then dyd I marck playnely thee castle of Ilion vplayd,  
And Troian buyldings quit topsy turvye remooued.  
Much lyk on a mountayn thee tree dry wythered oaken  
Sliest by the clowne Coridon rusticks with twibbil or hatchet.  
Then the tre deepe minced, far chopt dooth terrifye swinckers  
With menacing becking thee branches palsye before tyme,  
Vntil with sowghing yt grunts, as wounded in hacking.  
At length with rounsefal, from stock vntruncked yt harssheth.

Hee rested wyful lyk a wayward obstinat oldgrey.

These words owt showting with her howling the house she replennisht."

There is perhaps no greater evidence of the reverence in which the ancients were held than that such frantic balderdash as this did not extinguish it. Yet this was what a man of undoubted talent, of considerable learning, and of no small acuteness (for Stanyhurst's Preface to this very translation shows something more than glimmerings on the subject of classical and English prosody), could produce. It must never be forgotten that the men of this time were at a hopelessly wrong point of view. It never occurred to them that English left to itself could equal Greek or Latin. They simply endeavoured, with the utmost pains and skill, to drag English up to the same level as these unapproachable languages by forcing it into the same moulds which Greek and Latin had endured. Properly speaking we ought not to laugh at them. They were carrying out in literature what the older books of arithmetic call "The Rule of False," – that is to say, they were trying what the English tongue could *not* bear. No one was so successful as Stanyhurst in applying this test of the rack: yet it is fair to say that Harvey and Webbe, nay, Spenser and Sidney, had practically, though, except in Spenser's case, it would appear unconsciously, arrived at the same conclusion before. How much we owe to such adventurers of the impossible few men know except those who have tried to study literature as a whole.

A few words have to be said in passing as to the miscellanies which played such an important part in the poetical literature of the day. Tottel and *The Mirror for Magistrates* (which was, considering its constant accretions, a sort of miscellany) have been already noticed. They were followed by not a few others. The first in date was *The Paradise of Dainty Devices* (1576), edited by R. Edwards, a dramatist of industry if not of genius, and containing a certain amount of interesting work. It was very popular, going through nine or ten editions in thirty years, but with a few scattered exceptions it does not yield much to the historian of English poetry. Its popularity shows what was expected; its contents show what, at any rate at the date of its first appearance, was given. It is possible that the doleful contents of *The Mirror for Magistrates* (which was reprinted six times during our present period, and which busied itself wholly with what magistrates should avoid, and with the sorrowful

departing out of this life of the subjects) may have had a strong effect on Edwards, though one at least of his contributors, W. Hunnis, was a man of mould. It was followed in 1578 by *A Gorgeous Gallery of Gallant Inventions*, supposed to have been edited by Roydon and Proctor, which is a still drier stick. The next miscellany, six years later, *A Handful of Pleasant Delights*, edited by Clement Robinson, is somewhat better though not much. It is followed by the *Phœnix Nest*, an interesting collection, by no less than three miscellanies in 1600, edited by "A. B." and R. Allot, and named *England's Helicon*, *England's Parnassus*, and *Belvedere* (the two latter being rather anthologies of extracts than miscellanies proper), and by Francis Davison's famous *Poetical Rhapsody*, 1602, all which last belong to a much later date than our present subjects.

To call the general poetical merit of these earlier miscellanies high would be absurd. But what at once strikes the reader, not merely of them but of the collections of individual work which accompany them, as so astonishing, is the level which is occasionally reached. The work is often the work of persons quite unknown or unimportant in literature as persons. But we constantly see in it a flash, a symptom of the presence of the true poetical spirit which it is often impossible to find for years together in other periods of poetry. For instance, if ever there was a "dull dog" in verse it was Richard Edwards. Yet in *The Paradise of Dainty Devices* Edwards's poem with the refrain "The falling out of faithful friends renewing is of love," is one of the most charming things anywhere to be found. So is, after many years, the poem attributed to John Wootton in *England's Helicon* (the best of the whole set), beginning "Her eyes like shining lamps," so is the exquisite "Come, little babe" from *The Arbour of Amorous Devices*, so are dozens and scores more which may be found in their proper places, and many of them in Mr. Arber's admirable *English Garner*. The spirit of poetry, rising slowly, was rising surely in the England of these years: no man knew exactly where it would appear, and the greatest poets were – for their praises of themselves and their fellows are quite unconscious and simple – as ignorant as others. The first thirty years of the reign were occupied with simple education – study of models, efforts in this or that kind, translation, and the rest. But the right models had been provided by Wyatt and Surrey's study of the Italians, and by the study of the classics which all men then pursued; and the original inspiration, without which the best models are useless, though itself can do little when the best models are not used, was abundantly present. Few things are more curious than to compare, let us say, Googe and Spenser. Yet few things are more certain than that without the study and experiments which Googe represents Spenser could not have existed. Those who decry the historical method in criticism ignore this; and ignorance like wisdom is justified of all her children.

## CHAPTER II

### EARLY ELIZABETHAN PROSE

The history of the earlier Elizabethan prose, if we except the name of Hooker, in whom it culminates, is to a great extent the history of curiosities of literature – of tentative and imperfect efforts, scarcely resulting in any real vernacular style at all. It is, however, emphatically the Period of Origins of modern English prose, and as such cannot but be interesting. We shall therefore rapidly survey its chief developments, noting first what had been done before Elizabeth came to the throne, then taking Ascham (who stands, though part of his work was written earlier, very much as the first Elizabethan prosaist), noticing the schools of historians, translators, controversialists, and especially critics who illustrated the middle period of the reign, and singling out the noteworthy personality of Sidney. We shall also say something of Lyly (as far as *Euphues* is concerned) and his singular attempts in prose style, and shall finish with Hooker, the one really great name of the period. Its voluminous pamphleteering, though much of it, especially the Martin Marprelate controversy, might come chronologically within the limit of this chapter, will be better reserved for a notice in Chapter VI. of the whole pamphlet literature of the reigns of Elizabeth and James – an interesting subject, the relation of which to the modern periodical has been somewhat overlooked, and which indeed was, until a comparatively recent period, not very easy to study. Gabriel Harvey alone, as distinctly belonging to the earlier Elizabethans, may be here included with other critics.

It was an inevitable result of the discovery of printing that the cultivation of the vernacular for purposes of all work – that is to say, for prose – should be largely increased. Yet a different influence arising, or at least eked out, from the same source, rather checked this increase. The study of the classical writers had at first a tendency to render inveterate the habit of employing Latin for the journey-work of literature, and in the two countries which were to lead Western Europe for the future (the literary date of Italy was already drawing to a close, and Italy had long possessed vernacular prose masterpieces), it was not till the middle of the sixteenth century that the writing of vernacular prose was warmly advocated and systematically undertaken. The most interesting monuments of this crusade, as it may almost be called, in England are connected with a school of Cambridge scholars who flourished a little before our period, though not a few of them, such as Ascham, Wilson, and others, lived into it. A letter of Sir John Cheke's in the very year of the accession of Elizabeth is the most noteworthy document on the subject. It was written to another father of English prose, Sir Thomas Hoby, the translator of Castiglione's *Courtier*. But Ascham had already and some years earlier published his *Toxophilus*, and various not unimportant attempts, detailed notice of which would be an antedating of our proper period, had been made. More's chief work, *Utopia*, had been written in Latin, and was translated into English by another hand, but his *History of Edward V.* was not a mean contribution to English prose. Tyndale's *New Testament* had given a new and powerful impulse to the reading of English; Elyot's *Governor* had set the example of treating serious subjects in a style not unworthy of them, and Leland's quaint *Itinerary* the example of describing more or less faithfully if somewhat uncouthly. Hall had followed Fabian as an English historian, and, above all, Latimer's *Sermons* had shown how to transform spoken English of the raciest kind into literature. Lord Berners's translations of Froissart and of divers examples of late Continental romance had provided much prose of no mean quality for light reading, and also by their imitation of the florid and fanciful style of the French-Flemish *rhétoriciens* (with which Berners was familiar both as a student of French and as governor of Calais) had probably contributed not a little to supply and furnish forth the side of Elizabethan expression which found so memorable an exponent in the author of *Euphues*.

For our purpose, however, Roger Ascham may serve as a starting-point. His *Toxophilus* was written and printed as early as 1545; his *Schoolmaster* did not appear till after his death, and seems

to have been chiefly written in the very last days of his life. There is thus nearly a quarter of a century between them, yet they are not very different in style. Ascham was a Yorkshire man born at Kirbywiske, near Northallerton, in 1515; he went to St. John's College at Cambridge, then a notable seat of learning, in 1530; was elected scholar, fellow, and lecturer, became public orator the year after the appearance of *Toxophilus*, acted as tutor to the Princess Elizabeth, went on diplomatic business to Germany, was Latin secretary to Queen Mary, and after her death to his old pupil, and died on the 30th December 1568. A treatise on Cock-fighting (of which sport he was very fond) appears to have been written by him, and was perhaps printed, but is unluckily lost. We have also Epistles from him, and his works, both English and Latin, have been in whole or part frequently edited. The great interest of Ascham is expressed as happily as possible by his own words in the dedication of *Toxophilus* to Henry VIII. "Although," he says, "to have written this book either in Latin or Greek ... had been more easier and fit for my trade in study, yet ... I have written this English matter in the English tongue for Englishmen" – a memorable sentence none the worse for its jingle and repetition, which are well in place. Until scholars like Ascham, who with the rarest exceptions were the only persons likely or able to write at all, cared to write "English matters in English tongue for Englishmen," the formation of English prose style was impossible; and that it required some courage to do so, Cheke's letter, written twelve years later, shows.<sup>11</sup>

"I am of this opinion that our own tongue should be written clean and pure, unmixed and unmingled with borrowing of other tongues, wherein, if we take not heed by time, ever borrowing and never paying, she shall be fain to keep her house as bankrupt. For then doth our tongue naturally and praisably utter her meaning, when she borroweth no counterfeitures of other tongues to attire herself withal, but useth plainly her own with such shift as nature, craft, experience, and following of other excellent doth lead her unto, and if she want at any time (as being imperfect she must) yet let her borrow with such bashfulness that it may appear, that if either the mould of our own tongue could serve us to fashion a word of our own, or if the old denized words could content and ease this need we would not boldly venture of unknown words."<sup>12</sup>

The *Toxophilus* and the *Schoolmaster* are both in their different ways very pleasant reading; and the English is far more correct than that of much greater men than Ascham in the next century. It is, however, merely as style, less interesting, because it is clear that the author is doing little more than translate in his head, instead of on the paper, good current Latin (such as it would have been "more easier" for him to write) into current English. He does not indulge in any undue classicism; he takes few of the liberties with English grammar which, a little later, it was the habit to take on the strength of classical examples. But, on the other hand, he does not attempt, and it would be rather unreasonable to expect that he should have attempted, experiments in the literary power of English itself. A slight sense of its not being so "easy" to write in English as in Latin, and of the consequent advisableness of keeping to a sober beaten path, to a kind of style which is not much more English (except for being composed of good English words in straightforward order) than it is any literary language framed to a great extent on the classics, shows itself in him. One might translate passage after passage of Ascham, keeping almost the whole order of the words, into very good sound Latin prose; and, indeed, his great secret in the *Schoolmaster* (the perpetual translation and retranslation of English into the learned languages, and especially Latin) is exactly what would form such a style. It is, as the following examples from both works will show, clear, not inelegant, invaluable as a kind of

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<sup>11</sup> The letter is given in full by Mr. Arber in his introduction to Ascham's *Schoolmaster*, p. 5.

<sup>12</sup> It will be seen that Cheke writes what he argues for, "clean and pure English." "Other excellent" is perhaps the only doubtful phrase in the extract or in the letter.

go-cart to habituate the infant limbs of prose English to orderly movement; but it is not original, or striking, or characteristic, or calculated to show the native powers and capacities of the language.

"I can teach you to shoot fair, even as Socrates taught a man once to know God. For when he asked him what was God? 'Nay,' saith he, 'I can tell you better what God is not, as God is not ill, God is unspeakable, unsearchable, and so forth. Even likewise can I say of fair shooting, it hath not this discommodity with it nor that discommodity, and at last a man may so shift all the discommodities from shooting that there shall be left nothing behind but fair shooting. And to do this the better you must remember how that I told you when I described generally the whole nature of shooting, that fair shooting came of these things of standing, nocking, drawing, holding and loosing; the which I will go over as shortly as I can, describing the discommodities that men commonly use in all parts of their bodies, that you, if you fault in any such, may know it, and go about to amend it. Faults in archers do exceed the number of archers, which come with use of shooting without teaching. Use and custom separated from knowledge and learning, doth not only hurt shooting, but the most weighty things in the world beside. And, therefore, I marvel much at those people which be the maintainers of uses without knowledge, having no other word in their mouth but this use, use, custom, custom. Such men, more wilful than wise, beside other discommodities, take all place and occasion from all amendment. And this I speak generally of use and custom."

"Time was when Italy and Rome have been, to the great good of us who now live, the best breeders and bringers up of the worthiest men, not only for wise speaking, but also for well-doing in all civil affairs that ever was in the world. But now that time is gone; and though the place remain, yet the old and present manners do differ as far as black and white, as virtue and vice. Virtue once made that country mistress over all the world: vice now maketh that country slave to them that before were glad to serve it. All man [*i. e.* mankind] seeth it; they themselves confess it, namely such as be best and wisest amongst them. For sin, by lust and vanity, hath and doth breed up everywhere common contempt of God's word, private contention in many families, open factions in every city; and so making themselves bond to vanity and vice at home, they are content to bear the yoke of serving strangers abroad. Italy now is not that Italy it was wont to be; and therefore now not so fit a place as some do count it for young men to fetch either wisdom or honesty from thence. For surely they will make others but bad scholars that be so ill masters to themselves."

This same characteristic, or absence of characteristic, which reaches its climax – a climax endowing it with something like substantive life and merit – in Hooker, displays itself, with more and more admixture of raciness and native peculiarity, in almost all the prose of the early Elizabethan period up to the singular escapade of Lyly, who certainly tried to write not a classical style but a style of his own. The better men, with Thomas Wilson and Ascham himself at their head, made indeed earnest protests against Latinising the vocabulary (the great fault of the contemporary French *Pléiade*), but they were not quite aware how much they were under the influence of Latin in other matters. The translators, such as North, whose famous version of Plutarch after Amyot had the immortal honour of suggesting not a little of Shakespeare's greatest work, had the chief excuse and temptation in doing this; but all writers did it more or less: the theologians (to whom it would no doubt have been "more easier" to write in Latin), the historians (though the little known Holinshed has broken off into a much more vernacular but also much more disorderly style), the rare geographers (of whom the chief is Richard Eden, the first English writer on America), and the rest. Of this rest the most interesting, perhaps, are the small but curious knot of critics who lead up in various ways

to Sidney and Harvey, who seem to have excited considerable interest at the time, and who were not succeeded, after the early years of James, by any considerable body of critics of English till John Dryden began to write in the last third of the following century. Of these (putting out of sight Stephen Gosson, the immediate begetter of Sidney's *Apology for Poetry*, Campion, the chief champion of classical metres in English, and by a quaint contrast the author of some of the most charming of English songs in purely romantic style, with his adversary the poet Daniel, Meres, etc.), the chief is the author of the anonymous *Art of English Poesie*, published the year after the Armada, and just before the appearance of *The Faërie Queene*. This *Art* has chiefly to be compared with the *Discourse of English Poetrie*, published three years earlier by William Webbe. Webbe, of whom nothing is known save that he was a private tutor at one or two gentlemen's houses in Essex, exhibits that dislike and disdain of rhyme which was an offshoot of the passion for humanist studies, which was importantly represented all through the sixteenth and early seventeenth century in England, and which had Milton for its last and greatest exponent. *The Art of English Poesie*, which is attributed on no grounds of contemporary evidence to George Puttenham, though the book was generally reputed his in the next generation, is a much more considerable treatise, some four times the length of Webbe's, dealing with a large number of questions subsidiary to *Ars Poetica*, and containing no few selections of illustrative verse, many of the author's own. As far as style goes both Webbe and Puttenham fall into the rather colourless but not incorrect class already described, and are of the tribe of Ascham. Here is a sample of each: —

(*Webbe's Preface to the Noble Poets of England.*)

"Among the innumerable sorts of English books, and infinite fardels of printed pamphlets, wherewith this country is pestered, all shops stuffed, and every study furnished; the greater part, I think, in any one kind, are such as are either mere poetical, or which tend in some respects (as either in matter or form) to poetry. Of such books, therefore, sith I have been one that have had a desire to read not the fewest, and because it is an argument which men of great learning have no leisure to handle, or at least having to do with more serious matters do least regard. If I write something, concerning what I think of our English poets, or adventure to set down my simple judgment of English poetry, I trust the learned poets will give me leave, and vouchsafe my book passage, as being for the rudeness thereof no prejudice to their noble studies, but even (as my intent is) an *instar cotis* to stir up some other of meet ability to bestow travail in this matter; whereby, I think, we may not only get the means which we yet want, to discern between good writers and bad, but perhaps also challenge from the rude multitude of rustical rhymers, who will be called poets, the right practice and orderly course of true poetry."

(*Puttenham on Style.*)

"Style is a constant and continual phrase or tenour of speaking and writing, extending to the whole tale or process of the poem or history, and not properly to any piece or member of a tale; but is of words, speeches, and sentences together; a certain contrived form and quality, many times natural to the writer, many times his peculiar bye-election and art, and such as either he keepeth by skill or holdeth on by ignorance, and will not or peradventure cannot easily alter into any other. So we say that Cicero's style and Sallust's were not one, nor Cæsar's and Livy's, nor Homer's and Hesiodus',<sup>13</sup> nor Herodotus' and Thucydides', nor Euripides' and Aristophanes', nor Erasmus' and Budeus' styles. And because this continual course and manner of

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<sup>13</sup> The final *s* of such names often at the time appears unaltered.

writing or speech sheweth the matter and disposition of the writer's mind more than one or two instances can show, therefore there be that have called style the image of man (*mentis character*). For man is but his mind, and as his mind is tempered and qualified, so are his speeches and language at large; and his inward conceits be the metal of his mind, and his manner of utterance the very warp and woof of his conceits, more plain or busy and intricate or otherwise affected after the rate."<sup>14</sup>

Contemporary with these, however, there was growing up a quite different school of English prose which showed itself on one side in the *estilo culto* of Lyly and the university wits of his time; on the other, in the extremely vernacular and sometimes extremely vulgar manner of the pamphleteers, who were very often the same persons. Lyly himself exhibits both styles in *Euphues*; and if *Pap with a Hatchet* and *An Almond for a Parrot* are rightly attributed to him, still more in these. So also does Gabriel Harvey, Spenser's friend, a curious coxcomb who endeavoured to dissuade Spenser from continuing *The Faërie Queene*, devoted much time himself and strove to devote other people to the thankless task of composing English hexameters and trimeters, engaged (very much to his discomfiture) in a furious pamphlet war with Thomas Nash, and altogether presents one of the most characteristic though least favourable specimens of the Elizabethan man of letters. We may speak of him further when we come to the pamphleteers generally.

John Lyly is a person of much more consequence in English literature than the conceited and pragmatist pedant who wrote *Pierce's Supererogation*. He is familiar, almost literally to every schoolboy, as the author of the charming piece, "Cupid with my Campaspe Played," and his dramatic work will come in for notice in a future chapter; but he is chiefly thought of by posterity, whether favourably or the reverse, as the author of *Euphues*. Exceedingly little is known about his life, and it is necessary to say that the usually accepted dates of his death, his children's birth, and so forth, depend wholly on the identification of a John Lilly, who is the subject of such entries in the registers of a London church, with the euphuist and dramatist – an identification which requires confirmation. A still more wanton attempt to supplement ignorance with knowledge has been made in the further identification with Lyly of a certain "witty and bold atheist," who annoyed Bishop Hall in his first cure at Hawstead, in Suffolk, and who is called "Mr. Lilly." All supposed facts about him (or some other John Lyly), his membership of Parliament and so forth, have been diligently set forth by Mr. Bond in his Oxford edition of the *Works*, with the documents which are supposed to prove them. He is supposed, on uncertain but tolerable inferences, to have been born about 1554, and he certainly entered Magdalen College, Oxford, in 1569, though he was not matriculated till two years later. He is described as *plebeii filius*, was not on the foundation, and took his degree in 1573. He must have had some connection with the Cecils, for a letter of 1574 is extant from him to Burleigh. He cannot have been five and twenty when he wrote *Euphues*, which was licensed at the end of 1578, and was published (the first part) early next year, while the second part followed with a very short interval. In 1582 he wrote an unmistakable letter commendatory to Watson's *Hecatompithia*, and between 1580 and 1590 he must have written his plays. He appears to have continued to reside at Magdalen for a considerable time, and then to have haunted the Court. A melancholy petition is extant to Queen Elizabeth from him, the second of its kind, in which he writes: "Thirteen years your highness' servant, but yet nothing." This was in 1598: he is supposed to have died in 1606. *Euphues* is a very singular book, which was constantly reprinted and eagerly read for fifty years, then forgotten for nearly two hundred, then frequently discussed, but very seldom read, even it may be suspected in Mr. Arber's excellent reprint of it, or in that of Mr. Bond. It gave a word to English, and even yet there is no very distinct idea attaching to the word. It induced one of the most gifted restorers of old times to make a blunder, amusing in itself, but not in the least what its author intended it to be, and of late years

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<sup>14</sup> *i. e.* "in proportion."

especially it has prompted constant discussions as to the origin of the peculiarities which mark it. As usual, we shall try to discuss it with less reference to what has been said about it than to itself.

*Euphues* (properly divided into two parts, "Euphues, the Anatomy of Wit," and "Euphues and his England," the scene of the first lying in Naples) is a kind of love story; the action, however, being next to nothing, and subordinated to an infinite amount of moral and courtly discourse. Oddly enough, the unfavourable sentence of Hallam, that it is "a very dull story," and the favourable sentence of Kingsley, that it is "a brave, righteous, and pious book," are both quite true, and, indeed, any one can see that there is nothing incompatible in them. At the present day, however, its substance, which chiefly consists of the moral discourses aforesaid, is infinitely inferior in interest to its manner. Of that manner, any one who imagines it to be reproduced by Sir Piercie Shafton's extravagances in *The Monastery* has an entirely false idea. It is much odder than Shaftonese, but also quite different from it. Lyly's two secrets are in the first place an antithesis, more laboured, more monotonous, and infinitely more pointless than Macaulay's – which antithesis seems to have met with not a little favour, and was indeed an obvious expedient for lightening up and giving character to the correct but featureless prose of Ascham and other "Latiners." The second was a fancy, which amounts to a mania, for similes, strung together in endless lists, and derived as a rule from animals, vegetables, or minerals, especially from the Fauna and Flora of fancy. It is impossible to open a page of *Euphues* without finding an example of this eccentric and tasteless trick, and in it, as far as in any single thing, must be found the recipe for euphuism, pure and simple. As used in modern language for conceited and precious language in general, the term has only a very partial application to its original, or to that original's author. Indeed Lyly's vocabulary, except occasionally in his similes, is decidedly vernacular, and he very commonly mingles extremely homely words with his highest flights. No better specimen of him can be given than from the aforesaid letter commendatory to the *Hecatompithia*.

"My good friend, I have read your new passions, and they have renewed mine old pleasures, the which brought to me no less delight than they have done to your self-commendations. And certes had not one of mine eyes about serious affairs been watchful, both by being too busy, had been wanton: such is the nature of persuading pleasure, that it melteth the marrow before it scorch the skin and burneth before it warmeth. Not unlike unto the oil of jet, which rotteth the bone and never rankleth the flesh, or the scarab flies which enter into the root and never touch the fruit.

"And whereas you desire to have my opinion, you may imagine that my stomach is rather cloyed than queasy, and therefore mine appetite of less force than my affection, fearing rather a surfeit of sweetness than desiring a satisfying. The repeating of love wrought in me a semblance of liking; but searching the very veins of my heart I could find nothing but a broad scar where I left a deep wound: and loose strings where I tied hard knots: and a table of steel where I framed a plot of wax.

"Whereby I noted that young swans are grey, and the old white, young trees tender and the old tough, young men amorous, and, growing in years, either wiser or warier. The coral plant in the water is a soft weed, on the land a hard stone: a sword frieth in the fire like a black eel; but laid in earth like white snow: the heart in love is altogether passionate; but free from desire altogether careless.

"But it is not my intent to inveigh against love, which women account but a bare word and men reverence as the best God. Only this I would add without offence to gentlewomen, that were not men more superstitious in their praises than women are constant in their passions love would either be worn out of use, or men out of love, or women out of lightness. I can condemn none but by conjecture, nor commend any but by lying, yet suspicion is as free as thought, and as far as I can see as necessary as credulity.

"Touching your mistress I must needs think well, seeing you have written so well, but as false glasses shew the fairest faces so fine gloses amend the baddest fancies. Appelles painted the phoenix by hearsay not by sight, and Lysippus engraved Vulcan with a straight leg whom nature framed with a poult foot, which proveth men to be of greater affection their [then? = than] judgment. But in that so aptly you have varied upon women I will not vary from you, so confess I must, and if I should not, yet mought I be compelled, that to love would be the sweetest thing in the earth if women were the faithfulest, and that women would be more constant if men were more wise.

"And seeing you have used me so friendly as to make me acquainted with your passions, I will shortly make you privy to mine which I would be loth the printer should see, for that my fancies being never so crooked he would put them into straight lines unfit for my humour, necessary for his art, who setteth down blind in as many letters as seeing.<sup>15</sup> – Farewell."

Many efforts have been made to discover some model for Lyly's oddities. Spanish and Italian influences have been alleged, and there is a special theory that Lord Berners's translations have the credit or discredit of the paternity. The curious similes are certainly found very early in Spanish, and may be due to an Eastern origin. The habit of overloading the sentence with elaborate and far-fetched language, especially with similes, may also have come from the French *rhétoriciens* already mentioned – a school of pedantic writers (Chastellain, Robertet, Créatin, and some others being the chief) who flourished during the last half of the fifteenth century and the first quarter of the sixteenth, while the latest examples of them were hardly dead when Lyly was born. The desire, very laudably felt all over Europe, to adorn and exalt the vernacular tongues, so as to make them vehicles of literature worthy of taking rank with Latin and Greek, naturally led to these follies, of which euphuism in its proper sense was only one.

Michael Drayton, in some verse complimentary to Sidney, stigmatises not much too strongly Lyly's prevailing faults, and attributes to the hero of Zutphen the purification of England from euphuism. This is hardly critical. That Sidney – a young man, and a man of fashion at the time when Lyly's oddities were fashionable – should have to a great extent (for his resistance is by no means absolute) resisted the temptation to imitate them, is very creditable. But the influence of *Euphues* was at least as strong for many years as the influence of the *Arcadia* and the *Apology*; and the chief thing that can be said for Sidney is that he did not wholly follow Lyly to do evil. Nor is his positive excellence in prose to be compared for a moment with his positive excellence in poetry. His life is so universally known that nothing need be said about it beyond reminding the reader that he was born, as Lyly is supposed to have been, in 1554; that he was the son of Sir Henry Sidney, afterwards Viceroy of Ireland, and of Lady Mary, eldest daughter of the luckless Dudley, Duke of Northumberland; that he was educated at Shrewsbury and Christ Church, travelled much, acquiring the repute of one of the most accomplished cavaliers of Europe, loved without success Penelope Devereux ("Stella"), married Frances Walsingham, and died of his wounds at the battle of Zutphen, when he was not yet thirty-two years old. His prose works are the famous pastoral romance of the *Arcadia*, written to please his sister, the Countess of Pembroke, and the short *Apology for Poetry*, a very spirited piece of work, immediately provoked by a rather silly diatribe against the theatre by one Stephen Gosson, once a playwright himself, but turned Puritan clergyman. Both appear to have been written about the same time – that is to say, between 1579 and 1581; Sidney being then in London and in the society of Spenser and other men of letters.

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<sup>15</sup> "Blinde" with the *e* according to the old spelling having six letters, the same number as seeing. This curious epistle is both in style and matter an epitome of *Euphues*, which had appeared some three years before.

The amiability of Sidney's character, his romantic history, the exquisite charm of his verse at its best, and last, not least, the fact of his enthusiastic appreciation and patronage of literature at a time when literary men never failed to give aristocratic patrons somewhat more than *quid pro quo*, have perhaps caused his prose work to be traditionally a little overvalued. The *Apology for Poetry* is full of generous ardour, contains many striking and poetical expressions, and explains more than any other single book the secret of the wonderful literary production of the half-century which followed. The *Arcadia*, especially when contrasted with *Euphues*, has the great merit of abundant and stirring incident and interest, of freedom from any single affectation so pestering and continuous as Lyly's similes, and of constant purple patches of poetical description and expression, which are indeed not a little out of place in prose, but which are undeniably beautiful in themselves. But when this is said all is said. Enthusiastic as Sidney's love for poetry and for literature was, it was enthusiasm not at all according to knowledge. In the *Apology*, by his vindication of the Unities, and his denunciation of the mixture of tragedy and comedy, he was (of course without knowing it) laying down exactly the two principles, a fortunate abjuration and scouting whereof gave us the greatest possession in mass and variety of merit that any literature possesses – the Elizabethan drama from Shakespeare and Marlowe to Ford and Shirley. Follow Sidney, and good-bye to *Faustus*, to *Hamlet*, to *Philaster*, to *The Duchess of Malfi*, to *The Changeling*, to *The Virgin Martyr*, to *The Broken Heart*. We must content ourselves with *Gorboduc* and *Cornelia*, with *Cleopatra* and *Philotas*, at the very best with *Sejanus* and *The Silent Woman*. Again Sidney commits himself in this same piece to the pestilent heresy of prose-poetry, saying that verse is "only an ornament of poetry;" nor is there any doubt that Milton, whether he meant it or not, fixed a deserved stigma on the *Arcadia* by calling it a "vain and amatorious poem." It is a poem in prose, which is as much as to say, in other words, that it unites the faults of both kinds. Nor is Sidney less an enemy (though a "sweet enemy" in his own or Bruno's words) of the minor and more formal graces of style. If his actual vocabulary is not Latinised, or Italianised, or Lylyfied, he was one of the greatest of sinners in the special Elizabethan sin of convoluting and entangling his phrases (after the fashion best known in the mouths of Shakespeare's fine gentlemen), so as to say the simplest thing in the least simple manner. Not Osric nor Iachimo detests the *mot propre* more than Sidney. Yet again, he is one of the arch offenders in the matter of spoiling the syntax of the sentence and the paragraph. As has been observed already, the unpretending writers noticed above, if they have little harmony or balance of phrase, are seldom confused or breathless. Sidney was one of the first writers of great popularity and influence (for the *Arcadia* was very widely read) to introduce what may be called the sentence-and-paragraph-heap, in which clause is linked on to clause till not merely the grammatical but the philosophical integer is hopelessly lost sight of in a tangle of jointings and appendices. It is not that he could not do better; but that he seems to have taken no trouble not to do worse. His youth, his numerous avocations, and the certainty that he never formally prepared any of his work for the press, would of course be ample excuses, even if the singular and seductive beauty of many scraps throughout this work did not redeem it. But neither of the radical difference in nature and purpose between prose and verse, nor of the due discipline and management of prose itself, does Sidney seem to have had the slightest idea. Although he seldom or never reaches the beauties of the *flamboyant* period of prose, which began soon after his death and filled the middle of the seventeenth century, he contains examples of almost all its defects; and considering that he is nearly the first writer to do this, and that his writings were (and were deservedly) the favourite study of generous literary youth for more than a generation, it is scarcely uncharitable to hold him directly responsible for much mischief. The faults of *Euphues* were faults which were certain to work their own cure; those of the *Arcadia* were so engaging in themselves, and linked with so many merits and beauties, that they were sure to set a dangerous example. I believe, indeed, that if Sidney had lived he might have pruned his style not a little without weakening it, and then the richness of his imagination would probably have made him the equal of Bacon and the superior of Raleigh. But as it is, his light in English prose (we shall speak and speak very differently of his verse hereafter) was only too often

a will-o'-the-wisp. I am aware that critics whom I respect have thought and spoken in an opposite sense, but the difference comes from a more important and radical difference of opinion as to the nature, functions, and limitations of English prose. Sidney's style may be perhaps best illustrated by part of his Dedication; the narrative parts of the *Arcadia* not lending themselves well to brief excerpt, while the *Apology* is less remarkable for style than for matter.

### **To my dear Lady and Sister, the Countess of Pembroke**

"Here have you now, most dear, and most worthy to be most dear, lady, this idle work of mine; which, I fear, like the spider's web, will be thought fitter to be swept away than wove to any other purpose. For my part, in very truth, as the cruel fathers among the Greeks were wont to do to the babes they would not foster, I could well find in my heart to cast out in some desert of forgetfulness this child which I am loth to father. But you desired me to do it, and your desire to my heart is an absolute commandment. Now it is done only for you, only to you; if you keep it to yourself, or commend it to such friends who will weigh errors in the balance of good will, I hope, for the father's sake, it will be pardoned, perchance made much of, though in itself it have deformities. For indeed for severer eyes it is not, being but a trifle, and that triflingly handled. Your dear self can best witness the manner, being done in loose sheets of paper, most of it in your presence, the rest by sheets sent unto you as fast as they were done. In sum, a young head, not so well stayed as I would it were, and shall be when God will, having many fancies begotten in it, if it had not been in some way delivered, would have grown a monster, and more sorry might I be that they came in than that they gat out. But his<sup>16</sup> chief safety shall be the walking abroad; and his chief protection the bearing the livery of your name, which, if much good will do not deceive me, is worthy to be a sanctuary for a greater offender. This say I because I know thy virtue so; and this say I because it may be for ever so, or, to say better, because it will be for ever so."

The difference referred to above is again well exemplified by the difference of opinions on the style of Hooker as compared with that of Sidney. Hooker wrote considerably later than the other authors here criticised, but his work is so distinctly the climax of the style started by Ascham, Cheke, and their fellows (the style in which English was carefully adapted to literary purposes for which Latin had been previously employed, under the general idea that Latin syntax should, on the whole, rule the new literary medium), that this chapter would be incomplete without a notice of him. For the distinguished writers who were contemporary with his later years represent, with rare and only partly distinguished exceptions, not a development of Hooker, but either a development of Sidney or a fresh style, resulting from the blending in different proportions of the academic and classical manner with the romantic and discursive.

The events of Hooker's neither long nor eventful life are well-known from one of the earliest of standard biographies in English – that of Izaak Walton. He was born at Heavitree, a suburb of Exeter, in 1554(?). Though he was fairly connected, his parents were poor, and he was educated as a Bible clerk at Corpus Christi College, Oxford. He entered here in 1567, and for some fifteen years Oxford was his home, latterly as Fellow and Lecturer of Corpus. The story of his marriage is slightly pathetic, but more than slightly ludicrous, and he appears to have been greatly henpecked as well as obliged to lead an uncongenial life at a country living. In 1585 he was made Master of the Temple, and held that post for seven years, distinguishing himself both as a preacher and a controversialist. But neither was

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<sup>16</sup> Apparently = the book's.

this his vocation; and the last nine years of his life were spent, it would seem more congenially, in two other country livings, first in Wiltshire, then in Kent. He died in 1600. The first four books of the *Ecclesiastical Polity* were published in 1594, the fifth in 1597. The last three books, published after his death, lie under grave suspicion of having been tampered with. This, however, as the unquestionably genuine portion is considerable in bulk, is a matter rather of historical and theological than of purely literary interest. Hooker himself appears to have been something like the popular ideal of a student: never so happy as when pen in hand, and by no means fitted for the rougher kind of converse with his fellow-men, still less for the life of what is commonly called a man of the world.

But in the world of literature he is a very great man indeed. Very few theological books have made themselves a place in the first rank of the literature of their country, and if the *Ecclesiastical Polity* has done so, it has certainly not done so without cause. If there has been a certain tendency on the part of strong partisans of the Anglican Church to overestimate the literary and philosophical merit of this book, which may be called the first vernacular defence of the position of the English Church, that has been at least compensated by partisan criticism on the other side. Nor is there the least fear that the judgment of impartial critics will ever deprive Hooker of the high rank generally accorded to him. He is, of course, far from being faultless. In his longer sentences (though long sentences are by no means the rule with him) he often falls into that abuse of the classical style which the comparatively jejune writers who had preceded him avoided, but which constantly manifested itself in the richer manner of his own contemporaries – the abuse of treating the uninflected English language as if it were an inflected language, in which variations and distinctions of case and gender and number help to connect adjective with substantive, and relative with antecedent. Sometimes, though less often, he distorts the natural order of the English in order to secure the Latin desideratum of finishing with the most emphatic and important words of the clause. His subject leads and almost forces him to an occasional pedantry of vocabulary, and in the region which is not quite that of form nor quite that of matter, he sometimes fails in co-ordinating his arguments, his facts, and his citations, and in directing the whole with crushing force at his enemy. His argument occasionally degenerates into mere illustration; his logic into mere rhetoric.

But when all these things are admitted, the *Ecclesiastical Polity* remains a book in which matter and manner are wedded as in few other books of the same kind. The one characteristic which has been admitted by Hooker's faintest praisers as well as by his warmest – the golden moderation and judiciousness of his argument – is perhaps rather calculated to extort esteem than to arouse admiration. Moderation, like other kinds of probity, *laudatur et alget*: the adversary is not extremely grateful for not being pushed to extremity, and those on the same side would at least excuse a little more vehemence in driving advantages home. But Hooker has other qualities which are equally estimable and more shining. What especially distinguishes him from the literary point of view is his almost unique faculty of diversifying dry and technical argument with outbursts of rhetoric. These last are not mere purple patches; they do not come in with the somewhat ostentatious usherment and harbingery which, for instance, laid the even more splendid bursts of Jeremy Taylor open to the sharp sarcasm of South. There is nothing theatrical about them; they rise quite naturally out of the level of discussion and sink into it again, with no sudden stumble or drop. Nor are they ever (like some of Sidney's poetical excrescences) tags and hemistichs of unwritten sonnets or songs stuck in anyhow upon the prose. For instance, Sidney writes: "About the time when the candles had begun to inherit the sun's office." Now this in a somewhat quaint and conceited fashion of verse would be excellent. It would also be excellent in burlesque, and in such prose as Browne's it might conquer its place victoriously. But except in such a context (which Sidney cannot weave) it is a *rococo* ornament, a tawdry beautification. Compare with it any of the celebrated passages of Hooker, which may be found in the extract books – the encomium on law, the admirable passage, not so admirable indeed in the context as it might be but still admirable, about angels, the vindication of music in the church service. Here the expression, even at its warmest, is in no sense poetical, and the flight, as it is called,

connects itself with and continues and drops into the ordinary march of argument in the most natural and imperceptible manner. The elevated passages of Hooker's style resemble more than anything else those convenient exploits common, probably, in most persons' dreams, in which the dreamer, without any trouble to himself or any apparent surprise in those about him, lifts himself from the ground and skims or soars as he pleases, sure that he can return to earth also when he pleases, and without any shock. The speculators on the causes of beauty, admiration, and the like have sometimes sought them in contrast first of all, and it has been frequently noticed that the poets who charm us most are those who know how to alternate pity and terror. There is something of the same sort in these variations of the equable procession of Hooker's syllogisms, these flower-gardens scattered, if not in the wilderness, yet in the humdrum arable ground of his collections from fathers and philosophers, his marshallings of facts and theories against the counter-theories of Cartwright and Travers. Neither before him nor in his time, nor for generations after him – scarcely, indeed, till Berkeley – did any one arise who had this profound and unpretentious art of mixing the useful with the agreeable. Taylor – already mentioned as inferior to Hooker in one respect, however superior he may be in the splendour of his rhetoric – is again and still more inferior to him in the parts that are not ornamental, in the pedestrian body of his controversy and exposition. As a mere controversialist, Hooker, if not exactly a Hobbes or a Bentley, if not even a Chillingworth, is not likely to be spoken of without respect by those who understand what evidence means. If he sometimes seems to modern readers to assume his premisses, the conclusions follow much more rigidly than is customary with a good many of our later philosophers, who protest against the assumption of premisses; but having so protested neglect the ambiguity of terms, and leave their middles undistributed, and perpetrate illicit process with a gaiety of heart which is extremely edifying, or who fancy that they are building systems of philosophy when they are in reality constructing dictionaries of terms. But his argument is of less concern to us here than the style in which he clothes it, and the merit of that is indisputable, as a brief extract will show.

"As therefore man doth consist of different and distinct parts, every part endued with manifold abilities which all have their several ends and actions thereunto referred; so there is in this great variety of duties which belong to men that dependency and order by means whereof, the lower sustaining always the more excellent and the higher perfecting the more base, they are in their times and seasons continued with most exquisite correspondence. Labours of bodily and daily toil purchase freedom for actions of religious joy, which benefit these actions requite with the gift of desired rest – a thing most natural and fit to accompany the solemn festival duties of honour which are done to God. For if those principal works of God, the memory whereof we use to celebrate at such times, be but certain tastes and says,<sup>17</sup> as it were, of that final benefit wherein our perfect felicity and bliss lieth folded up, seeing that the presence of the one doth direct our cogitations, thoughts, and desires towards the other, it giveth surely a kind of life and addeth inwardly no small delight to those so comfortable anticipations, especially when the very outward countenance of that we presently do representeth, after a sort, that also whereunto we tend. As festival rest doth that celestial estate whereof the very heathens themselves, which had not the means whereby to apprehend much, did notwithstanding imagine that it must needs consist in rest, and have therefore taught that above the highest movable sphere there is no thing which feeleth alteration, motion, or change; but all things immutable, unsubject to passion, blest with eternal continuance in a life of the highest perfection, and of that complete abundant sufficiency within itself which no possibility of want, maim, or defect, can touch."

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<sup>17</sup> "Assays."

Hooker's defects have been already admitted, and it has to be added to them that he was necessarily destitute of much useful vocabulary which his successors inherited or added, and that he had absolutely no model of style. What he lacked was the audacity to be, not like Sidney more flowery, not like the contemporary pamphleteers more slangy, but more intelligently vernacular; to follow in the mould of his sentences the natural order of English speech rather than the conventional syntax of Latin, and to elaborate for himself a clause-architecture or order, so to speak, of word-building, which should depend upon the inherent qualities of euphony and rhythm possessed by English. It is, however, quite certain that nothing was further from Hooker's thoughts than the composition of English literature merely as English literature. He wanted to bring a certain subject under the notice of readers of the vulgar tongue, and being before all things a scholar he could not help making a scholarly use of that tongue. The wonder is that, in his circumstances and with his purposes, with hardly any teachers, with not a great stock of verbal material, and with little or no tradition of workmanship in the art, he should have turned out such admirable work.

It would be interesting to dwell on the prose of Fulke Greville, Sidney's friend, who long outlived him, and who anticipated not a little of that magnificence of the prose of his later contemporaries, beside which I have ventured to suggest that Sidney's own is sometimes but *rococo*. A place ought to be given to Richard Knolles, who deserves, if not the name of the first historian of England, certainly the credit of making, in his *History of the Turks* (1604), a step from the loose miscellany of the chronicle to the ordered structure of the true historic style. Some would plead for Richard Mulcaster, whose work on education and especially on the teaching of the English tongue in his *Positions* and *First Part of the Elementary* (1582) is most intimately connected with our general subject. But there is no room for more than a mention of these, or for further dwelling on the translators already glanced at and others, the most important and influential of whom was John Florio, the Englisher (1603) of Montaigne.

## CHAPTER III

### THE FIRST DRAMATIC PERIOD

It does not belong to the plan of this division of the present book to trace the earliest beginnings of the English theatre, or those intermediate performances by which, in the reigns of the four first Tudors, the Mystery and Morality passed into the Interlude. Even the two famous comedies of *Ralph Roister Doister* and *Gammer Gurton's Needle* stand as it were only at the threshold of our period in this chapter, and everything before them is shut out of it. On the other hand, we can take to be our province the whole rise, flourishing, and decadence of the extraordinary product, known somewhat loosely as the Elizabethan drama. We shall in the present chapter discuss the two comedies or rather farces just mentioned, and notice on the one hand the rather amorphous production which, during the first thirty years of Elizabeth, represented the influence of a growing taste for personal and lively dramatic story on the somewhat arid soil of the Morality and Interlude, and, on the other, the abortive attempt to introduce the regular Senecan tragedy – an attempt which almost immediately broke down and disappeared, whelmed in the abundance of chronicle-play and melodrama. And finally we shall show how the two rival schools of the university wits and the actor playwrights culminated, the first in Marlowe, the second in the earlier and but indistinctly and conjecturally known work of Shakespere. A second chapter will show us the triumph of the untrammelled English play in tragedy and comedy, furnished by Marlowe with the mighty line, but freed to a great extent from the bombast and the unreal scheme which he did not shake off. Side by side with Shakespere himself we shall have to deal with the learned sock of Jonson, the proud full style of Chapman, the unchastened and ill-directed vigour of Marston, the fresh and charming, if unkempt grace of Dekker, the best known and most remarkable members of a crowd of unknown or half-known playwrights. A third division will show us a slight gain on the whole in acting qualities, a considerable perfecting of form and scheme, but at the same time a certain decline in the most purely poetical merits, redeemed and illustrated by the abundant genius of Beaumont and Fletcher, of Middleton, of Webster, of Massinger, and of Ford. And the two latest of these will conduct us into the fourth or period of decadence where, round the voluminous work and still respectable fame of James Shirley, are grouped names like Brome, Glapthorne, Suckling, and others, whose writing, sometimes remarkable and even brilliant, gradually loses not only dramatic but poetical merit, till it drops into the formless plots, the unscannable verse, the coarseness unredeemed by passion, the horrors unlit by any tragic force, which distinguish the last plays before the closing of the theatres, and reappear to some extent at a period beyond ours in the drama (soon to be radically changed in almost every possible characteristic) of the Restoration. The field of survey is vast, and despite the abundant labour which has been bestowed upon it during the nineteenth century, it is still in a somewhat chaotic condition. The remarkable collection of old plays which we owe to Mr. A. H. Bullen shows, by sample only and with no pretence of being exhaustive, the amount of absolutely unknown matter which still exists. The collection and editing of texts has proceeded on the most widely different principles, and with an almost complete absence of that intelligent partition of labour which alone can reduce chaos to order in such a case. To give but one instance, there is actually no complete collection, though various attempts have been made at it, which gives, with or without sufficient editorial apparatus to supplement the canon, all the dramatic *adespota* which have been at one time or another attributed to Shakespere. These at present the painful scholar can only get together in publications abounding in duplicates, edited on the most opposite principles, and equally troublesome either for library arrangement or for literary reference. The editions of single authors have exhibited an equal absence of method; one editor admitting doubtful plays or plays of part-authorship which are easily accessible elsewhere, while another excludes those which are difficult to be got at anywhere. It is impossible for any one who reads literature as literature and not as a matter

of idle crotchet, not to reflect that if either of the societies which, during the nineteenth century, have devoted themselves to the study of Shakespere and his contemporaries, had chosen to employ their funds on it, a complete Corpus of the drama between 1560 and 1660, edited with sufficient, but not superfluous critical apparatus on a uniform plan, and in a decent if not a luxurious form, might now be obtainable. Some forty or fifty volumes at the outside on the scale of the "Globe" series, or of Messrs. Chatto's useful reprints of Jonson, Chapman, and other dramatists, would probably contain every play of the slightest interest, even to a voracious student – who would then have all his material under his hand. What time, expense, and trouble are required to obtain, and that very imperfectly, any such advantage now, only those who have tried to do it know. Even Mr. Hazlitt's welcome, if somewhat uncritical, reprint of Dodsley, long out of print, did not boldly carry out its principle – though there are plans for improving and supplementing it.

Nevertheless, if the difficulties are great so are the rewards. It has been the deliberate opinion of many competent judges (neither unduly prejudiced in favour of English literature nor touched with that ignorance of other literature which is as fatal to judgment as actual prejudice) that in no time or country has the literary interest of a short and definite period of production in one well-defined kind approached in value the interest of the Elizabethan drama. Other periods and other countries may produce more remarkable work of different kinds, or more uniformly accomplished, and more technically excellent work in the same kind. But for originality, volume, generic resemblance of character, and individual independence of trait, exuberance of inventive thought, and splendour of execution in detached passages – the Elizabethan drama from Sackville to Shirley stands alone in the history of the world. The absurd overestimate which has sometimes been made of its individual practitioners, the hyperbole of the language which has been used to describe them, the puerile and almost inconceivable folly of some of their scholiasts and parasitic students, find a certain excuse in this truth – a truth which will only be contested by those who have not taken the very considerable trouble necessary to master the facts, or who are precluded by a natural inability from savouring the *goût du terroir* of this abundant and intoxicating wine. There are those who say that nobody but an enthusiast or a self-deceiver can read with real relish any Elizabethan dramatist but Shakespere, and there are those who would have it that the incommunicable and uncommunicated charm of Shakespere is to be found in Nabbes and Davenport, in Glapthorne and Chettle. They are equally wrong, but the second class are at any rate in a more saving way of wrongness. Where Shakespere stands alone is not so much in his actual faculty of poetry as in his command of that faculty. Of the others, some, like Jonson, Fletcher, Massinger, had the art without the power; others, like Chapman, Dekker, Webster, had flashes of the power without the art. But there is something in the whole crew, jovial or saturnine, which is found nowhere else, and which, whether in full splendour as in Shakespere, or in occasional glimmers as in Tourneur or Rowley, is found in all, save those mere imitators and hangers-on who are peculiar to no period.

This remarkable quality, however, does not show itself in the dramatic work of our present period until quite the close of it. It is true that the period opens (according to the traditional estimate which has not been much altered by recent studies) with three plays of very considerable character, and of no inconsiderable merit – the two comedies already named and the tragedy of *Gorboduc*, otherwise *Ferrex and Porrex*. *Ralph Roister Doister* was licensed and is thought to have been printed in 1566, but it may have been acted at Eton by 1541, and the whole cast of the metre, language, and *scenario*, is of a colour older than Elizabeth's reign. It may be at least attributed to the middle of the century, and is the work of Nicholas Udall, a schoolmaster who has left at two great schools a repute for indulgence in the older methods of instruction not inferior to Busby's or Keate's. *Ralph Roister Doister*, though a fanciful estimate may see a little cruelty of another kind in it, is of no austere or pedagogic character. The author has borrowed not a little from the classical comedy – Plautine or even Aristophanic rather than Terentian – to strengthen and refine the domestic interlude or farce; and the result is certainly amusing enough. The plot turns on the courtship of Dame Christian Custance

[Constance], a widow of repute and wealth as well as beauty, by the gull and coxcomb, *Ralph Roister Doister*, whose suit is at once egged on and privately crossed by the mischievous Matthew Merrygreek, who plays not only parasite but rook to the hero. Although Custance has not the slightest intention of accepting Ralph, and at last resorts to actual violence, assisted by her maids, to get rid of him and his followers, the affair nearly breeds a serious quarrel between herself and her plighted lover, Gawin Goodluck; but all ends merrily. The metre is the somewhat unformed doggerel couplet of twelve syllables or thereabouts, with a strong cæsura in the middle, and is varied and terminated by songs from Custance's maids and others. Indeed the chief charm of the piece is the genuine and unforced merriment which pervades it. Although Merrygreek's practices on Ralph's silliness sometimes tend a little to tediousness, the action on the whole moves trippingly enough, and despite the strong flavour of the "stock part" in the characters they have considerable individuality. The play is, moreover, as a whole remarkably free from coarseness, and there is no difficulty in finding an illustrative extract.

*C. Custance loquitur.*

"O Lord! how necessary it is now o' days,  
That each body live uprightly all manner ways;  
For let never so little a gap be open,  
And be sure of this, the worst shall be spoken.  
How innocent stand I in this frame o' thought,  
And yet see what mistrust towards me it hath wrought.  
But thou, Lord, knowest all folks' thoughts and eke intents;  
And thou art the deliverer of all innocents.  
Thou didst keep the advoutress,<sup>18</sup> that she might be amended;  
Much more then keep, Lord,<sup>19</sup> that never sin intended.  
Thou didst keep Susanna, wrongfully accused,  
And no less dost thou see, Lord, how I am now abused.  
Thou didst keep Hester, when she should have died,  
Keep also, good Lord, that my truth may be tried.  
Yet, if Gawin Goodluck with Tristram Trusty speak,  
I trust of ill-report the force shall be but weak;  
And lo! yond they come talking sadly together:  
I will abide, and not shrink for their coming hither."

Freedom from coarseness is more than can be predicated of the still more famous *Gammer Gurton's Needle*, attributed to, and all but certainly known to be, by John Still, afterwards bishop. The authorship, indeed, is not quite certain; and the curious reference in Martin Marprelate's *Epistle* (ed. Arber, p. 11) to "this trifle" as "shewing the author to have had some wit and invention in him" only disputes the claim of Dr. Bridges to those qualities, and does not make any suggestion as to the identity of the more favoured author. Still was the son of a Lincolnshire gentleman, is supposed to have been born about 1543, was educated at Christ's College, Cambridge, and after a course of preferment through the positions of parish priest in London and at Hadleigh, Dean of Bocking, Canon of Westminster, Master successively of St. John's and Trinity, and Vice-Chancellor of his own University, was at the beginning of 1593 made Bishop of Bath and Wells, an office which he held for fifteen years. His play (taking it as his) was his only work of the kind, and was the first English play acted at either university, though later he himself had to protest officially against the use of the

<sup>18</sup> Adulteress.

<sup>19</sup> Understand "me."

vernacular in a piece performed before the Queen. *Gammer Gurton's Needle*, as has been said, is, despite the subsequent history of its author and the academic character of its appearance, of a much lower order of comedy than *Ralph Roister Doister*, though it is also more spontaneous, less imitative, and, in short, more original. The best thing about it is the magnificent drinking song, "Back and Side go Bare, go Bare," one of the most spirited and genuine of all bacchanalian lyrics; but the credit of this has sometimes been denied to Still. The metre of the play itself is very similar to that of *Ralph Roister Doister*, though the long swinging couplet has a tendency to lengthen itself still further, to the value of fourteen or even sixteen syllables, the central cæsura being always well marked, as may be seen in the following: —

*Diccon*. "Here will the sport begin, if these two once may meet,  
Their cheer, [I] durst lay money, will prove scarcely sweet.  
My gammer sure intends to be upon her bones,  
With staves, or with clubs, or else with coble stones.  
Dame Chat on the other side, if she be far behind,  
I am right far deceived, she is given to it of kind.  
He that may tarry by it a while, and that but short,  
I warrant him trust to it, he shall see all the sport.  
Into the town will I, my friends to visit there,  
And hither straight again to see the end of this gear.  
In the meantime, fellows, pipe up your fiddles; I say, take them,  
And let your friends hear such mirth as ye can make them."

As for the story, it is of the simplest, turning merely on the losing of her needle by Gammer Gurton as she was mending her man Hodge's breeches, on the search for it by the household, on the tricks by which Diccon the Bedlam (the clown or "vice" of the piece) induces a quarrel between Gammer and her neighbours, and on the final finding of the needle in the exact place on which Gammer Gurton's industry had been employed. The action is even better sustained and livelier than in Udall's play, and the swinging couplets canter along very cheerfully with great freedom and fluency of language. Unfortunately this language, whether in order to raise a laugh or to be in strict character with the personages, is anything but choice. There is (barring a possible double meaning or two) nothing of the kind generally known as licentious; it is the merely foul and dirty language of common folk at all times, introduced, not with humorous extravagance in the Rabelaisian fashion, but with literal realism. If there had been a little less of this, the piece would have been much improved; but even as it is, it is a capital example of farce, just as *Ralph Roister Doister* is of a rather rudimentary kind of regular comedy.

The strangeness of the contrast which these two plays offer when compared with the third is peculiar in English literature. Elsewhere it is common enough. That tragedy should be stately, decorous, and on the whole somewhat uneventful as far as visible action goes, – comedy bustling, crammed with incident, and quite regardless of decorum, – might seem a law of nature to the audience of Æschylus and Aristophanes, of Plautus and Pacuvius, even to the audience of Molière and Racine. But the vast and final change, the inception of which we have here to record, has made tragedy, tragi-comedy, comedy, and farce pass into one another so gradually, and with so little of a break in the English mind, that *Gammer Gurton's Needle* and *Gorboduc*, though they were presented to the same audiences, and in all probability written within ten years of each other at furthest, seem to belong to different worlds of literature and society. The two comedies just noticed are framed upon no literary model at all as wholes, but simply upon the model of human nature. *Gorboduc* is framed, though not with absolute fidelity, on the model of the tragedies of Seneca, which had, during the early years of the sixteenth century, mastered the attention of the literary playwrights of Italy, France,

and even to some extent Germany, and which determined for three hundred years, at any rate, the form of the tragedy of France. This model – which may be briefly described as the model of Greek tragedy, still further pruned of action, with the choruses retained, but estranged from their old close connection with the dialogue, and reduced to the level of elaborate lyrical moralisings, and with the tendency to such moralising in dialogue as well as in chorus largely increased – was introduced in England with hardly less advantage than abroad. Sackville, one of the reputed authors of *Gorboduc*, was far superior to Jodelle, both as poet and as versifier, and the existence of the two universities in England gave a support, to which nothing in France corresponded, to the influence of learned writers. Indeed, till nearly the close of our present period, the universities had the practical control of literary production. But the genius of the English nation would have none of Seneca. It refused him when he was first introduced by Sackville and others; it refused him once more when Daniel and the set of the Countess of Pembroke again attempted to introduce him; it refused him again and again in the later seventeenth century, when imitation, first of his earlier French followers, and then of the greater tragedy of Corneille and Racine (which was only the Senecan model strengthened and improved) was repeatedly tried by fine gentlemen and by needy hacks, by devotees of the unities, and by devotees of court fashion. I hardly know any other instance in literary history of a similar resistance offered to a similar tide of literary influence in Europe. We have little room here for fanciful comparisons, yet might the dramatic events of 1560-1590 in England well seem a literary battle of Tours, in which an English Charles Martel stemmed and turned back for ever and ever the hitherto resistless march of a literary invader and spread of a literary heresy.

To the modern reader *Gorboduc* (part of which is attributed to Thomas Norton, and which was acted on 18th January 1561, published piratically in 1565, and authoritatively under the title of *Ferrex and Porrex* in 1571?) is scarcely inviting, but that is not a criterion of its attractiveness to its own contemporaries. Perhaps the most curious thing about it is the violence done to the Horatian and Senecan theories, or rather the *naïf* outwitting of those theories, by an arrangement of dumb shows between the acts to satisfy the hunger for real action which the model refused to countenance. All the rest is of the most painful regularity: and the scrupulosity with which each of the rival princes is provided with a counsellor and a parasite to himself, and the other parts are allotted with similar fairness, reaches such a point that it is rather surprising that *Gorboduc* was not provided with two queens – a good and a bad. Such action as there is lies wholly in the mouths of messengers, and the speeches are of excessive length. But even these faults are perhaps less trying to the modern reader than the inchoate and unpolished condition of the metre in the choruses, and indeed in the blank verse dialogue. Here and there, there are signs of the stateliness and poetical imagery of the "Induction"; but for the most part the decasyllables stop dead at their close and begin afresh at their beginning with a staccato movement and a dull monotony of cadence which is inexpressibly tedious, as will be seen in the following: —

(*Videna soliloquises.*)

"Why should I live and linger forth my time  
 In longer life to double my distress?  
 O me, most woeful wight, whom no mishap  
 Long ere this day could have bereaved hence.  
 Might not these hands, by fortune or by fate,  
 Have pierc'd this breast, and life with iron reft?  
 Or in this palace here where I so long  
 Have spent my days, could not that happy hour  
 Once, once have happ'd in which these hugy frames  
 With death by fall might have oppressed me?"

Or should not this most hard and cruel soil,  
So oft where I have press'd my wretched steps,  
Some time had ruth of mine accursed life,  
To rend in twain and swallow me therein?  
So had my bones possessed now in peace  
Their happy grave within the closed ground,  
And greedy worms had gnawn this pined heart  
Without my feeling pain: so should not now  
This living breast remain the ruthless tomb  
Wherein my heart yielded to death is graved;  
Nor dreary thoughts, with pangs of pining grief,  
My doleful mind had not afflicted thus."

There is no blame due to Sackville in that he did not invent what no single man invented, and what even in England, where only it has been originally attained, took some thirty years of the genius of the nation working through innumerable individual tentatives and failures to bring about. But he did not invent it; he did not even make any attempt to invent it; and had this first English tragedy been generally followed, we should have been for an unknown period in the land of bondage, in the classical dungeon which so long retained the writers of a nation, certainly not, at the time of the appearance of *Gorboduc*, of less literary promise than our own.

In describing these tentatives and failures it will be impossible here to enter into any lengthened criticism of particular works. We shall have to content ourselves with a description of the general lines and groups, which may be said to be four in number: (1) The few unimportant and failing followers of Sackville; (2) The miscellaneous farce-and-interlude-writers, who, incult and formless as their work was, at least maintained the literary tradition; (3) The important and most interesting group of "university wits" who, with Marlowe at their head, made the blank verse line for dramatic purposes, dismissed, cultivated as they were, the cultivation of classical models, and gave English tragedy its Magna Charta of freedom and submission to the restrictions of actual life only, but who failed, from this cause or that, to achieve perfect life-likeness; and (4) The actor-playwrights who, rising from very humble beginnings, but possessing in their fellow Shakespere a champion unparalleled in ancient and modern times, borrowed the improvements of the University Wits, added their own stage knowledge, and with Shakespere's aid achieved the master drama of the world.

A very few lines will suffice for the first group, who are the merest literary curiosities. Indeed the actual number of Senecan dramas in English is very small indeed, though there may possibly be some undiscovered in MS. The *Tancred and Gismund* of Robert Wilmot (acted 1568, and of some merit), the *Cornelia* of Garnier, translated by Kyd and printed in 1594, the curious play called *The Misfortunes of Arthur*, acted before the Queen in the Armada year, with "triumphs" partly devised by Francis Bacon, the two plays of Samuel Daniel, and a very few others, complete the list; indeed *Cornelia*, *Cleopatra*, and *Philotas* are almost the only three that keep really close to the model. At a time of such unbounded respect for the classics, and when Latin plays of the same stamp were constantly acted at the universities, such a paucity of examples in English can only testify to a strong national distaste – an instinctive feeling that this would never do.

The nondescript followings of morality and farce are infinitely more numerous, and perhaps intrinsically more interesting; but they can hardly be said to be, except in bulk, of much greater importance. Their real interest to the reader as he turns them over in the first seven or eight volumes of Dodsley, or in the rarer single editions where they occur, is again an interest of curiosity – a desire to trace the various shiftings and turnings of the mighty but unorganised genius which was soon to find its way. Next to the difficulty of inventing a conveniently plastic form seems to have been the difficulty of inventing a suitable verse. For some time the swinging or lumbering doggerel in which

a tolerably good rhyme is reached by a kind of scramble through four or five feet, which are most like a very shuffling anapaest – the verse which appears in the comedies of Udall and Still – held its ground. We have it in the morality of the *New Custom*, printed in 1573, but no doubt written earlier, in the Interlude of *The Trial of Treasure*, in the farcical comedy of *Like Will to Like*, a coarse but lively piece, by Ulpian Fulwell (1568). In the very curious tragi-comedy of *Cambyses* this doggerel appears partly, but is alternated with the less lawless but scarcely more suitable "fourteener" (divided or not as usual, according to printer's exigencies) which, as was shown in the last chapter, for a time almost monopolised the attention of English poets. The same mixture appears to some extent, though the doggerel occupies the main text, in the *Damon and Pythias* of Richard Edwards, the editor of *The Paradise of Dainty Devices*. In *Appius and Virginia* (a decidedly interesting play) the fourteener on the contrary is the staple verse, the doggerel being only occasional. Something the same may be said of a very late morality, *The Conflict of Conscience*. Both doggerel and fourteeners appear in the quaint productions called *Three Ladies of London*, etc.; but by this time the decasyllable began to appear with them and to edge them out. They died hard, however, thoroughly ill-fitted as they were for dramatic use, and, as readers of *Love's Labour Lost* know, survived even in the early plays of Shakespere. Nor were the characters and minor details generally of this group less disorderly and inadequate than the general schemes or the versification. Here we have the abstractions of the old Morality; there the farcical gossip of the *Gammer Gurton's Needle* class; elsewhere the pale and dignified personages of *Gorboduc*: all three being often jumbled together all in one play. In the lighter parts there are sometimes fair touches of low comedy; in the graver occasionally, though much more rarely, a touching or dignified phrase or two. But the plays as wholes are like Ovid's first-fruits of the deluge – nondescripts incapable of life, and good for no useful or ornamental purpose.

It is at this moment that the cleavage takes place. And when I say "this moment," I am perfectly conscious that the exact moment in dates and years cannot be defined. Not a little harm has been done to the history of English literature by the confusion of times in which some of its historians have pleased themselves. But even greater harm might be done if one were to insist on an exact chronology for the efflorescence of the really poetical era of Elizabethan literature, if the blossoming of the aloe were to be tied down to hour and day. All that we can say is that in certain publications, in certain passages even of the same publication, we find the old respectable plodding, the old blind tentative experiment in poetry and drama: and then without warning – without, as it seems, any possible opportunity of distinguishing chronologically – we find the unmistakable marks of the new wine, of the unapproachable poetry proper, which all criticism, all rationalisation can only indicate and not account for. We have hardly left (if we take their counterparts later we have not left) the wooden verse of *Gorboduc*, the childish rusticity of *Like Will to Like*, when suddenly we stumble on the bower —

"Seated in hearing of a hundred streams" —

of George Peele, on the myriad graceful fancies of Lyly, on the exquisite snatches of Greene, on the verses, to this day the high-water mark of poetry, in which Marlowe speaks of the inexpressible beauty which is the object and the despair of the poet. This is wonderful enough. But what is more wonderful is, that these lightning flashes are as evanescent as lightning. Lyly, Peele, Greene, Marlowe himself, in probably the very next passages, certainly in passages not very remote, tell us that this is all matter of chance, that they are all capable of sinking below the level of Sackville at his even conceivably worst, close to the level of Edwards, and the various anonymous or half-anonymous writers of the dramatic miscellanies just noted. And then beyond these unequal wits arises the figure of Shakespere; and the greatest work of all literature swims slowly into our ken. There has been as yet no history of this unique phenomenon worthy of it: I have not the least pretension to supply one that shall be worthy. But at least the uniqueness of it shall here have due celebration. The age of

Pericles, the age of Augustus, the age of Dante, had no such curious ushering-in unless time has dealt exceptional injustice to the forerunners of all of them. We do not, in the period which comes nearest in time and nature to this, see anything of the same kind in the middle space between Villon and Ronsard, between Agrippa d'Aubigné and Corneille. Here if anywhere is the concentrated spirit of a nation, the thrice-decocted blood of a people, forcing itself into literary expression through mediums more and more worthy of it. If ever the historical method was justified (as it always is), now is its greatest justification as we watch the gradual improvements, the decade-by-decade, almost year-by-year acquisitions, which lead from Sackville to Shakespere.

The rising sap showed itself in two very different ways, in two branches of the national tree. In the first place, we have the group of University Wits, the strenuous if not always wise band of professed men of letters, at the head of whom are Lyly, Marlowe, Greene, Peele, Lodge, Nash, and probably (for his connection with the universities is not certainly known) Kyd. In the second, we have the irregular band of outsiders, players and others, who felt themselves forced into literary and principally dramatic composition, who boast Shakespere as their chief, and who can claim as seconds to him not merely the imperfect talents of Chettle, Munday, and others whom we may mention in this chapter, but many of the perfected ornaments of a later time.

It may be accident or it may not, but the beginning of this period is certainly due to the "university wits." Lyly stands a good deal apart from them personally, despite his close literary connection. We have no kind of evidence which even shows that he was personally acquainted with any one of the others. Of Kyd, till Mr. Boas's recent researches, we knew next to nothing, and we still know very little save that he was at Merchant Taylors' School and was busy with plays famous in their day. But the other five were closely connected in life, and in their deaths they were hardly divided. Lodge only of the five seems to have freed himself, partly in virtue of a regular profession, and partly in consequence of his adherence to the Roman faith, from the Bohemianism which has tempted men of letters at all times, and which was especially dangerous in a time of such unlimited adventure, such loose public morals, and such unco-ordinated society as the Elizabethan era. Whatever details we have of their lives (and they are mostly very meagre and uncertain) convey the idea of times out of joint or not yet in joint. The atheism of Marlowe rests on no proof whatever, though it has got him friends in this later time. I am myself by no means sure that Greene's supposed debauchery is not, to a great extent, "copy." The majority of the too celebrated "jests" attributed to George Peele are directly traceable to Villon's *Repues Franches* and similar compilations, and have a suspiciously mythical and traditional air to the student of literary history. There is something a little more trustworthily autobiographical about Nash. But on the whole, though we need not doubt that these ancestors of all modern Englishmen who live by the gray goose quill tasted the inconveniences of the profession, especially at a time when it was barely constituted even as a vocation or employment (to quote the Income Tax Papers), we must carefully avoid taking too gloomy a view of their life. It was usually short, it was probably merry, but we know very little else about it. The chief direct documents, the remarkable pamphlets which some of them have left, will be dealt with hereafter. Here we are busied only with their dates and their dramatic work, which was in no case (except perhaps in that of Kyd) their sole known work, but which in every case except those of Nash and perhaps Greene was their most remarkable.

In noticing *Euphues* an account has already been given of Lyly's life, or rather of the very scanty particulars which are known of it. His plays date considerably later than *Euphues*. But they all bear the character of the courtier about them; and both in this characteristic and in the absence of any details in the gossiping literature of the time to connect him with the Bohemian society of the playhouse, the distinction which separates Lyly from the group of "university wits" is noteworthy. He lost as well as gained by the separation. All his plays were acted "by the children of Paul's before her Majesty," and not by the usual companies before Dick, Tom, and Harry. The exact date and order of their writing is very uncertain, and in one case at least, that of *The Woman in the Moon*, we

know that the order was exactly reversed in publication: this being the last printed in Lyly's lifetime, and expressly described as the first written. His other dramatic works are *Campaspe*, *Sappho and Phaon*, *Endymion*, *Galathea*, *Midas*, *Mother Bombie*, and *Love's Metamorphosis*; another, *The Maid's Metamorphosis*, which has been attributed to him, is in all probability not his.

The peculiar circumstances of the production of Lyly's plays, and the strong or at any rate decided individuality of the author, keep them in a division almost to themselves. The mythological or pastoral character of their subject in most cases might not of itself have prevented their marking an advance in the dramatic composition of English playwrights. *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and much other work of Shakespere's show how far from necessary it is that theme, or class of subject, should affect merit of presentment. But Lyly's work generally has more of the masque than the play. It sometimes includes charming lyrics, such as the famous *Campaspe* song and others. But most of it is in prose, and it gave beyond doubt – though Gascoigne had, as we have seen, set the example in drama – no small impetus to the use and perfecting of that medium. For Lyly's dramatic prose, though sometimes showing the same faults, is often better than *Euphues*, as here: —

"*End.* O fair Cynthia, why do others term thee unconstant, whom I have ever found immovable? Injurious time, corrupt manners, unkind men, who finding a constancy not to be matched in my sweet mistress, have christened her with the name of wavering, waxing, and waning. Is she inconstant that keepeth a settled course, which since her first creation altereth not one minute in her moving? There is nothing thought more admirable, or commendable in the sea, than the ebbing and flowing; and shall the moon, from whom the sea taketh this virtue, be accounted fickle for increasing and decreasing? Flowers in their buds are nothing worth till they be blown; nor blossoms accounted till they be ripe fruit; and shall we then say they be changeable, for that they grow from seeds to leaves, from leaves to buds, from buds to their perfection? then, why be not twigs that become trees, children that become men, and mornings that grow to evenings, termed wavering, for that they continue not at one stay? Ay, but Cynthia being in her fulness decayeth, as not delighting in her greatest beauty, or withering when she should be most honoured. When malice cannot object anything, folly will; making that a vice which is the greatest virtue. What thing (my mistress excepted) being in the pride of her beauty, and latter minute of her age, that waxeth young again? Tell me, Eumenides, what is he that having a mistress of ripe years, and infinite virtues, great honours, and unspeakable beauty, but would wish that she might grow tender again? getting youth by years, and never-decaying beauty by time; whose fair face, neither the summer's blaze can scorch, nor winter's blast chap, nor the numbering of years breed altering of colours. Such is my sweet Cynthia, whom time cannot touch, because she is divine, nor will offend because she is delicate. O Cynthia, if thou shouldest always continue at thy fulness, both gods and men would conspire to ravish thee. But thou, to abate the pride of our affections, dost detract from thy perfections; thinking it sufficient if once in a month we enjoy a glimpse of thy majesty; and then, to increase our griefs, thou dost decrease thy gleams; coming out of thy royal robes, wherewith thou dazzlest our eyes, down into thy swath clouts, beguiling our eyes; and then — "

In these plays there are excellent phrases and even striking scenes. But they are not in the true sense dramatic, and are constantly spoiled by Lyly's strange weakness for conceited style. Everybody speaks in antitheses, and the intolerable fancy similes, drawn from a kind of imaginary natural history, are sometimes as prominent as in *Euphues* itself. Lyly's theatre represents, in short, a mere backwater in the general stream of dramatic progress, though not a few allusions in other men's work show us that it attracted no small attention. With Nash alone, of the University Wits proper, was Lyly connected,

and this only problematically. He was an Oxford man, and most of them were of Cambridge; he was a courtier; if a badly-paid one, and they all lived by their wits; and, if we may judge by the very few documents remaining, he was not inclined to be hail-fellow-well-met with anybody, while they were all born Bohemians. Yet none of them had a greater influence on Shakespere than Lyly, though it was anything but a beneficial influence, and for this as well as for the originality of his production he deserves notice, even had the intrinsic merit of his work been less than it is. But, in fact, it is very great, being almost a typical production of talent helped by knowledge, but not mastered by positive genius, or directed in its way by the precedent work of others.

In the work of the University Wits proper – Marlowe, Greene, Peele, Lodge, Nash, and Kyd, the last of whom, it must again be said, is not certainly known to have belonged to either university, though the probabilities are all in favour of that hypothesis – a very different kind of work is found. It is always faulty, as a whole, for even *Dr. Faustus* and *Edward II.*, despite their magnificent poetry and the vast capabilities of their form, could only be called good plays or good compositions as any kind of whole by a critic who had entirely lost the sense of proportion. But in the whole group, and especially in the dramatic work of Marlowe, Greene, Peele, and Kyd (for that of Lodge and Nash is small in amount and comparatively unimportant in manner), the presence, the throes of a new dramatic style are evident. Faults and beauties are more or less common to the whole quartet. In all we find the many-sided activity of the Shakesperian drama as it was to be, sprawling and struggling in a kind of swaddling clothes of which it cannot get rid, and which hamper and cripple its movements. In all there is present a most extraordinary and unique rant and bombast of expression which reminds one of the shrieks and yells of a band of healthy boys just let out to play. The passages which (thanks chiefly to Pistol's incomparable quotations and parodies of them) are known to every one, the "Pampered jades of Asia," the "Have we not Hiren here," the "Feed and grow fat, my fair Callipolis," the other quips and cranks of mine ancient are scattered broadcast in their originals, and are evidently meant quite seriously throughout the work of these poets. Side by side with this mania for bombast is another mania, much more clearly traceable to education and associations, but specially odd in connection with what has just been noticed. This is the foible of classical allusion. The heathen gods and goddesses, the localities of Greek and Roman poetry, even the more out-of-the-way commonplaces of classical literature, are put in the mouths of all the characters without the remotest attempt to consider propriety or relevance. Even in still lesser peculiarities the blemishes are uniform and constant – such as the curious and childish habit of making speakers speak of themselves in the third person, and by their names, instead of using "I" and "me." And on the other hand, the merits, though less evenly distributed in degree, are equally constant in kind. In Kyd, in Greene still more, in Peele more still, in Marlowe most of all, phrases and passages of blinding and dazzling poetry flash out of the midst of the bombast and the tedium. Many of these are known, by the hundred books of extract which have followed Lamb's *Specimens*, to all readers. Such, for instance, is the

"See where Christ's blood streams in the firmament"

of Marlowe, and his even more magnificent passage beginning

"If all the pens that ever poets held;"

such Peele's exquisite bower,

"Seated in hearing of a hundred streams,"

which is, with all respect to Charles Lamb, to be paralleled by a score of other jewels from the reckless work of "George Pyeboard": such Greene's

"Why thinks King Henry's son that Margaret's love  
Hangs in the uncertain balance of proud time?"

such even Kyd's

"There is a path upon your left hand side  
That leadeth from a guilty conscience  
Unto a forest of distrust and fear."

But the whole point of the thing is that these flashes, which are not to be found at all before the date of this university school, are to be found constantly in its productions, and that, amorphous, inartistic, incomplete as those productions are, they still show *Hamlet* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in embryo. Whereas the greatest expert in literary embryology may read *Gorboduc* and *The Misfortunes of Arthur* through without discerning the slightest signs of what was coming.

Nash and Lodge are so little dramatists (the chief, if not only play of the former being the shapeless and rather dull comedy, *Will Summer's Testament*, relieved only by some lyrics of merit which are probably not Nash's, while Lodge's *Marius and Sylla*, while it wants the extravagance, wants also the beauty of its author's companions' work), that what has to be said about them will be better said later in dealing with their other books. Greene's prose pieces and his occasional poems are, no doubt, better than his drama, but the latter is considerable, and was probably his earliest work. Kyd has left nothing, and Peele little, but drama; while beautiful as Marlowe's *Hero and Leander* is, I do not quite understand how any one can prefer it to the faultier but far more original dramas of its author. We shall therefore deal with these four individually here.

The eldest of the four was George Peele, variously described as a Londoner and a Devonshire man, who was probably born about 1558. He was educated at Christ's Hospital (of which his father was "clerk") and at Broadgates Hall, now Pembroke College, Oxford, and had some credit in the university as an arranger of pageants, etc. He is supposed to have left Oxford for London about 1581, and had the credit of living a Bohemian, not to say disreputable, life for about seventeen years; his death in 1597(?) being not more creditable than his life. But even the scandals about Peele are much more shadowy than those about Marlowe and Greene. His dramatic work consists of some half-dozen plays, the earliest of which is *The Arraignment of Paris*, 1581(?), one of the most elaborate and barefaced of the many contemporary flatteries of Elizabeth, but containing some exquisite verse. In the same way Peele has been accused of having in *Edward I.* adopted or perhaps even invented the basest and most groundless scandals against the noble and stainless memory of Eleanor of Castile; while in his *Battle of Alcazar* he certainly gratifies to the utmost the popular anti-Spanish and anti-Popish feeling. So angry have critics been with Peele's outrage on Eleanor, that some of them have declared that none but he could have been guilty of the not dissimilar slur cast on Joan of Arc's character in *Henry VI.*, the three parts of which it has been the good pleasure of Shakesperian commentators to cut and carve between the University Wits *ad libitum*. I cannot myself help thinking that all this has arisen very much from the idea of Peele's vagabondism given by the untrustworthy "Jests." The slander on Queen Eleanor was pretty certainly supplied to him by an older ballad. There is little or nothing else in Peele's undoubted writings which is at all discreditable. His miscellaneous poems show a man by no means given to low company or low thoughts, and one gifted with the truest poetic vein; while his dramas, besides exhibiting a greater command over blank verse than any of his predecessors and than any except Marlowe of his contemporaries can claim, are full of charming passages. *Sir Clyomon and Sir Clamydes*, which has been denied to him – an interesting play on the rare basis of the old romance – is written not in blank verse but in the fourteener. The *Old Wives' Tale* pretty certainly furnished Milton with the subject of *Comus*, and this is its chief merit. *Edward I.* and

*The Battle of Alcazar*, but especially the latter, contain abundance of the hectoring rant which has been marked as one of the characteristics of the school, and which is half-excused by the sparks of valour that often break from its smoke and clatter. But Peele would undoubtedly stand higher, though he might not be so interesting a literary figure, if we had nothing of his save *The Arraignment of Paris* and *David and Bethsabe*. *The Arraignment* (written in various metres, but mainly in a musical and varied heroic couplet), is partly a pastoral, partly a masque, and wholly a Court play. It thus comes nearest to Lyly, but is altogether a more dramatic, livelier, and less conceited performance than anything by the author of *Euphues*. As for *David and Bethsabe*, it is crammed with beauties, and Lamb's curiously faint praise of it has always been a puzzle to me. As Marlowe's are the mightiest, so are Peele's the softest, lines in the drama before Shakespeare; while the spirit and humour, which the author also had in plenty, save his work from the merely cloying sweetness of some contemporary writers. Two of his interposed or occasional lyrics will be given later: a blank verse passage may find room here: —

*Bethsabe*. "Come, gentle Zephyr, trick'd with those perfumes  
That erst in Eden sweeten'd Adam's love,  
And stroke my bosom with thy silken fan:  
This shade, sun-proof,<sup>20</sup> is yet no proof for thee;  
Thy body, smoother than this waveless spring,  
And purer than the substance of the same,  
Can creep through that his lances cannot pierce:  
Thou, and thy sister, soft and sacred Air,  
Goddess of life, and governess of health,  
Keep every fountain fresh and arbour sweet;  
No brazen gate her passage can repulse,  
Nor bushy thicket bar thy subtle breath:  
Then deck thee with thy loose delightsome robes,  
And on thy wings bring delicate perfumes,  
To play the wanton with us through the leaves."

Robert Greene, probably, if not certainly, the next in age of the group to Peele, was born in 1560, the son of apparently well-to-do parents at Norwich, and was educated at Clare Hall, Cambridge, where he took his Master's degree in 1553. He was subsequently incorporated at Oxford, and being by no means ill-inclined to make the most of himself, sometimes took the style of a member "Utriusque Academiae." After leaving the university he seems to have made a long tour on the Continent, not (according to his own account) at all to the advantage of his morals or means. He is said to have actually taken orders, and held a living for some short time, while he perhaps also studied if he did not practise medicine. He married a lady of virtue and some fortune, but soon despoiled and deserted her, and for the last six years of his life never saw her. At last in 1592, aged only two and thirty, — but after about ten years it would seem of reckless living and hasty literary production, — he died (of a disease caused or aggravated by a debauch on pickled herrings and Rhenish) so miserably poor that he had to trust to his injured wife's forgiveness for payment of the money to the extent of which a charitable landlord and landlady had trusted him. The facts of this lamentable end may have been spitefully distorted by Gabriel Harvey in his quarrel with Nash; but there is little reason to doubt that the received story is in the main correct. Of the remarkable prose pamphlets which form the bulk of Greene's work we speak elsewhere, as also of the pretty songs (considerably exceeding in poetical merit anything to be found in the body of his plays) with which

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<sup>20</sup> Cf. Milton's "elms star-proof" in the *Arcades*. Milton evidently knew Peele well.

both pamphlets and plays are diversified. His actual dramatic production is not inconsiderable: a working-up of the *Orlando Furioso*; *A Looking Glass for London and England* (Nineveh) with Lodge; *James IV.* (of Scotland), a wildly unhistorical romance; *Alphonsus, King of Arragon*; and perhaps *The Pinner of Wakefield*, which deals with his own part namesake George-a-Greene; not impossibly also the pseudo-Shakesperian *Fair Em*. His best play without doubt is *The History of Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay*, in which, after a favourite fashion of the time, he mingles a certain amount of history, or, at least, a certain number of historical personages, with a plentiful dose of the supernatural and of horseplay, and with a very graceful and prettily-handled love story. With a few touches from the master's hand, Margaret, the fair maid of Fressingfield, might serve as handmaid to Shakespere's women, and is certainly by far the most human heroine produced by any of Greene's own group. There is less rant in Greene (though there is still plenty of it) than in any of his friends, and his fancy for soft female characters, loving, and yet virtuous, appears frequently. But his power is ill-sustained, as the following extract will show: —

*Margaret.* "Ah, Father, when the harmony of heaven  
Soundeth the measures of a lively faith,  
The vain illusions of this flattering world  
Seem odious to the thoughts of Margaret.  
I lovèd once, – Lord Lacy was my love;  
And now I hate myself for that I loved,  
And doted more on him than on my God, —  
For this I scourge myself with sharp repents.  
But now the touch of such aspiring sins  
Tells me all love is lust but love of heaven;  
That beauty used for love is vanity:  
The world contains naught but alluring baits,  
Pride, flattery [ ], and inconstant thoughts.  
To shun the pricks of death I leave the world,  
And vow to meditate on heavenly bliss,  
To live in Framlingham a holy nun,  
Holy and pure in conscience and in deed;  
And for to wish all maids to learn of me  
To seek heaven's joy before earth's vanity."

We do not know anything of Thomas Kyd's, except *The Spanish Tragedy*, which is a second part of an extremely popular play (sometimes attributed to Kyd himself, but probably earlier) called *Jeronimo*, and the translation of *Cornelia*, though others are doubtfully attributed. The well-known epithet of Jonson, "sporting" Kyd, seems to have been either a mere play on the poet's name, or else *a lucus a non lucendo*; for both *Jeronimo* and its sequel are in the ghastliest and bloodiest vein of tragedy, and *Cornelia* is a model of stately dullness. The two "Jeronimo" or "Hieronimo" plays were, as has been said, extremely popular, and it is positively known that Jonson himself, and probably others, were employed from time to time to freshen them up; with the consequence that the exact authorship of particular passages is somewhat problematical. Both plays, however, display, nearly in perfection, the rant, not always quite ridiculous, but always extravagant, from which Shakespere rescued the stage; though, as the following extract will show, this rant is by no means always, or indeed often, smoke without fire: —

"O! forbear,  
For other talk for us far fitter were.

But if you be importunate to know  
The way to him, and where to find him out,  
Then list to me, and I'll resolve your doubt.  
There is a path upon your left hand side,  
That leadeth from a guilty conscience  
Unto a forest of distrust and fear —  
A darksome place and dangerous to pass.  
There shall you meet with melancholy thoughts  
Whose baleful humours if you but uphold,  
It will conduct you to despair and death.  
Whose rocky cliffs when you have once beheld  
Within a huge dale of lasting night —  
That, kindled with the world's iniquities,  
Doth cast up filthy and detested fumes —  
Not far from thence, where murderers have built  
An habitation for their cursed souls,  
There is a brazen cauldron fixed by Jove  
In his fell wrath upon a sulphur flame.  
Yourselves shall find Lorenzo bathing him  
In boiling lead and blood of innocents."

But nothing, except citation of whole scenes and acts, could show the extraordinary jumble of ghosts, blood, thunder, treachery, and horrors of all sorts which these plays contain.

Now for a very different citation: —

"If all the pens that ever poets held  
Had fed the feeling of their masters' thoughts,  
And every sweetness that inspir'd their hearts,  
Their minds, and muses, on admired themes;  
If all the heavenly quintessence they 'still  
From their immortal flowers of poesy,  
Wherein as in a mirror we perceive  
The highest reaches of a human wit;  
If these had made one poem's period,  
And all combined in beauty's worthiness,  
Yet should there hover in their restless heads  
One thought, one grace, one wonder at the least  
Which into words no virtue can digest."

It is no wonder that the whole school has been dwarfed in the general estimation, since its work was critically considered and isolated from other work, by the towering excellence of this author. Little as is known of all the band, that little becomes almost least in regard to their chief and leader. Born (1564) at Canterbury, the son of a shoemaker, he was educated at the Grammar School of that city, and at Benet (afterwards Corpus) College, Cambridge; he plunged into literary work and dissipation in London; and he outlived Greene only to fall a victim to debauchery in a still more tragical way. His death (1593) was the subject of much gossip, but the most probable account is that he was poniarded in self-defence by a certain Francis Archer, a serving-man (not by any means necessarily, as Charles Kingsley has it, a footman), while drinking at Deptford, and that the cause of the quarrel was a woman of light character. He has also been accused of gross vices not to be particularised, and of atheism.

The accusation is certain; and Mr. Boas's researches as to Kyd, who was also concerned in the matter, have thrown some light on it; but much is still obscure. The most offensive charges were due to one Bame or Baines, who was afterwards hanged at Tyburn. That Marlowe was a Bohemian in the fullest sense is certain; that he was anything worse there is no evidence whatever. He certainly was acquainted with Raleigh and other distinguished persons, and was highly spoken of by Chapman and others.

But the interest of Marlowe's name has nothing to do with these obscure scandals of three hundred years ago, though it may be difficult to pass them over entirely. He is the undoubted author of some of the masterpieces of English verse; the hardly to be doubted author of others not much inferior. Except the very greatest names – Shakespere, Milton, Spenser, Dryden, Shelley – no author can be named who has produced, when the proper historical estimate is applied to him, such work as is to be found in *Tamburlaine*, *Doctor Faustus*, *The Jew of Malta*, *Edward the Second*, in one department; *Hero and Leander* and the *Passionate Shepherd* in another. I have but very little doubt that the powerful, if formless, play of *Lust's Dominion* is Marlowe's, though it may have been rewritten, and the translations of Lucan and Ovid and the minor work which is more or less probably attributed to him, swell his tale. Prose he did not write, perhaps could not have written. For the one characteristic lacking to his genius was measure, and prose without measure, as numerous examples have shown, is usually rubbish. Even his dramas show a singular defect in the architectural quality of literary genius. The vast and formless creations of the writer's boundless fancy completely master him; his aspirations after the immense too frequently leave him content with the simply unmeasured. In his best play as a play, *Edward the Second*, the limitations of a historical story impose something like a restraining form on his glowing imagination. But fine as this play is, it is noteworthy that no one of his greatest things occurs in it. *The Massacre at Paris*, where he also has the confinement of reality after a fashion, is a chaotic thing as a whole, without any great beauty in parts. *The Tragedy of Dido* (to be divided between him and Nash) is the worst thing he ever did. But in the purely romantic subjects of *Tamburlaine*, *Faustus*, and *The Jew of Malta*, his genius, untrammelled by any limits of story, showed itself equally unable to contrive such limits for itself, and able to develop the most marvellous beauties of detail. Shakespere himself has not surpassed, which is equivalent to saying that no other writer has equalled, the famous and wonderful passages in *Tamburlaine* and *Faustus*, which are familiar to every student of English literature as examples of the *ne plus ultra* of the poetic powers, not of the language but of language. The tragic imagination in its wildest flights has never summoned up images of pity and terror more imposing, more moving, than those excited by *The Jew of Malta*. The riot of passion and of delight in the beauty of colour and form which characterises his version of *Hero and Leander* has never been approached by any writer. But Marlowe, with the fullest command of the *apeiron*, had not, and, as far as I can judge, never would have had, any power of introducing into it the law of the *peras*. It is usual to say that had he lived, and had his lot been happily cast, we should have had two Shakesperes. This is not wise. In the first place, Marlowe was totally destitute of humour – the characteristic which, united with his tragic and imaginative powers, makes Shakespere as, in a less degree, it makes Homer, and even, though the humour is grim and intermittent, Dante. In other words, he was absolutely destitute of the first requisite of self-criticism. In the natural course of things, as the sap of his youthful imagination ceased to mount, and as his craving for immensity hardened itself, he would probably have degenerated from bombast shot through with genius to bombast pure and simple, from *Faustus* to *Lust's Dominion*, and from *Lust's Dominion* to *Jeronimo* or *The Distracted Emperor*. Apart from the magnificent passages which he can show, and which are simply intoxicating to any lover of poetry, his great title to fame is the discovery of the secret of that "mighty line" which a seldom-erring critic of his own day, not too generously given, vouchsafed to him. Up to his time the blank verse line always, and the semi-couplet in heroics, or member of the more complicated stanza usually, were either stiff or nerveless. Compared with his own work and with the work of his contemporaries and followers who learnt from him, they are like a dried preparation, like something waiting for the infusion of blood, for the inflation of living breath.

Marlowe came, and the old wooden versification, the old lay-figure structure of poetic rhythm, was cast once for all into the lumber-room, where only poetasters of the lowest rank went to seek it. It is impossible to call Marlowe a great dramatist, and the attempts that have been made to make him out to be such remind one of the attempts that have been made to call Molière a great poet. Marlowe was one of the greatest poets of the world whose work was cast by accident and caprice into an imperfect mould of drama; Molière was one of the greatest dramatists of the world who was obliged by fashion to use a previously perfected form of verse. The state of Molière was undoubtedly the more gracious; but the splendour of Marlowe's uncut diamonds of poetry is the more wonderful.

The characteristics of this strange and interesting school may be summed up briefly, but are of the highest importance in literary history. Unlike their nearest analogues, the French romantics of the 1830 type, they were all of academic education, and had even a decided contempt (despite their Bohemian way of life) for unscholarly innovators. They manifested (except in Marlowe's fortuitous and purely genial discovery of the secret of blank verse) a certain contempt for form, and never, at least in drama, succeeded in mastering it. But being all, more or less, men of genius, and having the keenest sense of poetry, they supplied the dry bones of the precedent dramatic model with blood and breath, with vigour and variety, which not merely informed but transformed it. *David and Bethsabe*, *Doctor Faustus*, *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay*, are chaotic enough, but they are of the chaos that precedes cosmic development. The almost insane bombast that marks the whole school has (as has been noticed) the character of the shrieks and gesticulations of healthy childhood, and the insensibility to the really comic which also marks them is of a similar kind. Every one knows how natural it is to childhood to appreciate bad jokes, how seldom a child sees a good one. Marlowe and his crew, too (the comparison has no doubt often been used before), were of the brood of Otus and Ephialtes, who grew so rapidly and in so disorderly a fashion that it was necessary for the gods to make an end of them. The universe probably lost little, and it certainly gained something.

Side by side with this learned, extravagant, gifted, ill-regulated school, there was slowly growing up a very different one, which was to inherit all the gifts of the University Wits, and to add to them the gifts of measure and proportion. The early work of the actor school of English dramatists is a difficult subject to treat in any fashion, and a particularly difficult subject to treat shortly. Chronology, an important aid, helps us not very much, though such help as she does give has been as a rule neglected by historians, so that plays before 1590 (which may be taken roughly as the dividing date), and plays after it have been muddled up ruthlessly. We do not know the exact dates of many of those which are (many of the plays of the earlier time are not) extant; and of those which are extant, and of which the dates are more or less known, the authors are in not a few most important cases absolutely undiscoverable. Yet in the plays which belong to this period, and which there is no reason to attribute wholly to any of the Marlowe group, or much reason to attribute to them under the guidance, or perhaps with the collaboration of practical actors (some at least of whom were like Shakespere himself, men of no known regular education), there are characteristics which promise at least as well for the future as the wonderful poetic outbursts of the Marlowe school itself. Of these outbursts we find few in this other division. But we find a growing knowledge of what a play is, as distinguished from a series of tableaux acted by not too lifelike characters. We find a glimmering (which is hardly anywhere to be seen in the more literary work of the other school) of the truth that the characters must be made to work out the play, and not the play be written in a series of disjointed scenes to display, in anything but a successful fashion, the characters. With fewer flights we have fewer absurdities; with less genius we have more talent. It must be remembered, of course, that the plays of the university school itself were always written for players, and that some of the authors had more or less to do with acting as well as with writing. But the flame of discord which burns so fiercely on the one side in the famous real or supposed dying utterances of Greene, and which years afterwards breaks out on

the other in the equally famous satire of *The Return from Parnassus*,<sup>21</sup> illuminates a real difference – a difference which study of the remains of the literature of the period can only make plainer. The same difference has manifested itself again, and more than once in other departments of literature, but hardly in so interesting a manner, and certainly not with such striking results.

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<sup>21</sup> The outburst of Greene about "the only Shakescene," the "upstart crow beautified with our feathers," and so forth, is too well known to need extracting here. *The Return from Parnassus*, a very curious tripartite play, performed 1597-1601 but retrospective in tone, is devoted to the troubles of poor scholars in getting a livelihood, and incidentally gives much matter on the authors of the time from Shakespere downward, and on the jealousy of professional actors felt by scholars, and *vice versâ*.

## CHAPTER IV

# "THE FAËRIE QUEENE" AND ITS GROUP

### "Velut inter ignes luna minores"

There is no instance in English history of a poet receiving such immediate recognition, and deserving it so thoroughly, as did Edmund Spenser at the date of *The Shepherd's Calendar*. In the first chapter of this volume the earlier course of Elizabethan poetry has been described, and it will have been seen that, with great intention, no very great accomplishment had been achieved. It was sufficiently evident that a poetic language and a general poetic spirit were being formed, such as had not existed in England since Chaucer's death; but no one had yet arisen who could justify the expectation based on such respectable tentatives. It seems from many minute indications which need not be detailed here, that at the advent of *The Shepherd's Calendar* all the best judges recognised the expected poet. Yet they could hardly have known how just their recognition was, or what extraordinary advances the poet would make in the twenty years which passed between its publication and his death.

The life of Spenser is very little known, and here and elsewhere the conditions of this book preclude the reproduction or even the discussion of the various pious attempts which have been made to supply the deficiency of documents. The chief of these in his case is to be found in Dr. Grosart's magnificent edition, the principal among many good works of its editor. That he belonged to a branch – a Lancashire branch in all probability – of the family which produced the Le Despencers of elder, and the Spencers of modern English history, may be said to be unquestionable. But he appears to have been born about 1552 in London, and to have been educated at Merchant Taylors', whence in May 1569 he matriculated at Pembroke Hall, Cambridge, as a sizar. At or before this time he must have contributed (though there are puzzles in the matter) certain translations of sonnets from Petrarch and Du Bellay to a book called *The Theatre of Voluptuous Worldlings*, published by a Brabanter, John van der Noodt. These, slightly changed from blank verse to rhyme, appeared long afterwards with his minor poems of 1590. But the original pieces had been claimed by the Dutchman; and though there are easy ways of explaining this, the thing is curious. However it may be with these verses, certainly nothing else of Spenser's appeared in print for ten years. His Cambridge life, except for some vague allusions (which, as usual in such cases, have been strained to breaking by commentators and biographers), is equally obscure; save that he certainly fulfilled seven years of residence, taking his Bachelor's Degree in 1573, and his Master's three years later. But he did not gain a fellowship, and the chief discoverable results of his Cambridge sojourn were the thorough scholarship which marks his work, and his friendship with the notorious Gabriel Harvey – his senior by some years, a Fellow of Pembroke, and a person whose singularly bad literary taste, as shown in his correspondence with Spenser, may be perhaps forgiven, first, because it did no harm, and secondly, because without him we should know even less of Spenser than we do. It is reasonably supposed from the notes of his friend, "E. K." (apparently Kirke, a Pembroke man), to *The Shepherd's Calendar*, that he went to his friends in the north after leaving Cambridge and spent a year or two there, falling in love with the heroine, poetically named Rosalind, of *The Calendar*, and no doubt writing that remarkable book. Then (probably very late in 1578) he went to London, was introduced by Harvey to Sidney and Leicester, and thus mixed at once in the best literary and political society. He was not long in putting forth his titles to its attention, for *The Shepherd's Calendar* was published in the winter of 1579, copiously edited by "E. K.," whom some absurdly suppose to be Spenser himself. The poet seems to have had also numerous works (the titles of which are known) ready or nearly ready for the press. But

all were subsequently either changed in title, incorporated with other work, or lost. He had already begun *The Faërie Queene*, much to the pedant Harvey's disgust; and he dabbled in the fashionable absurdity of classical metres, like his inferiors. But he published nothing more immediately; and powerful as were his patrons, the only preferment which he obtained was in that Eldorado-Purgatory of Elizabethan ambition – Ireland. Lord Grey took him as private secretary when he was in 1580 appointed deputy, and shortly afterwards he received some civil posts in his new country, and a lease of abbey lands at Enniscorthy, which lease he soon gave up. But he stayed in Ireland, notwithstanding the fact that his immediate patron Grey soon left it. Except a few bare dates and doubtful allusions, little or nothing is heard of him between 1580 and 1590. On the eve of the latter year (the 1st of December 1589) the first three books of *The Faërie Queene* were entered at Stationers' Hall, and were published in the spring of the next year. He had been already established at Kilcolman in the county Cork on a grant of more than three thousand acres of land out of the forfeited Desmond estates. And henceforward his literary activity, at least in publication, became more considerable, and he seems to have been much backwards and forwards between England and Ireland. In 1590 appeared a volume of minor poems (*The Ruins of Time, The Tears of the Muses, Virgil's Gnat, Mother Hubbard's Tale, The Ruins of Rome, Muiopotmos, and the Visions*), with an address to the reader in which another list of forthcoming works is promised. These, like the former list of Kirke, seem oddly enough to have also perished. The whole collection was called *Complaints*, and a somewhat similar poem, *Daphnaida*, is thought to have appeared in the same year. On the 11th of June 1594 the poet married (strangely enough it was not known whom, until Dr. Grosart ingeniously identified her with a certain Elizabeth Boyle *alias* Seckerstone), and in 1595 were published the beautiful *Amoretti* or love sonnets, and the still more beautiful *Epithalamion* describing his courtship and marriage, with the interesting poem of *Colin Clout's Come Home Again*; while in the same year (old style; in January 1596, new style) the fourth, fifth, and sixth books of *The Faërie Queene* were entered for publication and soon appeared. The supposed allusions to Mary Stuart greatly offended her son James. The *Hymns* and the *Prothalamion* followed in the same year. Spenser met with difficulties at Court (though he had obtained a small pension of fifty pounds a year), and had like other Englishmen troubles with his neighbours in Ireland; yet he seemed to be becoming more prosperous, and in 1598 he was named Sheriff of Cork. A few weeks later the Irish Rebellion broke out; his house was sacked and burnt with one of his children; he fled to England and died on the 16th of January 1599 at King Street, Westminster, perhaps not "for lack of bread," as Jonson says, but certainly in no fortunate circumstances. In the year of his misfortune had been registered, though it was never printed till more than thirty years later, his one prose work of substance, the remarkable *View of the Present State of Ireland*; an admirable piece of prose, and a political tract, the wisdom and grasp of which only those who have had to give close attention to Irish politics can fully estimate. It is probably the most valuable document on any given period of Irish history that exists, and is certainly superior in matter, no less than in style, to any political tract in English, published before the days of Halifax eighty years after.

It has been said that *The Shepherd's Calendar* placed Spenser at once at the head of the English poets of his day; and it did so. But had he written nothing more, he would not (as is the case with not a few distinguished poets) have occupied as high or nearly as high a position in quality, if not in quantity, as he now does. He was a young man when he published it; he was not indeed an old man when he died; and it would not appear that he had had much experience of life beyond college walls. His choice of models – the artificial pastorals in which the Renaissance had modelled itself on Virgil and Theocritus, rather than Virgil and Theocritus themselves – was not altogether happy. He showed, indeed, already his extraordinary metrical skill, experimenting with rhyme-royal and other stanzas, fourteeners or eights and sixes, anapæsts more or less irregular, and an exceedingly important variety of octosyllable which, whatever may have been his own idea in practising it, looked back to early Middle English rhythms and forward to the metre of *Christabel*, as Coleridge was to start it afresh. He also transgressed into religious politics, taking (as indeed he always took, strange as it may seem

in so fanatical a worshipper of beauty) the Puritan side. Nor is his work improved as poetry, though it acquires something in point of quaint attractiveness, by good Mr. "E. K.'s" elaborate annotations, introductions, explanations, and general gentleman-usherings – the first in English, but most wofully not the last by hundreds, of such overlayings of gold with copper. Yet with all these drawbacks *The Shepherd's Calendar* is delightful. Already we can see in it that double command, at once of the pictorial and the musical elements of poetry, in which no English poet is Spenser's superior, if any is his equal. Already the unmatched power of vigorous allegory, which he was to display later, shows in such pieces as *The Oak and the Briar*. In the less deliberately archaic divisions, such as "April" and "November," the command of metrical form, in which also the poet is almost peerless, discovers itself. Much the same may be said of the volume of *Complaints*, which, though published later than *The Faërie Queene*, represents beyond all question very much earlier work. Spenser is unquestionably, when he is not at once spurred and soothed by the play of his own imagination, as in *The Queene*, a melancholy poet, and the note of melancholy is as strong in these poems as in their joint title. It combines with his delight in emblematic allegory happily enough, in most of these pieces except *Mother Hubbard's Tale*. This is almost an open satire, and shows that if Spenser's genius had not found a less mongrel style to disport itself in, not merely would Donne, and Lodge, and Hall, and Marston have had to abandon their dispute for the post of first English satirist, but the attainment of really great satire in English might have been hastened by a hundred years, and *Absalom and Achitophel* have been but a second. Even here, however, the piece still keeps the Chaucerian form and manner, and is only a kind of exercise. The sonnets from and after Du Bellay and others are more interesting. As in the subsequent and far finer *Amoretti*, Spenser prefers the final couplet form to the so-called Petrarchian arrangement; and, indeed, though the most recent fashion in England has inclined to the latter, an impartial judgment must pronounce both forms equally good and equally entitled to place. The *Amoretti* written in this metre, and undoubtedly representing some, at least, of Spenser's latest written work, rank with the best of Sidney's, and hardly below the best of Shakespeare's; while both in them and in the earlier sonnets the note of regret mingled with delight – the special Renaissance note – sounds as it rarely does in any other English verse. Of the poems of the later period, however (leaving *The Faërie Queene* for a moment aside), the *Epithalamion* and the *Four Hymns* rank undoubtedly highest. For splendour of imagery, for harmony of verse, for delicate taste and real passion, the *Epithalamion* excels all other poems of its class, and the *Four Hymns* express a rapture of Platonic enthusiasm, which may indeed be answerable for the unreadable *Psyches* and *Psychozoias* of the next age, but which is itself married to immortal verse in the happiest manner.

Still, to the ordinary reader, Spenser is the poet of *The Faërie Queene*, and for once the ordinary reader is right. Every quality found in his other poems is found in this greatest of them in perfection; and much is found there which is not, and indeed could not be, found anywhere else. Its general scheme is so well known (few as may be the readers who really know its details) that very slight notice of it may suffice. Twelve knights, representing twelve virtues, were to have been sent on adventures from the Court of Gloriana, Queen of Fairyland. The six finished books give the legends (each subdivided into twelve cantos, averaging fifty or sixty stanzas each) of Holiness, Temperance, Chastity, Friendship, Justice, and Courtesy; while a fragment of two splendid "Cantos on Mutability" is supposed to have belonged to a seventh book (not necessarily seventh in order) on Constancy. Legend has it that the poem was actually completed; but this seems improbable, as the first three books were certainly ten years in hand, and the second three six more. The existing poem comprehending some four thousand stanzas, or between thirty and forty thousand lines, exhibits so many and such varied excellences that it is difficult to believe that the poet could have done anything new in kind. No part of it is as a whole inferior to any other part, and the fragmentary cantos contain not merely one of the most finished pictorial pieces – the Procession of the Months – to be found in the whole poem, but much of the poet's finest thought and verse. Had fortune been kinder, the volume

of delight would have been greater, but its general character would probably not have changed much. As it is, *The Faërie Queene* is the only long poem that a lover of poetry can sincerely wish longer.

It deserves some critical examination here from three points of view, regarding respectively its general scheme, its minor details of form in metre and language, and lastly, its general poetical characteristics. The first is simple enough in its complexity. The poem is a long *Roman d'Adventure* (which it is perhaps as well to say, once for all, is not the same as a "Romance of Chivalry," or a "Romance of Adventure"), redeemed from the aimless prolixity incident to that form by its regular plan, by the intercommunion of the adventures of the several knights (none of whom disappears after having achieved his own quest), and by the constant presence of a not too obtrusive allegory. This last characteristic attaches it on the other side to the poems of the *Roman de la Rose* order, which succeeded the *Romans d'Adventures* as objects of literary interest and practice, not merely in France, but throughout Europe. This allegory has been variously estimated as a merit or defect of the poem. It is sometimes political, oftener religious, very often moral, and sometimes purely personal – the identifications in this latter case being sometimes clear, as that of Gloriana, Britomart, and Belphœbe with Queen Elizabeth, sometimes probable, as that of Duessa with Queen Mary (not one of Spenser's most knightly actions), and of Prince Arthur with Leicester, and sometimes more or less problematical, as that of Artegall with Lord Grey, of Timias the Squire with Raleigh, and so forth. To those who are perplexed by these double meanings the best remark is Hazlitt's blunt one that "the allegory won't bite them." In other words, it is always perfectly possible to enjoy the poem without troubling oneself about the allegory at all, except in its broad ethical features, which are quite unmistakable. On the other hand, I am inclined to think that the presence of these under-meanings, with the interest which they give to a moderately instructed and intelligent person who, without too desperate a determination to see into millstones, understands "words to the wise," is a great addition to the hold of the poem over the attention, and saves it from the charge of mere desultoriness, which some, at least, of the other greatest poems of the kind (notably its immediate exemplar, the *Orlando Furioso*) must undergo. And here it may be noted that the charge made by most foreign critics who have busied themselves with Spenser, and perhaps by some of his countrymen, that he is, if not a mere paraphrast, yet little more than a transplanter into English of the Italian, is glaringly uncritical. Not, perhaps, till Ariosto and Tasso have been carefully read in the original, is Spenser's real greatness understood. He has often, and evidently of purpose, challenged comparison; but in every instance it will be found that his beauties are emphatically his own. He has followed his leaders only as Virgil has followed Homer; and much less slavishly.

It is strange to find English critics of this great if not greatest English poem even nowadays repeating that Spenser borrowed his wonderful stanza from the Italians. He did nothing of the kind. That the *ottava rima* on the one hand, and the sonnet on the other, may have suggested the idea of it is quite possible. But the Spenserian stanza, as it is justly called, is his own and no one else's, and its merits, especially that primal merit of adaptation to the subject and style of the poem, are unique. Nothing else could adapt itself so perfectly to the endless series of vignettes and dissolving views which the poet delights in giving; while, at the same time, it has, for so elaborate and apparently integral a form, a singular faculty of hooking itself on to stanzas preceding and following, so as not to interrupt continuous narrative when continuous narrative is needed. Its great compass, admitting of an almost infinite variety of cadence and composition, saves it from the monotony from which even the consummate art of Milton could not save blank verse now and then, and from which no writer has ever been able to save the couplet, or the quatrain, or the stanzas ending with a couplet, in narratives of very great length. But the most remarkable instance of harmony between metrical form and other characteristics, both of form and matter, in the metrist has yet to be mentioned. It has been said how well the stanza suits Spenser's pictorial faculty; it certainly suits his musical faculty as well. The slightly (very slightly, for he can be vigorous enough) languid turn of his grace, the voluptuous cadences of his rhythm, find in it the most perfect exponent possible. The verse of great

poets, especially Homer's, has often been compared to the sea. Spenser's is more like a river, wide, and deep, and strong, but moderating its waves and conveying them all in a steady, soft, irresistible sweep forwards. To aid him, besides this extraordinary instrument of metre, he had forged for himself another in his language. A great deal has been written on this – comments, at least of the unfavourable kind, generally echoing Ben Jonson's complaint that Spenser "writ no language"; that his dialect is not the dialect of any actual place or time, that it is an artificial "poetic diction" made up of Chaucer, and of Northern dialect, and of classicisms, and of foreign words, and of miscellaneous archaisms from no matter where. No doubt it is. But if any other excuse than the fact of a beautiful and satisfactory effect is wanted for the formation of a poetic diction different from the actually spoken or the ordinarily written tongue of the day (and I am not sure that any such excuse is required) it is to be found at once. There was no actually spoken or ordinarily written tongue in Spenser's day which could claim to be "Queen's English." Chaucer was obsolete, and since Chaucer there was no single person who could even pretend to authority. Every writer more or less endowed with originality was engaged in beating out for himself, from popular talk, and from classical or foreign analogy, an instrument of speech. Spenser's verse language and Lyly's prose are the most remarkable results of the process; but it was, in fact, not only a common but a necessary one, and in no way to be blamed. As for the other criterion hinted at above, no one is likely to condemn the diction according to that. In its remoteness without grotesqueness, in its lavish colour, in its abundance of matter for every kind of cadence and sound-effect, it is exactly suited to the subject, the writer, and the verse.

It is this singular and complete adjustment of worker and implement which, with other peculiarities noted or to be noted, gives *The Faërie Queene* its unique unicity, if such a conceit may be pardoned. From some points of view it might be called a very artificial poem, yet no poem runs with such an entire absence of effort, with such an easy eloquence, with such an effect, as has been said already, of flowing water. With all his learning, and his archaisms, and his classicisms, and his Platonisms, and his isms without end, hardly any poet smells of the lamp less disagreeably than Spenser. Where Milton forges and smelts, his gold is native. The endless, various, brightly-coloured, softly and yet distinctly outlined pictures rise and pass before the eyes and vanish – the multiform, sweetly-linked, softly-sounding harmonies swell and die and swell again on the ear – without a break, without a jar, softer than sleep and as continuous, gayer than the rainbow and as undiscoverably connected with any obvious cause. And this is the more remarkable because the very last thing that can be said of Spenser is that he is a poet of mere words. Milton himself, the severe Milton, extolled his moral teaching; his philosophical idealism is evidently no mere poet's plaything or parrot-lesson, but thoroughly thought out and believed in. He is a determined, almost a savage partisan in politics and religion, a steady patriot, something of a statesman, very much indeed of a friend and a lover. And of all this there is ample evidence in his verse. Yet the alchemy of his poetry has passed through the potent alembics of verse and phrase all these rebellious things, and has distilled them into the inimitably fluent and velvet medium which seems to lull some readers to inattention by its very smoothness, and deceive others into a belief in its lack of matter by the very finish and brilliancy of its form. The show passages of the poem which are most generally known – the House of Pride, the Cave of Despair, the Entrance of Belphebe, the Treasury of Mammon, the Gardens of Acrasia, the Sojourn of Britomart in Busirane's Castle, the Marriage of the Thames and Medway, the Discovery of the False Florimel, Artegall and the Giant, Calidore with Melibœus, the Processions of the Seasons and the Months – all these are not, as is the case with so many other poets, mere purple patches, diversifying and relieving dullness, but rather remarkable, and as it happens easily separable examples of a power which is shown constantly and almost evenly throughout. Those who admire them do well; but they hardly know Spenser. He, more than almost any other poet, must be read continuously and constantly till the eye and ear and mind have acquired the freedom of his realm of enchantment, and have learnt the secret (as far as a mere reader may learn it) of the poetical spells by which he brings together and controls its wonders. The talk of tediousness, the talk of sameness, the talk of coterie-

cultivation in Spenser shows bad taste no doubt; but it rather shows ignorance. The critic has in such cases stayed outside his author; he speaks but of what he has *not* seen.

The comparative estimate is always the most difficult in literature, and where it can be avoided it is perhaps best to avoid it. But in Spenser's case this is not possible. He is one of those few who can challenge the title of "greatest English poet," and the reader may almost of right demand the opinion on this point of any one who writes about him. For my part I have no intention of shirking the difficulty. It seems to me that putting Shakespere aside as *hors concours*, not merely in degree but in kind, only two English poets can challenge Spenser for the primacy. These are Milton and Shelley. The poet of *The Faërie Queene* is generally inferior to Milton in the faculty of concentration, and in the minting of those monumental phrases, impressive of themselves and quite apart from the context, which often count highest in the estimation of poetry. His vocabulary and general style, if not more remote from the vernacular, have sometimes a touch of deliberate estrangement from that vernacular which is no doubt of itself a fault. His conception of a great work is looser, more excursive, less dramatic. As compared with Shelley he lacks not merely the modern touches which appeal to a particular age, but the lyrical ability in which Shelley has no equal among English poets. But in each case he redeems these defects with, as it seems to me, far more than counterbalancing merits. He is never prosaic as Milton, like his great successor Wordsworth, constantly is, and his very faults are the faults of a poet. He never (as Shelley does constantly) dissolves away into a flux of words which simply bids good-bye to sense or meaning, and wanders on at large, unguided, without an end, without an aim. But he has more than these merely negative merits. I have seen long accounts of Spenser in which the fact of his invention of the Spenserian stanza is passed over almost without a word of comment. Yet in the formal history of poetry (and the history of poetry must always be pre-eminently a history of form) there is simply no achievement so astonishing as this. That we do not know the inventors of the great single poetic vehicles, the hexameter, the iambic Senarius, the English heroic, the French Alexandrine, is one thing. It is another that in Spenser's case alone can the invention of a complicated but essentially integral form be assigned to a given poet. It is impossible to say that Sappho invented the Sapphic, or Alcæus the Alcaic: each poet may have been a Vespucci to some precedent Columbus. But we are in a position to say that Spenser did most unquestionably invent the English Spenserian stanza – a form only inferior in individual beauty to the sonnet, which is itself practically *adespoton*, and far superior to the sonnet in its capacity of being used in multiples as well as singly. When the unlikelihood of such a complicated measure succeeding in narrative form, the splendid success of it in *The Faërie Queene*, and the remarkable effects which have subsequently been got out of it by men so different as Thomson, Shelley, and Lord Tennyson, are considered, Spenser's invention must, I think, be counted the most considerable of its kind in literature.

But it may be very freely admitted that this technical merit, great as it is, is the least part of the matter. Whosoever first invented butterflies and pyramids in poetry is not greatly commendable, and if Spenser had done nothing but arrange a cunning combination of eight heroics, with interwoven rhymes and an Alexandrine to finish with, it may be acknowledged at once that his claims to primacy would have to be dismissed at once. It is not so. Independently of *The Faërie Queene* altogether he has done work which we must go to Milton and Shelley themselves to equal. The varied and singularly original strains of *The Calendar*, the warmth and delicacy combined of the *Epithalamion*, the tone of mingled regret and wonder (not inferior in its characteristic Renaissance ring to Du Bellay's own) of *The Ruins of Rome*, the different notes of the different minor poems, are all things not to be found in any minor poet. But as does not always happen, and as is perhaps not the case with Milton, Spenser's greatest work is also his best. In the opinion of some at any rate the poet of *Lycidas*, of *Comus*, of *Samson Agonistes*, even of the *Allegro* and *Penseroso*, ranks as high as, if not above, the poet of *Paradise Lost*. But the poet of *The Faërie Queene* could spare all his minor works and lose only, as has been said, quantity not quality of greatness. It is hardly necessary at this time of day to repeat the demonstration that Macaulay in his famous jibe only succeeded in showing that he had never read

what he jibed at; and though other decriers of Spenser's masterpiece may not have laid themselves open to quite so crushing a retort, they seldom fail to show a somewhat similar ignorance. For the lover of poetry, for the reader who understands and can receive the poetic charm, the revelation of beauty in metrical language, no English poem is the superior, or, range and variety being considered, the equal of *The Faërie Queene*. Take it up where you will, and provided only sufficient time (the reading of a dozen stanzas ought to suffice to any one who has the necessary gifts of appreciation) be given to allow the soft dreamy versicoloured atmosphere to rise round the reader, the languid and yet never monotonous music to gain his ear, the mood of mixed imagination and heroism, adventure and morality, to impress itself on his mind, and the result is certain. To the influence of no poet are the famous lines of Spenser's great nineteenth-century rival so applicable as to Spenser's own. The enchanted boat, angel-guided, floating on away, afar, without conscious purpose, but simply obeying the instinct of sweet poetry, is not an extravagant symbol for the mind of a reader of Spenser. If such readers want "Criticisms of Life" first of all, they must go elsewhere, though they will find them amply given, subject to the limitations of the poetical method. If they want story they may complain of slackness and deviations. If they want glorifications of science and such like things, they had better shut the book at once, and read no more on that day nor on any other. But if they want poetry – if they want to be translated from a world which is not one of beauty only into one where the very uglinesses are beautiful, into a world of perfect harmony in colour and sound, of an endless sequence of engaging event and character, of noble passions and actions not lacking their due contrast, then let them go to Spenser with a certainty of satisfaction. He is not, as are some poets, the poet of a certain time of life to the exclusion of others. He may be read in childhood chiefly for his adventure, in later youth for his display of voluptuous beauty, in manhood for his ethical and historical weight, in age for all combined, and for the contrast which his bright universe of invention affords with the work-day jejuneness of this troublesome world. But he never palls upon those who have once learnt to taste him; and no poet is so little of an acquired taste to those who have any liking for poetry at all. He has been called the poet's poet – a phrase honourable but a little misleading, inasmuch as it first suggests that he is not the poet of the great majority of readers who cannot pretend to be poets themselves, and secondly insinuates a kind of intellectual and æsthetic Pharisaism in those who do admire him, which may be justly resented by those who do not. Let us rather say that he is the poet of all others for those who seek in poetry only poetical qualities, and we shall say not only what is more than enough to establish his greatness but what, as I for one believe, can be maintained in the teeth of all gainsayers.<sup>22</sup>

Of Spenser as of two other poets in this volume, Shakespere and Milton, it seemed to be unnecessary and even impertinent to give any extracts. Their works are, or ought to be, in all hands; and even if it were not so, no space at my command could give sample of their infinite varieties.

The volume, variety, and vigour of the poetical production of the period in which Spenser is the central figure – the last twenty years of the sixteenth century – is perhaps proportionally the greatest, and may be said to be emphatically the most distinguished in purely poetical characteristics of any period in our history. Every kind of poetical work is represented in it, and every kind (with the possible exception of the semi-poetical kind of satire) is well represented. There is, indeed, no second name that approaches Spenser's, either in respect of importance or in respect of uniform excellence of work. But in the most incomplete production of this time there is almost always that poetical spark which is often entirely wanting in the finished and complete work of other periods. I shall, therefore, divide the whole mass into four groups, each with certain distinguished names at its head, and a crowd of hardly undistinguished names in its rank and file. These four groups are the sonneteers, the historians, the satirists, and lastly, the miscellaneous lyrists and poetical miscellanists.

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Although it is only recently that its mass and its beauty have been fully recognised, the extraordinary outburst of sonnet-writing at a certain period of Elizabeth's reign has always attracted the attention of literary historians. For many years after Wyatt and Surrey's work appeared the form attracted but little imitation or practice. About 1580 Spenser himself probably, Sidney and Thomas Watson certainly, devoted much attention to it; but it was some dozen years later that the most striking crop of sonnets appeared. Between 1593 and 1596 there were published more than a dozen collections, chiefly or wholly of sonnets, and almost all bearing the name of a single person, in whose honour they were supposed to be composed. So singular is this coincidence, showing either an intense *engouement* in literary society, or a spontaneous determination of energy in individuals, that the list with dates is worth giving. It runs thus: – In 1593 came Barnes's *Parthenophil and Parthenophe*, Fletcher's *Licia*, and Lodge's *Phillis*. In 1594 followed Constable's *Diana*, Daniel's *Delia*,<sup>23</sup> the anonymous *Zepheria*, Drayton's *Idea*, Percy's *Cælia*, and Willoughby's *Avisa*; 1595 added the *Alcilia* of a certain J. C., and Spenser's perfect *Amoretti*; 1596 gave Griffin's *Fidessa*, Lynch's *Diella*, and Smith's *Chloris*, while Shakespeare's earliest sonnets were probably not much later. Then the fashion changed, or the vein was worked out, or (more fancifully) the impossibility of equalling Spenser and Shakespeare choked off competitors. The date of Lord Brooke's singular *Cælica*, not published till long afterwards, is uncertain; but he may, probably, be classed with Sidney and Watson in period.

Fulke, or, as he himself spelt it, Foulke Greville, in his later years Lord Brooke,<sup>24</sup> was of a noble house in Warwickshire connected with the Beauchamps and the Willoughbys. He was born in 1554, was educated at Shrewsbury with Philip Sidney, whose kinsman, lifelong friend, and first biographer he was – proceeded, not like Sidney to Oxford, but to Cambridge (where he was a member, it would seem, of Jesus College, not as usually said of Trinity) – received early lucrative preferments chiefly in connection with the government of Wales, was a favourite courtier of Elizabeth's during all her later life, and, obtaining a royal gift of Warwick Castle, became the ancestor of the present earls of Warwick. In 1614 he became Chancellor of the Exchequer. Lord Brooke, who lived to a considerable age, was stabbed in a rather mysterious manner in 1628 by a servant named Haywood, who is said to have been enraged by discovering that his master had left him nothing in his will. The story is, as has been said, mysterious, and the affair seems to have been hushed up. Lord Brooke was not universally popular, and a very savage contemporary epitaph on him has been preserved. But he had been the patron of the youthful Davenant, and has left not a little curious literary work, which has only been recently collected, and little of which saw the light in his own lifetime. Of his two singular plays, *Mustapha* and *Alaham* (closet-dramas having something in common with the Senecan model), *Mustapha* was printed in 1609; but it would seem piratically. His chief prose work, the *Life of Sidney*, was not printed till 1652. His chief work in verse, the singular *Poems of Monarchy* (ethical and political treatises), did not appear till eighteen years later, as well as the allied *Treatise on Religion*. But poems or tracts on human learning, on wars, and other things, together with his tragedies as above, had appeared in 1633. This publication, a folio volume, also contained by far the most interesting part of his work, the so-called sonnet collection of *Cælica* – a medley, like many of those mentioned in this chapter, of lyrics and short poems of all lengths and metrical arrangements, but, unlike almost all of them, dealing with many subjects, and apparently addressed to more than one person. It is here, and in parts of the prose, that the reader who has not a very great love for Elizabethan literature and some experience of it, can be recommended to seek confirmation of the estimate in which Greville was held by Charles Lamb, and of the very excusable and pious, though perhaps excessive, admiration of his editor Dr. Grosart. Even *Cælica* is very unlikely to find readers as a whole, owing to the strangely

<sup>23</sup> *Delia* had appeared earlier in 1592, and partially in 1591; but the text of 1594 is the definitive one. Several of these dates are doubtful or disputed.

<sup>24</sup> He is a little liable to be confounded with two writers (brothers of a patronymic the same as his title) Samuel and Christopher Brooke, the latter of whom wrote poems of some merit, which Dr. Grosart has edited.

repellent character of Brooke's thought, which is intricate and obscure, and of his style, which is at any rate sometimes as harsh and eccentric as the theories of poetry which made him compose verse-treatises on politics. Nevertheless there is much nobility of thought and expression in him, and not unfrequent flashes of real poetry, while his very faults are characteristic. He may be represented here by a piece from *Cælica*, in which he is at his very best, and most poetical because most simple —

"I, with whose colours Myra dressed her head,  
I, that ware posies of her own hand making,  
I, that mine own name in the chimnies read  
By Myra finely wrought ere I was waking:  
Must I look on, in hope time coming may  
With change bring back my turn again to play?"

"I, that on Sunday at the church-stile found  
A garland sweet with true love knots in flowers,  
Which I to wear about mine arms, was bound  
That each of us might know that all was ours:  
Must I lead now an idle life in wishes,  
And follow Cupid for his loaves and fishes?"

"I, that did wear the ring her mother left,  
I, for whose love she gloried to be blamed,  
I, with whose eyes her eyes committed theft,  
I, who did make her blush when I was named:  
Must I lose ring, flowers, blush, theft, and go naked,  
Watching with sighs till dead love be awaked?"

"I, that when drowsy Argus fell asleep,  
Like jealousy o'erwatchèd with desire,  
Was ever warnéd modesty to keep  
While her breath, speaking, kindled Nature's fire:  
Must I look on a-cold while others warm them?  
Do Vulcan's brothers in such fine nets arm them?"

"Was it for this that I might Myra see  
*Washing the water with her beauties white?*  
Yet would she never write her love to me:  
Thinks wit of change when thoughts are in delight?  
Mad girls may safely love as they may leave;  
No man can print a kiss: lines may deceive."

Had Brooke always written with this force and directness he would have been a great poet. As it is, he has but the ore of poetry, not the smelted metal.

For there is no doubt that Sidney here holds the primacy, not merely in time but in value, of the whole school, putting Spenser and Shakespere aside. That thirty or forty years' diligent study of Italian models had much to do with the extraordinary advance visible in his sonnets over those of Tottel's *Miscellany* is, no doubt, undeniable. But many causes besides the inexplicable residuum of fortunate inspiration, which eludes the most careful search into literary cause and effect, had to do with the production of the "lofty, insolent, and passionate vein," which becomes noticeable in English

poetry for the first time about 1580, and which dominates it, if we include the late autumn-summer of Milton's last productions, for a hundred years. Perhaps it is not too much to say that this makes its very first appearance in Sidney's verse, for *The Shepherd's Calendar*, though of an even more perfect, is of a milder strain. The inevitable tendency of criticism to gossip about poets instead of criticising poetry has usually mixed a great deal of personal matter with the accounts of *Astrophel and Stella*, the series of sonnets which is Sidney's greatest literary work, and which was first published some years after his death in an incorrect and probably pirated edition by Thomas Nash. There is no doubt that there was a real affection between Sidney (Astrophel) and Penelope Devereux (Stella), daughter of the Earl of Essex, afterwards Lady Rich, and that marriage proving unhappy, Lady Mountjoy. But the attempts which have been made to identify every hint and allusion in the series with some fact or date, though falling short of the unimaginable folly of scholastic labour-lost which has been expended on the sonnets of Shakespere, still must appear somewhat idle to those who know the usual genesis of love-poetry – how that it is of imagination all compact, and that actual occurrences are much oftener occasions and bases than causes and material of it. It is of the smallest possible importance or interest to a rational man to discover what was the occasion of Sidney's writing these charming poems – the important point is their charm. And in this respect (giving heed to his date and his opportunities of imitation) I should put Sidney third to Shakespere and Spenser. The very first piece of the series, an oddly compounded sonnet of thirteen Alexandrines and a final heroic, strikes the note of intense and fresh poetry which is only heard afar off in Surrey and Wyatt, which is hopelessly to seek in the tentatives of Turberville and Googe, and which is smothered with jejune and merely literary ornament in the less formless work of Sidney's contemporary, Thomas Watson. The second line —

"That she, dear she, might take some pleasure of my pain,"

the couplet —

"Oft turning others' leaves to see if thence would flow  
Some fresh and fruitful showers upon my sunburnt brain,"

and the sudden and splendid finale —

"'Fool!' said my muse, 'look in thy heart and write!'"

are things that may be looked for in vain earlier.

A little later we meet with that towering soar of verse which is also peculiar to the period:

"When Nature made her chief work – Stella's eyes,  
In colour black why wrapt she beams so bright?" —

lines which those who deprecate insistence on the importance of form in poetry might study with advantage, for the thought is a mere commonplace conceit, and the beauty of the phrase is purely derived from the cunning arrangement and cadence of the verse. The first perfectly charming sonnet in the English language – a sonnet which holds its own after three centuries of competition – is the famous "With how sad steps, O moon, thou climbst the skies," where Lamb's stricture on the last line as obscure seems to me unreasonable. The equally famous phrase, "That sweet enemy France," which occurs a little further on is another, and whether borrowed from Giordano Bruno or not is perhaps the best example of the felicity of expression in which Sidney is surpassed by few Englishmen. Nor ought the extraordinary variety of the treatment to be missed. Often as Sidney girds at those who, like Watson, "dug their sonnets out of books," he can write in the learned literary manner with the best.

The pleasant ease of his sonnet to the sparrow, "Good brother Philip," contrasts in the oddest way with his allegorical and mythological sonnets, in each of which veins he indulges hardly less often, though very much more wisely than any of his contemporaries. Nor do the other "Songs of variable verse," which follow, and in some editions are mixed up with the sonnets, display less extraordinary power. The first song, with its refrain in the penultimate line of each stanza,

"To you, to you, all song of praise is due,"

contrasts in its throbbing and burning life with the faint and misty imagery, the stiff and wooden structure, of most of the verse of Sidney's predecessors, and deserves to be given in full: —

"Doubt you to whom my Muse these notes intendeth;  
Which now my breast o'ercharged to music lendeth?  
To you! to you! all song of praise is due:  
Only in you my song begins and endeth.

"Who hath the eyes which marry state with pleasure,  
Who keeps the keys of Nature's chiefest treasure?  
To you! to you! all song of praise is due:  
Only for you the heaven forgot all measure.

"Who hath the lips, where wit in fairness reigneth?  
Who womankind at once both decks and staineth?  
To you! to you! all song of praise is due:  
Only by you Cupid his crown maintaineth.

"Who hath the feet, whose steps all sweetness planteth?  
Who else; for whom Fame worthy trumpets wanteth?  
To you! to you! all song of praise is due:  
Only to you her sceptre Venus granteth.

"Who hath the breast, whose milk doth passions nourish?  
Whose grace is such, that when it chides doth cherish?  
To you! to you! all song of praise is due:  
Only through you the tree of life doth flourish.

"Who hath the hand, which without stroke subdueth?  
Who long dead beauty with increase reneweth?  
To you! to you! all song of praise is due:  
Only at you all envy hopeless rueth.

"Who hath the hair, which looses fastest tieth?  
Who makes a man live then glad when he dieth?  
To you! to you! all song of praise is due:  
Only of you the flatterer never lieth.

"Who hath the voice, which soul from senses sunders?  
Whose force but yours the bolts of beauty thunders?  
To you! to you! all song of praise is due:

Only with you not miracles are wonders.

"Doubt you to whom my Muse these notes intendeth?  
Which now my breast o'ercharged to music lendeth?  
To you! to you! all song of praise is due:  
Only in you my song begins and endeth."

Nor is its promise belied by those which follow, and which are among the earliest and the most charming of the rich literature of songs that really are songs – songs to music – which the age was to produce. All the scanty remnants of his other verse are instinct with the same qualities, especially the splendid dirge, "Ring out your bells, let mourning shows be spread," and the pretty lines "to the tune of Wilhelmus van Nassau." I must quote the first: —

"Ring out your bells! let mourning shows be spread,  
For Love is dead.  
All love is dead, infected  
With the plague of deep disdain;  
Worth as nought worth rejected.  
And faith, fair scorn doth gain.  
From so ungrateful fancy,  
From such a female frenzy,  
From them that use men thus,  
Good Lord, deliver us!

"Weep, neighbours, weep! Do you not hear it said  
That Love is dead?  
His deathbed, peacock's Folly;  
His winding-sheet is Shame;  
His will, False Seeming wholly;  
His sole executor, Blame.  
From so ungrateful fancy,  
From such a female frenzy,  
From them that use men thus,  
Good Lord, deliver us!

"Let dirge be sung, and trentals rightly read,  
For Love is dead.  
Sir Wrong his tomb ordaineth  
My mistress' marble heart;  
Which epitaph containeth  
'Her eyes were once his dart.'  
From so ungrateful fancy,  
From such a female frenzy,  
From them that use men thus,  
Good Lord, deliver us!

"Alas, I lie. Rage hath this error bred,  
Love is not dead.  
Love is not dead, but sleepeth

In her unmatched mind:  
 Where she his counsel keepeth  
 Till due deserts she find.  
 Therefore from so vile fancy  
 To call such wit a frenzy,  
 Who love can temper thus,  
 Good Lord, deliver us!"

The verse from the *Arcadia* (which contains a great deal of verse) has been perhaps injuriously affected in the general judgment by the fact that it includes experiments in the impossible classical metres. But both it and the Translations from the Psalms express the same poetical faculty employed with less directness and force. To sum up, there is no Elizabethan poet, except the two named, who is more unmistakably imbued with poetical quality than Sidney. And Hazlitt's judgment on him, that he is "jejune" and "frigid" will, as Lamb himself hinted, long remain the chiefest and most astonishing example of a great critic's aberrations when his prejudices are concerned.

Had Hazlitt been criticising Thomas Watson, his judgment, though harsh, would have been not wholly easy to quarrel with. It is probably the excusable but serious error of judgment which induced his rediscoverer, Professor Arber, to rank Watson above Sidney in gifts and genius, that has led other critics to put him unduly low. Watson himself, moreover, has invited depreciation by his extreme frankness in confessing that his *Passionate Century* is not a record of passion at all, but an elaborate literary *pastiche* after this author and that. I fear it must be admitted that the average critic is not safely to be trusted with such an avowal of what he is too much disposed to advance as a charge without confession. Watson, of whom as usual scarcely anything is known personally, was a Londoner by birth, an Oxford man by education, a friend of most of the earlier literary school of the reign, such as Lyly, Peele, and Spenser, and a tolerably industrious writer both in Latin and English during his short life, which can hardly have begun before 1557, and was certainly closed by 1593. He stands in English poetry as the author of the *Hecatopathia* or *Passionate Century* of sonnets (1582), and the *Tears of Fancy*, consisting of sixty similar poems, printed after his death. The *Tears of Fancy* are regular quatorzains, the pieces composing the *Hecatopathia*, though called sonnets, are in a curious form of eighteen lines practically composed of three six-line stanzas rhymed A B, A B, C C, and not connected by any continuance of rhyme from stanza to stanza. The special and peculiar oddity of the book is, that each sonnet has a prose preface as thus: "In this passion the author doth very busily imitate and augment a certain ode of Ronsard, which he writeth unto his mistress. He beginneth as followeth, *Plusieurs*, etc." Here is a complete example of one of Watson's pages: —

"There needeth no annotation at all before this passion, it is of itself so plain and easily conveyed. Yet the unlearned may have this help given them by the way to know what Galaxia is or Pactolus, which perchance they have not read of often in our vulgar rhymes. Galaxia (to omit both the etymology and what the philosophers do write thereof) is a white way or milky circle in the heavens, which Ovid mentioneth in this manner —

*Est via sublimis cælo manifesta sereno,  
 Lactea nomen habet, candore notabilis ipso.*

— *Metamorph. lib. 1.*

And Cicero thus in *Somnio Scipionis*: *Erat autem is splendissimo candore inter flammæ circulus elucens, quem vos (ut a Graijs accepistis) orbem lacteum nuncupatis.*

Pactolus is a river in Lydia, which hath golden sands under it, as Tibullus witnesseth in this verse: —

*Nec me regna juvant, nec Lydius aurifer amnis.—*

*Tibul. lib. 3.*

Who can recount the virtues of my dear,  
Or say how far her fame hath taken flight,  
That cannot tell how many stars appear  
In part of heaven, which Galaxia hight,  
Or number all the moats in Phœbus' rays,  
Or golden sands whereon Pactolus plays?

And yet my hurts enforce me to confess,  
In crystal breast she shrouds a bloody heart,  
Which heart in time will make her merits less,  
Unless betimes she cure my deadly smart:  
For now my life is double dying still,  
And she defamed by sufferance of such ill;

And till the time she helps me as she may,  
Let no man undertake to tell my toil,  
But only such, as can distinctly say,  
What monsters Nilus breeds, or Afric soil:  
For if he do, his labour is but lost,  
Whilst I both fry and freeze 'twixt flame and frost."

Now this is undoubtedly, as Watson's contemporaries would have said, "a cooling card" to the reader, who is thus presented with a series of elaborate poetical exercises affecting the acutest personal feeling, and yet confessedly representing no feeling at all. Yet the *Hecatopathia* is remarkable, both historically and intrinsically. It does not seem likely that at its publication the author can have had anything of Sidney's or much of Spenser's before him; yet his work is only less superior to the work of their common predecessors than the work of these two. By far the finest of his *Century* is the imitation of Ferrabosco —

"Resolved to dust intombed here lieth love."

The quatorzains of the *Tears of Fancy* are more attractive in form and less artificial in structure and phraseology, but it must be remembered that by their time Sidney's sonnets were known and Spenser had written much. The seed was scattered abroad, and it fell in congenial soil in falling on Watson, but the *Hecatopathia* was self-sown.

This difference shows itself very remarkably in the vast outburst of sonnetteering which, as has been remarked, distinguished the middle of the last decade of the sixteenth century. All these writers had Sidney and Spenser before them, and they assume so much of the character of a school that there are certain subjects, for instance, "Care-charming sleep," on which many of them (after Sidney) composed sets of rival poems, almost as definitely competitive as the sonnets of the later "Uranie et Job" and "Belle Matineuse" series in France. Nevertheless, there is in all of them — what as a rule is wanting in this kind of clique verse — the independent spirit, the original force which makes poetry.

The Smiths and the Fletchers, the Griffins and the Lynches, are like little geysers round the great ones: the whole soil is instinct with fire and flame. We shall, however, take the production of the four remarkable years 1593-1596 separately, and though in more than one case we shall return upon their writers both in this chapter and in a subsequent one, the unity of the sonnet impulse seems to demand separate mention for them here.

In 1593 the influence of the Sidney poems (published, it must be remembered, in 1591) was new, and the imitators, except Watson (of whom above), display a good deal of the quality of the novice. The chief of them are Barnabe Barnes, with his *Parthenophil and Parthenophe*, Giles Fletcher (father of the Jacobean poets, Giles and Phineas Fletcher), with his *Licia*, and Thomas Lodge, with his *Phyllis*. Barnes is a modern discovery, for before Dr. Grosart reprinted him in 1875, from the unique original at Chatsworth, for thirty subscribers only (of whom I had the honour to be one), he was practically unknown. Mr. Arber has since, in his *English Garner*, opened access to a wider circle, to whom I at least do not grudge their entry. As with most of these minor Elizabethan poets, Barnes is a very obscure person. A little later than *Parthenophil* he wrote *A Divine Centurie of Spiritual Sonnets*, having, like many of his contemporaries, an apparent desire poetically to make the best of both worlds. He also wrote a wild play in the most daring Elizabethan style, called *The Devil's Charter*, and a prose political *Treatise of Offices*. Barnes was a friend of Gabriel Harvey's, and as such met with some rough usage from Nash, Marston, and others. His poetical worth, though there are fine passages in *The Devil's Charter* and in the *Divine Centurie*, must rest on *Parthenophil*. This collection consists not merely of sonnets but of madrigals, sestines, canzons, and other attempts after Italian masters. The style, both verbal and poetical, needs chastising in places, and Barnes's expression in particular is sometimes obscure. He is sometimes comic when he wishes to be passionate, and frequently verbose when he wishes to be expressive. But the fire, the full-bloodedness, the poetical virility, of the poems is extraordinary. A kind of intoxication of the eternal-feminine seems to have seized the poet to an extent not otherwise to be paralleled in the group, except in Sidney; while Sidney's courtly sense of measure and taste did not permit him Barnes's forcible extravagances. Here is a specimen: —

"Phœbus, rich father of eternal light,  
And in his hand a wreath of Heliochrise  
He brought, to beautify those tresses,  
Whose train, whose softness, and whose gloss more bright,  
Apollo's locks did overprize.  
Thus, with this garland, whiles her brows he blesses,  
The golden shadow with his tincture  
Coloured her locks, aye gilded with the cincture."

Giles Fletcher's *Licia* is a much more pale and colourless performance, though not wanting in merit. The author, who was afterwards a most respectable clergyman, is of the class of *amoureux transis*, and dies for Licia throughout his poems, without apparently suspecting that it was much better to live for her. His volume contained some miscellaneous poems, with a dullish essay in the historical style (see *post*), called *The Rising of Richard to the Crown*. Very far superior is Lodge's *Phyllis*, the chief poetical work of that interesting person, except some of the madrigals and odd pieces of verse scattered about his prose tracts (for which see Chapter VI.) *Phyllis* is especially remarkable for the grace and refinement with which the author elaborates the Sidneian model. Lodge, indeed, as it seems to me, was one of the not uncommon persons who can always do best with a model before them. He euphuised with better taste than Lyly, but in imitation of him; his tales in prose are more graceful than those of Greene, whom he copied; it at least seems likely that he out-Marlowed Marlowe in the rant of the *Looking-Glass for London*, and the stiffness of the *Wounds of Civil War*, and he chiefly polished Sidney in his sonnets and madrigals. It is not to be denied, however, that in three out of these

four departments he gave us charming work. His mixed allegiance to Marlowe and Sidney gave him command of a splendid form of decasyllable, which appears often in *Phyllis*, as for instance —

"About thy neck do all the graces throng  
And lay such baits as might entangle death,"

where it is worth noting that the whole beauty arises from the dexterous placing of the dissyllable "graces," and the trisyllable "entangle," exactly where they ought to be among the monosyllables of the rest. The madrigals "Love guards the roses of thy lips," "My Phyllis hath the morning sun," and "Love in my bosom like a bee" are simply unsurpassed for sugared sweetness in English. Perhaps this is the best of them: —

"Love in my bosom like a bee,  
Doth suck his sweet;  
Now with his wings he plays with me,  
Now with his feet.  
Within mine eyes he makes his nest  
His bed amidst my tender breast,  
My kisses are his daily feast;  
And yet he robs me of my rest?  
'Ah, wanton! will ye?'

"And if I sleep, then percheth he,  
With pretty flight,<sup>25</sup>  
And makes his pillow of my knee  
The livelong night.  
Strike I my lute, he tunes the string.  
He music plays, if so I sing.  
He lends me every lovely thing  
Yet cruel! he, my heart doth sting.  
'Whist, wanton! still ye!'

"Else I with roses, every day  
Will whip you hence,  
And bind you, when you want to play,  
For your offence.  
I'll shut my eyes to keep you in,  
I'll make you fast it for your sin,  
I'll count your power not worth a pin.  
Alas, what hereby shall I win  
If he gainsay me?

"What if I beat the wanton boy  
With many a rod?  
He will repay me with annoy  
Because a god.  
Then sit thou safely on my knee,

---

<sup>25</sup> Printed in *England's Helicon* "sleight."

And let thy bower my bosom be.  
Lurk in mine eyes, I like of thee.  
O Cupid! so thou pity me,  
Spare not, but play thee."

1594 was the most important of all the sonnet years, and here we are chiefly bound to mention authors who will come in for fuller notice later. The singular book known as Willoughby's *Avisa* which, as having a supposed bearing on Shakespere and as containing much of that personal puzzlement which rejoices critics, has had much attention of late years, is not strictly a collection of sonnets; its poems being longer and of differing stanzas. But in general character it falls in with the sonnet-collections addressed or devoted to a real or fanciful personage. It is rather satirical than panegyric in character, and its poetical worth is very far from high. William Percy, a friend of Barnes (who dedicated the *Parthenophil* to him), son of the eighth Earl of Northumberland, and a retired person who seems to have passed the greater part of a long life in Oxford "drinking nothing but ale," produced a very short collection entitled *Cælia*, not very noteworthy, though it contains (probably in imitation of Barnes) one of the tricky things called echo-sonnets, which, with dialogue-sonnets and the like, have sometimes amused the leisure of poets. Much more remarkable is the singular anonymous collection called *Zepheria*. Its contents are called not sonnets but canzons, though most of them are orthodox quatorzains somewhat oddly rhymed and rhythmical. It is brief, extending only to forty pieces, and, like much of the poetry of the period, begins and ends with Italian mottoes or dedication-phrases. But what is interesting about it is the evidence it gives of deep familiarity not only with Italian but with French models. This appears both in such words as "jouissance," "thesaurise," "esperance," "souvenance," "vatical" (a thoroughly Ronsardising word), with others too many to mention, and in other characteristics. Mr. Sidney Lee, in his most valuable collection of these sonneteers, endeavours to show that this French influence was less uncommon than has sometimes been thought. Putting this aside, the characteristic of *Zepheria* is unchastened vigour, full of promise, but decidedly in need of further schooling and discipline, as the following will show: —

"O then Desire, father of Jouissance,  
The Life of Love, the Death of dastard Fear,  
The kindest nurse to true persèverance,  
Mine heart inherited, with thy love's rever. [?]  
Beauty! peculiar parent of Conceit,  
Prosperous midwife to a travelling muse,  
The sweet of life, Nepenthe's eyes receipt,  
Thee into me distilled, O sweet, infuse!  
Love then (the spirit of a generous sprite,  
An infant ever drawing Nature's breast,  
The Sum of Life, that Chaos did unnight!)  
Dismissed mine heart from me, with thee to rest.  
And now incites me cry, 'Double or quit!  
Give back my heart, or take his body to it!'"

This cannot be said of the three remarkable collections yet to be noticed which appeared in this year, to wit, Constable's *Diana*, Daniel's *Delia*, and Drayton's *Idea*. These three head the group and contain the best work, after Shakespere and Spenser and Sidney, in the English sonnet of the time. Constable's sonnets had appeared partly in 1592, and as they stand in fullest collection were published in or before 1594. Afterwards he wrote, like others, "divine" sonnets (he was a Roman Catholic) and some miscellaneous poems, including a very pretty "Song of Venus and Adonis." He

was a close friend of Sidney, many of whose sonnets were published with his, and his work has much of the Sidneian colour, but with fewer flights of happily expressed fancy. The best of it is probably the following sonnet, which is not only full of gracefully expressed images, but keeps up its flight from first to last – a thing not universal in these Elizabethan sonnets: —

"My Lady's presence makes the Roses red,  
Because to see her lips they blush for shame.  
The Lily's leaves, for envy, pale became;  
And her white hands in them this envy bred.  
The Marigold the leaves abroad doth spread;  
Because the sun's and her power is the same.  
The Violet of purple colour came,  
Dyed in the blood she made my heart to shed.  
In brief all flowers from her their virtue take;  
From her sweet breath, their sweet smells do proceed;  
The living heat which her eyebeams doth make  
Warmeth the ground, and quickeneth the seed.  
The rain, wherewith she watereth the flowers,  
Falls from mine eyes, which she dissolves in showers."

Samuel Daniel had an eminently contemplative genius which might have anticipated the sonnet as it is in Wordsworth, but which the fashion of the day confined to the not wholly suitable subject of Love. In the splendid "Care-charmer Sleep," one of the tournament sonnets above noted, he contrived, as will be seen, to put his subject under the influence of his prevailing faculty.

"Care-charmer Sleep, son of the sable Night,  
Brother to Death, in silent darkness born,  
Relieve my anguish, and restore the light,  
With dark forgetting of my cares, return;  
And let the day be time enough to mourn  
The shipwreck of my ill-adventured youth;  
Let waking eyes suffice to wail their scorn  
Without the torment of the night's untruth.  
Cease, Dreams, th' imag'ry of our day-desires,  
To model forth the passions of the morrow,  
Never let rising sun approve you liars,  
To add more grief to aggravate my sorrow.  
Still let me sleep, embracing clouds in vain;  
And never wake to feel the day's disdain."

But as a rule he is perhaps too much given to musing, and too little to rapture. In form he is important, as he undoubtedly did much to establish the arrangement of three alternate rhymed quatrains and a couplet which, in Shakespere's hands, was to give the noblest poetry of the sonnet and of the world. He has also an abundance of the most exquisite single lines, such as

"O clear-eyed rector of the holy hill,"

and the wonderful opening of Sonnet XXVII., "The star of my mishap imposed this pain."

The sixty-three sonnets, varied in different editions of Drayton's *Idea*, are among the most puzzling of the whole group. Their average value is not of the very highest. Yet there are here and there the strangest suggestions of Drayton's countryman, Shakespere, and there is one sonnet, No. 61, beginning, "Since there's no help, come let us kiss and part," which I have found it most difficult to believe to be Drayton's, and which is Shakespere all over. That Drayton was the author of *Idea* as a whole is certain, not merely from the local allusions, but from the resemblance to the more successful exercises of his clear, masculine, vigorous, fertile, but occasionally rather unpoetical style. The sonnet just referred to is itself one of the very finest existing – perhaps one of the ten or twelve best sonnets in the world, and it may be worth while to give it with another in contrast: —

"Our flood's Queen, Thames, for ships and swans is crowned;  
And stately Severn for her shore is praised.  
The crystal Trent for fords and fish renowned;  
And Avon's fame to Albion's cliffs is raised;  
Carlegion Chester vaunts her holy Dee;  
York many wonders of her Ouse can tell.  
The Peak her Dove, whose banks so fertile be;  
And Kent will say her Medway doth excel.  
Cotswold commends her Isis to the Tame;  
Our northern borders boast of Tweed's fair flood  
Our western parts extol their Wily's fame;  
And the old Lea brags of the Danish blood.  
Arden's sweet Ankor, let thy glory be  
That fair Idea only lives by thee!"

"Since there's no help, come, let us kiss and part!  
Nay, I have done. You get no more of me  
And I am glad, yea, glad with all my heart

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