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AN INTRODUCTION TO ENGLISH
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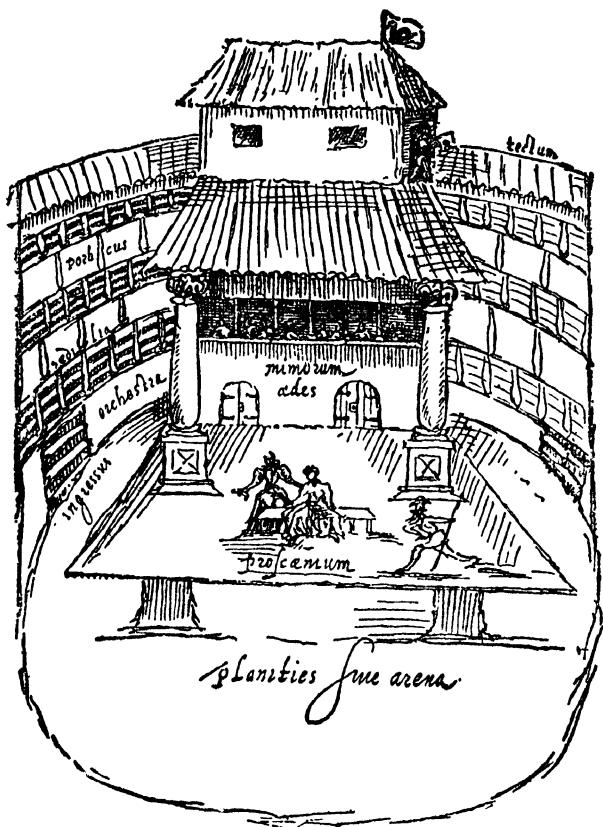
W. H. KING, B.A.

NEW ERA LIBRARY

THE New Era Library represents an attempt to meet the demand on the part of the general reader for works which are, frankly, merely introductions to a subject and not indigestible tabloid primers. They give in broad outline something of the main principles and sphere of activity of the subject covered by the title or sub-title. They do not profess to be encyclopædic in character, and they assume little if any previous knowledge on the part of the reader.

The explanations are in each case full enough to permit a person, unaided, to get a wide general view of some important topic, unburdened with excessive detail, in order that the larger classical works may afterwards be the more easily attacked by those who desire to pursue their studies further.

In these days it is necessary for the man in the street to know a little of many things. Our aim is to present 'that little' in such a way that it is easily assimilated, and yet so accurately that nothing has to be unlearned at a later stage.



THE STAGE OF A LONDON THEATRE IN 1596

From an original sketch made by a Dutch visitor, and now preserved in the University Library at Utrecht

BOOKLAND

BY

W·H·KING



GEORGE PHILIP & SON LTD

CONTENTS

Chap.	Page
I. INTRODUCTORY	I
II. CHAUCER	5
III. THE CANTERBURY TALES: THE PROLOGUE	12
IV. OLD BALLADS	21
V. THE RENASCENCE AND MORTE D'ARTHUR	32
VI. THE REFORMATION AND THE BIBLE	42
VII. THE DRAMA AND MARLOWE	51
VIII. SHAKESPEARE	63
IX. BEN JONSON	74
X. SPENSER	83
XI. POETRY AND PROSE	92
XII. PURITANS AND CAVALIERS	100
XIII. TWO GREAT PURITANS	111
XIV. DRYDEN AND POPE	124
XV. JOURNALISTS AND ESSAYISTS	136
XVI. DR. JOHNSON AND HIS AGE	147
XVII. THE REVIVAL OF ROMANCE	156
XVIII. THE AGE OF ROMANCE	170
XIX. THREE YOUNG ROMANTICS	181

Chap.	Page
XX. ESSAYS	194
XXI. NOVELS	204
XXII. VICTORIAN POETS	214
XXIII. VICTORIAN ESSAYISTS	226
XXIV. VICTORIAN NOVELISTS	236
SOME USEFUL DATES	247

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTORY



ONE often reads or hears the expression, the 'soul' of a nation—thus, 'the soul of France' or 'the soul of England'; and one may come across some such sentence as 'Russia has found her soul.'

What is the 'soul' of a country or nation? What do men mean, when they say that a nation is only great so long as she is true to her soul? What is the soul of England? What is the English spirit, if you will? It is, some answer, the spirit of St. George, who rode out to the help of the weak and oppressed. It is, others will say, the spirit of Shakespeare, a kind and tender spirit, yet fond of the frolic of life and revelling in all its rough realities. That modest, kind, gentle, laughter-loving and manly soul is the soul of England.

It is the spirit we find in the speaking beauty of the English countryside, in its still valleys, in its peaceful villages, and in its old grey churches. It is in the English singing. We find it, too, in the old ballads, those wild flowers of our literature, and, indeed, in all our great writers. For the literature of a nation, even more than her art and music, is the expression of that nation's spirit. The English spirit is in Chaucer, in Shakespeare, and in Dickens.

In the literature of a nation are reflected the ideals of that nation—its ideals of beauty and of truth. If one is to understand the English spirit, one must not be content with reading the national history only. It is not enough to know the beautiful deeds of a St. George or the valiant victories of a Nelson. One must read also the literature of the country and learn the dreams behind these deeds—the dreams, in fact, that made the deeds possible. The dream is always greater than the deed, but without the one there cannot be the other. Columbus discovered America; his discovery was not his dream; but had he not dreamed he would have discovered nothing. The literature of a country is the expression of that country's activity. Every strand in the stuff of our nation's life is woven into the fabric of our literature.

Before coming to the great books of English literature, then, one must realise the connection that exists between life and literature. Harking back through the centuries, we find that no matter how great the personality of a writer, even though to some extent his genius mark the age, yet the age also sets its stamp on him. He is the expression of the spirit of the time, and shows how the people of that period looked upon life and what they thought about it.

If a writer is the product of his time, then the history of literature has a national as well as a personal character. But, of course, every writer must be affected differently, according to his temperament, by the spirit and movements of the period in which he lives. To realise this it is only necessary to think of the Puritan period and the two great writers it produced, Milton and Bunyan, or, again, of the French Revolution and its power-

ful influence on writers in this country as well as in France.

Or, to take as another example, the Industrial Revolution. During that dark period of our history, when the country was passing from the beauty of its agricultural life into the wild welter of black industrialism, the soul of the land passed under a cloud. The age was one of discontent, but a noble discontent. It found its voice in Blake, who, pondering on the dark, satanic mills, cried :—

‘I will not cease from mental fight,
Nor shall my sword sleep in my hand,
Till we have built Jerusalem
In England’s green and pleasant land.’

The cry became more bitter in Byron, the violent poet of rebellion. And even in the last century it was taken up by two great prose writers, Carlyle and Ruskin, who railed against social conditions.

Thus literature is an expression of life. All our great books have sprung from life. They are real, vital, vivid things, and, if we would understand the history of the nation, we must go to the works of the great writers. One should not be content to read what is written about these men and their books. Such is not the study of literature. Our ambition is to know literature, not what has been written about it, and to do this we must go to the great books, to the fountain-heads of literature. There is no better advice than that of Dr. Johnson. He is speaking of Shakespeare, but his advice holds throughout all literature :—

‘Let him that is unacquainted with the powers of Shakespeare, and who desires to feel the highest pleasure that the drama can give, read every play from the first scene to

the last, with utter negligence of all his commentators. When his fancy is once on the wing, let it not stop at correction or explanation. When his attention is strongly engaged, let it disdain to turn aside to the name of Theobald and of Pope. Let him read on through brightness and obscurity, through integrity and corruption; let him preserve his comprehension of the dialogue and his interest in the fable, and when the pleasures of novelty have ceased, let him attempt exactness and read the commentators.'

In the following chapters an attempt will be made to show the relation between the events of history and the books and lives of our writers. Only the greatest authors will be mentioned, and their lives will be briefly told, in order to throw their books on the background of the life of the time.

OTHER BOOKS TO READ

In this Series

England in Her Days of Peace. E. Doorly.
The Romance of Building. A. Walker.

Literary Taste. Arnold Bennett. Hodder and Stoughton.
Books and Persons. Arnold Bennett. Chatto and Windus.

Rudiments of Criticism. Lambourne. Oxford University Press.

Short History of the English People. Green. Macmillan.

CHAPTER II

CHAUCER



IF a national literature is the expression of the thoughts and feelings of a nation, then there cannot be a national literature without a nation and a national language.

Now it was a long time before the English people could be said to be a nation, a united people owing allegiance to a central government. We are compounded of many materials—Britons, Angles, Saxons, Danes, Normans—and in the pages of the historian the story is set forth of how all these different elements were welded into one. It will be sufficient here to state that it was not until the fourteenth century that we can be considered as one people, each man regarding his neighbour as an Englishman like himself, no matter by what social differences they might be separated.

In the second place, it was a long time before we had a national language. Anglo-Saxon, the ancestor of our modern speech, came to us with wandering tribes from the North Sea and the Baltic. But to read, say *Beowulf*, the great poem that the invaders brought with them, it is necessary to study Old English, or Anglo-Saxon, almost as one would study a foreign tongue, though it must not, for that reason, be regarded as a foreign language.

When William, Duke of Normandy, subdued England, people were compelled to learn the speech of the conqueror, and for three centuries, a period known as the Middle Ages, French was the language of the upper classes, of the law courts, and of Parliament. But Anglo-Saxon was not dead, for the people clung to their own speech, and used it amongst themselves in their daily life. An important part, too, was played by the friars, who went about the country preaching, not in French, but in the speech of the people. The language changed very much with the years, so that, when Chaucer began to write, he found in use a number of dialects rather than a language.

The English tongue was a kind of medley, a mixture of French and English and other words and constructions, and the special gift of Chaucer in this direction is that he fused the French and English elements and gave us what is really modern English. Out of a dialect he created a language. He was the first writer to use the simple words and phrases of the people, and to weld them all together, in such a way that we can read him without having to use a dictionary and a grammar. This fact was realised by the men of his own time and those who came soon after him. The greatest compliment that can perhaps be paid him is that of the poet Spenser, who calls him 'the well of English undefiled.'

But besides a nation and a national language something else is required before there can be a national literature, and that is something to express—something, moreover, that the people care about expressing. There must be some body of thought and feeling, which arouses so much interest, that there is a desire to discuss these thoughts and feelings both in speech and in writing.

Thus, for instance, the Great War of 1914-1918 was the cause of much literary work—essays, poems, novels, and plays. Sometimes it is a religious movement that moves the mind and heart, sometimes politics and revolutions. But there is never any noble literature, unless there is something stirring in the minds and hearts of those who write it.

In the fourteenth century, the century of Chaucer, there was a great awakening of the national spirit. It was a time of tumult; there were abuses in the Government, the Church, and society, and topics to argue about, and even to fight about, were neither few nor feeble. Chaucer was born in 1340 and died in 1400, so that he lived during more than half of those tumultuous years when the discontent of the mass of the people was expressing itself so strongly. Out of this tumult was born the English national spirit; its growth was hastened by the victories in the Hundred Years' War with France, and reached its height in the reign of Edward III., when all political ties with France were severed, the bondage of Rome was broken, and English took the place of French as the language of court and Parliament.

In the reign of Edward's successor the unrest became critical. The tremendous cost of the French wars had to be met by heavy burdens of taxation. Following the Black Death, and resulting from the scarcity of labour, there arose a bitter struggle between landowners and labourers. At bottom this struggle was the eternal fight between wealth and want, between the idle rich and the overburdened poor. At one time the movement gets dignity from the leadership of John Wyclif, who speaks for the disturbed Christian conscience; at another it gathers violence under the rhetoric

of John Ball, known as 'the mad priest of Kent,' who preaches socialism from the text :—

‘When Adam delved and Eve span,
Who was then the gentleman?’

This widespread social unrest led to the Peasant Revolt under Wat Tyler.

While his contemporaries, Langland, Wyclif, and Gower, reflect all the discontent and unrest of the time, and show a lively interest in questions of social reform, Chaucer, on the other hand, is little touched by such questions. He reflects rather the English spirit, the spirit which rises above it all. It is the spirit of Shakespeare, which will have its jest on the moor in the thunderstorm with the mad old King, the spirit which finds humour at the heart of sorrow and the fun of the tragedy—the spirit, if you will, of the British soldier.

Born in Thames Street, near the river, Geoffrey Chaucer spent his early life in London. His father was a wine merchant, purveyor to the royal household. In this way Geoffrey probably found his way to the court, for at the age of seventeen he was appointed page to the wife of Lionel, son of Edward III. Henceforward, for nearly forty years, he was closely connected with this brilliant court, which he knew intimately under three kings. At an early age he accompanied Edward III. on a military expedition to the Continent, and was taken prisoner at the unsuccessful siege of Rheims. Ransomed with money from the royal purse, he became personal attendant of the King and later a squire. About this time he married one of the Queen's maids of honour.

For some years after his appointment to the King's service Chaucer was frequently sent to France and Italy on commercial and diplomatic

missions. In 1372 he visited Italy, and his imagination was vividly impressed by his stay in such cities as Florence, Genoa, and Padua. It was the golden age of Italian literature. Dante had just died, but Petrarch and Boccaccio were still living. Indeed, Chaucer is said to have met the latter at Padua.

Of these it will be well to add a word about Boccaccio. He was the great raconteur, the storyteller of the Middle Ages. Some of his stories he wrote in verse, but his great work, *The Decameron*, is in prose. In it he imagines seven ladies and three gentlemen, who, withdrawn from plague-stricken Florence, tell tales of love and adventure, to beguile the time in the safety and luxury of their country retreat. It was from Boccaccio's *Decameron* that Chaucer borrowed the plan of his greatest work.

Chaucer paid many visits to Italy, and during the intervals filled the post of Comptroller of the Customs at Aldgate. In 1386 he was elected member of Parliament for Kent.

Very little is actually known about Chaucer as a man, though much has been written about him as a poet. An attempt has been made to find, in his own works, information about his appearance, his tastes, and his habits, but all the conclusions arrived at are, at best, but guess-work.

Thus the first three following passages point to his love of reading, a not unnatural pursuit for a man who was well read in Latin, French, and Italian, while the fourth is evidence of his love of nature. At first sight the language looks rather difficult. The grammar is different from that of modern English, and some of the words used have since disappeared. But there is no need, for that reason, to make a modernised version of the poems.

One has only to read them aloud—the true way of appreciating all poetry—and one cannot fail to hear the melody, and so get the meaning of the most musical of all poets. Most difficulties disappear, and, when a word is unfamiliar to the eye, the ear will often recognise it by the sound. The metre will also decide the pronunciation of the final ‘e.’ The final ‘e’ is pronounced unless the following word begins with a vowel or with ‘h’; at the end of a line it should be only lightly pronounced.

- (I) But of thy verray neyghebores,
That dwellen almost at thy dores,
Thou herest neither that ne this;
For whan thy labour doon al is,
And hast y-maad thy rekeninges,
Instede of reste and newe thinges,
Thou gost hoom to thy hous anon;
And, also domb as any stoon,
Thou sittest at another boke,
Till fully daswed is thy loke,
And livest thus as an hermyte,
Although thyn abstinence is lyte.
- (II) And, as for me, though that my wit be lyte,
On bokes for to rede I me delyte,
And in myn herte have hem in reverence;
And to hem yeve swich lust and swich credence,
That ther is wel unethe game noon
That from my bokes make me to goon,
But hit be other up-on the haly-day,
Or elles in the joly tyme of May;
Whan that I here the smale foules singe,
And that the floures ginne for to springe,
Farwel my studie, as lasting that sesoun.
- (III) So whan I saw I might not slepe,
Til now late, this other night,
Upon my bedde I sat upright,

And bad oon reche me a book
A romaunce, and he hit me took
To rede and dryve the night away ;
For me thoghte it better play
Than playen either at chesse or tables.

- (IV) Of alle the floures in the mede,
Than love I most these floures whyte and rede,
Swiche as men callen daysies in our toun
To hem have I so greet affeccoun,
As I seyde erst, whan comen is the May,
That in my bed ther daweth me no day
That I nam up, and walking in the mede
To seen this flour agein the sonne sprede,
Whan hit upryseth erly by the morwe ;
That blisful sighte softeneth all my sorwe,
So glad am I whan I have presence
Of hit, to doon al maner reverence,
As she, that is of alle floures flour,
Fulfilled of al vertu and honour,
And ever ylyke fair, and fresh of hewe ;
And I love hit and ever ylyke newe,
And ever shal, til that myn herte dye.'

OTHER BOOKS TO READ

Works. Chaucer. Oxford University Press.
My Study Windows. Lowell. Routledge.
Chaucer Primer. Pollard. Macmillan.

CHAPTER III

THE CANTERBURY TALES

THE PROLOGUE



CHAUCER had been soldier, courtier, diplomat, ambassador, man of affairs, and politician. He had seen much in many countries. He knew both the court and the people. As a result of all this wide and varied experience, he had much to say, and amongst the many ways he chose of saying it the greatest is that of *The Canterbury Tales*. Of this work the best-known portion is the Prologue.

‘Whan that Aprille with his shoures sote
The droghte of Marche hath perced to the rote,
And bathed every veyne in swich licour,
Of which vertu engendred is the flour ;
Whan Zephirus eek with his swete breeth
Inspired hath in every holt and heeth
The tendre croppes, and the yonge sonne
Hath in the Ram his halfe cours y-ronne,
And smale fowles maken melodye,
That slepen al the night with open ye,
(So priketh hem nature in hir corages)
That longen folk to goon on pilgrimages
(And palmers for to seken straunge strondes)
To ferne halwes, couthe in sondry londes ;
And specially, from every shires ende
Of Engelond, to Caunterbury they wende,
The holy blisful martir for to seke.’

At the head of the Pilgrim's Road to Canterbury

CANTERBURY TALES: THE PROLOGUE 13

stood the Tabard Inn, in Southwark. On just such an evening Chaucer came hither :—

‘ In Southwerk at the Tabard as I lay
Redy to wenden on my pilgrymage
To Caunterbury with ful devout corage,
At night was come into that hostelrye
Wel nyne and twenty in a companye
Of sondry folk, by aventure y-falle
In felawshipe, and pilgrims were they alle,
That toward Caunterbury wolden ryde ;
The chambres and the stables weren wyde,
And wel we weren esed atte beste.
And shortly, whan the sonne was to reste,
So hadde I spoken with hem everichon,
That I was of hir felawshipe anon,
And made forward erly for to ryse,
To make our wey, ther as I yow devyse.’

This varied company of pilgrims is now described to us in a wonderful series of portraits. Dryden says of the Prologue: ‘ I see all the pilgrims, their humours, their features, and their very dress as distinctly as if I had supped with them at the Tabard Inn at Southwark.’

As an illustration, take the first portrait, that of the Knight :—

‘ A knight ther was, and that a worthy man,
That fro the tyme that he first bigan
To ryden out, he loved chivalrye,
Trouthe and honour, fredom and curteisye.
Ful worthy was he in his lordes werre,
And therto hadde he ridden (no man ferre)
As wel in Christendom as hethenesse
And ever honoured for his worthinesse
At Alisaundre he was, whan it was wonne,

And though that he were worthy, he was wys,
And of his port as meke as is a mayde.
He never yet no vileinye ne sayde

In all his lyf, unto no maner wight.
 He was a verray parfit gentle knight.
 But for to tellen yow of his array,
 His hors were gode, but he was nat gay.
 Of fustian he wered a gipoun
 Al bismotered with his habergeoun ;
 For he was late y-come from his viage,
 And wente for to doon his pilgrimage.'

Do you really want to chatter about that ? Cannot you take it on trust ? Read on. Let Chaucer have his own way. Let his words drop like the gentle rain from heaven and sink in.

This is only one portrait. There are many more, for all classes of society are painted on the crowded canvas, from a knight to a poor ploughman and a begging friar. With the Knight was his son, a young Squyer, 'as fresh as is the month of May,' and attendant Yeman.

Eleven of the pilgrims were in the service of the Church. Of these, the chief was the Prioress :—

' Ther was also a Nonne, a Prioressse
 That of hir smyling was ful simple and coy ;
 Hir gretteste ooth was but by seynt Loy ;
 And she was cleped madam Eglentyne,
 Ful wel she song the service divyne,
 Entuned in hir nose ful semely,
 And Frensh she spak ful faire and fetisly,
 After the scole of Stratford-atte-Bowe,
 For Frensh of Paris was to hir unknowe.
 At mete wel y-taught was she with alle ;
 She leet no morsel from hir lippes falle,
 Ne wette hir fingres in hir sauce depe.
 Wel coude she carie a morsel, and wel kepe,
 That no drope ne fille upon hir brest.
 In curteisye was set ful muche hir lest.
 Hir over lippe wyped she so clene,
 That in hir coppe was no ferthing sene
 Of grece, whan she dronken hadde hir draughte.
 Full semely after hir mete she raughte,

CANTERBURY TALES: THE PROLOGUE 15

And sikerly she was of greet disport,
And ful plesaunt, and amiable of port,
And peyned hir to countrefete chere
Of court, and been estatlich of manere,
And to ben holden digne of reverence.
But, for to speken of hir conscience,
She was so charitable and so pitous,
She wolde wepe, if that she sawe a mous
Caught in a trappe, if it were deed or bledde.
Of smale houndes had she, that she fedde
With rosted flesh, or milk and wastel-breed.
But sore weep she if oon of hem were deed,
Or if men smoot it with a yerde smerte.
And al was conscience and tendre herte.
Ful semely hir wimpel pinched was
Hir nose tretys ; hir eyen greye as glas
Hir mouth ful smal and ther-to softe and reed ;
But silkerly she hadde a fair forheed ;
It was almost a spanne brood, I trowe,
For, hardily, she was nat undergrowe.
Ful fetis was hir cloke, as I was war ;
Of smal coral aboute hir arm she bar
A peire of bedes, gauded al with grene,
And ther-on heng a broche of gold ful shena,
On which ther was first write a crowned A,
And after, Amor vincit omnia.'

With the Prioress were her chapeleyne and
three Preestes. Then came the Monk and the
Frere. Later we have a Somnour (or summoner
of offenders against ecclesiastical law), and a
Pardoner, who sold pardons. More attractive
Church characters, however, are the Povre Persoun,
a picture of an ideal parish priest, and the Clerk of
Oxenford, a picture of the true mediæval scholar.

' A Clerk ther was of Oxenford also
That unto logik hadde longe y-go.
As lene was his horse as is a rake,
But he was nat right fat, I undertake ;
But loked holwe, and ther-to soberly ;
Ful thredbar was his overest courtepy.

For he had geten him yet no benefyce,
 Ne was so worldly for to have offyce ;
 For him was lever have at his beddes heed
 Twenty bokes, clad in blak or reed,
 Of Aristotle and his philosophye,
 Than robes riche, or fithele, or gay sautrye :
 But al be that he was a philosophre,
 Yet hadde he but litel gold in cofre ;
 But al that he mighte of his freendes hente,
 On bokes and on lerninge he it spente,
 And bisily gan for the soules preye
 Of hem that yaf him wher-with to scoleye.
 Of studie took he most cure and most hede.
 Noght o word spak he more than was nede,
 And that was seyde in forme and reverence,
 And short and quik, and ful of hy sentence.
 Souninge in moral vertu was his speche,
 And gladly wolde he lerne, and gladly teche.'

From the other professions there came a Sergeant of the Lawe and a Doctour. From other walks of life came the Marchant, the Shipman, the thieving Miller, and the rascally Cook. Other rogues were the Maunciple and the Reve. In the same company, however, were five honest Londoners, a Haberdassher, Carpenter, Webbe, Dyere, and Tapicer, and with them a poor Plowman, brother to the Persoun :—

' With him ther was a Plowman, was his brother,
 That hadde ylad of dong ful many a fother,
 A trewe swinker and a good was he,
 Livinge in pees and parfit charitee.
 God loved he best with al his hole herte
 At alle tymes, thogh him gamed or smerte,
 And thanne his neighebour right as himselve.
 He wolde thresshe and ther-to dyke and delve,
 For Cristes sake, for every povre wight,
 Withouten hyre, if it lay in his might.
 His tythes payed he ful faire and wel,
 Bothe of his propre swink and his catel.
 In a tabard he rood upon a mere.'

CANTERBURY TALES: THE PROLOGUE 17

Beside the Prioress and her Nun there was one other woman among the pilgrims, a Wyf of Bathe :—

‘ Of clooth-making she hadde swiche an haunt,
She passed hem of Ypres and of Gaunt.’

The jolly host of the Tabard, Harry Bailey, was pleased with his guests :—

‘ A semely man our hoste was with-alle
For to han been a marshal in an halle ;
A large man he was with eyen stepe,
A fairer burgeys in ther noon in Chepe :
Bold of his speche, and wys, and wel y-taught,
And of manhod him lakkede right naught.’

In sooth a fine fellow. To enliven the ride to Canterbury he suggests that each pilgrim shall tell four stories, two on the outward journey and two on the return. He promises to act as judge, the best story to be rewarded with a supper on the return to the inn.

“ Lordinges,” quod he, “ now herkneth for the beste ;
But tak it not, I prey yow, in desdeyn ;
This is the poynt, to speken short and pleyn,
That ech of yow, to shorte with your weye,
In this viage, shal telle tales tweye,—
To Caunterbury-ward, I mene it so,
And homward he shall tellen othere two,
Of aventures that whylom han bifalle.
And which of yow that bereth him best of alle,
That is to seyn, that telleth in this cas
Tales of best sentence and most solas,
Shal have a soper at our aller cost
Here in this place, sitting by this post,
Whan that we come agayn fro Caunterbury.
And for to make yow the more mery,
I wol my-selven gladly with yow ryde,
Right at myn owne cost, and be your gyde.”’

The stories form the body of the poem. Chaucer

did not, however, complete the plan that each of the thirty-one pilgrims should tell four stories. The number actually written is only twenty-four. The poet himself began to tell a tale called 'Sir Thopas,' in which he made fun of the romantic ballads of the time, but Harry Bailey soon bade him stop and 'telle in prose somewhat,' whereupon he told 'The Tale of Melibeus.'

The stories are linked together by prologues which are really chats by the wayside. They not only connect the stories, but they also relieve the monotony of a too long narrative. In them we see the pilgrims applauding, discussing the tale, jeering, and sometimes even fighting. There is incident as varied as the characters. Thus:—

'Whan that the Knight had thus his tale y-told,
 In al the route nas ther yong ne old
 That he ne seyde it was a noble storie,
 And worthy for to drawen to memorie ;
 And namely the gentils everichoon.
 Our Hoste lough and swoor, "So moot I goon,
 This gooth aright, unboked is the male ;
 Lat see now who shal telle another tale ;
 For trewely the game is wel bigonne.
 Now telleth ye, sir Monk, if that ye conne,
 Sumwhat, to quyte with the Knightes tale."
 The Miller, that for-dronken was al pale,
 So that unnethe upon his hors he sat,
 He nolde avalen neither hood ne hat,
 Ne abyde no man for his curteisye,
 But in Pilates vois he gan to crye,
 And swoor by armes and by blood and bones,
 "I can a noble tale for the nones,
 With which I wol now quyte the Knightes tale."
 Our Hoste saugh that he was dronke of ale,
 And seyde : "Abyd, Robin, my leve brother,
 Som bettre man shal telle us first another :
 Abyd, and lat us werken thriftily."
 "By goddes soul," quod he, "that wol nat I ;

CANTERBURY TALES: THE PROLOGUE 19

For I wol speke, or elles go my wey."
Our Hoste answerde : "Tel on, a devel way !
Thou art a fool, thy wit is overcome."
"Now herkneth," quod the Miller, "alle and some !
But first I make a protestacioun
That I am dronke, I knowe it by my soun ;
And therefore, if that I misspeke or seye,
Wyte it the ale of Southwerk, I yow preye." '

At the end of the first day's ride the pilgrims rested at Dartford. The story-telling of the second day closed at Rochester with the Nonne Preestes Tale of the Cok and Hen, the best of all the tales.

In *The Canterbury Tales* we find little evidence of the tumultuous times in which Chaucer lived. He has avoided all the burning questions of the age. Plague, famine, religious and social strife have little place in this work, or, for that matter, in any of his work. And yet it would not be true to say that his work has no connection with the age in which it was written.

In the first place, we get the best account we have of a pilgrimage, the popular holiday excursion of the time. Then we have a series of portraits of men and women in every class of society, so that we know and understand this period all the better for having the poems. Further, in the tales themselves, there is set forth all the life of the Middle Ages : ' the legend of the saint, the romance of the knight, the wonderful fables of the traveller, the coarse tale of the common life, the love-story, the allegory, the animal fable, and the satirical lay.'

But perhaps most of all, in these stories, is reflected the spirit of the age. Chaucer looks not on the black, but on the brighter, lighter side of life. Towards the end of his own days he met disaster with a brimming, buoyant cheerfulness; and the people he shows us in his unsurpassed pictures of

the Middle Ages looked on life in exactly the same way. The pilgrims are a happy company, talking, chaffing, and laughing, and ever making fun. They are bubbling with glee and regard living as being a very joyous affair, as it is and always has been to most healthy-minded people.

Chaucer is like one of his own pilgrims—gay, tolerant, heartily admiring the noble characters that pass him in the highway of life, and yet with a boundless pity and mercy for the worst.

In conclusion, a few words must be said about the form of the verse. Two lines may be taken by way of illustration :—

‘ A Clerk | ther was | of Ox | enford | also |
That un | to log | ik had | de longe | y-go.’ |

It will be seen that in each line there are five divisions or *feet*; each foot contains two syllables, with the accent on the second. This form of verse line is known as *iambic pentameter*. Then note that the lines rhyme in couples, forming a series of *couplets*. Now the couplet of this kind—that is, one made up of five feet, each of two syllables, with the accent on the second—is called the *heroic couplet*. This is a very important and common form in English verse after, but not before, Chaucer. It must be remembered that Chaucer used other forms, but this is the one used in most of *The Canterbury Tales*.¹

OTHER BOOKS TO READ

Prologue. Chaucer. Marshall.

Chaucer and His England. Coulton. Methuen.

¹ In connection with Chapters I.-III., read ‘England in Her Days of Peace’ (Doorly), chapters i.-iii., xi.-xiv., xv. and xxvi.

CHAPTER IV

OLD BALLADS



TO pass from Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* to our next book, we must move forward more than a hundred years, to the end of the fifteenth century, when Caxton printed Sir Thomas Malory's *Morte d'Arthur*. During the fifteenth century itself there are no outstanding names to record and no great book to mention. Yet this century must not be written down as barren of literature, for to it belong those wonderful poems, the old ballads.

It is difficult to say exactly what these old ballads are. They are all anonymous—that is, the authors are not known; but of all English poetry they are the simplest and sincerest, belonging as they do to the childhood of the nation, when most men could neither read nor write. We may call them democratic poetry, and, remembering Abraham Lincoln's famous description of democracy as 'government of the people by the people for the people,' one may say that these ballads are literature of the people by the people for the people.

Bards, or wandering minstrels, probably went from village to village, telling stories and singing songs. These songs and stories, passing from mouth to mouth, came slowly but surely down the growing years. They were handed on orally and

lived in the memory of the simple folk, who listened to them and learned them by heart; there was no printing-press.

Many of these old ballads were first collected in the eighteenth century by Bishop Percy in his *Reliques of English Poetry*, a book which Sir Walter Scott discovered in his boyhood. 'I remember well,' he says, 'the spot where I read those volumes—Percy's *Reliques*—for the first time. It was beneath a large plantanus tree in the ruins of what had been intended for an old-fashioned arbour in the garden. The summer day sped on so fast that, notwithstanding the sharp appetite of thirteen, I forgot the hour of dinner, was sought for with anxiety, and was found still entranced in my intellectual banquet.'

Scott himself, travelling in the Highland glens far from towns, found many a ballad that lived on in the same way in the memory of simple folk. These he gathered together in his *Scottish Minstrelsy*.

Most of these ballads tell a story, so that the term ballad has come to be used of any poem which tells a straightforward tale. Thus Scott's *Proud Maisie* is called a ballad, and so are *The Ancient Mariner* of Coleridge, Kipling's *Ballad of East and West* and the Barrack Room Ballad *Gunga Din*. But none of these newer ballads resembles the old. Read as an example of the old, the famous *Sir Patrick Spens* :—

'The King sits in Dunfermline town,
Drinking the blude-red wine;
"O whare will I get a skeely skipper
To sail this new ship o' mine?"
O up and spak an eldern knight,
Sat at the king's right knee:
"Sir Patrick Spens is the best sailor
That ever sail'd the sea."

Our King has written a braid letter,
And seal'd it with his hand,
And sent it to Sir Patrick Spens,
Was walking on the strand.

“ To Noroway, to Noroway,
To Noroway o'er the faem ;
The king's daughter o' Noroway,
'Tis thou must bring her hame.”

The first word that Sir Patrick read
So loud, so loud laugh'd he ;
The neist word that Sir Patrick read
The tear blinded his e'e.

“ O wha is this has done this deed
And tauld the King o' me,
To send us out, at this time o' year,
To sail upon the sea ?

“ Be it wind, be it weet, be it hail, be it sleet,
Our ship must sail the faem ;
The King's daughter o' Noroway,
'Tis we must fetch her hame.”

They hoysed their sails on Monenday morn
Wi' a' the speed they may ;
They hae landed in Noroway
Upon a Wodensday.'

Such was ' The Sailing.' But hear ' The Return ' :

' They hadna sail'd a league, a league,
A league but barely three,
When the lift grew dark and the wind blew loud
And gurly grew the sea.

The ankers brak, and the topmast lap,
It was sic a deadly storm :
And the waves cam owre the broken ship
Till a' her sides were torn.'

The sailors grappled with the storm, but

‘ Mony was the feather bed
That flatter’d on the faem ;
And mony was the gude lord’s son
That never mair cam hame.

O lang, lang may the ladies sit,
Wi’ their fans into their hand,
Before they see Sir Patrick Spens
Come sailing to the strand !

And lang, lang may the maidens sit,
Wi’ their gowd kames in their hair,
A-waiting for their ain dear loves !
For them they ’ll see nae mair.

Half-owre, half-owre to Aberdour,
’Tis fifty fathoms deep :
And there lies gude Sir Patrick Spens
Wi’ the Scots lords at his feet !’

In every verse of that is the magic of the old ballads. There is also the rapid movement which is a character of them all. It is this jog-trot that makes the ballads so easy to learn by heart and to carry in the memory. One has only to take as a further example of this rapid swing some verses from the well-known poem *Chevy Chase*, which deals with the struggle between the English lord, Earl Percy, and the Scottish chieftain, Earl Douglas. Percy swore to hunt on the land of Douglas, and a fierce fight was the result :—

‘ The Englishmen had their bows ybent,
Their hearts were good enow ;
The first of arrows that they shot off
Seven score spearmen they slew.

Yet bides the Earl Douglas upon the bent,
A captain good enoghe ;
And that was seene verament,
For he wrought them both woe and wouche.

The Douglas parted his host in three,
 Like a chief chieftain of pride ;
 With sure spears of mighty tree
 They came in on every side ;

Throughe our English archery
 Gave many a woond full wide ;
 Many a doughty they gar'd to dye,
 Which gained them no pride.

The Englishmen let their bowes be,
 And pulled out brands that were bright ;
 It was a heavy sight to see
 Bright swords on basnets light.

At last the Douglas and the Percy met,
 Like to captains of might and main ;
 They swapt together till they both swat
 With swordes of fine Milan.

These worthy freykes for to fight
 Thereto they were full fain,
 Till the blood out of their basnets sprent
 As ever did hail or rain.

“ Yield thee, Percy,” said the Douglas,
 “ And i’ faith I shall thee bring
 Where thou shalt have an Earl’s wages
 Of Jamie, our Scottish king.

“ Thou shalte have thy ransom free,
 I hight thee here this thing ;
 For the manfullest man thou art that e’er
 I conquer’d in field fighting.”

But “ Nay,” then said the Lord Percye,
 “ I told it thee beforne,
 That I would never yielded be
 To man of a woman born ? ”

With that an arrow came hastily
 Forth of a mighty wane ;
 And it hath stricken the Earl Douglas
 In at the breaste-bane.

Thoro' liver and lunges both
The sharp arrow is gone,
That never after in his life days
He spake no words but one :
'Twas, " Fight ye, my merry men, whiles ye may
For my life days bin gone ! "

The Percy leaned on his brand
And saw the Douglas dee,
He took the dead man by the hand,
And said, " Woe is me for thee !

" To have sav'd thy life I 'd have parted with
My lands for yeares three,
For a better man of heart nor of hand
Was not in the north countrey." "

' I never heard the olde song of Percy and
Duglas, that I found not my heart moved more
than with a trumpet,' says Sir Philip Sidney in his
Apologie for Poetrie.

In addition to stories of border fights and forays
there are such tales as those of Robin Hood and his
Merry Men.

' Lithe and listen, gentlemen,
That be of free-born blood :
I shall tell you of a good yeoman,
His name was Robin Hood.

Robin was a proud outlaw,
The while he walked on ground ;
So courteous an outlaw as he was one
Was never none y-found.'

The King rode out to punish Robin Hood, but
pardoned him on condition that he came to live at
the court. This he did for a time, but soon 'his
heart sickened for the greenwood, and there he
returned :—

' When he came to greene-wood
In a merry morning,
There he heard the notes small
Of birds merry singing.

" It is far gone," said Robin Hood,
" That I was latest here ;
Me list a little for to shoot
At the dunne deer."

Robin slew a full great hart ;
His horn then gan he blow,
That all the outlaws of that forest
That horn they coulde know.

And them together gathered
In a little throw ;
Seven score of wight young men
Came ready on a row,

And faire didden off their hoods
And set them on their knee :
" Welcome," they said, " our dear master.
Under this greenwood tree."

Robin dwelt in greene-wood
Twenty year and two ;
For all dread of Edward our King,
Again would he not go.

Christ have mercy on his soul,
That died upon the rood !
For he was a good outlaw,
And did poor men much good.'

The circumstances of his death show us something of that character that caused his followers, and even his enemies, to think him worthy of the name 'good outlaw.' Little John found his chief dying by the treachery of the Abbess of Kirkleys, and begged as a last boon to be allowed to burn the nunnery in revenge :—

- “ What is that boon,” said Robin Hood,
“ Little John, thou begs of me ? ”
“ It is to burn fair Kirkleys hall,
And all their nunnerye.”
- “ Now nay, now nay,” quoth Robin Hood,
“ That boon I ’ll not grant thee ;
I never hurt woman in all my life,
Nor men in their company.
- “ I never hurt maid in all my time,
Nor at my end shall it be ;
But give me my bent bow in my hand,
And a broad arrow I ’ll let flee ;
And where this arrow is taken up
There shall my grave digg’d be.
- “ But lay me a green sod under my head,
And another at my feet ;
And lay my bent bow at my side,
Which was my music sweet ;
And make my grave of gravel and green
Which is most right and meet.
- “ Let me have length and breadth enough,
And under my head a sod ;
That they may say when I am dead,
—Here lies bold Robin Hood ! ”

As already said, most of the ballads were stories of fierce battles or stirring events, composed by minstrels, who then recited them from village to village. The stories lived on in the memories of the village folk who heard them, until some such enthusiast as Bishop Percy or Sir Walter Scott came along and wrote them down from the lips of the descendants of those same village folk who had formed the first audience.

Some of the ballads which have survived carry a refrain at the end of each verse, and, sometimes, half-way through the verse. Thus :—

‘ There were twa sisters sat in a bour,
 Binnorie, O Binnorie !
 There cam a knight to be their wooer,
 By the bonnie milldams o’ Binnorie.’

The presence of these refrains led to the belief that the ballad was a kind of song and dance combined. The story was told by one speaker, while the dancers came in with a line or refrain of their own. Some of the ballads were, no doubt, performed in this way ; this was the case in the famous ‘ Binnorie ’ just quoted. Let us continue the story, omitting the double refrain :—

‘ He courted the eldest with glove and ring,
 But he lo’ed the youngest abune a’ thing.

The eldest she was vexed sair,
 And sair envied her sister fair.

Upon a morning fair and clear,
 She cried upon her sister dear :

“ O sister, sister, tak my hand,
 And we ’ll see our father’s ships to land.”

She’s ta’en her by the lily hand,
 And led her down to the river strand.

The youngest stood upon a stane,
 The eldest came and push’d her in.

Sometimes she sank, sometimes she swam,
 Until she came to the miller’s dam.

Out then cam the miller’s son
 And saw the fair maid soummin’ in.

“ O father, father, draw your dam !
 There’s either a mermaid or a milk-white swan.”

The miller hastened and drew his dam,
 And there he found a drown’d woman.

You couldna see her yellow hair,
For the string o' pearls was twisted there.

You couldna see her fingers sma'—
Wi' diamond rings they were cover'd a'.

And by there cam a harper fine,
That harpit to the King at dine ;

And when he look'd that lady on,
He sigh'd and made a heavy moan.

He's made a harp of her breast-bane,
Whose sound wad melt a heart of stane.

He's ta'en three locks o' her yellow hair,
And wi' them strung his harp sae rare.

He went into her father's hall,
And there was the court assembled all.

He laid his harp upon a stane,
And straight it began to play by lane.

But the last tune that the harp play'd then,
Binnorie, O Binnorie !
Was, " Woe to my sister, false Helen ! "
By the bonnie milldams o' Binnorie.'

The ballads either give a clarion call to battle or they stir the heart with the sad music of that harp of Binnorie, strung with the hair of the dead.

' Our own literature is particularly rich in ballads of the true traditional kind, and which alike in form and spirit bear evident traces of the unlettered but vigorous times out of which they sprang, and of the tastes of the popular audiences for which they were originally made. Their themes are commonly furnished by the more elementary aspects of life ; large space is given in them to tales of adventure, fighting, deeds of prowess and valour ; they have frequently a strong infusion of supernaturalism ;

while love, hatred, pity, and the simpler interests of the domestic lot, receive a full share of attention.

'In method and style they are characterised by straightforwardness and rapidity of narration, and a certain childlike naiveté; often crude, they are often, too, astonishingly energetic; and while habitually garrulous in matters of detail, they seldom linger over descriptions or concern themselves about motives and passions, save as these translate themselves immediately into action. Many of these ballads have immense dramatic power and wonderful metrical beauty, and for this reason they must be assigned to a distinct place among the great imperishable things of our literature.'¹

OTHER BOOKS TO READ

Oxford Book of Ballads. Quiller-Couch.

Reliques of Ancient English Poetry. Percy. Everyman's Library.

¹ 'An Introduction to the Study of Literature,' W. H. Hudson.

CHAPTER V

THE RENASCENCE AND MORTE D'ARTHUR



FOR more than a century after the death of Chaucer, no great book was produced in England. Many people wrote in imitation of the author of *The Canterbury Tales*, but the old ballads are the only real literature of the fifteenth century.

With Chaucer the Middle Ages came to an end and a new era began. The succeeding century witnessed, in 1415, Henry V.'s famous victory at Agincourt and the Treaty of Troyes, by which the French agreed to accept the English King as their overlord. The promise of glory, however, was short-lived. A succession of disasters darkened the reign of Henry VI., and all that had been gained in France, in the previous fighting, was lost; the French marched to victory under the banner of their magic leader, Joan of Arc.

The years that followed were troublous; first came Cade's Rebellion (1450), and then the terrible Wars of the Roses (1455-1485). More frightful was the reign of Richard III., which saw the end of feudalism.

Under the popular Tudors English life went forward again. Henry VII., though a despot, gave the country peace, and many important changes were brought about without the battles and murders of former reigns; there was gradual

THE RENASCENCE: MORTE D'ARTHUR 33

growth of national power at home and abroad. Under Henry VIII. came the breaking of England with Rome in the famous Act of Supremacy. Feudalism and chivalry had already gone. Now the monasteries were ruthlessly suppressed, and, in this passing of monastic life, the last relic of the Middle Ages disappeared.

The fifteenth century was a time of great political changes, and, above all, a period of intellectual progress. There was a kindling of new life and a lighting of new ideas. In literature it was a time of preparation for the future, when the seeds were sown which were to be reaped in such glorious harvest during the spacious Elizabethan days to come.

The two lasting movements which stand out from the turmoil of these years, and which are of interest in the story of our literature, are the Renaissance, or Revival of Learning, and the Reformation. In this chapter we are concerned only with the first of these movements.

'The word Renaissance means re-birth. Just as the trees which have been gaunt and bare, apparently dead, and bound by the frosts of winter, put forth new life in the spring, so the freedom-loving, adventuring thought of man, which during the Middle Ages . . . had been bound by the wintry discipline of religious fear and authority, broke forth alive again, and free to set out upon the way of infinite discoveries.'¹

It is sometimes said that the Renaissance dates from the capture of Constantinople by the Turks in 1453. As the result of that capture the Greek scholars who were living in that city fled to Italy with all their treasures of old manuscripts. Sett-

¹ 'England in Her Days of Peace, chapter xvi., The Renaissance. E. Dooley.

ling there and teaching with much zeal and enthusiasm, they inspired the thinking minds of Western Europe with a burning enthusiasm for the study of the ancient Greek writings. But the Renaissance is something more than this; the spirit of inquiry and adventure that it breathes had been kindled long before the capture of Constantinople. It is impossible to fix any exact date for its beginning, as it is impossible to coin a phrase that will fully express its meaning.

Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio, three Italian poets, whose works had much to do with the direction of Chaucer's thinking and the fashion of his writing, had all studied the writings of Greece and Rome, and through the English poet had already had some influence on the literature of this country. After the death of these men and of others like-minded, the study of the ancient literatures still continued, and the desire for learning, that never completely died, now gave rise to the foundation of schools and colleges. It is related that a brother of Henry v., who shared in the new desires and aspirations, had the *Republic* of Plato¹ translated into English, and sent scholars to Italy to bring him books.

The desire for learning, then, preceded the fall of Constantinople, but it received fresh vigour when the Greeks, driven from their country by the Turks, fled to Italy and made that country the source of inspiration of European art and literature. Florence, especially under the Medici family, became the home of artists and writers. To this town came men from all countries to carry back

¹ Plato was a pupil of Aristotle, the Athenian philosopher. In his 'Dialogues' and 'Republic' he taught the superiority of the soul over the body and the greatness of things spiritual as compared with things material. Setting up a high ideal, he inspired the people of his time with an eager desire for reform, both social and religious.

home with them the enthusiasm and learning won in the Italian city.

The study of the poetry, drama, and art of ancient Greece became a great spur to the artists and writers of other countries. Indeed, the debt of the modern world to Greece, to whom we owe the writings of Plato and the Greek version of the New Testament, is incalculable.

The minds of the period were given to the study of ancient writings rather than to the production of new ones, and there are no great books to mention. To the effects of this study we must add the imaginative impulse given to the spirit of the nation by the discoveries of the explorers. New horizons were being opened up ; new worlds were being revealed, and men were spurred to fresh and noble endeavour. Thus, in 1492, America was discovered by Columbus. Five years later, Vasco da Gama sailed round the Cape of Good Hope to India. While the scholars were rediscovering the ancient literary worlds of Greece and Rome, the explorers were revealing the new worlds of men and women across the seas.

Men of science, too, were enlightening the world with new ideas. The Polish astronomer, Copernicus, for instance, by his discovery of the roundness of the earth and its movement round the sun, laid the foundations for a truer idea of the universe, though, owing to the opposition of the Church, his discoveries were suppressed for some time.

INVENTION OF PRINTING

One thing was wanting, and that was a rapid means of spreading new ideas, of carrying them to other countries, for the wandering scholar was a long time on his journeys. In the latter part of

the century, however, the art of printing was introduced, the first printing-press in England being set up by William Caxton in 1475.

Caxton, after serving an apprenticeship to a London merchant, went to Flanders, where he became governor of Bruges. In this city he studied the new art, and issued the first book printed in the English language. Then, returning to this country, he set up his press in the Almonry, near Westminster Abbey. A stained-glass window to his memory in St. Margaret's Church, Westminster, where he was buried, commemorates the fact.

Caxton printed over a hundred volumes, among them the *Morte d'Arthur* of Sir Thomas Malory, next to Chaucer's poems, the greatest thing in our literature before Spenser.

MORTE D'ARTHUR

In the fifth century there had been a long struggle between King Arthur and the Saxons, and around the memory of this struggle there had grown, with the passage of time, a series of stories, some in verse and some in prose, dealing with Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table.

Many of these had been written down by an early historian, Geoffrey of Monmouth, and were used later by a Norman minstrel, Eustace Wace, as the basis of a narrative which included the British stories and also the Breton legends about Merlin, Lancelot, Tristram, and Gawayne.

The French stories of Arthur and his followers came into the hands of an early English writer, Layamon, who, about 1200, retold them to Englishmen in a long story called *Brut*. The Arthurian legends were very popular, both in England and

France, and new stories or new versions of old stories were continually being discovered, so that there was much confusion as to details. In the reign of Edward IV., however, Sir Thomas Malory collected all the Arthurian legends that were then known, and made out of the collection that one simple, vivid legend which counts as one of the greatest books in English literature. So powerful has been its influence that, from Shakespeare to Tennyson, poet after poet has gone to it, to seek for inspiration and delight.

One has only to open the book and read the chapter titles to be led on to read the chapters themselves: 'How Sir Lancelot came into the Chapel Perilous and gat there of a dead corpse a piece of cloth and a sword'; 'How the damsel and Beaumains came to the siege, and came to a sycamore tree, and there Beaumains blew an horn, and then the Knight of the Red Lands came to fight him'; 'How Arthur by the mean of Merlin gat Excalibur his sword of the Lady of the Lake.'

Each title is a summons to the reader to enter the realm of romance. Let us answer the summons and see, in Malory's prose, how Arthur got his famous sword, Excalibur (Book I. chapter xxiii.):—

'Right so the king and he departed and went unto an hermit that was a good man and a great leach. So the hermit searched all his wounds and gave him good salves; so the king was there three days, and then were his wounds well amended that he might ride and go, and so departed. And as they rode, Arthur said, I have no sword. No force, said Merlin, hereby is a sword that shall be yours, and I may. So they rode till they came to a lake, the which was a fair water and broad, and in the midst of the lake Arthur was ware of an arm clothed in white samite, that held a fair sword in that hand. Lo! said Merlin, yonder is that sword that I spake of. With that they saw a damsel going

upon the lake. What damsel is that ? said Arthur. That is the Lady of the Lake, said Merlin ; and within that lake is a rock, and therein is as fair a place as any on earth, and richly beseen ; and this damsel will come to you anon, and then speak ye fair to her that she will give you that sword. Anon withal came the damsel unto Arthur, and saluted him, and he her again. Damsel, said Arthur, what sword is that, that yonder the arm holdeth above the water ? I would it were mine, for I have no sword. Sir Arthur, king, said the damsel, that sword is mine, and if ye will give me a gift when I ask it you, ye shall have it. By my faith, said Arthur, I will give you what gift ye will ask. Well ! said the damsel, go ye into yonder barge, and row yourself to the sword, and take it and the scabbard with you, and I will ask my gift when I see my time. So Sir Arthur and Merlin alight and tied their horses to two trees, and so they went into the ship, and when they came to the sword that the hand held, Sir Arthur took it up by the handles, and took it with him, and the arm and hand went under the water. And so they came unto the land and rode forth.'

In the above extract, which is typical of Malory's writing, English is seen in its simplest yet noblest style. The 'music of the monosyllables' grips the attention with a force there is no denying.

As another example, take the passage that tells of the Passing of Arthur (Book XXI. chapter v.):—

'My time hieth fast, said the king. Therefore, said Arthur unto Sir Bedivere, take thou Excalibur, my good sword, and go with it to yonder water side, and when thou comest there I charge thee throw my sword in that water, and come again, and tell me what thou there seest. My lord, said Bedivere, your commandment shall be done, and lightly bring you word again. So Sir Bedivere departed, and by the way he beheld that noble sword, that the pommel and the haft were all of precious stones ; and then he said to himself : If I throw this rich sword into the water, thereof shall never come good, but harm and loss. And then Sir Bedivere hid Excalibur under a tree. And so, as

THE RENASCENCE: MORTE D'ARTHUR 39

soon as he might, he came again unto the king, and said he had been at the water, and had thrown the sword in the water. What sawest thou there ? said the king. Sir, he said, I saw nothing but waves and winds. That is untruly said of thee, said the king, therefore go thou lightly again and do my command ; as thou art to me lief and dear, spare not, but throw it in. Then Sir Bedivere returned again, and took the sword in his hand ; and then him thought sin and shame to throw away that noble sword, and so eft he hid the sword, and returned again, and told the king that he had been at the water, and done his commandment. What saw thou there ? said the king. Sir, he said, I saw nothing but the waters wap and the waves wan. Ah, traitor untrue, said King Arthur, now hast thou betrayed me twice. Who would have wend that, thou that hast been to me so lief and dear, and thou art named a noble knight, and would betray me for the riches of the sword. But now go again lightly, for thy long tarrying putteth me in great jeopardy of my life, for I have taken cold. And but if thou do now as I bid thee, if ever I may see thee, I shall slay thee with my own hands ; for thou wouldst for my rich sword see me dead. Then Sir Bedivere departed, and went to the sword and lightly took it up, and went to the water side ; and there he bound the girdle about the hilts, and then he threw the sword as far into the water as he might ; and there came an arm and an hand above the water and met it, and caught it, and so shook it thrice and brandished, and then vanished away the hand with the sword in the water. So Sir Bedivere came again to the king, and told him what he saw. Alas, said the king, help me hence, for I dread me I have tarried over long. Then Sir Bedivere took the king upon his back, and so went with him to that water side. And when they were at the water side, even fast by the bank hove a little barge with many fair ladies in it, and among them all was a queen, and all they had black hoods, and all they wept and shrieked when they saw King Arthur. Now put me into the barge, said the king, and so he did softly. And there received him three queens with great mourning, and so they set them down, and in one of their laps King Arthur laid his head. And then that queen said : Ah, dear

brother, why have ye tarried so long from me ? Alas, this wound on your head hath caught overmuch cold. And so they rowed from the land, and Sir Bedivere beheld all those ladies go from him.'

It is interesting to compare the above fifteenth-century prose account of the Passing of Arthur with its nineteenth-century translation into verse by Tennyson :—

' So all day long the noise of battle roll'd
Among the mountains by the winter sea ;
Until King Arthur's table, man by man,
Had fall'n in Lyonness about their Lord,
King Arthur : then, because his wound was deep,
The bold Sir Bedivere uplifted him,
Sir Bedivere, the last of all his knights,
And bore him to a chapel nigh the field,
A broken chancel with a broken cross,
That stood on a dark strait of barren land.
On one side lay the ocean, and on one
Lay a great water, and the moon was full.'¹

After the Passing of Arthur comes the penitence of Launcelot and Guinevere. They too pass in their turn, and then we get those wonderful words spoken by Sir Ector over the dead body of Launcelot (Book XXI. chapter xiii.) :—

' Ah, Launcelot, he said, thou were head of all Christian knights, and now I dare say, said Sir Ector, thou Sir Launcelot, there thou liest, that thou were never matched of earthly knight's hand. And thou were the courtiest knight that ever bare shield. And thou were the truest friend to thy lover that ever bestrode horse. And thou were the truest lover of a sinful man that ever loved woman.

¹ The last two lines are cited by Meredith as the two greatest lines in English poetry. The 'Morte d'Arthur' is so easy and delightful that no student of English literature should fail to read it ; at the same time there should also be read, by way of comparison, Tennyson's 'Idylls of the King.'

THE RENASCENCE: MORTE D'ARTHUR 41

And thou were the kindest man that ever strake with sword.
And thou were the goodliest person ever came among
press of knights. And thou wast the meekest man and
the gentlest that ever ate in hall among ladies. And thou
were the sternest knight to thy mortal foe that ever put
spear in the rest.'

The best comment on Malory's book are the words of its editor and printer, Caxton. 'Herein, he says, men shall find joyous and pleasant histories, and noble and renowned acts of humanity, gentleness, and chivalry. For herein may be seen noble chivalry, courtesy, humanity, friendliness, hardiness, love, friendship, cowardice, murder, hate, goodness, and sin. Do after the good and leave the evil, and it shall bring you to good fame and renommee.'

OTHER BOOKS TO READ

Great Englishmen of the Sixteenth Century. Sidney
Lee. Nelson.
Morte d'Arthur. Malory. Globe.

CHAPTER VI

THE REFORMATION AND THE BIBLE



THE *Morte d'Arthur* is the only great book of the fifteenth century. The political turmoil was against the making of books. Men, moreover, were too busy studying the old world and dreaming of the new, and, finally, there was a disturbing religious struggle. In the fourteenth century there was unity, patriotism, and intellectual alertness; in the fifteenth there was discord, civil wars, and the distraction of men's thoughts from purely intellectual things.

About the beginning of the sixteenth century there was a movement of rebellion against the authority of the Pope of Rome in matters religious; this movement, which is sometimes said to have been begun by Luther, in Germany, is called the Reformation. But there were reformers before Luther, and in other countries besides Germany.

The Reformation is, in fact, the climax of a movement which began, like the Renaissance, in the fourteenth century. Wyclif, Langland, and Chaucer had all attacked the bribery, corruption, and moral slackness of the Church, and the Lollards, inspired by the teaching of Wyclif, had carried on a campaign to win liberty of conscience. When we come to the sixteenth-century literature we find that the scholars, who were still handing

on the torch of the New Learning, had also realised the evils in the Church and were lending their aid towards its reformation. But they were not anxious to break with Rome and did not deny the spiritual lordship of the Pope.

Henry VIII., however, wished to be rid of the authority of the Pope altogether. With Henry it was not a question of religion at all; he wanted to divorce his wife and marry the pretty Anne Boleyn, and the Pope stood in his way, by refusing to grant the divorce. And a great many of the English people were content to go with the King in his rejection of papal power because they disliked owing allegiance to a foreigner. Free within their island home, they wanted to be free in conscience also. They desired liberty of thought and action and the destruction of all prejudice, narrowness, and bigotry. Thus, with somewhat different ends in view, monarch and people worked together.

Among the scholars who visited Italy to study Greek, and who afterwards gave of their learning in this country, was John Colet. He became Dean of St. Paul's and founded St. Paul's School, one of the many schools that were built at the time. His favourite pupils were Erasmus, who wrote *The Praise of Folly*, and Sir Thomas More, author of *Utopia*. Both these books, direct products of the Renaissance and the Reformation, were written in Latin, but were soon afterwards translated into English, and, indeed, into all European languages.

Utopia is a striking study of social conditions. In it we meet for the first time those three great principles, Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité, the watchwords of the French Revolution, and the ideals, still unrealised, of all government.

The book is interesting as being the first example of a kind of writing which has attracted many

authors since. To-day especially, many writers are describing for us their utopias, or dream-cities, in which they remould this sorry scheme of things nearer to their heart's desire.

But greater than these books by More or Erasmus is Tyndale's translation of the New Testament, which became the basis of all subsequent editions and culminated in that miracle of English prose, the Authorised Version of the Bible of 1611.

THE BIBLE

As early as the seventh century the poet Cædmon wrote the story of the Bible in simple verse. Bede, the historian, spent his last hours completing his translation of the Gospel of St. John. But the first complete version was that of John Wyclif and his helpers in the fourteenth century. Wyclif's Bible was forbidden to the people, the authorities threatening with persecution any one found reading it.

In the sixteenth century the Revival of Learning gave a fresh impetus to the translation of the Bible. First Erasmus translated the Greek version of the New Testament into Latin, and then an English version of the Bible was made by William Tyndale. Tyndale was not only an accomplished Greek and Hebrew scholar, but also a man of fine poetic feeling, and his translation—the Bible of Tyndale—has contributed more than any other to the beauty of our Authorised Version and of the English language. Tyndale carried on his work under great difficulties; the menace of persecution drove him abroad, and his books had to be brought to this country by the help of friendly merchants.

THE REFORMATION AND THE BIBLE 45

Another version was the Great Bible of Archbishop Cranmer, which was published in 1540, and was read in the churches for several years. It is to Cranmer that we owe the Book of Common Prayer, a fine example of beautiful English prose. The Bible of Archbishop Cranmer was replaced by the Bishops' Bible, so called because several bishops helped in the translation.

When James I. came to the throne, a conference was called to settle a number of differences between the members of the Church of England and the Puritans. At this meeting it was decided to prepare a new version of the Bible, using all the translations that had been already made as well as the existing Hebrew, Latin, and Greek versions. The King, wishing that the work should be well done, called together forty-seven scholars from different parts of the country. These forty-seven scholars were divided into groups, and to each group was assigned a particular part of the work. The forty-seven then sat together in a joint committee, to receive and discuss the results of their labour. In 1611 they gave to the country the greatest prose work in the English language—the Authorised Version of the Bible, 'a wonder,' says our finest modern critic, 'before which I can only stand humble and aghast.'

If we had never opened a Bible till our literary tastes had been formed, if its sheer literary grandeur had never been dulled for us by much ineffective reading in public, we should, all of us, upon a first perusal at an adult age, stand, like the critic quoted above, 'humble and aghast.' And its influence upon our literature is something that resists calculation. The Bible is the quarry from which countless writers have dug the material of their works. There is scarcely a

great book, written in English since 1611, that somewhere or other does not bear traces, direct or indirect, of the greatest monument of the power of our native language.

Forget for a moment—and it is possible to do so by making the effort—that you have ever heard the story, for instance, of the Prodigal Son (Luke xv. 11-32). Read it, as for the first time, purely as a story, told in language that has no equal.

‘ And he said, A certain man had two sons : and the younger of them said to his father, Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me. And he divided unto them his living. And not many days after the younger son gathered all together, and took his journey into a far country, and there wasted his substance with riotous living. And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land ; and he began to be in want. And he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country ; and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. And he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat : and no man gave unto him. And when he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father’s have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger ! I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son : make me as one of thy hired servants.

‘ And he arose and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him. And the son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son. But the father said to his servants, Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him ; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet : and bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it ; and let us eat, and be merry : for this my son was dead, and is alive again ; he was lost, and is found. And they began to be merry.

‘ Now his elder son was in the field : and as he came and

THE REFORMATION AND THE BIBLE 47

drew nigh to the house, he heard music and dancing. And he called one of the servants, and asked what these things meant. And he said unto him, Thy brother is come ; and thy father hath killed the fatted calf, because he hath received him safe and sound. And he was angry, and would not go in : therefore came his father out, and intreated him. And he answering said to his father, Lo, these many years do I serve thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment : and yet thou never gavest me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends : but as soon as this thy son was come, which hath devoured thy living with harlots, thou hast killed for him the fatted calf. And he said unto him, Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine. It was meet that we should make merry, and be glad : for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again ; and was lost, and is found.'

Is there anything in all the books of the world to surpass the telling of that story in simplicity, grace, and power ? Or turn to the poetry of the Old Testament and read the Lament of David over Saul and Jonathan:—

THE STORY OF THE BOW (2 Samuel i. 19-27)

'The beauty of Israel is slain upon thy high places :
How are the mighty fallen !
Tell it not in Gath,
Publish it not in the streets of Askelon ;
Lest the daughters of the Philistines rejoice,
Lest the daughters of the uncircumcised triumph.
Ye mountains of Gilboa, let there be no dew,
Neither let there be rain, upon you, nor fields of offerings :
For there the shield of the mighty is vilely cast away,
The shield of Saul, as though he had not been anointed
with oil.
From the blood of the slain, from the fat of the mighty,
The bow of Jonathan turned not back,
And the sword of Saul returned not empty.

Saul and Jonathan were lovely and pleasant in their lives,
And in their death they were not divided :
They were swifter than eagles,
They were stronger than lions.
Ye daughters of Israel, weep over Saul,
Who clothed you in scarlet, with other delights,
Who put on ornaments of gold upon your apparel.
How are the mighty fallen in the midst of the battle !
O Jonathan, thou wast slain in thy high places.
I am distressed for thee, my brother Jonathan :
Very pleasant hast thou been unto me :
Thy love to me was wonderful,
Passing the love of women.
How are the mighty fallen,
And the weapons of war perished ! ’

Is there anything in all the books of the world to surpass that poem of sorrow in simplicity, grace, and power ?

But the Bible contains not only stories and poems, but also philosophy. Philosophy is that kind of love for wisdom which leads to the search for it, and so comes to that knowledge of the principles that underlie facts. As an example, to be found in the New Testament, consider St. Paul’s wonderful First Epistle to the Corinthians, chapter xiii.

‘ Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge ; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing. Charity suffereth long, and is kind ; charity envieth not ; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil ; rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth

in the truth ; beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. Charity never faileth ; but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail ; whether there be tongues, they shall cease ; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away. For we know in part, and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect is come, that which is in part shall be done away. When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child : but when I became a man, I put away childish things. For now we see through a glass, darkly ; but then face to face : now I know in part ; but then shall I know even as also I am known. And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three ; but the greatest of these is charity.'

Is there any reasoning in all the books of the world that surpasses that for simplicity and for force ? And because this is a book about famous men—men for whom Charles Lamb would have had us say grace as we say it for a meal—we cannot forbear quoting a celebrated passage from Ecclesiasticus xlv. 1-14.

' Let us now praise famous men, and our fathers that begat us. The Lord hath wrought great glory by them through his great power from the beginning. Such as did bear rule in their kingdoms, men renowned for their power, giving counsel by their understanding, and declaring prophecies : leaders of the people by their counsels, and by their knowledge of learning meet for the people, wise and eloquent in their instructions : such as found out musical tunes, and recited verses in writing : rich men furnished with ability, living peaceably in their habitations : all these were honoured in their generations, and were the glory of their times. There be of them, that have left a name behind them, that their praises might be reported. And some there be, which have no memorial ; who are perished, as though they had never been ; and are become as though they had never been born ; and their children after them. But these were merciful men, whose righteousness hath not been forgotten. With their seed shall

continually remain a good inheritance, and their children are within the covenant. Their seed standeth fast, and their children for their sakes. Their seed shall remain for ever, and their glory shall not be blotted out. Their bodies are buried in peace ; but their name liveth for evermore.'

Rudyard Kipling, who was asked to choose an inscription for the graves of those who perished in the Great European War, wrote :—

' It was necessary to find words of praise and honour, which should be both simple and well known, comprehensible and of the same value in all tongues, and standing, as far as might be, outside the flux of men and things. After search and consultation with all ranks and many races in our armies and navies, as well as with those who had given their sons, it seemed to me that no single phrase could better that which closes the tribute to " famous men " in Ecclesiasticus :

" Their name liveth for evermore ! " '

A fitting conclusion to these quotations is the following description of the English of the Authorised Version :—

' Its felicities seem to be almost things instead of words ; it is part of the national mind, and the anchor of national seriousness ; the memory of the dead passes into it ; the potent traditions of childhood are stereotyped in its verses ; the power of all the griefs and trials of a man is hidden beneath its words.'

Whatever book the student of English literature may neglect, he cannot afford to neglect the Bible.

BOOK TO READ

Passages from the Bible. Frazer. Black.

CHAPTER VII

THE DRAMA AND MARLOWE



Now come to the Elizabethan Age, one of the most important periods in the annals of the world's literature, for it contains the work of Shakespeare, the greatest writer of England—perhaps the greatest of the world.

If we are to understand the Elizabethan drama, especially the work of Shakespeare, we must enter into the spirit of the time, for progress in literature during these years is connected with a most striking activity in the life of the people.

The note of the age was one of tolerance—religious tolerance. The defeat of the Spanish Armada had brought Englishmen together again, and the fierce feuds between Protestants and Catholics were forgotten. The country was rocking and roaring with Armada enthusiasm. It was a time of great national prosperity; the tide of life was at its highest. Drake had sailed round the world, and the air was ringing with the names of famous adventurers—Cabot, Raleigh, Frobisher, Willoughby, and Hawkins; their ocean adventures, by their daring and vision, had stirred the imagination of all. Men were dreaming of the new world that was being opened up—and of a new heaven.

The Revival of Learning, too, was in its summer. 'Every breeze was dusty with the pollen of Greece, of Rome, and of Italy.'

Such, then, was the spirit of the age. 'Men lived intensely, they thought intensely and wrote intensely,' and they chose a new form of expression. The activity of the nation, the daring deeds and lofty dreams, wanted bold expression, something more powerful than the ordinary prose form, something more impressive even than poetry. Men turned to drama, and, in this manner of writing, reached a high level.

Shakespeare towers like a peak above all the other dramatists of his time. But he took up the drama at a certain stage in its growth, following lines already laid down by those who had written before him. To understand this we must hark back to beginnings.

MIRACLE PLAYS

In its beginning the drama was a religious thing. The services of the Church, especially those at Christmas and Easter, contained dramatic elements, which were taken up and developed by the clergy to give vividness to their teaching. There were no books, so stories from the Bible and the legends of the saints were acted by priests in Latin, the language of the services. These dramatic lessons were called Miracle Plays or Mysteries.

At first the performances were given in church, but later, as crowds began to throng the building, they were given outside in the churchyard. Then when the performances became more dramatic, and especially when the comic element entered, they passed from the hands of the clergy and were adopted by the town gilds.

From the fourteenth century onwards the miracle play was performed in the market-place

or on the village green by the gilds. Later the plays were gathered together into a continuous religious series or cycle and given in the large towns every year, beginning on Corpus Christi Day. Each gild took some Bible story suited to its trade. The goldsmiths would play the three Kings of the East, bringing precious gifts, the fishmongers would play the Flood, and the shipwrights, the building of Noah's ark. Four of the cycles have come down to us—those of York, Wakefield, Chester, and Coventry. The latter cycle was probably seen by Shakespeare when a boy.

The pageant of Noah and the Flood is a good example of the style of these early religious dramas. There is Noah, sorrowing over the sins of the world, and God descends from heaven with instructions to build the ark. Then enters the comic element, when Noah's bad-tempered wife begins to scold and jeer at him, and they come to blows. A rheumatic old shipwright toils at the building of the vessel. Mrs. Noah declines to come down off the hill-top till the waves are wetting her feet, and then she comes bounding into the ark in terror of her life.

Noah welcomes her with a severe flogging, whereupon she calls him all the popular nasty names of the time, refuses to ask for mercy, wishes her husband dead, turns to the audience and wishes the same fate for all the husbands there gathered. Noah also addresses the audience:—

'Ye men that has wives, whyles they are yong,
If ye luff your lives, chastise thare tong.'

MORALITY PLAYS

Miracle plays continued to be acted in this country until the seventeenth century. On the

Continent there is a present-day survival at Ober-Ammergau, in Bavaria, where every ten years the famous Passion Play is acted. The miracle play was followed by the morality play and the interlude. The morality plays were intended to teach some lesson, and in this they revived the early seriousness of the miracle plays. But instead of the characters being taken from Scripture, abstract virtues and vices were shown as persons, the plot generally being a struggle between certain virtues and vices for the possession of man's soul. The best known of the morality plays is *Everyman*, which has lately been revived. In this drama, Everyman is summoned by Death to go on a long journey, and he invites Fellowship, Strength, Discretion, Beauty, Knowledge, and Good Deeds to accompany him.

‘Everyman, I will bide with thee,
I will not forsake thee, indeed
Thou shalt find me a good friend at need.
Beauty, Strength, and Discretion do men forsake,
Foolish friends and kinsmen that fair spake,
All fleeth save Good Deeds, and that am I.’

The interlude was the morality, shortened for entertainments in banqueting halls, and aimed simply at amusement. The best-known example is *The Four P's*, a dialogue in which a Palmer, a Pardoner, a Pothecary, and a Pedlar enter into competition to see who can tell the biggest lie.

The Palmer, who has travelled much, says :—

‘I have seen women five hundred thousand,
Yet in all places where I have been,
Of all the women that I have seen,
I never saw or knew in my conscience
Any one woman out of patience.

Pothecary. By the Mass, there is a great lie !

Pardoner. I never heard a greater, by our Lady !

Pedlar. A greater ! Nay, know ye any so great ?'

The Palmer wins.

From this to comedy was but a step. Men had long been engaged in translating Latin, Greek, and Italian plays, and these translations became the models for our own playwrights. But all these beginnings were very crude ; sometimes the action all takes place *behind* the scenes, and is merely reported to the audience by messengers upon the stage itself.

MARLOWE

In the years before Shakespeare, however, a group of playwrights, known as the University Wits, gave to the drama the literary grace that it lacked, and made of it a thing of great force and beauty. By their experiments in dramatic writing they prepared the ground for the greatest of all dramatists—Shakespeare.

Of these University Wits the chief was Christopher Marlowe. He was the head and fount of the new movement, and his best plays are often ranked with those of Shakespeare. He was born at Canterbury in 1564, two months before Shakespeare. Moving to London, he became an actor, and, after a wild life, was stabbed to death in a tavern brawl at Deptford, at the early age of twenty-eight.

Marlowe wrote, amongst other things, four great dramas, each of which has one central person acting under the influence of a powerful motive. Three of these dramas exhibit characteristic features of the life of the time—the longing for illimitable power, for infinite knowledge, and for

wealth. In their language, their spirit, and their motives they speak to us, in unmistakable accents, of the ideas that were surging in the brains of thinking men in those days of adventure and discovery. Nothing was too great to be dreamed about—the conquest of the whole known world, the possession of all known knowledge, the attainment of all forms of wealth and power.

‘ From jiggling veins of rhyming mother wits,
And such conceits as clownage keeps in pay,
We ’ll lead you to the stately tent of war,
Where you shall hear the Scythian Tamburlaine
Threatening the world with high astounding terms
And scourging kingdoms with his conquering sword.
View but his picture in this tragic glass,
And then applaud his fortune as you please.’

That is the prologue to Marlowe’s first play, *Tamburlaine the Great*, which tells of the illimitable lust for power of a Scythian shepherd, who becomes a mighty monarch and sweeps the East like a whirlwind. At the height of his ambition he is afflicted with disease by the gods against whom he raves. At the close of Act II. we have this Titan voicing the burning passion of Elizabethan times:—

‘ The thirst of reign and sweetness of a crown
That caused the eldest son of heavenly Ops,
To thrust his doting father from his chair,
And place himself in the empyreal heaven,
Moved me to manage arms against thy state.
What better precedent than mighty Jove ?
Nature that framed us of four elements,
Warring within our breasts for regiment,
Doth teach us all to have aspiring minds :
Our souls, whose faculties can comprehend
The wondrous architecture of the world,
And measure every wandering planet’s course,

Still climbing after knowledge infinite,
And always moving as the restless spheres,
Will us to wear ourselves, and never rest,
Until we reach the ripest fruit of all,
That perfect bliss and sole felicity,
The sweet fruition of an earthly crown.'

There you have the passion for dominion.

In his second play, *The Tragical History of Dr. Faustus*, the subject is the passion for the power that comes of the possession of infinite knowledge. To gain such power Faustus sells his soul to the devil ; in exchange he is, for twenty-four years, to receive everything for which he asks. The play tells the story of what happened during those twenty-four years. Like *Tamburlaine*, it is not what people would to-day call a good play, but it contains passages of poetic beauty that seem destined to eternal fame.

For instance, Faustus asks for Helen of Troy, and, when she appears, he greets her in a passage that is a flame of loveliness akin to her own beauty.

' Was this the face that launched a thousand ships
And burnt the topless towers of Ilium ?
Sweet Helen, make me immortal with a kiss—
Her lips suck forth my soul ; see where it flies !
Come, Helen, come, give me my soul again.
Here will I dwell, for heaven is in these lips,
And all is dross that is not Helena.
O, thou art fairer than the evening air,
Clad in the beauty of a thousand stars ;
Brighter art thou than flaming Jupiter
When he appeared to hapless Semele ;
More lovely than the monarch of the sky
In wanton Arethusa's azured arms ;
And none but thou shalt be my paramour ! '

The closing scene, when the twenty-four years

have expired and the devil comes to claim his own, is full of fire and dramatic intensity. Says Faustus himself, recognising that the debt has to be paid : ' For vain pleasure of twenty-four years hath Faustus lost eternal joy and felicity. I writ them a bill with mine own blood : the date is expired ; the time will come, and he will fetch me.'

Hell is disclosed to his tormented eyes, and, as he waits for the end, he bursts forth into the following passionate farewell.

'[The clock strikes eleven.

Faustus.

Ah, Faustus,

Now hast thou but one bare hour to live,
And then thou must be damned perpetually !
Stand still, you ever-moving spheres of heaven,
That time may cease and midnight never come.
Fair Nature's eye, rise, rise again and make
Perpetual day ; or let this hour be but
A year, a month, a week, a natural day,
That Faustus may repent and save his soul.
O lente, lente, currite noctis equi !
The stars move still, time runs, the clock will strike,
The Devil will come, and Faustus must be damned.
O, I'll leap up to my God ! Who pulls me down ?
See, see where Christ's blood streams in the firmament—
One drop would save my soul—half a drop : ah, my
Christ !

Ah, rend not my heart for naming of my Christ !
Yet will I call on him : O spare me, Lucifer !—
Where is it now ? 'tis gone : and see where God
Stretcheth out his arm, and bends his ireful brows !
Mountains and hills, come, come and fall on me,
And hide me from the heavy wrath of God !
No ! No !

Then will I headlong run into the earth ;
Earth, gape ! O no, it will not harbour me !
You stars that reigned at my nativity,
Whose influence hath allotted death and hell,
Now draw up Faustus like a foggy mist

Into the entrails of yon labouring clouds,
That when they vomit forth into the air,
My limbs may issue from their smoky mouths,
So that my soul may but ascend to heaven.

[The clock strikes the half-hour.]

Ah, half the hour is past ! 'twill all be past anon !
O God !
If thou wilt not have mercy on my soul,
Yet for Christ's sake, whose blood hath ransomed me,
Impose some end to my incessant pain ;
Let Faustus live in hell a thousand years—
A hundred thousand, and—at last—be saved !
O, no end is limited to damnèd souls !
Why wert thou not a creature wanting soul ?
Or why is this immortal that thou hast ?
Ah, Pythagoras' metempsychosis ! were that true,
This soul should fly from me, and I be changed
Unto some brutish beast ! all beasts are happy,
For, when they die,
Their souls are soon dissolved in elements ;
But mine must live, still to be plagued in hell.
Curst be the parents that engendered me !
No, Faustus : curse thyself : curse Lucifer,
That hath deprived thee of the joys of heaven.

[The clock strikes twelve.]

O, it strikes, it strikes ! Now, body, turn to air,
Or Lucifer will bear thee quick to hell.

[Thunder and lightning.]

O soul, be changed into little water-drops,
And fall into the ocean—ne'er be found.

Enter Devils

My God ! My God ! look not so fierce on me !
Adders and serpents, let me breathe awhile !
Ugly hell, gape not ! come not, Lucifer !
I'll burn my books !—Ah, Mephistophiles !

[Exeunt Devils with Faustus.]

Enter Chorus

Cut is the branch that might have grown full straight,
And burned is Apollo's laurel bough,
That sometime grew within this learned man.
Faustus is gone, regard his hellish fall,
Whose fiendful fortune may exhort the wise
Only to wonder at unlawful things,
Whose deepness doth entice such forward wits,
To practice more than heavenly power permits.

[*Exit.*']

In Marlowe's third play, *The Jew of Malta*, the subject is the passion for wealth, and the central figure is a terrible old money-lender, named Barabas. We have not space to describe this play; it will be sufficient to state that it is full of horrors, and ends with Barabas falling into a boiling cauldron and dying with only one regret—that he had not accomplished more evil than he had, in the time allotted to him on earth.

In the quotations already given from the plays it will be noticed that most of the lines are divisible into five feet, each of two syllables, with the second accented. This is the iambic pentameter, already illustrated in Chaucer. But there is one difference between these lines of Marlowe and those of Chaucer—they do not rhyme. This form of unrhymed iambic pentameter is called *blank verse*, and, as a really beautiful form of expression, is the creation of Marlowe. Previously it had been but a clumsy instrument; in Marlowe's hands it became the resounding splendid thing we have already seen, the perfect form for dramatic verse. All the highest English poetry after this date, from Shakespeare and Milton to our days, is written in 'Marlowe's mighty line.'

THE ELIZABETHAN PLAYHOUSE

Before dealing with Shakespeare, it will be as well to understand something of the conditions under which plays were presented at this time.

The play moved from the church to the churchyard, and thence to the village green or market square. It next took up its home in inn yards surrounded by balconies. Most of such inn yards have now disappeared, but a good example is to be seen at the Pilgrim's Inn at Gloucester; it suggests the way in which the structure of the modern theatre building has developed.

By the time that Shakespeare arrived in London there were two buildings devoted to the presentation of drama, the Curtain at Shoreditch and another at Blackfriars, near the site of *The Times* printing office. During the period when Shakespeare was in London others were built, the chief of which was the Globe in Southwark, near the site of Barclay and Perkins' brewery.

These playhouses were made of wood, were round or octagonal in shape, and had no roof.¹ The stage and the surrounding boxes were covered over with thatch, but the pit was exposed to the weather. This pit or 'yard' contained no seats, and was occupied by the 'groundlings,' who paid an entrance fee of a penny or twopence; the richer spectators watched the performance from the boxes on either side of the stage, while many young 'bloods' sat on the stage itself, chaffing the actors and throwing nuts at the groundlings. The stage was a platform four or five feet high, projecting into the pit, so that the groundlings were quite close to the actors. We must keep in

¹ See Frontispiece.

mind this nearness of the listeners to the players. The play depended entirely on what was said and done ; there were practically no scenic effects ; a board bearing briefly ' This is Rome,' or ' This is a forest,' was hung up and deemed sufficient.

There were no actresses, and the female parts were played by boys until the time of the Restoration.

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Specimens of English Dramatists. Lamb. Dent.

Everyman, and other Plays. Pollard. Everyman's Library.

Ralph Roister Doister. Udall. Temple Dramatists. Plays. Marlowe. Everyman's Library.

CHAPTER VIII

SHAKESPEARE



IT would take a whole book as large as this one to give even a brief outline of Shakespeare's work, of his place in literature, of his influence on his own and all succeeding times, and of the way in which he mirrors for us the emotions and ideals of the sixteenth century. When we are confined to one short chapter, the task becomes frankly impossible; we can only touch on a few points in the hope that the reader will for himself seek further knowledge.

William Shakespeare was born at Stratford-on-Avon on or about 23rd April 1564; his father was a fairly prosperous tradesman. At the age of eighteen the future dramatist married Anne Hathaway, who was twenty-six; this unhappy marriage and the decline of his father's fortune probably sent him to the golden-paved streets of London in search of fortune. Another factor in driving the youth to the capital was, no doubt, the visit to Stratford of the Earl of Leicester's players and those of Lord Warwick, for, through them, he may have heard of the London stage and its demand for plays and players.

°In 1584 he came to London, where he earned his living as an actor, frequenting the society of Marlowe and other dramatists. While an actor

he began to revise and adapt old plays. Having learned the secret of the old dramatists, he soon became an independent playwright. For more than twenty years he remained in London, producing on an average two plays a year, and winning both wealth and fame. He became part proprietor of the Globe and Blackfriars Theatres, and in these his own plays were given by his own companies.

In 1612, at the age of forty-eight, his dramatic work ended, and he returned to quiet retirement at Stratford, where, after a few years of life as a country gentleman, he died, 23rd April 1616, and was buried in Stratford Parish Church.

Those are the chief facts in his life, and they do not amount to much, in bulk. There are certain writers about whose lives we know a great deal, but whose works we never read : in the case of Shakespeare it is the other way about : there is perhaps no writer whose works are so well known ; there are few about whose lives we have less information.

The literature that has grown up round Shakespeare and his plays would fill a good-sized library. But while he has attracted the minds of scholars of all countries, he nevertheless has charms that capture just the average reader and delights that fascinate just the ordinary playgoer. There is no need to read books about Shakespeare ; the proper way to begin to study him is to take every opportunity of seeing the plays performed. They were written to be acted, not to be read, and they become more subtle and suggestive when seen in their natural setting on the stage. Of course a great deal depends on the actors, and, unfortunately, so many of them understand neither the thoughts they speak nor the beauty of the language

they recite. Still, even the worst of them will probably make living some phrase or other that might not seem so real when read in a chair by the fire.

It was said of the tragedian Kean, that to see him act was like reading Shakespeare by 'flashes of lightning.' We are not blessed with such flashes in these days, but twice a year a Shakespeare festival is held at Stratford, where good renderings are given of the chief plays.

Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch suggests yet another way of vivifying our reading and knowledge of Shakespeare, and that is the exploration of his country, one of the most beautiful bits of rural England. 'Some years ago,' he tells us, 'in hope to get a better understanding of Shakespeare, a friend and I tracked the Warwick Avon together, from its source on Naseby battlefield down to Tewkesbury, where by a yet more ancient battlefield it is gathered to the great Severn.'¹

As already remarked, the plays were written to be acted, and it was some time before they were printed. It was not until 1623 that they were all gathered together and published in one volume. Hence it is difficult to be sure of the exact order in which they were written. Certain industrious critics have, however, determined approximately the order in which they were produced.

The plays are often classified under three heads : Comedy, Tragedy, and History, but this is not the best order in which to read them. It is far better to study them in the order in which they were written, because in so doing one can see Shakespeare grow up, as it were ; we can follow thus the gradual progress and development of his power as a thinker, his knowledge of human nature, and his skill as a writer.

¹ Sir A. Quiller-Couch, 'Shakespeare's Workmanship.'

Sir Sidney Lee says :—

‘ The subject matter and metre both afford rough clues as to the period in his career to which each play may be referred. In his early plays the spirit of comedy or tragedy appears in its simplicity ; as his powers gradually matured he depicted life in its most complex involutions, and portrayed with masterly insight the subtle gradations of human sentiment and the mysterious workings of human passion. Comedy and tragedy are gradually blended, and his work finally developed a pathos such as could only come of ripe experience. Similarly, the metre undergoes emancipation from the hampering restraints of fixed rule, and becomes flexible enough to respond to every phase of human feeling.’

Four periods are thus brought out :—

1. Early work, ‘ In the workshop,’ 1586-1594.
2. Development of dramatic power, ‘ In the world,’ 1594-1600.
3. Maturity of genius—the period of the great tragedies, ‘ Out of the depths,’ 1600-1609.
4. Last plays, ‘ On the heights,’ 1609-1612.

The first period is one of preparation, and the chief plays are historical. Shakespeare is following on the heels of Marlowe ; indeed Marlowe may have helped in the *Henry VI.* plays, and he certainly inspired *Richard III.* and *Richard II.* These plays bear traces of that wealth of imagination and extravagance of language characteristic of Marlowe.

Romeo and Juliet is the first tragedy, the tragedy of love. There is about it a wonderful lyric grace and tenderness, but it has not the depth of the later tragedies. The bright, youthful, vivacious comedies, *Love’s Labour’s Lost*, *Comedy of Errors*, and *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, are of this period. *The Merchant of Venice* is also a comedy, though mixed up with the comedy are tragic elements.

It has a sombre setting, which is relieved by rays of romance :—

'Lorenzo. How sweet the moonlight sleeps upon this bank !
Here will we sit, and let the sounds of music
Creep in our ears : soft stillness and the night
Become the touches of sweet harmony.
Sit, Jessica : look how the floor of heaven
Is thick inlaid with patines of bright gold :
There 's not the smallest orb which thou behold'st
But in his motion like an angel sings,
Still quiring to the young-eyed cherubins ;
Such harmony is in immortal souls ;
But, whilst this muddy vesture of decay
Doth grossly close it in, we cannot hear it.

Enter Musicians

Come, ho ! and wake Diana with a hymn :
With sweetest touches pierce your mistress' ear,
And draw her home with music.

[*Music.*

Jessica. I am never merry when I hear sweet music.

Lorenzo. The reason is, your spirits are attentive.
For do but note a wild and wanton herd,
Or race of youthful and unhandled colts,
Fetching mad bounds, bellowing and neighing loud,
Which is the hot condition of their blood ;
If they but hear perchance a trumpet sound,
Or any air of music touch their ears,
You shall perceive them make a mutual stand,
Their savage eyes turned to a modest gaze
By the sweet power of music ; therefore the poet
Did feign that Orpheus drew trees, stones, and floods ;
Since naught so stockish, hard, and full of rage,
But music for the time doth change his nature.
The man that hath no music in himself
Nor is not moved with concord of sweet sounds,
Is fit for treasons, stratagems, and spoils ;
The motions of his spirit are dull as a night,
And his affections dark as Erebus .
Let no such man be trusted.'

In the second period Shakespeare outgrows the crudities of his apprenticeship. He finds himself. Three historic plays, the two parts of *Henry IV.*, and *Henry V.*, show a more careful workmanship than the early plays. They are leavened with the leaven of Falstaff's laughter. *Henry V.* has been described as a 'National Anthem in five acts.' The closing lines of *King John* strike the note of all the historical plays:—

' This England never did, nor never shall
Lie at the proud foot of a conqueror,
But when it first did help to wound itself.
Now these, her princes, are come home again,
Come the three corners of the world in arms,
And we shall shock them : Nought shall make us rue,
If England to itself do rest but true.'

The comedies of the period, from the brilliant *Midsummer Night's Dream* to *Twelfth Night*, which is Shakespeare's farewell to mirth, show a growing power and deepening insight into human nature. In them humour and romance are beautifully blended. It is impossible not to surrender to Oberon's charm in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

'*Oberon*. I know a bank whereon the wild thyme blows,
Where oxlips and the nodding violet grows,
Quite over-canopied with luscious woodbine,
With sweet musk-roses, and with eglantine :
There sleeps Titania, some time of the night,
Lull'd in these flowers with dances and delight :
And there the snake throws her enamell'd skin,
Weed wide enough to wrap a fairy in :
And with the juice of this I'll streak her eyes,
And make her full of hateful fantasies.
Take thou some of it, and seek through this grove :
A sweet Athenian lady is in love
With a disdainful youth : anoint his eyes :
But do it, when the next thing he espies

May be the lady. Thou shalt know the man
 By the Athenian garments he hath on.
 Effect it with some care, that he may prove
 More fond of her, than she upon her love.
 And look thou meet me ere the first cock crow.'

In the third period Shakespeare reaches the summit of his achievement in those stupendous tragedies, *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *Macbeth*, and *King Lear*, the most powerful dramas in all literature.

Hamlet is the tragedy of inaction. His native hue of resolution is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought. He thinks, but does not act. Meanwhile the wheels of fate run on to a tragic end. In *Othello* the tragedy is the result of jealousy subtly grafted into the mind of Othello by the villainous Iago. *Macbeth* is a tragedy of ambition—'last infirmity of noble minds.' Persuaded by his wife, Macbeth plunges into a pit of crime. In *Lear* we have the tragedy of pathos. The old King trusts in his wicked daughters, and the end is calamity.

The Roman historical plays, *Antony and Cleopatra*, *Coriolanus*, and *Julius Cæsar*, are practically tragedies. Thus, in the last, the farewell and then the death of both Brutus and Cassius.

'*Brutus*. I know not how
 But I do find it cowardly and vile,
 For fear of what might fall, so to prevent
 The time of life :—arming myself with patience,
 To stay the providence of some high powers,
 That govern us below.

Cassius. Then, if we lose this battle,
 You are contented to be led in triumph
 Through the streets of Rome ?

Brutus. No, Cassius, no : think not, thou noble Roman,
 That ever Brutus will go bound to Rome ;
 He bears too great a mind. But this same day

Must end that work the ides of March began ;
And whether we shall meet again, I know not,
Therefore our everlasting farewell take :—
For ever, and for ever, farewell, Cassius !
If we do meet again, why, we shall smile ;
If not, why then, this parting was well made.

Cassius. For ever, and for ever, farewell, Brutus !
If we do meet again, we 'll smile indeed ;
If not, 'tis true, this parting was well made.

Brutus. Why, then, lead on. O, that a man might know
The end of this day's business ere it come !
But it sufficeth that the day will end,
And then the end is known. Come, ho ! away !'

The darkness that broods over the plays of this period is perhaps due to some misfortune in the poet's life. It was certainly a time of public gloom ; the spacious Elizabethan days had passed.

But the gloom passes, and in the fourth period the dramatist comes through the raging, wreck-strewn sea to the calm of a sunlit harbour. All the joy and romance of the early golden comedies return, and we get *The Winter's Tale*, *Cymbeline*, and *The Tempest*.

In *The Tempest* Shakespeare takes his farewell of his public :—

' Our revels now are ended. These our actors,
As I foretold you, were all spirits and
Are melted into air, into thin air ;
And, like the baseless fabric of this vision,
The cloud-capped towers, the gorgeous palaces,
The solemn temples, the great globe itself,
Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve
And, like this insubstantial pageant faded,
Leave not a rack behind. We are such stuff
As dreams are made on, and our little life
Is rounded with a sleep.'

Shakespeare belongs to Elizabethan times. He is an Elizabethan, but, like Abraham Lincoln, 'he belongs to the ages.' He is the universal poet, the most impressive figure in all literature, overtopping even giants like Homer, Dante, and Molière. One cannot analyse his power. It is too vivid and vital a thing to be defined, yet there are certain qualities we can point out.

There is his creation of character. No other artist has painted such a gallery of portraits of men and women of all classes of society and of all tempers. Dryden, our first critic, says: 'He was the man who of all modern and perhaps ancient poets had the most comprehensive soul.' Later, Dryden speaks of his 'universal mind.' Indeed, Shakespeare's deep insight into human nature has given us something more than portraits; we feel his characters to be creatures of flesh and blood like ourselves. They are as living as they were upon the boards of the Globe. If one place them beside the creations of any other dramatist or of any of our novelists, one finds Shakespeare's people still real and living, while the others often belong to an age gone by.

Secondly, there is about his work a lofty tone. Not that he makes any confession of faith; indeed, it has been declared that 'Shakespeare has nowhere drawn the religious type of man in his plays.' Yet we realise that the dramatist was religiously minded. There is always some soul of goodness in the evil he shows us. His high brooding tragedies deal with the mystery of human things, but while he paints in bold strokes the world that passes, he seems restlessly to reach beyond.

'Sometimes from the very furnace of affliction a conviction seems borne to us that somehow, if we could see it,

this agony counts as nothing against the heroism and love which appear in it and thrill our hearts. Sometimes we are driven to cry out that these mighty or heavenly spirits who perish are too great for the little space in which they move, and that they vanish not into nothingness, but into freedom. Sometimes from these sources and from others comes a presentiment, formless but haunting, and even profound, that all the fury of conflict, with its waste and woe, is less than half the truth, even an illusion—"such stuff as dreams are made on." '1

Thirdly, no playwright has equalled Shakespeare in dramatic power, whether in comedy or tragedy. A play can only be carried by action, but an action is not in itself dramatic. When a man stabs another, that is not drama; but when he hesitates between his desire to stab and the consequences of his deed, as in *Hamlet*, then we have drama. In *Macbeth*, again, the murder is not the play; the drama is the murder's effect on the conscience of the murderer, and it holds us breathless to the last scene.

Lastly, there is Shakespeare's great poetic gift. Not only is he pre-eminent in his command of rhythm, but of all men in the world he has just the right word or phrase to hand.

His influence on our thought and language is incalculable. Shakespeare and the Authorised Version of the Bible are the two great wells of English speech.

Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch has said that if he were limited to three texts on which to preach English literature, he would choose Homer (though it were but a prose translation), the Bible in the Authorised Version, and Shakespeare.²

¹ Bradley, 'Shakespearean Tragedy.'

² Sir A. Quiller-Couch, 'On the Art of Writing.'

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CHAPTER IX

BEN JONSON



THE Elizabethan drama began with Marlowe and his fellows and reached its height in the plays of Shakespeare, but Shakespeare was only the greatest of a crowd of dramatists. At the close of the sixteenth century the drama was in its heyday, and the passion for the theatre was carried to a degree never surpassed. The court, the town, and the country, all were interested in drama. English players even went to Germany to perform, and in this country theatres were numerous and performances frequent. Every writer tried his talents in dramatic creation, so that there was a whole tribe of playwrights who are loosely described as 'Elizabethan'; some of them, however, belong to a later period and began to write in the days of the Stuarts. The most noted of all the successors to Shakespeare was Ben Jonson.

Jonson was born in London in 1573, nine years after Shakespeare. At Westminster School he was a favourite pupil of Camden, the historian. He left school at the age of sixteen, and, after working as a bricklayer, went to fight the Spaniards in the Netherlands. Returning to England, he became an actor. His life was a stormy one. At war with accepted ideas, he was continually quarrelling with his friends. For ever laying

about him with his sword, he actually killed a man in a duel. Bricklayer, soldier, actor, duellist, scholar, he now turned playwright, and his first play was staged by Shakespeare, who probably played a part in it himself.

Jonson's plays are not very popular to-day, but it is impossible to leave the man out of this brief sketch of English literature. He was a great figure in his own time, and a much more profound scholar than Shakespeare. He had very definite ideas as to the art and craft of literature, and he ruled, as it were, over a court of dramatists and poets, to whom he laid down the law. They seem to have been quite willing to accept this dictatorship, to sit at his feet in the Mermaid Tavern, and to declare themselves 'sealed of the tribe of Ben.' To those meetings at the Mermaid we owe the following lines by Beaumont, one of the chief playwrights and poets of this period:—

' What things have we seen
Done at the Mermaid ! heard words that have been
So nimble and so full of subtle flame,
As if that every one from whence they came
Had meant to put his whole wit in a jest,
And had resolved to live a fool the rest
Of his dull life.'

Jonson is well worth spending a chapter on because of the things he did. By his time the drama had begun to decline. In all art, just as in life, there is always a beginning, a period of great achievement, and then a decline. Jonson appears at a time when the structure of plays is loose ; carelessly composed scenes are merely strung together, and the plot does not develop naturally. For a modern representation of all these faults, see a modern revue.

The plays also were lacking in moral tone. Shakespeare might draw wickedness and vice, but never for their own sake; his successors pandered to the taste of the groundlings and produced plays of such low tone and objectionable language that they have deservedly passed, so far as the general public is concerned, into the limbo of forgotten things. The drama, in fact, degenerated into such a low form of amusement that in 1641 the theatres were closed by order of Parliament. One man, Ben Jonson, strove to arrest the downward course of the drama. He set before himself certain laws to be followed in play-writing, and he fashioned more than one play more or less in accordance with those laws. In the first place, he attempted to restore to the drama the three laws which had been laid down to govern the classic plays of Greece and Rome. These laws are known as the Unities, and are three in number.

1. Unity of Time. The play is to last as long as the story would have taken had it been lived in real life.

2. Unity of Place. Its action must be laid either in one spot, or at any rate in places so close to each other that the change from place to place could be made, without stretching the imagination, in the time taken to act the play.

3. Unity of Action. The whole action of the play must be confined to one series of events; this last unity also demanded a rigid separation of tragedy and comedy.

Marlowe had headed the Elizabethans in a revolt against these laws. He wanted to bring the span of life within the two or three hours' traffic of the stage, so he scorned the unity of time. As to the second unity, he boldly leaped seas and continents; and as to the third, tragedy and comedy

he mingled in one play, in his desire to show life as it was and is. By the time of Shakespeare, the romantic, as opposed to the classic drama, was firmly established. Now Jonson wanted to return to the examples of the Greeks and Romans, and his influence was such in after times, that, though he himself was only respectful to the Unities, and did not always obey them, he has been called 'the first of the English Classics.'

In the next place, Jonson wrote his comedies with the idea of bringing London to a sense of its follies and sins, a 'thing throughout pleasant and ridiculous and accommodated to the correction of manners.'

He began his career as a playwright with the satiric comedy, *Everyman in his Humour*, a play that is not unlike *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. In this he does not set out to tell a story by action and dialogue; like a caricaturist, he chooses some particular folly and vice, which he calls a 'humour.' This 'humour' he turns into a character.

Thus in the prologue he says:—

'When some one peculiar quality
Doth so possess a man that it doth draw
All his affects, his spirits, and his powers
In their confluxions all to run one way.
This may be truly said to be a humour.'

In Shakespeare we have men and women in whose characters a certain quality works, but in Jonson the man or woman becomes representative of some one quality, and consequently there is no development of character. Shakespeare's men and women are living creatures, while Jonson's are only types. Indeed, he often labels them, as in the morality plays, with names which show the particular 'humour'—as, for instance, 'Morose,'

'Subtle,' 'Wellbred,' 'Sir Epicure Mammon,'
'Cutbeard.'

His best comedy is *The Alchemist*, a perfect specimen of English classic drama, and, even now, a quite readable book. Lovewit has left his servant, Face, in charge of the house. With Face are associated Subtle, the alchemist, and Dol Common, a fortune-teller. To these knaves come several people in search of advice. There is, for instance, Druggier, a tobacconist.

'*Subtle*. What is your name, say you—Abel Druggier ?

Drug. Yes, sir.

Sub. A seller of tobacco ?

Drug. Yes, sir.

Sub. Umph !

Free of the grocers ?

Drug. Ay, an't please you.

Sub. Well —

Your business, Abel ?

Drug. This, an't please your worship ;

I am a young beginner, and am building

Of a new shop, an't like your worship, just

At corner of a street :—Here is the plot on 't—

And I would know by art, sir, of your worship,

Which way I should make my door, by necromancy,

And where my shelves ; and which should be for boxes,

And which for pots. I would be glad to thrive, sir :

And I was wish'd to your worship by a gentleman,

One Captain Face, that says you know men's planets,

And their good angels, and their bad.

Sub. I do,

If I do see them——

Re-enter Face

Face. What ! my honest Abel ?

Thou art well met here.

Drug. Troth, sir, I was speaking,

Just as your worship came here, of your worship :

I pray you, speak for me to master doctor.

Face. He shall do anything. Doctor, do you hear ?

This is my friend, Abel, an honest fellow ;
 He lets me have good tobacco, and he does not
 Sophisticate it with sack lees or oil,
 Nor washes it in muscadels and grains,
 Nor buries it in gravel, under ground ;
 But keeps it in fine lily pots, that, opened,
 Smell like conserve of roses, or French beans.
 He has his maple block, his silver tongs,
 Winchester pipes, and fire of juniper :
 A neat, spruce, honest fellow, and no goldsmith.

Sub. He is a fortunate fellow, that I am sure on.

Face. Already, sir, you have found it ? Lo thee, Abel !

Sub. And in right way toward riches——

Face. Sir !

Sub. This summer

He will be of the clothing of his company,
 And next spring called to the scarlet ; spend what he can.

Face. What, and so little beard ?

(Act i. scene 1.)

Among the gulls is Sir Epicure Mammon, who
 wants to find the philosopher's stone.

'Mammon. Where is my Subtle, there ? Within, ho !

Face (within). Sir, he 'll come to you by and by.

Mammon. That is his fire-drake,

His Lungs, his Zephyrus, he that puffs his coals,
 Till he firk nature up, in her own centre.
 You are not faithful, sir. This night I 'll change
 All that is metal in my house to gold :
 And, early in the morning, will I send
 To all the plumbers and the pewterers,
 And buy their tin and lead up ; and to Lothbury
 For all the copper.

Surly. What, and turn that, too ?

Mam. Yes, and I 'll purchase Devonshire and Cornwall,
 And make them perfect Indies ! you admire now ?

(Act ii. scene 2.)

All Jonson's comedies are models of dramatic

construction. They are full of farce, and his skill in devising characters and situations is such that these plays held the boards for two hundred years, in spite of the stress he put on their moral lesson, for he was a teacher first and a playwright afterwards. They lack, however, the freshness and charm of Shakespeare's romances, are weighted with learning, and appeal more to the intellect than to the emotions.

Jonson not only wrote comedies and tragedies, he was also the author of a number of masques. The masque was a kind of procession or pageant, brought to this country from Italy in the reign of Henry VIII. At first all the acting was in dumb-show, but it gradually changed until dialogue, either in prose or verse, was introduced. This, again, was interspersed with songs and the whole entertainment converted into an opportunity for the display of gorgeous scenery and dresses.

Many poets tried their hands at the masque, and it was Jonson's perfect performance in this line of composition that won him royal favour, when James I. ascended the throne; for by this time the masque had become the favourite amusement of the court and of the aristocracy.

In his masques Jonson shows his ability as a writer of lyrics—that is, of poems suitable for singing. Some of his songs are now much better known than his plays. There is, for instance, the exquisite 'Drink to me only with thine eyes':—

'TO CELIA

Drink to me only with thine eyes,
And I will pledge with mine ;
Or leave a kiss but in the cup,
And I 'll not ask for wine.

The thirst that from the soul doth rise
Doth ask a drink divine ;
But might I of Jove's nectar sup,
I would not change for thine.

I sent thee late a rosy wreath,
Not so much honouring thee
As giving it a hope that there
It could not wither'd be ;
But thou thereon didst only breathe
And sent'st it back to me ;
Since when it grows, and smells, I swear,
Not of itself, but thee ! '

' Stanzas to Diana ' are even finer :—

' Queen and huntress, chaste and fair,
Now the sun is laid to sleep,
Seated in thy silver chair,
State in wonted manner keep :
Hesperus entreats thy light,
Goddess excellently bright.

Earth, let not thy envious shade
Dare itself to interpose ;
Cynthia's shining orb was made
Heaven to clear when day did close :
Bless us, then, with wishèd sight,
Goddess excellently bright.

Lay thy bow of pearl apart,
And thy crystal-shining quiver ;
Give unto the flying hart
Space to breathe, how short soever :
Thou that mak'st a day of night,
Goddess excellently bright.'

And here is a final example of his skill as a poet,
though one not exactly suitable for singing :—

' It is not growing like a tree
In bulk, doth make Man better be ;
Or standing long an oak, three hundred year,
To fall a log at last, dry, bald, and sere :

A lily of a day
Is fairer far in May ;
Although it fall and die that night,
It was the plant and flower of light.
In small proportions we just beauties see ;
And in short measures life may perfect be.'

Jonson died in 1637, and was buried in Westminster Abbey. On his grave are carved the words, ' O rare Ben Jonson '—a fitting epitaph.

OTHER BOOKS TO READ

Plays. Jonson. Mermaid Series.
Everyman in his Humour. Jonson. Oxford University Press.
Six Plays by Contemporaries of Shakespeare. World's Classics.

CHAPTER X

SPENSER



THE Elizabethan period was as much noted for its poets as its dramatists. The time was dotted with poets as the heaven is with stars, all glorious, but differing from each other in brilliance. The greatest of them was Spenser.

Edmund Spenser was born in London, near the Tower, in 1552, six years before the accession of Queen Elizabeth. From Merchant Taylors' School he went to Cambridge, where he studied the writers of ancient Greece and Rome, and the Italian poets who had been such a source of joy and inspiration to Chaucer.

After leaving Cambridge, Spenser went to the north of England, where he wrote the *Shepheards Calender*, in which he laments his lost Rosalind. This pastoral poem consists of twelve short poems, one for each month of the year; the one for January runs thus:—

‘Colin Cloute, a shepheardes boy, complaineth of his unfortunate love . . . he compareth his carefull case to the sadde season of the yeare, to the frostie ground, to the frozen trees, and to his owne winter-beaten flocks.’

‘Thou barrein ground, whome winters wrath hath wasted,
Art made a myrrhour to behold my plight :
Whilome thy fresh spring flowrd, and after hasted
The sommer prowde, with Daffadillies dight ;
And now is come thy wynters stormy state,
Thy mantle mard, wherein thou maskedst late.

Such rage as winters reigneth in my heart,
My life-bloud frieing with unkindly cold ;
Such stormy stoures do breede my balefull smart,
As if my yeare were wast and woxen old ;
And yet, alas ! but now my spring begonne,
And yet, alas ! yt is already donne.

You naked trees, whose shady leaves are lost,
Wherein the byrds were wont to build their bowre,
And now are clothd with mosse and hoary frost,
Instede of blossomes, wherewith your buds did flowre ;
I see your teares that from your boughes doe raine,
Whose drops in drery ysicles remaine.

All so my lustfull leafe is drye and sere,
My timely buds with wayling all are wasted ;
The blossom which my braunch of youth did beare
With breathed sighes is blowne away and blasted ;
And from mine eyes the drizzling teares descend,
As on your boughes the ysicles depend.'

This *Shepherds Calender* put Spenser the first poet of the day. His friend, Gilbert Harvey, now introduced him to the Earl of Leicester, who took Spenser into his house. There he met the brilliant Sidney and other favourites of the Queen. The poet, however, soon tired of the deceit and flattery of the court, and, through Leicester's influence, was appointed secretary to Lord Grey, the Lord-Deputy of Ireland.

For many years Spenser lived in Ireland, having been granted the forfeited estate of the Earl of Desmond, with the Castle of Kilcolman, just north of Cork ; here the years of lonely exile passed in the writing of the *Faerie Queene*, of which more presently.

Raleigh visited Spenser, listened to the reading of the first three books of the *Faerie Queene*, and was much impressed. He brought the poet to London and introduced him to the Queen, who

accepted the dedication of the poem and conferred a pension on the author.

Spenser returned to an exile brightened by the publication of the first three books, and even more by his marriage to an Irish girl, Elizabeth, in whose honour he wrote *Epithalamion*, the greatest song of human love in the language :—

‘ Tell me, ye merchants daughters, did ye see
So fayre a creature in your towne before ;
So sweet, so lovely, and so mild as she,
Adorn’d with beautyes grace and vertues store ?
Her goodly eyes lyke Saphyres shining bright,
Her forehead yvory white,
Her cheeks lyke apples which the sun hath rudded.

But if ye saw that which no eyes can see,
The inward beauty of her lively spright,
Garnisht with heavenly gifts of high degree,
Much more then would ye wonder at that sight,
And stand astonisht lyke to those which red
Medusaes mazeful hed.
There dwels sweet love, and constant chastity,
Unspotted fayth and comely womanhood,
Regard of honour and mild modesty ;
There vertu raynes as Queene in royal throne,
And giveth lawes alone,
The which the base affections doe obay,
And yeeld theyr services unto her will ;
Ne thought of thing uncomely ever may
Thereto approach to tempt her mind to ill.
Had ye once seene these her celestial treasures,
And unrevealed pleasures,
Then would ye wonder, and her prayses sing,
That al the woods should answer, and your echo ring.’

After a second visit to London, and the publication of three more parts of the *Faerie Queene*, Spenser returned to Ireland. Tyrone and Tyrconnel now set the country aflame, and

Kilcolman Castle was burned to the ground, one of the poet's children perishing in the flames. It is believed that some unpublished parts of the *Faerie Queene* were also burned. Heartbroken, the poet returned to London, and died in poverty in an inn in Westminster. Devereux, Earl of Essex, had him buried in the Abbey by the side of Chaucer. 'His hearse,' says Dean Stanley, 'was attended by poets; and mournful elegies, with the pens of those who wrote them, were thrown into his tomb. What a funeral was that, at which Beaumont, Fletcher, Jonson, and, in all probability, Shakespeare attended! What a grave, in which the pen of Shakespeare may be mouldering away!'

'THE FAERIE QUEENE'

Spenser's fame rests on this poem. In a letter to Raleigh, which is prefixed to the poem, he says :

'To pourtraict in Arthure, before he was a king, the image of a brave Knight, perfected in the twelve private Morall Vertues, as Aristotle hath devised; which is the purpose of these first twelve bookes.'

It appears that Spenser intended to write twenty-four books, making in all one long poem. Each poem was to tell of the adventures and triumphs of one knight, who represented one virtue. Each knight was to meet and conquer the opposing vices. Now, only six of the intended twenty-four books were ever finished, but even then the poem is one of the longest in our language. In fact, it is a great deal too long for most beginners, and it is not bad advice that bids the reader read only the First Book, and, at a first reading, skip all the verses that have nothing to do with the tale.

We begin, in Book I., with St. George, the Red

Cross Knight, his rescue of the matchless maid Una, and his defeat of the witch Duessa and the arch-sorcerer, Archimago. The story is quite alive and full of interest; but we have to remember that it is not a mere story and nothing else. St. George stands for Holiness, Una represents Religion, and so on; there is a lesson as well as a story.

Such forms of composition have long been common in the history of the world. Christ's parables, for instance, were mostly simple tales with meanings other than those that appear on the surface; the old fables of foxes and sour grapes, and the like, are other examples. Spenser's masterpiece belongs to this class, and is known as an allegory. The fable exists for the sake of the moral; the allegory need not actually convey a moral, though it often does. In the case of the *Faerie Queene* there is a double allegory; first, there is the one of vices and virtues, and then, in addition, there is one of living persons also. St. George, in this connection, stands for Sidney, the model Englishman, Duessa is Mary, Queen of Scots, and so on. The poem is full of references to political events—the turmoil in Ireland, the wars in the Netherlands, and the plots against Queen Elizabeth. There is, however, no necessity to understand the allegory or the historical references in order to enjoy the poem.

Hazlitt says:—

‘But some people will say that all this may be very fine, but that they cannot understand it on account of the allegory. They are afraid of the allegory, as if they thought it would bite them: they look at it as a child looks at a painted dragon, and think it will strangle them in its shining folds. This is very idle. If they do not meddle with the allegory, the allegory will not meddle with them. Without minding it at all, the whole is as plain as a pikestaff.’

The story parts of the First Book, read merely for the joy of reading, give a marvellous series of visions, visions painted in beauty and splendour, by an artist who sees with remarkable clearness and paints what he sees in resplendent colours.

BOOK I

I

'A gentle knight was pricking on the plaine,
Ycladd in mightie armes and silver shielde,
Wherein old dints of deepe woundes did remaine,
The cruell markes of many a bloody felde ;
Yet armes till that time did he never wield.
His angry steede did chide his foming bitt,
As much disdayning to the curbe to yield :
Full jolly knight he seemd, and faire did sitt,
As one for knightly giusts and fierce encounters fitt.

II

And on his brest a bloodie Cross he bore,
The deare remembrance of his dying Lord,
For whose sweete sake that glorious badge he wore,
And dead, as living ever, him ador'd :
Upon his shield the like was also scor'd,
For soveraine hope, which in his helpe he had.
Right faithfull true was he in deede and word ;
But of his cheere did seeme too solemne sad ;
Yet nothing did he dread, but ever was ydrad.

III

Upon a great adventure he was bond,
That greatest Gloriana to him gave,
(That greatest Glorious Queene of Faerylond)
To winne him worshippe, and her grace to have,
Which of all earthly thinges he most did crave :
And ever as he rode his hart did earne
To prove his puissance in battell brave
Upon his foe, and his new force to learne,
Upon his foe, a Dragon horrible and stearne.

IV

A lovely Ladie rode him faire beside,
Upon a lowly Asse more white then snow,
Yet she much whiter ; but the same did hide
Under a vele, that wimpled was full low ;
And over all a blacke stole shee did throw :
As one that inly mournd, so was she sad,
And heavie sate upon her palfrey slow ;
Seemed in heart some hidden care she had,
And by her, in a line, a milkewhite lambe she lad.

V

So pure and innocent, as that same lambe,
She was in life and every vertuous lore ;
And by descent from Royall lynage came
Of ancient Kinges and Queenes, that had of yore
Their sceptres stretcht from East to Western shore,
And all that world in their subjection held ;
Till that infernall feend with foule uprore
Forwasted all their land, and them expeld ;
Whom to avenge she had this knight from far compeld.

VI

Behind her farre away a Dwarfe did lag,
That lasie seemd, in being ever last,
Or wearied with bearing of her bag
Of needments at his backe. Thus as they past,
The day with cloudes was suddaine overcast,
And angry Jove an hideous storme of raine
Did poure into his Lemans lap so fast,
That everie wight to shrowd it did constrain ;
And this faire couple eke to shroud themselves were fain.'

The Faerie Queene holds her court for twelve days. Each day a certain knight sets out at her behest, and his adventures provide the subject of a book.

Meanwhile, Prince Arthur goes in search of the Faerie Queene, of whom he has dreamed, and falls

in with each knight in turn by the way. His repeated appearance is used as the means by which the different stories are held together.

The language of the poem is rich, but archaic or old-fashioned ; Ben Jonson cried in scorn that ' Spenser, imitating the ancients, writ no language at all.' At the time the poet wrote there was no standard language, and he drew his vocabulary from many sources, old and new. Words from Chaucer, now obsolete, he mingled with words of the time, adding others of his own coining. The result is a golden language, loved of the poets who came after ; Spenser has been called ' the poet's poet.' Many, from Milton to Wordsworth, have paid him tribute, and many a one, besides lingering over his language, has learned music from the melody of his verse.

As an example of the magic of his language, take the following description of the dwelling of Morpheus, the god of Sleep. The first five lines, read repeatedly in a monotonous voice, would almost serve to send the hearers upon a speedy journey to Morpheus himself :—

' And, more to lulle him in his slumber soft,
A trickling streame from high rock tumbling down,
And ever drizzling raine upon the loft,
Mixt with a murmuring winde, much like the sowne
Of swarming bees, did cast him in a swowne.
No other noyse, nor peoples troublous cryes,
As still are wont t' annoy the walled towne,
Might there be heard : but careless Quiet lyes,
Wrapt in eternall silence farre from enemyes.'

Notice, next, the form of the verse or stanza. In each case the first and third lines rhyme ; the second, fourth, fifth, and seventh all rhyme ; and so do the sixth, eighth, and ninth. If the

letters a, b, c, stand for rhyming words or syllables, we can write the form of this verse as

a b a b b c b c c.

There are nine lines to every verse: the first eight have ten syllables to every line, and are iambic pentameter again, while the last line comes in with the roll of a wave, twelve syllables long. This particular form of verse was invented by Spenser himself and is named after him—the Spenserian stanza. It has formed the mould into which many a later poet has poured his music, but there have been none who have ever filled it so well as its inventor.

Lastly, Spenser has a creed, the poet's creed, beauty. This is seen in the richness of his language, the melody of his verse, and the wonder of his imagery. But his belief in beauty is something more than a mere matter of words and verses. To him there is an even higher beauty—that of a noble life; and he takes Sidney, the courtier and soldier, and Raleigh, the courtier and adventurer, and under the guise of his knights paints the characters of the Elizabethan heroes, as they would have been if they could. In Spenser mingle two spirits, those of the Renaissance and the Reformation; he is the descendant of Chaucer and the forerunner of Milton.

OTHER BOOKS TO READ

Tottel's Miscellany. Arber's Reprints. Constable.
 Elizabethan Sonnets. Sidney Lee. Constable.
 Shorter Elizabethan Poems. Bullen. Constable.
 Longer Elizabethan Poems. Bullen. Constable.
 Works. Spenser. Globe.
 Homer. Chapman. Temple Classics.

CHAPTER XI

POETRY AND PROSE



WE have looked at some of the books of the dramatists and poets, but poetry and the drama did not exhaust the energies of the tireless Elizabethans. They have also left us many prose works, which, though not perhaps so brilliant in appearance as the plays and poems, are none the less of lasting value. Printing had become a cheaper process, and experiments in many different directions were possible.

Prose tales, the ancestors of our modern novels, began to come from the new presses. Our first story-tellers were Lyly, author of the fanciful and flowery *Euphues*, and Sir Philip Sidney, who wrote the pastoral *Arcadia*. Then there were the writings of the theologian, Richard Hooker, the historians, among them Sir Walter Raleigh, who beguiled his weary years in the Tower by writing history, and the explorers and adventurers of the age who found recorders of their achievements in Hakluyt and Purchas. Men, too, were beginning to question and to judge; there was a spirit of criticism abroad which found expression in Sidney's *Apologie for Poetrie*, the first book of English literary criticism.

Story, theology, history, travel, criticism, make up a big body of books, from which we select for mention the *Apologie for Poetrie*. Hitherto the

poet has taken most of our story, and yet, to most of us, the word 'poetry' is a 'name of fear,' a thing men often shun as they would the plague, even though they profess admiration for it. Here, in Sidney, himself a poet, is the apologist or defender of poetry.

SIR PHILIP SIDNEY

Sidney was the Sir Calidore of Spenser's *Faerie Queene*, 'a verray parfit gentle knight.' Elizabeth called him one of the jewels of her crown, while William the Silent declared 'that in Sidney the Queen of England had one of the greatest and ripest counsellors that could be found in Europe.' He was a brilliant soldier—and he was a poet.

Courtier, statesman, soldier, poet, the story of his life is the history of Elizabethan times. He is the image of his age, its life and thought, its deeds and dreams.

He died at Zutphen, in the Netherlands, and we all know how the gentle knight, lying mortally wounded, gave up the cup of water that was offered to him, to a dying soldier.

'THE APOLOGIE FOR POETRIE'

The Apologie for Poetrie begins with a general defence of poetry, whose aim is to teach and delight :—

'Poesie, therefore, is an arte of imitation, for so Aristotle termeth it in his word Mimesis, that is to say, a representing, counterfetting, or figuring foorth: to speake metaphorically, a speaking picture: with this end, to teach and delight. . . .

'This purifying of wit, this enrichting of memory, enabling of judgment, and enlarging of conceit, which commonly we call learning, under what name soever it com forth, or to what immediat end soever it be directed,

the final end is to lead and draw us to as high a perfection as our degenerate soules, made worse by their clayey lodgings, can be capable of.'

The various kinds of poetry are classified, and the superiority of poetry to philosophy and history is pointed out. It is more serious than philosophy; as to history, nothing in it is so noble but that

'The poet (if he list) may with his imitation make it his own, beautifying it both for further teaching, and more delighting, as it pleaseth him, having all, from Dante his heaven to his hell, under the authoritie of his penne.'

Next we come to the various species of poetry—pastoral, elegiac, iambic, satiric, comic, tragic, lyric, and heroic. In speaking of lyric poetry Sidney says:—

'Certainly, I must confesse of my own barbarousness, I never heard the olde song of Percy and Duglas that I found not my heart moved more than with a trumpet.'

The second part of the book is a criticism of the poets and dramatists of the day. Of special interest is the following:—

'Chaucer, undoubtedly, did excellently in his *Troylus and Cresseid*; of whom, truly, I know not whether to mervaile more, either that he in that mistie time could see so clearly, or that wee in this cleare age walke so stumblingly after him. Yet had he great wants, fitte to be forgiven in so reverent antiquity. . . . *The Shepheards Kalender* hath much Poetrie in his Eclogues, indeede worthy the reading if I be not deceived.'

This is simple, melodious prose, but the best example of clear, lucid English is to be found in the *Essays* of Bacon. The reading of one of these essays, along with a sonnet of Shakespeare or Sidney, would help to an understanding of what poetry is. One cannot define poetry, for it is one of those living things which defy definition;

yet we can recognise it by its effects upon us. There is a troubling of the waters of the spirit, and to trouble the waters of the spirit is one of the greatest aims of all art. You remember Bethesda. It was a pool in the sheep market near the Temple at Jerusalem. At certain hours an angel came and troubled the waters, and when the waters were troubled the sick and infirm bathed in the pool and came out whole and strong.

Likewise true peace or happiness is only won after a troubling of the waters of the spirit and a disturbing of the emotions. The appeal of poetry is to the emotions. It must be remembered that the first poets sang their lines to the harp or some other musical instrument, and in that fact lies the secret of poetry. With the strains of music comes a stirring of the emotions. The harp is gone, but the voice never forgets it. Thus the only true way to appreciate poetry is to read it aloud. You will probably have to hide yourself to do so, but it is worth it.

All this may be summed up in the line of Sir Philip Sidney: 'Fool! said my Muse, look in thy heart and write.' The poet looks in his heart and writes, so that his appeal goes direct to the heart of the reader or listener. Many another has looked into some handy box of pretty tricks and written, but the result is not poetry.

FRANCIS BACON

Let us now turn to the worldly wisdom of the materially minded Bacon. Bacon was a philosopher, as prominent a figure in the history of thought as in the story of our literature. He began an enormous philosophical treatise on *The Advancement of Learning*, and he wrote *The History of Henry VII.*, the first piece of scientific

history in our language. Besides these, in *The New Atlantis*, he painted a picture of Utopia similar to that of More. The wisdom of all these books is compressed into one slender volume of *Essays* which contain the observation and study of a lifetime.

Bacon, son of the Keeper of the Great Seal under Elizabeth, was born in 1561. Lawyer, politician, courtier, place-seeker, he failed to win the favour of the Queen. But, on the accession of James I., he rose rapidly in fame and fortune, becoming Lord Chancellor, an office from which he was finally deposed by the House of Lords on the charge of taking bribes. Bacon's personality is a bewildering one. Harnessed with the worship of truth as expressed in his writings is his spirit of self-seeking. In life he is the time-server, recognising any means to an end, flattery, corruption, treason itself, if only it help him to achieve his aim ; in his books he is the servant of science.

His book of *Essays* was first published in Elizabeth's reign. Many subsequent enlarged editions were published, until it appeared, in its final form, *Essays or Counsels, Civil and Moral*, in 1625, a book containing fifty-eight essays. Under such headings as 'Of Truth,' 'Of Adversity,' 'Of Riches,' 'Of Ambition,' 'Of Beauty,' 'Of Praise,' 'Of Anger,' the rather worldly philosophy of Bacon is given in brief.

'OF STUDIES

'Studies serve for delight, for ornament, and for ability. Their chief use for delight is in privateness and retiring ; for ornament, is in discourse ; and for ability, is in the judgment and disposition of business. For expert men can execute, and perhaps judge of particulars, one by one ; but the general counsels, and the plots and marshalling of

affairs, come best from those that are learned. To spend too much time in studies is sloth ; to use them too much for ornament is affectation ; to make judgment wholly by their rules is the humour of a scholar. They perfect nature and are perfected by experience ; for natural abilities are like natural plants that need proyning by study ; and studies themselves do give forth directions too much at large, except they be bounded in by experience. Crafty men contemn studies ; simple men admire them ; and wise men use them, for they teach not their own use ; but that is a wisdom without them and above them, won by observation. Read not to contradict and refute ; nor to believe and to take for granted ; nor to find talk and discourse ; but to weigh and consider. Some books are to be tasted, others to be swallowed, and some few to be chewed and digested : that is, some books are to be read only in parts ; others to be read, but not curiously ; and some few to be read wholly and with diligence and attention. Some books also may be read by deputy, and extracts made of them by others ; but that would be only in the less important arguments, and the meaner sort of books ; else distilled books are like common distilled water, flashy things. Reading maketh a full man ; conference a ready man ; and writing an exact man. And therefore, if a man write little, he had need have a great memory ; if he confer little, he had need have a present wit ; and if he read little, he had need have much cunning, to seem to know that he doth not. Histories make men wise ; poets witty ; the mathematics subtile ; natural philosophy deep ; moral grave ; logic and rhetoric able to contend. *Abeunt studia in mores.* Nay, there is no stond or impediment in the wit, but may be wrought out by fit studies : like as diseases of the body may have appropriate exercises.'

Nothing could be more direct. Into short, pithy sentences Bacon packs an infinity of riches. One has only to turn for further illustration to the essay 'Of Gardens':—

'God Almighty first planted a garden. And indeed it is the purest of human pleasures. It is the greatest refresh-

ment to the spirits of man ; without which, buildings and palaces are but gross handyworks : and a man shall ever see that when ages grow to civility and elegancy, men come to build stately sooner than to garden finely ; as if gardening were the greater perfection. I do hold it, in the royal ordering of gardens, there ought to be gardens for all the months in the year ; in which, severally, things of beauty may be then in season.'

He runs through a long calendar, then continues:—

' And because the breath of flowers is far sweeter in the air (where it comes and goes, like the warbling of music) than in the hand, therefore nothing is more fit for that delight, than to know what be the flowers and plants that do best perfume the air. Roses, damask and red, are fast flowers of their smells ; so that you may walk by a whole row of them, and find nothing of their sweetness ; yea, though it be in a morning's dew. Bays likewise yield no smell as they grow. Rosemary little ; nor sweet marjoram. That which above all others yields the sweetest smell in the air, is the violet ; specially the white double violet, which comes twice a year ; about the middle of April, and about Bartholomewtide. Next to that is the musk-rose. Then the strawberry-leaves dying, which yield a most excellent cordial smell. Then the flower of the vines ; it is a little dust, like the dust of a bent, which grows upon the cluster in the first coming forth. Then sweet-briar. Then wall-flowers, which are very delightful to be set under a parlour or lower chamber window. Then pinks and gillyflowers, specially the matted pink and clove gillyflower. Then the flowers of the lime-tree. Then the honeysuckles, so they be somewhat afar off. Of bean flowers I speak not, because they are field flowers. But those which perfume the air most delightfully, not passed by as the rest, but being trodden upon and crushed, are three : that is, burnet, wild thyme, and water mints. Therefore you are to set whole alleys of them, to have the pleasure when you walk or tread.'

There, is the more human side of the philosopher. Ben Jonson said of him :—

'No man ever spoke more neatly, more precisely, more weightily, or suffered less emptiness, less idleness in what he uttered. No member of his speech but consisted of his own graces. His hearers could not cough or look aside from him, without loss. He commanded where he spoke, and had his judges angry and pleased at his devotion. No man had their affections more in his power. The fear of every man that heard him was lest he should make an end.'

In Francis Bacon, so far as this book is concerned, we take leave of the mighty Elizabethans. The times are fast changing. The bright days of the Elizabethans have given place to the greyness and gloom of life under James I. We are coming now to the Puritans. But our appreciation of our literature rests on our understanding of the great books from Chaucer to Bacon, especially those of the Elizabethans.

The Elizabethans are the beacons of the English spirit in whom it flames up brightly, almost bewilderingly. The soul of England is in their writings. They reflect their age. The writers of the Puritan period, in their turn also, reflect their times. The Victorian writers, again, reveal the thoughts and emotions of another age. But these reflections of the Puritan period and of the Victorian age are only images of a passing phase. The Elizabethans caught the immortal substance of the English spirit. In them is enshrined, for all time, that love of freedom and of beauty, that heroism and idealism that have made England.

OTHER BOOKS TO READ

Apologie for Poetrie. Sidney. Arber's Reprints. Constable.
Essays. Bacon, edited by West. Cambridge University Press.
Sidney. Symonds. English Men of Letters Series.

CHAPTER XII

PURITANS AND CAVALIERS



WE are looking at books in the light of the events that produced them. Thus the Age of Chaucer and the Age of Shakespeare are definite periods in our country's history, which find expression in the books of Chaucer and of Shakespeare. These two authors stand to us for the spirit of the age in which they lived ; from them we learn what people thought and what they dreamed.

We now pass from the books of the Elizabethan Age to the writers of the Puritan period. During these years Puritanism, which sprang from the seeds of religious discord, becomes a political power directing the course of national events. The ship of State is shaken from stem to stern. With the coming of James I. in 1603, the old ideals were already crumbling ; the zeal of the Elizabethan explorers, adventurers, and buccaneers was sinking to the melancholy and gloom of the Puritans, until by the end of the reign of Charles I. the whole temper and tone of English life and thought were changed. The Puritans were supreme.

To-day the word 'Puritan' means rather a kill-joy, a Pharisee who prohibits theatres, dancing, and the like—a fanatic who lays down hard rules of life and forbids even simple pleasures. The

term was first used, in the reign of Elizabeth, in speaking of the descendants of John Wyclif and his Lollards, who were not satisfied with the religious reforms of Archbishop Parker. They wanted to go further, as John Calvin of Geneva had done, and demanded absolute freedom of worship. For them, weary of Creeds, Articles, and Bishops, the Bible alone existed. On this rock they founded their religion. Honesty and freedom were their battle-cries.

The Puritans carried the war into Parliament, and Puritanism became a national force. The arrogance of the Stuarts, who blustered about a Divine Right, together with the high-handed behaviour of Laud, drove into the Puritan camp all Englishmen in whom burned the passion for purity and liberty. Puritanism was now Parliament, and the struggle between King and Parliament was the struggle between Puritanism and tyranny. It brought Charles I. to the scaffold and established the Commonwealth under a Puritan, Cromwell.

The Puritans were jeered at by the gay Cavaliers, but there was in them, nevertheless, something fine and noble. Their character has been explained by Macaulay in his *Essay on Milton* :—

‘ Those who roused the people to resistance, who directed their measures through a long series of eventful years, who formed, out of the most unpromising materials, the finest army that Europe has ever seen, who trampled down King, Church, and Aristocracy, who, in the short intervals of domestic sedition and rebellion, made the name of England terrible to every nation on the face of the earth, were no vulgar fanatics. Most of their absurdities were mere external badges, like the signs of Freemasonry, or the dresses of friars. We regret that these badges were not more attractive. We regret that a body to whose courage and

talents mankind has owed inestimable obligations had not the lofty elegance which distinguished some of the adherents of Charles the First, or the easy-going breeding for which the court of Charles the Second was celebrated. But, if we must make our choice, we shall, like Bassanio in the play, turn from the specious caskets which contain only the death's head and the fool's head, and fix on the plain leaden casket which conceals the treasure.'

The effect of the Puritan spirit on literature is seen in the change from brightness and romance to gloom and sadness. Those merry Elizabethan wits no longer revelled at the 'Mermaid,' throwing off their verses, sword and tankard on table. The sterner Puritans shunned such worldly ways and brooded most on things eternal. They denounced art as an evil thing. The ardent quest of beauty led, they declared, but to the famous city of Hell. Yet the Puritan spirit gave us first the Authorised Version of the Bible, then Milton, and finally Bunyan.

Of the Bible we have already spoken. Before coming to the two great Puritans, Milton and Bunyan, there are certain other Puritans—and Cavaliers too—with whom we must linger. We cannot jump from Spenser to Milton, nor can we leap forward from Bacon to Bunyan, without neglecting many a great book.

PURITANS

Milton apart, the greatest Puritan is John Donne. But, like Browning in the nineteenth century, he is not now much read because of the extravagance and obscurity of his verse.

Donne lived a turbulent life, whose story can be read in Izaak Walton's *Lives*. A Catholic, he abandoned his faith, then served under Essex

at Cadiz and in the Azores. At this time two of his best-known poems, *The Storm* and *The Cabin*, were written. After travelling about Europe he returned to England. Then followed imprisonment, years of wandering and poverty, until he attracted the favour of James. Entering the Church, he became Dean of St. Paul's and the greatest preacher of his time. Walton likens him in the pulpit to 'an angel leaning from a cloud.'

The difficulty of Donne's poetry lies in its intellectual character. Even in his lyrics, which he wrote during his early life, he had abandoned the Elizabethan manner. There is no honey-lipped lover puling here. Donne was very rugged and real, a gentleman with a temper and a fist to wield a pen. Out of his deep learning he could not speak simply. There is the passionate tone of Marlowe in his work.

In later life he expressed himself in hymns and religious poetry. Into these he empties bagfuls of ideas with bewildering rapidity; they are packed with thought. Yet they wear an air of beauty, the wild beauty of longing. The poet peers into the mists to discover some hidden thing, a quest that never ends.

This is the beauty of Donne's *Sermons*, in which we have some of our finest prose. Few read sermons; as a rule, men are not overfond of people who preach, whether in the pulpit or out of it. Yet many turn back to these sermons of the greatest of English preachers. In them Donne is still the singer.¹

¹ The beauties of his singing have recently been collected and made into an anthology by Pearsall Smith: 'Selected Passages from Donne's Sermons.'

SELECTED PASSAGES FROM DONNE'S SERMONS

Here is religious prose at its best :—

' A day that hath no pridie or postridie, yesterday doth not usher it in, nor to-morrow shall not drive it out. Methusalem, with all its hundreds of yeares, was but a Mushrome of a night's growth to this day. And all the foure Monarchies, with all their thousands of yeares. And all the powerfull Kings, and all the beautifull Queenes of this world, were but as a bed of flowers, some gathered at six, some at seaven, some at eight. All in one morning in respect of this Day. In all the two thousand yeares of Nature, before the Law given by Moses and the two thousand yeares of Law, before the Gospel given by Christ, and the two thousand yeares of Grace, which are running now, (of which last houre we have heard three-quarters strike, more than fifteen hundred of this last two thousand spent). In all his six thousand, and in all those, which God may be pleased to add, In domo patris ; In this House of his Fathers, there was never heard quarter clock to strike, never seen minute glasse to turn.'

We listen to him on the bounty of God :—

' He brought light out of darknesse, not out of a lesser light ; he can bring thy Summer out of Winter, though thou have no Spring ; though in the wayes of fortune, or understanding or conscience, thou have been benighted till now, wintred and frozen, clouded and eclysped, damped and benumbed, smothered and stupefied till now, now God comes to thee, not as in the dawning of the day, not as in the bud of the spring, but as the sun at noon to illustrate all shadowes, as the sheaves in harvest to fill all penuries, all occasions invite his mercies, and all times are his seasons.'

After Donne came George Herbert and Henry Vaughan, two of our noblest writers of religious verse.

From Walton we learn that Herbert was rector

of Bemerton, in Wiltshire, loved of the people among whom he worked. His collection of poems, *The Temple*, breathes a spirit of pure piety. Thus 'The Gifts of the Gods':—

'When God at first made man,
Having a glass of blessings standing by,
Let us (said He) pour on him all we can :
Let the world's riches, which dispersèd lie,
Contract into a span.

So strength first made a way ;
Then beauty flow'd, then wisdom, honour, pleasure ;
When almost all was out, God made a stay,
Perceiving that alone, of all His treasure,
Rest in the bottom lay.

For if I should (said He)
Bestow this jewel also on my creature,
He would adore my gifts instead of me,
And rest in Nature, not the God of Nature :
So both should losers be.

Yet let him keep the rest,
But keep them with repining restlessness :
Let him be rich and weary, that at least,
If goodness lead him not, yet weariness
May toss him to my breast.'

Vaughan also reflects the Puritan spirit. His poem, *The Retreat*, is said to have suggested to Wordsworth his *Ode to Immortality*.

This same Puritan spirit is seen in many another follower of Donne, but the gay spirit of the Cavalier still finds expression in the work of the Cavalier poets ;¹ they stand, in their light songs, for the revolt against the seriousness of the Puritans.

¹ The poets of this period are a favourite field for makers of anthologies. The best poems can be found in 'The Golden Treasury' (Palgrave), or in 'The Oxford Book of English Verse' (Quiller-Couch).

CAVALIERS

The simple lyrics of the Cavaliers are among the finest in our language. These singers are truly of 'the tribe of Ben'; the greatest of them is Thomas Carew, of whose verse the following is a typical example:—

' Ask me no more where Jove bestows,
When June is past, the fading rose,
For in your beauty's orient deep
These flowers as in their causes sleep.

Ask me no more whither do stray
The golden atoms of the day,
For, in pure love, heaven did prepare
Those powders to enrich your hair.

Ask me no more whither doth haste
The nightingale, when May is past,
For in your sweet dividing throat
She winters and keeps warm her note.

Ask me no more where those stars light
That downwards fall in dead of night,
For in your eyes they sit, and there
Fixèd become as in their sphere.

Ask me no more if east or west
The Phoenix builds her spicy nest,
For unto you at last she flies
And in your fragrant bosom dies.'

Others, like those brilliant Caroline courtiers, Sir John Suckling and Sir Richard Lovelace, have given us verse of a reckless gaiety and also a few perfect songs.

Take, as examples, Lovelace's memorable *To Lucasta* and *To Althea from Prison*.

‘ Yet this inconstancy is such
As you too shall adore ;
I could not love thee, Dear, so much
Loved I not Honour more.’

‘TO ALTHEA FROM PRISON

Stone walls do not a prison make,
Nor iron bars a cage ;
Minds innocent and quiet take
That for an hermitage ;
If I have freedom in my love
And in my soul am free,
Angels alone that soar above
Enjoy such liberty.’

ROBERT HERRICK

There remains Robert Herrick. Is he Puritan or Cavalier? He was a happy, devil-may-care Cavalier who, somehow, strayed into the Church. In the exile of his Devon vicarage he longed for the joys of the Mermaid Tavern and the company of Jonson's tribe. Like Spenser in Ireland, he turned in his exile to poetry. His first book was *Noble Numbers*, a collection of religious poems. Then followed *Hesperides*, which contains his best work.

Herrick tells us what we may expect of him :—

‘ I sing of brooks, of blossomes, birds and bowers,
Of April, May, of June and July flowers.
I sing of Maypoles, Hock carts, Wassails, Wakes,
Of Bride-grooms, Brides and of their Bridal cakes.
I sing of Time's trans-shifting, and I write
How Roses first came red and Lilies white.’

In his songs we hear of his old housekeeper, and of his 'pets, the dog, the cat, the hen, and the lamb, and of the pig which drank beer out of a

tankard. It is natural that, in these poems written far from the tumult and confusion of the time, Herrick should sing the joys of life in flower-scented Devon gardens. Many are his flower poems : *To Violets, To Daisies, To Primroses filled with Dew*—all of which have a lyrical grace and charm.

‘TO THE DAFFODILS

Fair Daffodils, we weep to see
You haste away so soon :
As yet the early rising sun
Has not attained his noon.
Stay, stay,
Until the hasting day
Has run
But to the evensong ;
And having pray'd together, we
Will go with you along.

We have as short a time to stay as you,
We have as short a spring ;
As quick a growth to meet decay,
As you or anything.
We die
As your hours do, and dry
Away,
Like to the summer's rain ;
Or as the pearls of morning's dew,
Ne'er to be found again.'

All the writers so far mentioned in this chapter stand on the highway of literature. If we go into the byways we meet two writers of this time who have written books which are even more lasting, perhaps, than those mentioned above. They are the Norwich physician, Sir Thomas Browne, author of *Religio Medici*, and Izaak

Walton, the quiet fisherman, who tells, in *The Compleat Angler*, of the joys of angling.

The title of Sir Thomas Browne's book, *Religio Medici*, or *The Religion of a Doctor*, need not alarm us. It is a very popular book and possesses no narrow ecclesiasticism. The doctor makes a confession of his faith; at least he calls it such. It is rather a collection of heresies, but very engaging heresies. 'There is all Africa and her prodigies in us,' he says. After such a confession we expect the kindness and tolerance we get from this gentle physician, who finds everywhere the revelation of God in nature.

The charm of the book lies more in the manner than in the matter. Browne was a stylist; he was not so much interested in what he was saying as in the style in which he was saying it. In this he is the master of Lamb and, in later times, of Stevenson.

Of all the prose books of this period, the most widely read to-day is *The Compleat Angler* of Izaak Walton. Walton was a London tradesman who forsook the city for the country and its trout streams. His book opens with a conversation between a falconer, a hunter, and an angler, but the angler does most of the talking. He describes his sport and tells of the beauty of the countryside, all in a simple, charming manner:—

'But turn out of the way a little, good scholar, towards yonder high hedge: we will sit whilst this shower falls so gently upon the teeming earth, and gives a sweeter smell to the lovely flowers that adorn the verdant meadows.

'Look, under that broad beech tree I sat down when I was last this way a-fishing, and the birds in the adjoining grove seemed to have a friendly contention with an echo whose dead voice seemed to live in a hollow cave near to the brow of that primrose-hill. There I sat, viewing the silver

stream glide silently towards their centre, the tempestuous sea, yet sometimes opposed by rugged roots and pebble-stones, which broke their waves and turned them into foam : and sometimes viewing the harmless lambs, some leaping securely in the cool shade, whilst others sported themselves in the cheerful sun. As thus I sat, these and other sights had so fully possessed my soul that I thought—as the poet has happily expressed it :

“ I was for that time lifted above earth ;
And possessed joys not promised in my birth.”

‘ As I left this place and entered into the next field, a second pleasure entertained me ; ’twas a handsome milk-maid that had cast away all care, and sung like a nightingale. Her voice was good, and the ditty fitted for it ; ’twas that smooth song which was made by Kit Marlow, now at least fifty years ago, and the milkmaid’s mother sung an answer to it, which was made by Sir Walter Raleigh in his younger days.’

Walton closes with a benediction ‘ upon all that are lovers of virtue, and dare trust in His providence, and be quiet, and go a-angling.’

OTHER BOOKS TO READ

Poems. Donne. Muses’ Library.
Selected Passages from Donne’s Sermons, edited by
Pearsall Smith. Oxford University Press.
The Temple. Herbert. Everyman’s Library.
Poems. Herrick. Muses’ Library.
The Golden Treasury. Palgrave. Macmillan.
Companion to the Golden Treasury. Somervell. Grant
Richards.
Oxford Book of English Verse. Quiller-Couch.
Religio Medici. Browne. Everyman’s Library.
The Compleat Angler. Walton. Dent’s Temple Classics.
Lives. Walton. Dent’s Temple Classics.

CHAPTER XIII

TWO GREAT PURITANS



HERE remain the two great Puritans, John Milton and John Bunyan. In Milton are blended the religious earnestness of Puritanism with that love of the beautiful which belongs to the Renascence. In this fusion of the spirit of the Renascence with that of the Reformation he completes the work attempted by Spenser.

Milton religiously consecrated himself to the vocation of a poet. He cultivated character and intellect, setting himself to hard study in order to prepare for the poet's task. The story of his life can be divided into three periods:—

1. Early life. The period of *L'Allegro*, *Il Penseroso*, *Comus*, and *Lycidas*, 1608-1639.

2. The Commonwealth. The period of his prose writings, 1639-1658.

3. Poetic achievement. The period of *Paradise Lost*, *Paradise Regained*, and *Samson Agonistes*, 1658-1672.

EARLY POETRY

Milton was born in Bread Street, Cheapside, London, in 1608, some eight years before the death of Shakespeare. From St. Paul's School he went to Cambridge to prepare for the Church, but, though deeply religious, he abandoned the idea, refusing to be bound by creeds. On leaving Cambridge

he spent six years in solitary study at his father's house at Horton, Buckinghamshire. Already at Cambridge he had written a few poems; during his retirement he wrote very little, but that little includes *L'Allegro*, *Il Penseroso*, *Comus*, and *Lycidas*, some of the finest things in our language.

L'Allegro and *Il Penseroso* are companion poems, describing the pleasures of the scholar poet living in his country retreat. In the one poem is the mood of mirth, in the other that of melancholy; in *L'Allegro* we are taken out into the fields, glad with song and beautiful with flowers:—

‘ While the ploughman near at hand
Whistles o’er the furrow’d land,
And the milkmaid singeth blithe,
And the mower whets his scythe,
And every shepherd tells his tale
Under the hawthorn in the dale.
Straight mine eye hath caught new pleasures
Whilst the landskip round it measures;
Russet lawns, and fallows grey,
Where the nibbling flocks do stray,
Mountains, on whose barren breast
The lab’ring clouds do often rest;
Meadows trim with daisies pied,
Shallow brooks and rivers wide.’

In *Il Penseroso*, the moon and stars look down on the same ground, but the mood of the morning is gone. We see things through the eyes of the quiet scholar who has abandoned vain deluding joys for the divine melancholy of study:—

‘ But let my due feet never fail
To walk the studious cloisters pale,
And love the high embowed roof,
With antic pillars massy proof,
And storied windows richly dight,
Casting a dim religious light :

There let the pealing organ blow,
To the full voic'd quire below,
In service high and anthems clear,
As may with sweetness, through mine ear,
Dissolve me into ecstasies,
And bring all heav'n before mine eyes.
And may at last my weary age
Find out the peaceful hermitage,
The hairy gown and mossy cell,
Where I may sit and rightly spell
Of every star that heav'n doth shew,
And every herb that sips the dew ;
Till old experience do attain
To something like prophetic strain.
These pleasures, Melancholy, give,
And I with thee will choose to live.'

Quotation cannot suggest the beauty of these two poems. They are solely under the inspiration of the Renaissance spirit, and are fired with the splendour that came from Italy. The Puritan spirit still sleeps ; in *Comus* it wakes.

Comus is a masque. While giving entertainment, it drives a moral lesson. In its picture of the struggle between Virtue and Vice it resembles the Moralities. Virtue, in the person of the Lady wandering in the forest, falls in with Vice, represented by Comus. The conflict ends in the triumph of the Lady. Her attendant Spirit speaks the lesson :

' Mortals, that would follow me,
Love Virtue ; she alone is free.
She can teach you how to climb
Higher than the sphery chime ;
Or if Virtue feeble were,
Heaven itself would stoop to her.'

The finest of this group of poems, however, is *Lycidas*. It is an elegy, or funeral song, written

in memory of Milton's friend, Edward King, who was drowned in the Irish Sea. To the expression of his personal sorrow the poet adds a denunciation of the Church, the cry of the Puritan.

Listen to the passionate note on Fame :—

' Alas ! what boots it with incessant care
To tend the homely, slighted shepherd's trade,
And strictly meditate the thankless Muse ?
Were it not better done as others use,
To sport with Amaryllis in the shade,
Or with the tangles of Neæra's hair ?
Fame is the spur that the clear spirit doth raise
(That last infirmity of noble mind)
To scorn delights, and live laborious days ;
But the fair guerdon when we hope to find,
And think to burst out into sudden blaze,
Comes the blind Fury with th' abhorred shears,
And slits the thin-spun life. But not the praise,
Phœbus replied, and touch'd my trembling ears ;
Fame is no plant that grows on mortal soil,
Nor in the glist'ring foil
Set off to th' world, nor in broad rumour lies ;
But lives and spreads aloft by those pure eyes,
And perfect witness of all-judging Jove ;
As he pronounces lastly on each deed,
Of so much fame in heav'n expect thy meed.'

PERIOD OF PROSE

In 1637, in order to further his Italian studies, Milton set out for Italy, still the source of European art. He had not been travelling long, when he heard of the quarrels at home between King and Parliament. ' While I was preparing to pass over into Sicily and Greece,' he says, ' the melancholy intelligence which I received of the civil commotions in England made me alter my purpose ; for I thought it base to be travelling for my amusement abroad while my fellow-citizens were fighting for

liberty at home.' He returned at once and plunged into the political and religious turmoil, taking sides with the Puritans. Indeed, on account of his powerful pamphlets, he may almost be regarded as the Puritan leader. He deserted poetry, and for many years his pen was busy only with prose.

Many were the pamphlets written at this time. As they were concerned with political quarrels, and hastily written, they have little modern interest. They are disfigured by bluster and bitterness, and these qualities do not serve to make them attractive reading. One of them, however, stands apart, as a fine and noble protest. It is the *Areopagitica*, in which Milton pleads for freedom of thought and speech. 'Liberty,' he cries, 'is the nurse of all great wits. Give me the liberty to know, to utter, and to argue freely according to conscience above all liberties.'

On the establishment of the Commonwealth, in 1649, Milton was made Latin Secretary to the Council of State. Into his new work he flung himself so ardently that the blindness with which he had long been threatened at last fell upon him. He had refused to give up his work, to protect his failing sight, and, in his forty-third year, the great calamity overtook him. Henceforward he lived in darkness.

During these years of strife the smouldering poetic fire burst into flame in occasional sonnets. The term 'sonnet' needs explanation. But first read one of the best known of Milton's poems in this form. It is the sonnet *On His Blindness*.

'When I consider how my light is spent,
Ere half my days, in this dark world and wide,
And that one talent which is death to hide
Lodg'd with me useless, though my soul more bent

To serve therewith my Maker, and present
My true account, lest He returning chide ;
Doth God exact day labour, light denied ?
I fondly ask ; but Patience, to prevent
That murmur, soon replies, God doth not need
Either man's works, or His own gifts : who best
Bear His mild yoke, they serve Him best : His state
Is kingly ; thousands at His bidding speed,
And post o'er land and ocean without rest ;
They also serve who only stand and wait.'

The sonnet was originally a poem that was sung to an accompaniment on a musical instrument. But it is now a poem of fourteen lines with the rhymes arranged in a particular way. Usually it contains two sets of lines, eight in the first set and six in the second. The sonnet form was employed by Dante and Petrarch, and was made fashionable in this country by Sidney and Shakespeare in the sixteenth century. The earlier part of the seventeenth century produced but few sonnets, the best of which are by Milton. After his time it practically died out, and was not revived again till the beginning of the nineteenth century, when Wordsworth once more made it famous.

At one time the rules that governed the number of syllables in a line and the position of the rhymes were strictly regarded, and there was usually both a change of rhyme and a break in the sense between the two sets of lines referred to above. Milton neglected this break, though he observed certain rules as to the position of the rhyming syllables. These rules can be discovered by numbering the lines in the above sonnet and noticing where the rhymes fall.

The form of the sonnet fits it for the expression of a single mood ; it expresses thought coloured

with emotion ; the lyric on the other hand, which we have already briefly discussed, expresses pure emotion.

LAST YEARS

With the Restoration of Charles II. in 1660, the party for which Milton had fought perished. His books were burned by the public hangman, and he was driven to retirement in a cottage, which still exists, in the world-forgotten village of Chalfont St. Giles. There, in darkness and sorrow, to forget the revels and rejoicing that welcomed back the Stuart monarch, he turned to his great work.

‘ Now blind, disheartened, shamed, dishonoured, quelled,
To what can I be useful ? wherein serve
My nation, and the work from Heaven imposed ?
But to sit idle on the household hearth,
A burdenous drone ; to visitants a gaze
Or pitied object.’

Yet he was anything but a drone, for it was in this later period of his life that he wrote those mighty poems, *Paradise Lost*, *Paradise Regained*, and *Samson Agonistes*.

For many years Milton had been looking about for a subject for an epic poem—that is, for a poem written in stately verse and celebrating the achievements of some hero or demigod. At one time he thought of the Arthurian legend, then of different Biblical and historical themes. Finally he decided to write —

‘ Of man’s first disobedience and the fruit
Of that forbidden tree, whose mortal taste
Brought death unto the world, and all our woe,
With loss of Eden.’

Paradise Lost, the greatest epic poem in our language, is compounded of the passion for beauty which belongs to the Renaissance and the moral earnestness which marked the Reformation. In it Milton is seen as both a great artist and a theologian. Taking as his subject matter the first three chapters of Genesis, a few verses in the Revelation, and a few verses here and there in the Bible generally, Milton, by might of intellect and beauty of imagination, built a colossal epic dealing with the Fall of Man.

The first four books give, amongst other things, accounts of Satan and the rebel angels, their fall from heaven, and their plot to tempt Adam and Eve. Curiously enough, the most romantic figure in the poem is Satan, and most of his speeches, though rebellious and even blasphemous in tone, are phrased in great and noble language. Thus, after his descent into hell, he exclaims :—

‘Farewell, happy fields,
Where joy for ever dwells : hail, horrors ; hail,
Infernal world ; and thou, profoundest hell,
Receive thy possessor ; one who brings
A mind not to be chang’d by place or time.
The mind is its own place, and in itself
Can make a heav’n of hell, a hell of heav’n.
What matter where, if I be still the same,
And what I should be, all but less than he
Whom thunder hath made greater ? here at least
We shall be free ; th’ Almighty hath not built
Here for his envy, will not drive us hence :
Here we may reign secure, and in my choice
To reign is worth ambition, though in hell :
Better to reign in hell, than serve in heav’n.’

(Book I., 249-263.)

In the next four books is included ‘an account of the creation of the world, told to Adam and

Eve by Raphael, who has been sent by God to warn Adam and Eve of the consequences of disobeying the Almighty.

' Let there be light, said God, and forthwith light
Ethereal, first of things, quintessence pure,
Sprung from the deep, and from her native east
To journey through the aery gloom began,
Spher'd in a radiant cloud, for yet the sun
Was not ; she in a cloudy tabernacle
Sojourn'd the while. God saw the light was good ;
And light from darkness by the hemisphere
Divided : light the day, and darkness night,
He nam'd. Thus was the first day ev'n and morn :
Nor past uncelebrated, nor unsung
By the celestial choirs, when orient light
Exhaling first from darkness they beheld,
Birthday of heav'n and earth ; with joy and shout
The hollow universal orb they fill'd,
And touched their golden harps, and hymning prais'd
God and his works, creator him they sung,
Both when first evening was and when first morn.'
(Book VII., 243-260.)

Finally, in the remaining books we have the Fall and expulsion from Paradise of Adam and Eve, and the vision, shown to Adam, of the redemption of mankind by Christ.

' They looking back, all th' eastern side beheld
Of paradise, so late their happy seat,
Wav'd over by that flaming brand, the gate
With dreadful faces throng'd and fiery arms :
Some natural tears they dropp'd, but wip'd them soon ;
The world was all before them, where to choose
Their place of rest, and providence their guide
They, hand in hand, with wand'ring steps and slow,
Through Eden took their solitary way.'

The poem has been described as the dream of a Puritan fallen asleep over his Bible. It is, indeed,

a wonderful vision. The whole is strewn with passages of stark grandeur. Milton is the most sublime of English poets, and, in his hands, blank verse becomes a wonderful instrument, capable of infinite variety and harmony.

Paradise Regained describes the victory of Christ over Satan. It contains only two characters, Christ and Satan, seen in one episode, the Temptation.

Samson Agonistes is a tragedy written on the model of the ancient Greek drama. Samson, blind and captive, is asked to show his strength before the Philistines. He does so, and involves his enemies in his own death. Milton sees, in Samson, images both of the lost Puritan cause and of himself, blind and scorned. Samson's victorious death is the poet's hope of the triumph of the spirit of Puritanism over the licence of the days of Charles II.

Milton died in 1674, and was buried in St. Giles's Church, Cripplegate. His best epitaph is Wordsworth's sonnet :—

‘Milton ! thou shouldst be living at this hour.

Thy soul was like a star, and dwelt apart :
Thou hadst a voice whose sound was like the sea
Pure as the naked heavens, majestic, free ;
So didst thou travel on life's common way
In cheerful godliness ; and yet thy heart
The lowliest duties on herself did lay.’

JOHN BUNYAN

First came the Bible, then the Puritan Bunyan. Undoubtedly one of the earliest results in literature of the Authorised Version of 1611 was *Pilgrim's Progress*. The pious tinker of Bedford knew no other book, and a deep knowledge of this one work,

winged with religious fervour, gave us our greatest allegory.

John Bunyan was born at Elstow, near Bedford, in 1628, and later served in the armies of Cromwell. On leaving the army he was converted from his careless way of living and became a Baptist. He then began to preach in the villages round Bedford, in which town he worked as a tinker. As a powerful and popular village preacher he drew upon himself the wrath of the Church, who cast him into Bedford prison. In all, he spent twelve years in this prison, supporting himself by making tagged laces. Unable to preach, Bunyan began to write. He wrote sixty books altogether, the greatest of which is *Pilgrim's Progress*, an allegory like Spenser's *Faerie Queene*; but, unlike the *Faerie Queene*, it appeals to readers of every age and condition. Marked by all the qualities of a great novel, it has been read more than any other book, save the Bible, and has been translated into seventy-five different languages.

Although an allegory, *Pilgrim's Progress* is not a procession of abstract figures. It is a real story, with clear, strong characters. The narrative, heightened by vigorous and picturesque descriptions, carries the reader along to the very end. Christian, the hero of the story, sets out on a journey from the City of Destruction to the Holy City. In the Valley of Humiliation he meets the fiend Apollyon.

'Then Apollyon straddled quite over the whole breadth of the way, and said, I am void of fear in this matter: prepare thyself to die; for I swear by my infernal den, that thou shalt go no further; here will I spill thy soul.

'And with that he threw a flaming dart at his breast; but Christian had a shield in his hand, with which he caught it, and so prevented the danger of that.

'Then did Christian draw ; for he saw that it was time to bestir him : and Apollyon as fast made at him, throwing darts as thick as hail ; by the which, notwithstanding all that Christian could do to avoid it, Apollyon wounded him in his head, his hand, his foot. This made Christian give a little back ; Apollyon, therefore, followed his work amain, and Christian again took courage, and resisted as mainfully as he could. This sore combat lasted for above half a day, even till Christian was almost quite spent ; for you must know, that Christian, by reason of his wounds, must needs grow weaker and weaker.

'Then Apollyon, espying his opportunity, began to gather up close to Christian, and wrestling with him, gave him a dreadful fall ; and with that, Christian's sword flew out of his hand. Then said Apollyon, I am sure of thee now. And with that he had almost pressed him to death ; so that Christian began to despair of his life ; but as God would have it, while Apollyon was fetching of his last blow, thereby to make a full end of this good man, Christian nimbly stretched out his hand for his sword, and caught it, saying, " Rejoice not against me, O mine enemy : when I fall, I shall arise," and with that gave him a deadly thrust, which made him give back as one that had received his mortal wound. Christian perceiving that, made at him again, saying, " Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors, through him that loved us." And with that Apollyon spread forth his dragon's wings, and sped him away, that Christian for a season saw him no more.'

Nothing could be more homely and direct. Further, the characters speak in a dialogue at once humorous and alive. The story interest is the first and great appeal of the book, but we are also interested in listening to characters who think and speak like living beings. And the story is told in a strong, simple prose with something of the beauty that belongs to the Bible narratives.

'Thus therefore they walked on together ; and as they walked, ever and anon these Trumpeters, even with joyful

sound, would, by mixing their music with looks and gestures, still signify to Christian and his Brother, how welcome they were into their company, and with what gladness they came to meet them; and now were these two men as 'twere in heaven before they came at it, being swallowed up with the sight of angels, and with hearing of their melodious notes. Here also they had the City itself in view, and they thought they heard all the bells therein ring to welcome them thereto. But above all, the warm and joyful thoughts that they had about their own dwelling there, with such company, and that for ever and ever. Oh, by what tongue or pen can their glorious joy be expressed ! And thus they came up to the gate.'

Bunyan was a simple modest tinker to the end ; at his death he was buried in the Dissenters' Burial Ground at Bunhill Fields, London. A few years ago a window to his memory was placed in Westminster Abbey ; but more lasting than any monument in stone or glass is the thrilling beauty of Bunyan's literary masterpiece.

OTHER BOOKS TO READ

Poems. Milton. Globe.

Areopagitica. Milton. Arber's Reprints. Constable.

Milton. Pattison. English Men of Letters Series.

Pilgrim's Progress. Bunyan. Everyman's Library.

CHAPTER XIV

DRYDEN AND POPE

THE RESTORATION

HE Stuart Restoration brought about a tremendous change in the life of the English people. During the Puritan Age life was taken very seriously. Absorbed in religion, the Puritans forbade all amusements and shunned the simplest pleasures. But with the noisy welcome of Charles II. at Dover, in 1660, another age began. The pendulum swung violently to the other extreme. All the old amusements were brought back; the theatres were opened again and sports of all kinds were revived. In a wild riot of song and dance the stern Puritan spirit passed from the face of English life. In throwing off the fetters of the Puritans, all moderation was forgotten. The vicious monarch gathered round him a crew of coarse, evil courtiers; all decencies of life were abandoned, and the court of Charles became the most shameless this country has ever known.

Nothing better shows how literature reflects life than a comparison between the Restoration theatre and that of Shakespeare's time. The Elizabethans created a wonderful drama, which mirrored the romance and high ideals of the court. To provide entertainment for the courtiers of Charles, however, a group of playwrights dealt

in low coarse comedies, which are mostly unreadable.

Yet, submerged beneath this widespread wickedness, the stream of Puritanism flowed on, and, in many a home, Bunyan was still read. But the real religion of Milton and Bunyan was gone. Gone, too, were the love of romance and fine feeling of the Elizabethans. Spenser had led men into the dreamland of his imagination. Milton had painted the splendour of heaven and the horrors of hell. But with the Restoration this keen imaginative sense passes.

During the Puritan period many literary men had gone to live on the Continent, especially in France. There they acquired a liking for French style, and, on their return at the Restoration, they introduced new fashions in English literature. Just as there is a complete break between the social and political life before and after the return of Charles II., so there is also a complete change in the ideals and styles of English writing.

It must be remembered that at this time France had stepped into the position, formerly occupied by Italy, as the dictator of European taste. Into the causes of this we cannot now inquire. Suffice it to say that the reign of Louis XIV. in France corresponds to the reign of Elizabeth in England, and produced a brilliant company of writers in most forms of literature. Hitherto, Italy and Italian art had been the fashion; now the fashion was France, and in this country there was a great hurry to be fashionable. So much was this the case that *Midsummer Night's Dream* was looked upon as insipid and ridiculous, and *Hamlet* described as disgusting to a more refined age.

The French literature which English writers

were now taking for a model was a mixture of virtues and vices, abounding in wit and delicate ideas. Among the vices was the love of describing the coarsest motives, passions, and scenes in human life in the coarsest language. This plain blunt calling of a spade a spade is known as realism ; realism can deal with either good or evil. The English writers chose to concentrate on the description of all that was bad, not to despise or denounce it, but to enjoy it. After a time realism ceased to deal so much with the outward habits of man, and took the form of a study of the motives which lie behind the habits. We may say, then, that the first label that can be placed on the literature of the Restoration period is—Realism.

The second is—Formalism ; intellect takes the place of imagination. There is no room for emotion or fine feeling or imagination. Enthusiasm of any kind was judged bad form by the gallants of Charles. The head is always in control of the heart, and poetry becomes a thing of form. It is made, moreover, the instrument of argument, of politics, and of personalities. Milton wrote pamphlets, but in prose ; now we get pamphlets in verse.

The tendency to write according to strict rules led to the revival of the old heroic couplet which we first saw in the verse of Chaucer. These couplets were polished and repolished, for the poets set great stress on neatness and finish. To them the way of saying a thing was more important than anything they had to say ; they thought more of the manner than the matter, the form than the content.

All this can be illustrated by the work of one writer. The fourteenth century is the century of Chaucer ; the sixteenth that of Shakespeare ;

the Puritan period gave us Milton. In the same way one man stands out from the crowd of writers that belong to the Restoration. John Dryden is that one author, and in his books we may see the new turn that was taken by English literature.

JOHN DRYDEN

John Dryden, who belonged to a strict Puritan family, went from Westminster School to Cambridge, whence he came to seek his fortune in London. Although a Puritan and Cromwellian, he attached himself to the new monarch, and gave up the best years of his life catering for the depraved theatre-goers of the time. He wrote many plays, both tragedies and comedies, for the actors of the King's Theatre. At this time he was well known in London, and filled the rôle of literary dictator as Ben Jonson had done before him. In 1670 he was appointed Poet Laureate.

The income of this office, and the money his plays had brought him, made Dryden independent of a public, and, late in life, he turned to religion and politics.

The two parties, Cavaliers and Roundheads, had become the 'Court' and 'Country' parties of Charles II. The latter party, led by Shaftesbury, had been plotting to divert the succession from James, Duke of York, to Monmouth. For his share in the conspiracy Shaftesbury was imprisoned. A few days before the trial Dryden published a poem called *Absalom and Achitophel*, in which the political events are described under the guise of the Biblical story of David and Absalom. The object of the poem is to pour scorn upon all those whom Dryden disliked. This species of composition, in which vice, folly, or

incapacity is held up to ridicule, is called satire, and Dryden was so clever in this form of literature that he is known as the greatest of British satirists.

In the poem above mentioned the Country party and its leaders are made the subjects of bitter ridicule. Achitophel is Shaftesbury; Zimri stands for the Duke of Buckingham. The vivid portraits which Dryden draws of these two men are amongst the wittiest things that British satire knows. Buckingham had at one time ridiculed Dryden. Dryden now gets his revenge by thus satirising him in verse :—

‘ Some of their chiefs were princes of the land ;
In the first rank of these did Zimri stand,
A man so various that he seemed to be
Not one, but all mankind’s epitome :
Stiff in opinions, always in the wrong,
Was everything by starts, and nothing long ;
But, in the course of one revolving moon,
Was chymist, fiddler, statesman, and buffoon ;
Then all for women, painting, rhyming, drinking,
Besides ten thousand freaks that died in thinking.
Blest madman, who could every hour employ
With something new to wish or to enjoy !
Railing and praising were his usual themes,
And both, to show his judgment, in extremes.
So over violent, or over civil,
That every man with him was God or devil.
In squandering wealth was his peculiar art ;
Nothing went unrewarded but desert.
Beggared by fools whom still he found too late,
He had his jest and they had his estate.
He laughed himself from Court ; then sought relief
By forming parties, but could ne’er be chief :
For spite of him, the weight of business fell
On Absalom and wise Achitophel ;
Thus wicked but in will, of means bereft,
He left not faction, but of that was left.’

The picture of Shaftesbury runs :—

‘ Of these the false Achitophel was first ;
 A name to all succeeding ages curst :
 For close designs and crooked counsels fit,
 Sagacious, bold, and turbulent of wit ;
 Restless, unfixed in principles and place ;
 In power unpleased, impatient of disgrace :
 A fiery soul, which, working out its way,
 Fretted the pigmy body to decay,
 And o’er-informed the tenement of clay.
 A daring pilot in extremity,
 Pleased with the danger, when the waves went high,
 He sought the storms : but, for a calm unfit,
 Would steer too nigh the sands, to boast his wit.
 Great wits are sure to madness near allied,
 And thin partitions do their bounds divide ;
 Else, why should he, with wealth and honour blest,
 Refuse his age the needful hours of rest ?
 Punish a body which he could not please ;
 Bankrupt of life, yet prodigal of ease ? ’

When James II. became king and tried to establish the Roman faith, Dryden turned Roman Catholic. He had previously written a defence of the Church of England in verse ; now he makes an apology for his change in more verse. Macaulay called him ‘ a time-server in politics, a turn-coat in religion,’ but in the Revolution of 1688, true to his new religion, Dryden refused to own William of Orange as king, and was deprived of his offices and pensions.

He turned once more to playwriting, and began a translation of Virgil. It was during this period that he wrote *Alexander’s Feast*, and *Fables Ancient and Modern*. These latter include poetical paraphrases from Boccaccio and Chaucer, and are to-day the most favoured of Dryden’s works. He died in 1700 and was buried, near Chaucer, in Westminster Abbey.

In poetry Dryden set the fashion of the heroic couplet, which Pope afterwards followed; but, clever as he was, we cannot reckon him among our leading poets. His poetry lacks depth of feeling and imaginative power; it has no spiritual fervour. On the other hand, it is marked by keen intellectual force and vigour. Dryden is not a poet in the sense that Spenser and Shakespeare are poets; he is our greatest satirist.

But he did not confine himself to verse, and his prose is of such a character that he has been called the 'Father of English Prose.' He was our first real critic, and he wrote his criticisms in a direct, fresh, and vigorous style, that set the pattern for all those who followed him. Those who are interested can study that pattern in the prefaces or introductions to his poetry, especially in the Preface to the *Fables* and in the *Essay on Dramatic Poetry*.

Hitherto, with the exception of Bacon, Walton, and Bunyan, prose had been a thing of long, cumbrous sentences and much decoration. But there is nothing cumbrous or over-ornamental in the prose of Dryden. As an example, consider the following short passage from his criticism of Chaucer:—

'He must have been a man of a most wonderful comprehensive nature, because, as it has been truly observed of him, he has taken into the compass of his *Canterbury Tales* the various manners and humours of the whole English nation in his age. Not a single character has escaped him. All his pilgrims are severely distinguished from each other; and not only in their inclinations, but in their very physiognomies and persons. Baptista Porta could not have described their names better, than by the marks which the poet gives them. The matter and manner of their tales, and of their telling, are so suited to their different education, humours, and callings, that each of them would be

improper in any other mouth. Even the grave and serious characters are distinguished by their several sorts of gravity, their discourses are such as belong to their age, their calling, and their breeding ; such as are becoming of them and of them only. Some of his persons are vicious and some virtuous ; some are unlearned, or (as Chaucer calls them) lewd, and some are learned. Even the ribaldry of the low characters is different ; the Reeve, the Miller, and the Cook, are several men and distinguished from each other as much as the mincing Lady Prioress and the broad-speaking, gap-toothed Wife of Bath. But enough of this , there is such a variety of game springing up before me, that I am distracted in my choice, and know not what to follow. It is sufficient to say, according to the proverb, that here is God's plenty. We have our forefathers and great-grand-dames all before us, as they were in Chaucer's days ; their general characters are still remaining in mankind, and even in England, though they are called by other names than those of monks, and friars, and canons, and lady abbesses, and nuns : for mankind is ever the same, and nothing lost out of nature, though everything is altered.'

In such a passage it is obvious that Dryden was not concerned with ornament. He had something to say, and he said it in clear, concise sentences. Indeed, his written words resemble spoken speech in their natural flow ; to realise this, read the passage aloud as ' if you were talking.' He is not out to preach to the reader ; he talks to him as he would to a friend. His is the conversational ideal of prose.

ALEXANDER POPE

Macaulay says of Dryden : ' No man exercised so much influence on the age. The reason is obvious. On no man did the age exercise so much influence.' In politics and religion the pendulum was swinging back again. The nation first realised how low she had sunk when the guns of the

Dutch fleet thundered in the mouth of the Thames. People began to make a stand against Restoration depravity, and there arose a determined effort for a better life. Good sense and reason marked literature. There was none of the passion of either the Elizabethans or the Puritans. Good form in life, and elegance in literature, went hand in hand. It was an artificial literature, cold and without feeling, the result of intelligence playing on the surface of life and never penetrating to any depth.

Pope is the child of this material age. There is none of the real glow of true poetry in his books, only elegantly turned phrases and finish of style. The simplicity and naturalness and fire of real poetry are buried beneath the accumulated ashes of high-sounding phrases and fine words.

Pope was born in London in 1688, the year of the Revolution. As a child he was sickly and deformed, and throughout his life he showed an irritable temper and a petty disposition. He wrote two poems, *An Essay on Criticism* and *An Essay on Man*, both remarkable for finish of phrase. The first is a statement of the poet's creed. Many of its lines—

‘ A little learning is a dangerous thing,’

‘ And fools rush in where angels fear to tread,’

‘ To err is human, to forgive divine ’

—are to-day part of our speech, often on our lips. Indeed, next to Shakespeare, Pope is the most frequently quoted of our poets. He had the knack of throwing everyday thoughts into snappy, quotable form.

The *Essay on ‘Man* is a philosophical poem, in which he set out ‘ to vindicate the ways of God to Man.’ But it is a poem only in form. Pope was not a great thinker, and the thought, nowhere very

deep, is drawn out in a fanciful work of words.
This dabbling in philosophy ends thus :—

‘ All nature is but art, unknown to thee ;
All chance, direction which thou canst not see ;
All discord, harmony not understood ;
All partial evil, universal good :
And, spite of pride, in erring reason’s spite,
One truth is clear, whatever is, is right.’

There is a passage in this poem which it may be useful to compare with the famous Seven Ages of Man in Shakespeare’s *As You Like It*. Says Shakespeare :—

‘ All the world ’s a stage,
And all the men and women merely players :
They have their exits and their entrances ;
And one man in his time plays many parts,
His acts being seven ages. At first the infant,
Mewling and puking in the nurse’s arms.
And then the whining schoolboy, with his satchel
And shining morning face, creeping like snail
Unwillingly to school. And then the lover,
Sighing like furnace, with a woeful ballad
Made to his mistress’ eyebrow. Then a soldier,
Full of strange oaths, and bearded like the pard,
Jealous in honour, sudden and quick in quarrel,
Seeking the bubble reputation
Even in the cannon’s mouth. And then the justice,
In fair round belly with good capon lin’d,
With eyes severe and beard of formal cut,
Full of wise saws and modern instances ;
And so he plays his part. The sixth age shifts
Into the lean and slipper’d pantaloon,
With spectacles on nose and pouch on side,
His youthful hose, well sav’d, a world too wide
For his shrunk shank ; and his big manly voice,
Turning again toward childish treble, pipes
And whistles in his sound. Last scene of all,
That ends this strange eventful history,
Is second childishness, and mere oblivion ;
Sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans everything.’

Pope says :—

‘ Behold the child, by Nature’s kindly law,
Pleased with a rattle, tickled with a straw :
Some livelier plaything gives his youth delight,
A little louder, but as empty quite :
Scarfs, garters, gold, amuse his riper stage,
And beads and prayer-books are the toys of age :
Pleased with this bauble still, as that before,
Till tired he sleeps, and life’s poor play is o’er.’

The comparison shows that, although Pope was hailed by his age as a great poet, his was not the highest kind of poetry.

He did, however, produce one real masterpiece, *The Rape of the Lock*. This poem is read for the picture it gives of the time. Nowhere is this artificial age, its paint and powder and patches and high-heeled shoes, better revealed than in this poem. Its occasion was trivial enough. One Lord Petre, a beau of Queen Anne’s court, had cut a curl from the hair of a maid of honour while she was sipping a cup of coffee. This incident plunged two families into a fierce feud, and Pope made it the subject of a long poem, in which he satirises the society of the day with the most delicate wit. The trivial affair is handled with all the dignity and seriousness that belong to an epic poem ; it is called a mock epic.

Pope also made a verse translation of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* of Homer in which, however, the characters are just like the beaux of his own time. Some one said : ‘ It is a pretty poem, Mr. Pope, but you must not call it Homer.’ This work was financially so successful as to make the poet independent of both public and patrons, and he bought a villa at Twickenham on the Thames, where he spent the remainder of his life. There,

in the little garden, more artificial than his verse, the 'wicked wasp of Twickenham' held court.

His last work was the *Dunciad* (The Iliad of Dunces). It begins as a controversy about Shakespeare, but finally becomes a bitter attack on a number of people of the time. Pope's success had made him many enemies, and in this poem he takes his revenge. It would have been better to have treated those enemies with silence. To attack them fiercely, as Pope did in an otherwise brilliant poem, showed his petty nature. The more kindly Johnson said: 'What did it concern to know that one scribbler or another was a dunce?' Our judgment of Pope's spite and bad temper is somewhat softened by the knowledge that he suffered from ill-health, and, moreover, he has already judged himself in *The Universal Prayer* :—

' Mean though I am, not wholly so,
Since quickened by Thy breath ;
Oh, lead me whereso'er I go,
Through this day's life or death.

This day be bread and peace my lot :
All else beneath the sun,
Thou know'st if best bestowed or not ;
And let Thy will be done.

To Thee, whose temple is all space,
Whose altar, earth, sea, skies,
One chorus let all being raise,
All nature's incense rise.'

OTHER BOOKS TO READ

- Poems. Dryden. Globe.
- Essays. Dryden. Everyman's Library.
- Poems. Pope. Globe.

CHAPTER XV

JOURNALISTS AND ESSAYISTS



THE successors of Dryden adopted the model of his clear, forcible prose and turned it to the everyday discussion of politics and religion. The years that followed the Revolution of 1688 saw the rise of modern journalism and the beginnings of the essay.

JOURNALISTS

Under Charles II. there were, as we have seen, two parties, 'Court' and 'Country.' The latter, mainly Dissenters who lived in the towns, wanted to curb the power of the King in favour of the Parliament and the people. The 'Court' party, chiefly Churchmen and landowners, desired more freedom for their monarch and feared the growing power of the people. But when James II. began his reign and tried to make the country Catholic, 'Court' and 'Country,' or 'Tories' and 'Whigs,' to give them their new names, united in the bloodless Revolution of 1688 and placed William of Orange upon the throne.

A fight making for political and religious freedom had been won, and, henceforth, men's minds are occupied with questions of government. There were Tories and Whigs in politics and Churchmen and Dissenters in religion. The masses of the

people were now taking an interest in the vital questions of the hour, and, to supply their demand for simple discussion of these problems, there sprang up the newspaper and the magazine, two powerful engines in the social progress of the nation.

DANIEL DEFOE

The first journalist was Defoe. He was also the first of English novelists. A long life of adventure, during which he came to know grinding poverty and luxurious wealth, the pillory and the prison, even the royal favour, provided him with the material of his books. He worked this out in a simple, vivid, narrative style.

Defoe joined Monmouth's Rebellion of 1685, fled to the Continent, hid there for some time, and, finally, returned to London, where he began his career as a journalist. As a Dissenter he was disgusted at the want of toleration among all religious parties, and he wrote a remarkable pamphlet, called *The Shortest Way with the Dissenters*, supporting the claims of the Free Churches against the 'High Fliers,' as he called the Tories and Churchmen.

In a spirit of ridicule he advocated that all dissenting ministers should be hanged; the satire was so clever that it deceived both Tory and Whig, who were apparently too stupid to understand the joke, and Defoe was sentenced to be fined, to stand for three days in the pillory, and to be imprisoned. His sense of humour never left him, and, in *A Hymn to the Pillory*, he at once explained just what had happened. This exposure of the stupidity of the people who had misjudged him was scattered about and caused so much amusement that crowds came to cheer the author, and

his foes, to get him out of the way, at once bundled him off to Newgate gaol. From there he published a newspaper called *The Weekly Review*, in which he discussed the events of the day in a popular way. The experiment was not a success, but it is interesting as the first attempt in this country to publish a newspaper.

It was not till he was an old man that Defoe turned from journalism to fiction and wrote that book, loved of all children, *The Life and Adventures of Robinson Crusoe*. This, though written to teach a lesson, charms by its vivid realism. Every child is interested in Friday's doings and what the parrot says. The details of Crusoe's life on the island are described in simple narrative and with such vividness as to make them seem quite real. Throughout the story Defoe is preaching his ideal of the simple life. Happiness, he urges, does not depend on material comforts, and his hero finds it on a desert island.

Defoe wrote several other novels, dealing, most of them, with the shadier side of London life; they are all marked by the same simple narrative style and the same intense realism.

JONATHAN SWIFT

Defoe had been the champion of the Whigs; on the Tory side was Jonathan Swift, the fiercest satirist in all our literature and the master of a vigorous prose. No one carried the simple forthright prose of Dryden to such a pitch as he did. But he stands out vividly against the age a dark and tragic figure. Tragedy is written across his life, the tragedy of broken ambition. A masterful mind of boundless ambition saw all its high hopes fail, and came, at length, to madness.

Swift was an Irishman. As a young man he left Dublin to become secretary to Sir William Temple, the statesman and diplomat. At Moor Park he stayed for ten years. It was there he met Hester Johnson, who was living with her guardian, Temple. She became his firm friend, and remained so till her death. For her was written the famous *Journal to Stella*, the one delightful thing the unhappy man ever wrote.

About this time there was raging a silly squabble as to the merits of ancient and modern authors. Swift poured ridicule on both sides in the *Battle of the Books*, which describes a fight in the King's Library between the rival hosts. In the preface he says :—

‘ Satire is a sort of glass wherein beholders do generally discover everybody’s face but their own ; which is the chief reason for that kind reception it meets with in the world, and that so very few are offended with it. But, if it should happen otherwise, the danger is not great ; and I have learned from long experience never to apprehend mischief from those understandings I have been able to provoke : for anger and fury, though they add strength to the sinews of the body, yet are found to relax those of the mind, and to render all its efforts feeble and impotent.’

Tiring of life at Moor Park, Swift quarrelled with his patron and entered the Church. There followed a few years in an Irish parish, when he returned to London and threw himself into party politics, winning great power as a politician by his brilliant pamphlets. He was one of the most important people in London, for Whig and Tory alike lived in dread of his malicious pen.

When the Tories went from office, Swift saw that all hope of further power or position was gone, and he accepted the offer of the Deanery of St. Patrick’s, Dublin. There, in the last bitter

years of his tragic life, he wrote *Gulliver's Travels*. During this last bitterness, deepening to madness, fate dealt its final blow to the unhappy genius. His lifelong friend, Stella, died. Insane, Swift lingered on till death mercifully brought release in 1745. He said once : ' I shall be like that tree ; I shall die at the top.'

Of *A Tale of a Tub* he exclaimed in his old age : ' Good God, what a genius I had when I wrote that book ! ' *A Tale of a Tub* is an allegory, in which three brothers stand respectively for the Roman Church, the Church of England, and the Nonconformists. Swift's aim is to defend the Church of England against the extravagances of the other two. But the terrible satire is so blasphemous in its treatment of sacred things, that the book only served to forbid all advancement in the Church to its author.

In *Gulliver's Travels* is all the anger of Swift with fate and with mankind. By a strange destiny this satire on man has become a favourite book for children. *Robinson Crusoe* has made the name of Defoe dear to all children ; in the same way *Gulliver's Travels* has made the name of Swift known to every boy and girl. In Defoe's book the story was quite a possible one. The hero and his adventures were natural. Swift, on the other hand, took his reader on a journey into strange and impossible lands. Yet, such is his power to give to fiction the colour of fact, that his giants and pygmies are as real as if they had actually lived. He reports an Irish bishop as saying that ' the book contained some things which he could not prevail upon himself to believe,' while ' one seaman is said to have sworn he knew Captain Gulliver very well, but he lived at Wapping, not at Rotherhithe.'

Defoe's story was written in a lofty strain, directed by an ideal. The adventures of Gulliver are a burning satire. Thus his adventures among the Lilliputians and Men of Brobdingnag are a satire on the politics of the age. In the voyage to Laputa philosophers suffer ridicule. Finally, among the Houyhnhnms, Swift shows us 'that animal called man.' He strips him of every shred of decency and honour and makes him little better than a brute. He is 'the most pernicious race of little odious vermin that nature ever suffered to crawl on the face of the earth.'

To such ends does satire carry Swift. Turn to the *Journal to Stella*, and you will find charming letters. In them the politician tells to Stella the daily happenings of his life in London. He talks to her in the 'little language' he invented for their use. In it we realise that, deep down in the heart of this dark, savage satirist there must have dwelt a real tenderness.

That Swift is one of the greatest masters of prose is undeniable. He goes straight to the point, and says what he has to say in the fewest and most effective words. 'He says what he means in the homeliest native English that can be conceived. His sentences are self-sufficient, and fit the occasion as a glove the hand.' He uses 'proper words in proper places.'

ESSAYISTS

We turn from the bitterness of the satirist to the cheerfulness and playfulness of Joseph Addison and Richard Steele. Taking as their models the prose of Dryden, and the light and grace of the French writers, these two friends wrote many polished essays. Some of them we can read in

The Spectator, in which the extravagance and licence of the Restoration pass for ever. The object of this publication was, in the words of Addison, to 'enliven morality with wit and temper wit with virtue.' The courtiers of Charles had poured ridicule upon virtue. Addison and Steele rode forth to attack vice, and their readers went with them. They did their best also to 'bring philosophy out of closets and libraries, to dwell in clubs and assemblies, at tea-tables and coffee-houses.' They tried to make books popular.

At this period the coffee-house and the club became quite general. In them writers met together to talk and bandy words. It was in a coffee-house that Pope met Dryden, and that Addison chopped logic with his friends. What the tavern had been to the sixteenth century, the coffee-house was to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Addison made the life of these coffee-houses and clubs the subject of a number of essays, in which he drew types of living men and described the manners of the time.

Addison and Steele were boys together at Charterhouse School, whence they both passed on to Oxford. On leaving the University their ways parted, Steele entering the Horse Guards and Addison setting out upon a parliamentary career.

A rollicking, reckless, but good-hearted Irishman, Steele left the army and, after an adventurous career in all kinds of callings, settled in London. Here, in imitation of Defoe's *Review*, he published *The Tatler*, a penny paper which came out twice a week for two years.

Addison, meanwhile, had risen rapidly in the world of politics. 'A cold, austere, unemotional man, so different from the genial Steele, he had won favour with a poor poem, *The Battle of Blen-*

heim, written in praise of Marlborough and the conduct of the war by the Whigs. So popular was this poem that Addison became Secretary of State.

Now Steele's *Tatler*, besides giving politics and news, contained essays and criticism. To help him with these, Steele called in his friend Addison, who became a frequent contributor. Later on, after the death of *The Tatler*, the two friends started a second paper, called *The Spectator*. In this, news was ignored and all the space was given up to essays, which had been so popular in the first paper.

The second periodical also lived for two years. In it Mr. Spectator reviewed all that happened in his club, and gave a picture of the life and manners of the century as complete as that which Chaucer gave of the fourteenth century in his *Canterbury Tales*. We see Ned Softly, the literary dabbler; Will Wimble, the ne'er-do-well; Sir Andrew Freeport, the London merchant; Will Honeycomb, the fop; and, most real and amusing of all, Sir Roger de Coverley, the genial country squire

'The first of our society is a gentleman of Worcestershire, of ancient descent, a baronet, his name Sir Roger de Coverley. His great-grandfather was inventor of that famous country dance which is called after him. All who know that shire are very well acquainted with the parts and the merits of Sir Roger. He is a gentleman that is very singular in his behaviour, but his singularities proceed from his good sense, and are contradictions to the manners of the world, only as he thinks the world is wrong. However, this humour creates him no enemies, for he does nothing with sourness or obstinacy; and his being unconfined to modes and forms makes him but the readier and more capable to please and oblige all who know him. When he is in town, he lives in Soho Square. It is said, he keeps himself a bachelor by reason he was crossed in love by a perverse beautiful widow of the next county to him. Before

this disappointment, Sir Roger was what you call a fine gentleman, had often supped with my Lord Rochester and Sir George Etherege, fought a duel upon his first coming to town, and kicked Bully Dawson in a public coffee-house, for calling him a youngster. But, being ill-used by the above mentioned widow, he was very serious for a year and a half ; and though, his temper being naturally jovial, he at last got over it, he grew careless of himself, and never dressed afterwards. He continues to wear a coat and doublet of the same cut that were in the fashion at the time of his repulse, which, in his merry humours, he tells us, has been in and out twelve times since he first wore it. He is now in his fifty-sixth year, cheerful, gay, and hearty ; keeps a good house both in town and country ; a great lover of mankind ; but there is such a mirthful cast in his behaviour, that he is rather beloved than esteemed. His tenants grow rich, his servants look satisfied, all the young women profess to love him, and the young men are glad of his company ; when he comes into a house he calls the servants by their names, and talks all the way upstairs to a visit.'

The work of the two essayists is quite different. The generous, broad-minded Steele is the kinder of the two men and supplies the human element. Addison, on the other hand, is often malicious. He gives us, for instance, a ridiculous Sir Roger. Thus in the description of Sir Roger at church :—

' As Sir Roger is landlord to the whole congregation, he keeps them in very good order, and will suffer nobody to sleep in it besides himself, for if by chance he has been surprised into a short nap at sermon, upon recovery out of it he stands up and looks about him, and if he sees anybody else nodding, either wakes them himself or sends his servant to them. Several others of the old knight's peculiarities break out on these occasions. Sometimes he will be lengthening out a verse in the singing Psalms half a minute after the rest of the congregation have done with it ; sometimes when he is pleased with the matter of his devotion, he pronounces Amen three or four times to the same prayer ; and sometimes stands up when everybody

else is upon their knees, to count the congregation, or see if any of his tenants are missing.'

Steele is less refined than Addison, but more genial. Addison was the more expert craftsman of the two, and Dr. Johnson says: 'Whoever wishes to attain an English style, familiar but not coarse, elegant but not ostentatious, must give his days and nights to the volumes of Addison.'

SAMUEL PEPYS

A book which gives an amusing picture of life under Charles II. is Pepys' *Diary*. Take a few brief extracts from the year 1666 :—

'March 17th. To Hales and paid him £14 for the picture and £1, 5s. for the frame. This day I began to sit, and he will make me, I think, a very fine picture. He promises me it shall be as good as my wife's, and I sit to have it full of shadows, and do almost break my neck looking over my shoulder to make the posture for him to work by.

'Home, having a great cold: so to bed drinking butter-ale.'

'September 9th. Up; and was trimmed, and sent my brother to Woolwich to my wife, to dine with her. I go to church, when our parson made a melancholy but good sermon; and many and most in the church cried, especially the women. The church mighty full; but few of fashion and most strangers. To church again, and there preached Dean Harding; but, methinks, a bad, poor sermon, though proper for the time; nor eloquent, in saying at this time that the City is reduced from a large folio to a decimo tertio. So to my office, there to write down my journall, and take leave of my brother, whom I send back this afternoon, though rainy: which it hath not done a good while before. To Sir W. Pen's to bed, and made my boy Tom to read me asleep.'

'September 27th. A very furious blowing all the night; and my mind still mightily perplexed with dreams, and burning the rest of the town; and waking in much pain for the fleet. I to look out Penny, my tailor, to speak for

a cloak and cassock for my brother, who is coming to town ; and I will have him in a canonical dress, that he may be the fitter to go abroad with me. No news of the fleet yet, but that they went by Dover on the 25th towards the Gun-fleet ; but whether the Dutch be yet abroad, or no, we hear not.'

'October 9th. To the office, where we sat the first day since the fire.'

Pepys tells freely all that he saw and did, never thinking that any one was to read what he wrote. He used a shorthand that was not deciphered until 1825, when the *Diary* was first published. It is a brisk panorama he unfolds before us, as he prattles on about his daily round of work and play, and describes what happens in the world around him.

There are two recent diaries that might be read alongside Pepys. They are *The Diary of a Dead Officer*, and *The Journal of a Disappointed Man*, by Barbellion. The latter writes: 'My pen is a delicate needle-point tracing out the graph of a temperament.' Both these books are made out of blood and tears, and, while we can neglect the massy memoirs of the tin gods—and goddesses—who sit up o' nights keeping a diary, we should do well to read these. It is not enough to look at the books of the past. Literature is a living, growing thing, and should be studied in the present as well as in the past.

OTHER BOOKS TO READ

Adventures of Robinson Crusoe. Defoe. World's Classics.
Gulliver's Travels. Swift. World's Classics.
Journal to Stella. Swift. Routledge.
The Spectator. Addison and Steele. Everyman's Library.
Diary. Pepys. Globe.
The Diary of a Dead Officer. Fisher Unwin.
The Journal of a Disappointed Man. Barbellion. Chatto and Windus.

CHAPTER XVI

DR. JOHNSON AND HIS AGE



THE eighteenth century, to which period Johnson belongs, was a period of tremendous changes. In political government it saw, under George I., the establishment of the Cabinet and the rise of the doctrine that the body of ministers that form it are responsible to Parliament and the people. At one time ministers were responsible to the King, who appointed and dismissed whom and when he pleased. The change in procedure indicates that men were thinking more strongly and deeply on political matters and beginning to realise their political power.

About the middle of the century, machinery came into extensive use, coal and steam were harnessed, and England changed from an agricultural land to the first manufacturing country in Europe. The Industrial Revolution, by which name this movement is known, was productive of evil as well as of much good, and gave rise to much questioning and stirring of hearts.

Then, too, a manufacturing people needed raw materials for industry and markets for manufactured goods. The population was rapidly increasing and needed room to expand. These years, then, saw the beginning of the British Empire. England was constantly at war with France, for both were competitors in the race for overseas possessions. But Clive in India, Cook in Australia and the Pacific, and Wolfe in Canada

held the French at bay, and planted everywhere the British flag. These things tended to a quickening of the imagination and to the growth of a new factor in the idea of national unity.

All this rush for gain, whether of gold or land, was not favourable to a deeply spiritual life. It led, in fact, to quite selfish and often brutal ideas and practices. At the same time, there was a spiritual quickening, led by John and Charles Wesley, who left the Church of England and founded a new religious body, the Wesleyans.

Here is another epoch of great national movements that should give rise to a new body of literature. And so it did, but just as extensions of commerce, territory, or religious reform did not come suddenly into being, so, also, the new literature that was born of the turmoil was some time in reaching its full stature. The long procession of writers exhibits, in their outlook and their work, all the stages of the transition from the stiffness and artificial polish of Pope to the wild emotional freedom of Robert Burns.

We have learned that on the Restoration of Charles II., in 1660, Dryden led the way in English literature; his successor, in the next generation, was Pope. These writers belong to the Age of Reason. Reason is a good thing in its way, but the artificial rules that reason and good sense imposed on writing prevented its growth, and made literature a thing of the intellect rather than of the emotions. Writers tried to criticise and teach. Even verse became the medium of argument and satire, politics and personality became the stuff of poetry, and the imaginative brilliance of the Elizabethans gave way to the chill, formal writing of this age of common sense. 'Chaucer, Spenser, and Shakespeare were no longer read.

But by the year 1730 most of the followers of Dryden and Pope were dead, and Johnson, the leader of the age that followed, had begun his career as a man of letters. The period from 1730 to 1789, the year of the French Revolution, may be called the Age of Johnson.

Johnson himself, round whose burly figure the writers of this period group themselves, followed in the steps of Pope. But towards the end of his life other voices were heard. Two young poets, Blake and Burns, raised the standard of revolt. They heralded a new era. Once again men dreamed dreams and saw visions, and something of the colour, beauty, and romance of the Elizabethans returned. There was another renascence, this time the renascence of beauty and romance. But there is much ground to traverse before we come to this second renascence.

SAMUEL JOHNSON

Samuel Johnson was born in Lichfield, but came, as many another writer had done, to seek his fortune in London. He had, as his companion on the journey, David Garrick, who afterwards became a famous actor. Now Johnson had neither money nor friends, and for many years his life was a bitter struggle with poverty, a fact that perhaps accounts for a passage in one of his works: 'When we take the most distant prospect of life, what does it present to us but a chaos of unhappiness, a confused and tumultuous scene of labour and contest, disappointment and defeat?'

He earned his living for a while as a hack writer, contributing to *The Idler* and other periodicals which had been started in imitation of *The Spectator*. After some years of hardship

he became known to the booksellers, who asked him to compile a *Dictionary of the English Language*. This request to compile a dictionary has a very definite meaning for us. The age that was passing, but had not yet passed, believed in hard and fast rules, and judged literature, as being good or bad, in proportion as it obeyed or disobeyed these rules. And this meant that it was desirable to know also the exact meanings of words, what was their origin, and what authority there was for using them in a given way. The Elizabethans did not ask for dictionaries, and if they wanted a word and could not find it, they simply invented a new one.

This Dictionary of Johnson's is his greatest work, and is quite readable, as the following quotations will show:—

'*Oats*. A grain which in England is generally given to horses, but in Scotland supports the people.'

'*Lexicographer*. A writer of dictionaries: a harmless drudge.'

'*Pension*. An allowance made to any one without an equivalent. In England it is generally understood to mean pay given to a State hireling for treason to his country.'

'*Patriotism*. The last refuge of a scoundrel.'

Johnson's prose is a reaction. Compare, for instance, any of the passages given in this book from Dryden or Addison, with the following, which is Johnson's definition of *Network* in the Dictionary: 'Any thing reticulated or decussated, at equal distances, with interstices between the inter-sections,' or a remark in his novel *Rasselas*, that the poet, 'must neglect the minuter discriminations, which one may have remarked and another have neglected, for those characteristics which are alike obvious to vigilance and carelessness.'

Johnson made prose heavy and pompous again, as it had once been before, and invented a style that has been described as 'Johnsonese.' He

is not, however, remembered for the books he wrote, but for his personality. 'The memory of other authors is kept alive by their works; but the memory of Johnson keeps many of his works alive,' says Macaulay.

Except for his penetrating criticisms of other writers, his books are not much read to-day, yet he was the literary dictator of his time. His life and his sayings are contained in the finest biography in the language, Boswell's *Life of Johnson*.

Boswell was a Scotch barrister, who came to London in search of the great Johnson. Having made his acquaintance, he followed him everywhere. For ever at his hero's heels, he marked his every action and treasured his least remark, afterwards giving us a real portrait of the man in one of the most entertaining books ever written. From Boswell's book, more than from any of Johnson's own, we get the picture of Johnson as the typical Englishman of his time. And the most marked feature of his character was his independence. His independent spirit is well shown in his famous letter to Lord Chesterfield refusing the latter's patronage:—

'7th February 1755.

'My Lord.—I have been lately informed, by the proprietor of *The World*, that two papers, in which my Dictionary is recommended to the public, were written by your lordship. To be so distinguished is an honour, which, being very little accustomed to favours from the great, I know not well how to receive, or in what terms to acknowledge.

'When, upon some slight encouragement, I first visited your lordship, I was overpowered, like the rest of mankind, by the enchantment of your address, and could not forbear to wish that I might boast myself *Le vainqueur du vainqueur de la terre*;—that I might obtain that regard for which I saw the world contending; but I found my attendance so little encouraged, that neither pride nor modesty would

suffer me to continue it. When I had once addressed your lordship in public, I had exhausted all the art of pleasing which a retired and uncourtly scholar can possess. I had done all that I could ; and no man is pleased to have his all neglected, be it ever so little.

‘ Seven years, my lord, have now past, since I waited in your outward rooms, or was repulsed from your door ; during which time I had been pushing on my work through difficulties, of which it is useless to complain, and have brought it, at last, to the verge of publication, without one act of assistance, one word of encouragement, or one smile of favour. Such treatment I did not expect, for I never had a patron before.

‘ The shepherd in Virgil grew at last acquainted with Love, and found him a native of the rocks.

‘ Is not a patron, my lord, one who looks with unconcern on a man struggling for life in the water, and, when he has reached ground, encumbers him with help ? The notice which you have been pleased to take of my labours, had it been early, had been kind ; but it has been delayed till I am indifferent, and cannot enjoy it ; till I am solitary, and cannot impart it ; till I am known, and do not want it. I hope it is no very cynical asperity not to confess obligations where no benefit has been received, or to be unwilling that the public should consider me as owing that to a patron, which Providence has enabled me to do for myself.

‘ Having carried on my work thus far with so little obligation to any favourer of learning, I shall not be disappointed though I should conclude, if less be possible, with less ; for I have long been wakened from that dream of hope, in which I once boasted myself with so much exultation,—My Lord, Your lordship’s most humble, most obedient servant,

SAM JOHNSON.’

The years of poverty have now passed. Hard struggle and bitter circumstances have moulded a fine character, honest and robust. George III. granted Johnson ‘a fairly considerable pension, and the last years of his life were a time of comfort and great influence. Gathering round him a large circle of friends, he founded ‘The Literary

Club,' to which all the great men of the day belonged. Among the original members were Oliver Goldsmith, the poet and novelist; Edmund Burke, the statesman and orator; Edward Gibbon, the historian; Sir Joshua Reynolds, the famous portrait painter and first president of the Royal Academy; David Garrick, the greatest actor of the day; and Sheridan, the dramatist.

These share in the conversations which have been so faithfully preserved by Boswell. Indeed in Boswell we can see and hear not only the burly dictator, but all his friends.

Johnson ranks as a great critic. The preface to his edition of Shakespeare's plays is one of his most interesting criticisms, and contains many wise sayings. His best-known book, however, is *The Lives of the Poets*, a book which grew out of the prefaces to an edition of the poets of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. This is very readable and gives interesting studies of the poets, especially of those who followed Donne.

Johnson died at his house in Bolt Court, Fleet Street, in 1784, and was buried in Westminster Abbey, near to the grave of his friend Garrick.

OLIVER GOLDSMITH

Of the men who gathered round Johnson in 'The Literary Club' the most beloved was the eccentric 'Goldy,' who wrote a novel, two comedies, and some poetry.

Goldsmith was born in Ireland; he was the son of an Irish curate, who will always live, in the person of Dr. Primrose, in the novel *The Vicar of Wakefield*. An idle, improvident youth, Goldsmith abandoned his training as a doctor and adopted the more attractive life of a vagabond. He visited America twice in search of adventure,

then made a tour of Europe with a guinea in his pocket, one clean shirt, and his celebrated flute, by the playing of which he gained enough money to carry him from place to place. From Flanders he made his way to Paris, thence across the Alps down into Italy as far as Padua. The experiences of those years are told in his poem *The Traveller*, and in the account of George Primrose's wanderings in *The Vicar of Wakefield*.

He arrived back in London penniless, and, after struggling to live first as an usher, then as a druggist, and finally as a physician, he drifted into Grub Street, where Johnson also had begun his life in poverty and obscurity. He wrote a number of essays in *The Spectator* style and sent them to periodicals. While his master had broken away from the direct, simple prose of the first journalists, Goldsmith carries on the simple, polished style of Addison. Like that graceful essayist, he loved French literature and, with the elegant French models before him, he wrote with lightness and ease.

These essays, which bore the mark of his attractive personality—'he touched nothing he did not adorn'—brought him to the notice of Johnson and his friends Garrick and Reynolds, who received him into the Club. His best books now appeared, first the poems, *The Traveller* and *The Deserted Village*, then the novel, *The Vicar of Wakefield*, and finally the two comedies, *The Good-natured Man* and *She Stoops to Conquer*. The latter, with its lively scenes and those amusing characters, Marlow, the Hardcastles, and Tony Lumpkin, holds the boards to-day.

Goldsmith and his fellow-countryman, Sheridan, are the last writers of comedy until we come to two other Irishmen of recent years, Wilde and Synge.

The manuscript of *The Vicar of Wakefield* was discovered by Johnson, who took it and sold it, when Goldsmith was in great need of money. It is a delightful story of simple country life, and as it has remained popular to this day, is easily procurable. Other novels were being written, but they are mostly coarse in tone. Goldsmith refined and elevated the novel, as Addison and Steele had purified the satire and the essay.

Goldsmith's books brought him in much money, but vain, careless, and generous to the end, he died deeply in debt in 1774. His tomb is in the Temple grounds.

Boswell, in his *Life of Johnson*, makes many references, some unkind, to the witty Irishman. A childish fellow, Goldsmith was often the laughing-stock of the members of the Club. Johnson himself said: 'No man was more foolish when he had not a pen in his hand, or more wise when he had.' But none the less he was loved, and we may here take farewell of him in a mock epitaph which Garrick wrote for him one evening when he was late at the Club:—

'Here lies Nolly Goldsmith, for shortness called Noll,
Who wrote like an angel, but talked like poor Poll.'

OTHER BOOKS TO READ

Life of Johnson. Boswell. Oxford University Press.
Lives of the Poets. Johnson. World's Classics.
On Shakespeare. Johnson. Oxford University Press.
The Vicar of Wakefield. Goldsmith. World's Classics.
She Stoops to Conquer. Goldsmith. Oxford University Press.
Plays. Sheridan. Heinemann's Favourite Classics.
Selections. Burke, edited by Perry. • Bell.
Letters. Chesterfield. Scott Library.
Letters. Lady Montague. Everyman's Library.
Select Letters. Walpole. Bohn's Library.

CHAPTER XVII

THE REVIVAL OF ROMANCE



THE poets of the latter part of this eighteenth century prepare the way for Wordsworth and the other poets of the Age of Romance. They are the heralds of the Romantic Revival; to understand this term we must look back.

With the death of Milton the splendour of the Renaissance faded from literature. Chaucer, Spenser, Shakespeare, all the great romantics, were forsaken. French writers became the models for English writers, and Dryden and Pope became the high priests of reason and common sense. The poetry of Dryden and Pope was of the intellect; imagination and the emotions did not enter into it. Just as enthusiasm in religion was judged 'bad form,' so the light and colour of Elizabethan poetry were shunned.

The subjects of poetry were found in society life and politics. Its province was the artificial society seen in *The Rape of the Lock* or the political strife of *Absalom and Achitophel*, never the simple life of the country or nature. Moreover, these subjects were treated in a formal, artificial style. Stiff, pompous expressions took the place of simple natural language, and the heroic couplet was the one form of verse in common use.

THE RENASCENCE OF BEAUTY AND ROMANCE

There takes place another renaissance; the emotional tide rises again. Imagination and the emotions invade poetry and sweep away the intellectual verse of Dryden and Pope. Poetry is of the heart once more. It no longer concerns itself with the life of towns and the political squabbles of London, but goes straight to nature and tells of the simple life lived by the people in the country. When it does speak of the town, it is to spill its heart in sympathy for the poor and oppressed, often to voice the nation's indignation at the cruelties that the Industrial Revolution had brought in its train.

The poet is fired again with the ideals of those burning Elizabethan days. With Spenser, Shakespeare, and Milton in mind, he tells in simple, unadorned language his heart's desire for a better land.

We return to nature and simple emotions, and witness a new renaissance of beauty and romance.

The revival comes slowly. The tide creeps up on many a wave. There are signs in this poet; others in a later one. Let us look at some of them.

JAMES THOMSON

James Thomson published, in four parts, between the years 1726 and 1730, a long poem called *The Seasons*. This gives descriptions in a somewhat strange language, of the sights and sounds of nature as they vary with the changing seasons. Thomson uses the stiff, artificial language of Pope, but he points out a new way for poetry to take. If he does not shake off the style of Dryden and Pope, he, at least, turns his back on

their subjects and takes us direct to nature and its landscapes ; and he throws off the bondage of the heroic couplet and writes in blank verse.

It is not an accident that at such a time he should have written one of our national songs—‘Rule, Britannia’—a song of which most people know only the chorus. Thomson was born in 1700 and died in 1748, a period that saw the battle of Blenheim and the Union of England and Scotland under one Parliament.

‘RULE, BRITANNIA

‘ When Britain first at Heaven’s command
Arose from out the azure main,
This was the charter of her land,
And guardian angels sung the strain :
Rule, Britannia ! Britannia, rule the waves !
Britons never shall be slaves.

The nations not so blest as thee
Must in their turn to tyrants fall,
Whilst thou shalt flourish great and free,
The dread and envy of them all.

Still more majestic shalt thou rise,
More dreadful from each foreign stroke ;
As the loud blast that tears the skies
Serves but to root thy native oak.

Thee haughty tyrants ne’er shall tame ;
All their attempts to bend thee down
Will but arouse thy generous flame,
And work their woe and thy renown.

To thee belongs the rural reign ;
Thy cities shall with commerce shine ;
All thine shall be the subject main,
And every shore it circles thine !

The Muses, still with freedom found,
 Shall to thy happy coast repair ;
 Blest isle, with matchless beauty crown'd
 And many hearts to guard the fair :—
 Rule, Britannia ! Britannia, rule the waves !
 Britons never shall be slaves.'

OLIVER GOLDSMITH

Goldsmith, who follows Thomson, does not altogether forsake the old ways. He is too much influenced by Johnson to take at once to new paths. His two poems, *The Traveller* and *The Deserted Village*, are both written in the heroic couplet form and are stilted in language.

In the first of these poems the traveller visits the different countries of Europe and describes the life of the people. He preaches the lesson that happiness is a personal thing, depending on people themselves, and not on social systems. In thus using poetry to criticise and teach, Goldsmith is with his age, but the schoolmaster disappears in the tender charm of his whimsical personality. Most of the countries Goldsmith had himself seen during the years of his vagabondage ; looking into his memory, he paints the countryside and the peasants and takes us to the nature that he loves.

In *The Deserted Village* he is distressed by the passing of the beauty of the English village, and cries out against the ugliness of the new industrial towns. The parson of the village of ' Sweet Auburn ' is a lovable character :—

' At church, with meek and unaffected grace,
 His looks adorned the venerable place ;
 Truth from his lips prevailed with double sway,
 And fools, who came to scoff, remained to pray.

The service past, around the pious man,
 With steady zeal, each honest rustic ran ;
 E'en children followed, with endearing wile,
 And plucked his gown, to share the good man's smile ;
 His ready smile a parent's warmth expressed,
 Their welfare pleased him, and their cares distressed ;
 To them his heart, his love, his griefs were given,
 But all his serious thoughts had rest in heaven.
 As some tall cliff that lifts its awful form,
 Swells from the vale, and midway leaves the storm,
 Though round its breast the rolling clouds are spread,
 Eternal sunshine settles on its head.'

Goldsmith had a keen sympathy for humanity. The poets are beginning to preach a social gospel and cry out against the oppression of the poor. It is this love of nature and sympathy for humanity that mark the poets of the eighteenth century. They are the forerunners of Wordsworth, the first poet of the Age of Romance.

We pass on to the poetry of Collins and Gray.

THOMAS GRAY

Gray was a scholar who lived a hermit-like life. The volume of his poetry is a slender one, but it brought him lasting fame. Indeed, his *Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard* is the most famous poem in our language. Many a literary pilgrim has it guided to the little churchyard at Stoke Poges, where it was written. It is said that Wolfe, gliding in the darkness down the river St. Lawrence, quoted the poem as he neared the Heights of Abraham, that his men were to scale in their attack on Quebec.

' Can storied urn or animated bust
 Back to its mansion call the fleeting breath ?
 Can Honour's voice provoke the silent dust,
 Or Flattery soothe the dull cold ear of Death ?

Perhaps in this neglected spot is laid
 Some heart once pregnant with celestial fire ;
 Hands that the rod of empire might have sway'd,
 Or waked to ecstasy the living lyre :

But knowledge to their eyes her ample page,
 Rich with the spoils of time, did ne'er unroll ;
 Chill penury repress'd their noble rage,
 And froze the genial current of the soul.

Full many a gem of purest ray serene
 The dark, unfathom'd caves of ocean bear :
 Full many a flower is born to blush unseen,
 And waste its sweetness on the desert air.

Some village Hampden, that with dauntless breast
 The little tyrant of his fields withstood,
 Some mute, inglorious Milton here may rest,
 Some Cromwell, guiltless of his country's blood.'

Of that Johnson said : ' It abounds with images which find a mirror in every mind, and with sentiments to which every heart returns an echo.'

Here Gray quits the conventional Dryden manner of his own early poems and follows the lead of those poets who were going back to nature. There is in his work both the growing love of the countryside and a real human sympathy, a tender feeling for the people who live their simple lives forgotten by the ever-hurrying dwellers of the town.

' Beneath those rugged elms, that yew-tree's shade,
 Where heaves the turf in many a mouldering heap,
 Each in his narrow cell for ever laid,
 The rude forefathers of the hamlet sleep.'

WILLIAM COLLINS

With the name of Gray is usually coupled that of William Collins, who wrote even finer poetry

than his contemporary, although his poems are not so well known as those of Gray. His *Ode to Evening* is a beautiful poem without any rhyme at all, the effect being produced by sound and a delicate handling of the lines :—

‘ Now air is hushed, save where the weak-eyed bat,
With short shriek flits by on leathern wing,
Or where the beetle winds
His small but sullen horn,

As oft he rises midst the twilight path,
Against the pilgrim borne in heedless hum :
Now teach me, Maid composed,
To breathe some softened strain,

Whose numbers, stealing thro’ thy dark’ning vale,
May, not unseemly, with its stillness suit,
As, musing slow, I hail
Thy genial loved return.

For when thy folding star arising shows
His paly circlet, at his waning lamp
The fragrant Hours and Elves
Who slept in buds the day,

And many a Nymph who wreathes her brows with sedge,
And sheds the freshening dew, and, lovelier still,
The Pensive Pleasures sweet
Prepare thy shadowy car.’

But nothing in Collins is so good as the little ode written in 1746, in memory of those who had fallen during the ’45 Rebellion :—

‘ How sleep the brave, who sink to rest
By all their country’s wishes blessed !
When spring, with dewy fingers cold,
Returns to deck their hallowed mould,
So there shall dress a sweeter sod
Than Fancy’s feet have ever trod.
By fairy hands their knell is rung ;
By forms unseen their dirge is sung ;

There Honour comes, a pilgrim grey,
 To bless the turf that wraps their clay ;
 And Freedom shall awhile repair,
 To dwell, a weeping hermit, there !

WILLIAM COWPER

We come now to William Cowper, another poet whose work is a mixture of the old and the new. His early poems are hampered by forms and rules in the affected manner of Pope. But he soon breaks away from formalism and, by his love of nature and sympathy for simple rural lives, carries us forward on the swelling tide of romance.

Cowper's life is one of the saddest in our story. A shy, sensitive spirit, his school life was very unhappy. Even in later life he shrank from contact with the rough world. He was so timid, that an examination at the bar of the House of Lords, on his appointment as Clerk of the Journals of the House, brought on madness. He recovered, but his whole life was passed a victim to melancholy, which sometimes deepened to insanity. He lived for many years with the family of the vicar of Huntingdon, first in that town, and then at Olney. It was the care of Mrs. Unwin, who is the ' Mary ' of all his poems, and the friendship of Lady Austen, which preserved this morbid, melancholy genius from actual madness.

At Olney, Cowper wrote the famous *Olney Hymns*, many of which (e.g. ' God moves in a mysterious way,' and ' Hark, my soul, it is the Lord ') are still sung in our churches. A reverence for religion marks all his poetry ; to him it was more than anything else, the true material for the poet's craft. His two best known poems are the immortal *John Gilpin* and a long poem, called *The Task*, both suggested by Lady Austen. To

rescue Cowper from a bitter mood of melancholy, Lady Austen told him the story of John Gilpin, and asked for a ballad on the subject. The night was disturbed by the roars of the poet's laughter as he set the story to verse. Next morning, at breakfast, he read his *John Gilpin*, which bubbles with the merry humour that springs up in other places in his work. On another occasion Lady Austen asked for a poem in blank verse. To Cowper's request for a subject she suggested the sofa, and a poem, called *The Sofa*, was immediately written. To this were added from time to time other poems—*The Timepiece*, *The Garden*, *The Winter Evening*, *The Winter Morning Walk*, and *The Winter Walk at Noon*. The whole was published in 1785, and was called *The Task*. It was one of the finest poems of the century. 'God made the country, and man made the town,' says Cowper, and to the country round Olney he takes us, giving us a picture of himself and of the simple country life he lived.

'THE WINTER WALK AT NOON

'The night was winter in his roughest mood ;
The morning sharp and clear. But now at noon,
Upon the southern side of the slant hills,
And where the woods fence off the northern blast,
The season smiles, resigning all its rage,
And has the warmth of May. The vault is blue
Without a cloud, and white without a speck
The dazzling splendour of the scene below.
Again the harmony comes o'er the vale ;
And through the trees I viewed the embattled tow'r,
Whence all the music. I again perceive
The soothing influence of the wafted strains,
And settle in soft musings as I tread
The walk, still verdant, under oaks and 'elms,
Whose outspread branches overarch the glade.'

In natural, unstudied language he describes rural scenes, the fields, the woods, and the streams, and tells of the humble lives of the ploughman, the teamsters, and the letter carrier :

‘ He comes the herald of a noisy world,
With spattered boots, strapped waist, and frozen locks :
News from all nations lumbering at his back.’

Cowper also made a translation of Homer in blank verse and left a collection of delightful letters. His last poem, *The Castaway*, was suggested by the story of a sailor who was washed overboard and perished in the presence of his comrades. It is a cry from the heart of a man ‘whelmed in deeper gulfs than he’—a cry from the pit of despair. Cowper died in 1800.

Love of nature, keen sympathy for all men, simple speech—what are these but the lights of Romance? Two more voices of revolt, those of Burns and Blake, and we come to the Age of Romance.

ROBERT BURNS

The greatest song-writer in the world is Burns. Here, in his own words, is his creed :—

‘ Give me a spark o’ Nature’s fire,
That ’s a’ the learning I desire ;
Then, though I trudge thro’ dub an’ mire
At pleugh or cart,
My Muse, though hamely in attire,
May touch the heart.’

Robert Burns is the poet of the human heart, the greatest lyric poet of the world. He was the son of a poor Scotch peasant, living in Ayrshire, and began work early in life on his father’s small farm. When the father died, he and his brothers took Mossgiel Farm, where Bobbie composed his

famous songs as he followed the plough. He wrote in Scotch dialect what the winds whispered and the birds whistled to him. His two most beautiful nature poems are *To a Mouse* and *To a Mountain Daisy*. His plough turns up the nest of a field-mouse :—

‘ Wee, sleekit, cow’rin’, tim’rous beastie,
 Oh, what a panic’s in thy breastie !
 Thou need na start awa sae hasty,
 Wi’ bickering brattle !
 I wad be laith to rin an’ chase thee,
 Wi’ murd’ring pattle !

By the plough the daisy is cut down :—

‘ Wee, modest, crimson-tippèd flow’r,
 Thou’st met me in an evil hour ;
 For I maun crush amang the stoure
 Thy slender stem :
 To spare thee now is past my pow’r,
 Thou bonnie gem.’

Not prospering as a farmer, he decided to emigrate to Jamaica. To raise money for the journey, he printed his poems. They met with tremendous success, and their author was lionised by the delighted people of Edinburgh. The idea of emigration was abandoned, and the poet returned to Mossgiel. He settled down again to farming and married Jean Armour, who lives in the following lines :—

‘ I see her in the dewy flowers,
 I see her sweet and fair :
 I hear her in the tunefu’ birds,
 I hear her charm the air :
 There’s not a bonnie flower that springs
 By fountain, shaw, or green,
 There’s not a bonnie bird that sings
 But minds me o’ my Jean.’

Shortly afterwards Burns became an excise

officer, but he only lived to fill the post for two years, for riotous living brought him to an early grave in 1796. His last lyric was the beautiful 'O wert Thou in the cauld Blast,' so often sung to Mendelssohn's music.

Besides the lyrics, he wrote longer poems, of which the best known are *The Cotter's Saturday Night* and *Tam o' Shanter*. Into the former is poured his scorn of the conventions and hypocrisy of the rich and powerful. More noble to him is the poor man in his cottage. As he says in another poem :—

' What tho' on hamely fare we dine,
Wear hoddin grey and a' that ;
Gie fools their silks and knaves their wine,
A man's a man for a' that !
For a' that, and a' that,
Their tinsel show, and a' that ;
The honest man, though ne'er sae poor,
Is king o' men for a' that !

Then let us pray that come it may—
As come it will for a' that ;
That sense and worth, o'er a' the earth,
May bear the gree, and a' that ;
For a' that, and a' that,
It's coming yet, for a' that,
That man to man, the world o'er,
Shall brithers be for a' that.'

WILLIAM BLAKE

Of these heralds of Romance, William Blake most closely resembles the Elizabethan song-writers. His early lyric poems are delightfully simple and perfect in form. They come from the heart, spontaneous and unstudied as the song of a thrush. Thus in those happy *Songs of Innocence* which appeared in 1789, he begins :—

‘ Piping down the valleys wild,
Piping songs of pleasant glee,
On a cloud I saw a child,
And he laughing said to me :
“ Pipe a song about a lamb ” ;
So I piped with merry cheer,
“ Piper, pipe that song again ” ;
So I piped : he wept to hear.
“ Piper, sit thee down and write
In a book that all may read ” ;
So he vanished from my sight,
And I plucked a hollow reed,
And I made a rural pen,
And I stained the water clear,
And I wrote my happy songs
Every child may joy to hear.’

The *Songs of Innocence* were followed by another collection, *Songs of Experience*, which contain that wonderful poem :—

‘ Tiger ! Tiger ! burning bright
In the forests of the night,
What immortal hand or eye
Could frame thy fearful symmetry ?
In what distant deeps or skies
Burnt the fire of thine eyes ?
On what wings does he aspire ?
What the hand dare seize the fire ?
And what shoulder, and what art,
Could twist the sinews of thy heart ?
And when thy heart began to beat,
What dread hand ? and what dread feet ?
What the hammer ? what the chain ?
In what furnace was thy brain ?
What the anvil ? what dread grasp
Dare its deadly terrors clasp ?

When the stars threw down their spears,
And water'd heaven with their tears,
Did He smile His work to see ?
Did He who made the Lamb make thee ?

Tiger ! Tiger ! burning bright
In the forests of the night,
What immortal hand or eye
Dare frame thy fearful symmetry ? '

Blake, who was an artist as well as a poet, lived in London ; but the material world, in which he passed his days, did not exist for him. From a child he had dreamed dreams and looked on visions, living in a world of his own imagination. As he grew older he followed his visions into strange lands. He became more and more visionary, and found it difficult to put his visions into words. His later poems, therefore, are strange and difficult to understand ; they are clouded by mysticism. The poet illustrated these poems with strange designs and pictures. Among his pictures is a wonderful series of illustrations to the book of Job.

The great prophetic poems apart, however, the freshness and delicacy of his lyrics, his passionate pity for the poor and oppressed, and his power to enter into the joys and sorrows of childhood, rank Blake with Burns, as the two great lyric poets of the century.

OTHER BOOKS TO READ

- Poems. Gray. Oxford University Press.
- Poems. Collins. Oxford University Press.
- Poems. Cowper. Macmillan.
- Letters. Cowper. World's Classics.
- Poems. Burns. Oxford University Press.
- The Lyrical Poems. Blake. Oxford University Press.
- English Romantic Movement. Phelps. Ginn.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE AGE OF ROMANCE



Now come to the Age of Romance, which begins about the middle of the reign of George III. (1760-1820), and lasts through the reigns of George IV. and of William IV. until the accession of Victoria in 1837. This early part of the nineteenth century resembles the Elizabethan Age in the brilliance of its books. The national activity of Elizabeth's time, when new horizons were being opened up and new worlds revealed, found expression in the great dramas of Shakespeare and his fellows. This age, however, has little drama; the tide of emotion and imagination sweeps up in a great flood of poetry, first Wordsworth and Coleridge, the poets of the Lakes, then Byron, Shelley, and Keats. The Elizabethan literature was a literature of adventure and daring, its stuff the world of action, and drama its shape. This romantic writing, on the other hand, is a writing of protest and of escape. The poets raised their voices against the growing poverty, dirt, and misery of the machine-made towns. They sought escape into a world of beauty and of romance. Wordsworth turned to the world of nature, while Keats escaped into the world of beauty within his own mind. In nature and in their own imaginations, the new poets found their paradise.

This romantic literature, then, springs from new social conditions. The land had been blackened by the Industrial Revolution, which was turning us from a peasant people into a nation of manufacturers and merchants. Limitless wealth poured into the country, but it went into the hands of a few—the manufacturers, who grew rich on the profits of industry, and the landowners, who fattened on high rents and the inflated price of corn. There was a stirring of protest in the nation; the starving workers began to riot. It was the same in all the countries of Europe. Everywhere there was a bitter cry against oppression. In France the people rose up and threw off their fetters. They stormed and destroyed the prison of the Bastille, the stronghold of tyranny.

The fall of the Bastille, in 1789, marks the beginning of the French Revolution, a movement which flung calamity over a whole continent. In that calamity more than one oppressive government fell to pieces. At first, the writers of our own country showed themselves sympathetic towards the French people in their great effort to break free from the tyranny of king, nobles, and clergy. But the glorious promises of the fight for freedom went unfulfilled. There followed the horrors of that reign of terror, when the tumbrils clattered daily over the cobbles to the guillotine, and there arose the great military despot Napoleon, with all the wars and horrors of war that accompanied his ambitions.

The battle-cry of the Revolution—Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité—which rallied the first revolutionaries, was taken up in all European countries. Had not Burke and the nobles forced the people of England into a war with the French, it is possible that we, too, might have experienced

the terrors that come with revolutions. For the time being internal strife disappeared in the struggle with Napoleon, but, on his defeat at Waterloo, in 1815, people turned again to demand reform at home. Men were determined to realise, no matter what the cost, that ideal of liberty, which in France had kindled the flames of revolution. In response to this demand, reforms of all kinds were made: there was prison reform; child labour was forbidden; slavery was abolished in the colonies. Above all, an attempt was made at giving the people a greater share in their own government by means of the Reform Bill of 1832.

This Reform Bill is the beginning of democracy—that is, government of the people by the people for the people. And with democracy in government goes a romantic literature.

The way had been prepared by Cowper, Burns, and Blake. We move on. We soon get a new landmark in literature—the *Lyrical Ballads* of Wordsworth and Coleridge, published in 1798, nine years after the fall of the Bastille.

LYRICAL BALLADS

In the *Lyrical Ballads* Wordsworth and Coleridge raised the standard of liberty in literature; theirs is a cry for freedom from the dull formalism of the school of Pope, and for an escape from the misery, poverty, and dirt of industrial England into the beauty of nature and the world of romance.

WILLIAM WORDSWORTH

William Wordsworth was born at Cockermouth, Cumberland, in 1770. His boyhood was spent in the beautiful dales of his native county among simple shepherd folk. While a student at Cambridge he

went on a tour in France the year after the outbreak of the French Revolution. The first phase of the Revolution was over, and affairs were being directed by the Girondists, that group of revolutionary orators who came from La Gironde. With them Wordsworth threw in his lot and, had he not been ordered back to England by his relatives, he would probably have gone with the Girondists to the guillotine. Back at home his ardour for liberty died down; the burning young revolutionary relapsed into a Tory of the Tories. Later in life he accepted a small Government post, and was also appointed Poet Laureate. As Browning says of the lost leader :—

‘ Just for a handful of silver he left us ;
Just for a riband to stick on his coat.’

Immediately on his return from France he settled with his sister, Dorothy, in Somerset, where he became friendly with Coleridge.

SAMUEL TAYLOR COLERIDGE

Samuel Taylor Coleridge was born at Ottery St. Mary, Devonshire. At Christ's Hospital, in London, he and Charles Lamb were boys together. When the French Revolution broke out it fired their youthful enthusiasms. On leaving Cambridge, Coleridge, full of revolutionary spirit, joined Southey, afterwards his brother-in-law, in a scheme to found an ideal community on the banks of the Susquehanna River in America. The plan came to naught. Coleridge married and settled on the Quantock Hills in Somerset, where began his friendship with Wordsworth. Discussions between the two men led to the making of a volume of poems, illustrating their theory of poetry.

The book contained two different kinds of poetry. In one, as Coleridge says, 'the incidents and agents were to be—in part, at least—supernatural'; in the other, 'subjects were to be chosen from ordinary life.'

THE SUPERNATURAL

The supernatural was the domain of Coleridge. He wrote only a few poems, but among them are the wonderful *Kubla Khan*, *Christabel*, and *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*.

In *Kubla Khan* the poet tried to paint a dream. He had been reading Purchas's *Pilgrimage* when he fell asleep; on waking he began to write:—

'In Xanadu did Kubla Khan
A stately pleasure-dome decree :
Where Alph, the sacred river, ran
Through caverns measureless to man
Down to a sunless sea.
So twice five miles of fertile ground
With walls and towers were girdled round :
And there were gardens bright with sinuous rills
Where blossomed many an incense-bearing tree ;
And here were forests ancient as the hills,
Enfolding sunny spots of greenery.

But oh ! that deep romantic chasm which slanted
Down the green hill athwart a cedarn cover !
A savage place ! as holy and enchanted
As e'er beneath a waning moon was haunted
By woman wailing for her demon lover !
And from this chasm, with ceaseless turmoil seething,
As if this earth in fast thick pants was breathing,
A mighty fountain momently was forced :
Amid whose swift half-intermitted burst
Huge fragments vaulted like rebounding hail,
Or chaffy grain beneath the thresher's flail ;
And 'mid these dancing rocks at once and ever
It flung up momently the sacred river.

Five miles meandering with a mazy motion
Through wood and dale the sacred river ran,
Then reached the caverns measureless to man,
And sank in tumult to a lifeless ocean :
And 'mid this tumult Kubla heard from far
Ancestral voices prophesying war !'

The writer was interrupted, and his dream picture was never finished.

Christabel is another fragment. It is a ballad of mediæval times in which an atmosphere of wonder and mystery is suggested with an eerie power. One shudders as one reads the opening lines :—

' 'Tis the middle of night by the castle clock,
And the owls have awakened the crowing cock ;
Tu-whit !—Tu-whoo !
And hark, again, the crowing cock,
How drowsily it crew.

Is the night chilly and dark ?
The night is chilly, but not dark.
The thin gray cloud is spread on high,
It covers but not hides the sky.
The moon is behind, and at the full ;
And yet she looks both small and dull.
The night is chill, the cloud is gray :
'Tis a month before the month of May,
And the Spring comes slowly up this way.'

The words are plain and the phrasing simple, yet we feel the silence and find ourselves in a world full of foreboding.

The Rime of the Ancient Mariner is one of the most wonderful poems in all literature. Here there is the same stark simplicity of word and phrase :—

' Down dropt the breeze, the sails dropt down,
'Twas sad as sad could be ;
And we did speak only to break
The silence of the sea !

All in a hot and copper sky,
The bloody sun, at noon,
Right up above the mast did stand,
No bigger than the moon.

Day after day, day after day,
We stuck, nor breath nor motion ;
As idle as a painted ship
Upon a painted ocean.

Water, water every where,
And all the boards did shrink ;
Water, water every where,
Nor any drop to drink.

The very deep did rot : O Christ !
That ever this should be !
Yea, slimy things did crawl with legs
Upon the slimy sea.'

Once across the line, the ship is driven by storm towards the South Pole ; she regains the tropics in the Pacific Ocean. There are wonderful descriptions of arctic cold and tropical heat. Sea, sun, stars, and moon are drawn in bold lines. Thus:—

' The sun's rim dips ; the stars rush out :
At one stride comes the dark ;
With far-heard whisper, o'er the sea,
Off shot the spectre bark.'

But more wonderful are the suggestions the poet gives of supernatural things—the phantom ship with its crew of dead men, the albatross, the crimson lights, and the angels' songs. The whole poem is a world of wonder and mystery won without any apparent effort.

The glowing promise of these poems went unfulfilled. Coleridge wrote very little poetry after this. After the publication of *Lyrical Ballads* he accompanied Wordsworth to Germany. A short stay among the Lakes, and Coleridge settled at

Highgate. The years at Highgate were given up to philosophy and criticism. He died in 1834, and was buried in Highgate Church.

THE NATURAL

In the *Ancient Mariner* we get one side of the *Lyrical Ballads*—the supernatural. The natural aspect is supplied by Wordsworth's poems, especially in *Lines written above Tintern Abbey*. Wordsworth was the poet of nature. While Pope had painted the town and its artificial life, Wordsworth takes us to the country and its inhabitants. As a boy he loved the lakes and streams, the woods and mountains, the trees and flowers. These were the stuff of his poetry :—

‘ I cannot paint
What then I was. The sounding cataract
Haunted me like a passion : the tall rock,
The mountain, and the deep and gloomy wood,
Their colours and their forms, were then to me
An appetite ; a feeling and a love,
That had no need of a remoter charm,
By thought supplied, nor any interest
Unborrowed from the eye.’

That was nature to the boy. To the man and the poet it became something more. It became the revelation of the divine spirit. In those *Lines written above Tintern Abbey* he says :—

‘ For I have learned
To look on nature, not as in the hour
Of thoughtless youth ; but hearing oftentimes
The still, sad music of humanity,
Nor harsh, nor grating, though of ample power
To chasten and subdue. And I have felt
A presence that disturbs me with the joy
Of elevated thoughts ; a sense sublime
Of something far more deeply interfused,

Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
 And the round ocean and the living air ;
 And the blue sky, and in the mind of man :
 A motion and a spirit, that impels
 All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
 And rolls through all things. Therefore am I still
 A lover of the meadows, and the woods,
 And mountains ; and of all that we behold
 From this green earth : of all the mighty world
 Of eye and ear, both what they half create,
 And what perceive ; well pleased to recognise
 In nature and the language of the sense,
 The anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse,
 The guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul
 Of all my moral being.'

To show nature as man's teacher was his first aim. Further, he wanted to show that poetry could be found in the everyday life and language of ordinary people. He says : ' The principal object proposed in these poems was to choose incidents and situations from common life, and to relate or describe them throughout in a selection of the language really used by men, and at the same time to throw over them a certain colouring of imagination, whereby ordinary things should be presented to the mind in an unusual aspect.' He says that ' humble and rustic life was generally chosen because in that condition the essential passions of the heart find a better soil in which they can attain their maturity, and less under restraint, and speak a plainer and more emphatic language.'

Thus in *Michael* he describes the life of the shepherd in the dales :—

' Upon the forest-side in Grasmere Vale
 There dwelt a shepherd, Michael was his name :
 An old man, stout of heart and strong of limb.
 His bodily frame had been from youth to age
 Of an unusual strength : his mind was keen,
 Intense, and frugal, apt for all affairs,

And in his shepherd's calling he was prompt
And watchful more than ordinary men.
Hence had he learned the meaning of all winds,
Of blasts of every tone : and, oftentimes,
When others heeded not, he heard the south
Make subterraneous music, like the noise
Of bagpipers on distant Highland hills.'

On his return from Germany, whither he went with Coleridge, Wordsworth, with his wife and his sister, Dorothy, settled in the Lake District, first near Grasmere, then at Rydal Mount, where he remained until his death in 1850.

These years in the Lake District were all given up to poetry. The volume of Wordsworth's poetry is enormous, but his finest poems were written during the early part of his life, and it is best to approach him in a selection of the odes, sonnets, and short descriptive poems before coming to the longer works. There are none finer than the sonnets of Wordsworth at his best ; he lifted the sonnet to heights never before reached in this form. Take the *Sonnet composed upon Westminster Bridge, September 1802* :—

' Earth has not any thing to show more fair :
Dull would he be of soul who could pass by
A sight so touching in its majesty :
This City now doth like a garment wear
The beauty of the morning ; silent, bare,
Ships, towers, domes, theatres, and temples lie
Open unto the fields and to the sky,
All bright and glittering in the smokeless air.
Never did sun more beautifully steep
In his first splendour valley, rock, or hill ;
Ne'er saw I, never felt, a calm so deep !
The river glideth at his own sweet will :
Dear God ! the very houses seem asleep ;
And all that mighty heart is lying still !'

Wordsworth is the poet of nature ; but he is

equally the poet of man. The bloody tale of the September massacres damped his ardour for the cause of the Revolution in France, so with a shaken faith he turned to nature, where he found peace. But his love of nature did not shut out entirely the love of man, of the simple shepherds of the dales, and after them, of humanity at large. He points to nature as the source of peace and happiness, and the revelation of God in nature as the solution of the riddle of life. All Wordsworth's moral teaching is summed up in the *Ode on Intimations of Immortality*, the greatest of all his works. Its words 'seem to come fresh from God':—

' Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting ;
 The Soul that rises with us, our life's Star,
 Hath had elsewhere its setting,
 And cometh from afar :
 Not in entire forgetfulness,
 And not in utter nakedness,
 But trailing clouds of glory do we come
 From God, who is our home :
 Heaven lies about us in our infancy !
 Shades of the prison-house begin to close
 Upon the growing Boy,
 But he beholds the light, and whence it flows,
 He sees it in his joy ;
 The Youth, who daily farther from the east
 Must travel, still is Nature's priest,
 And by the vision splendid
 Is on his way attended ;
 At length the Man perceives it die away,
 And fade into the light of common day.'

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- Lyrical Ballads, Wordsworth and Coleridge. Oxford University Press.
 Poems. Wordsworth. Golden Treasury Series.
 Selected Poems. Coleridge, edited by Thompson. Cambridge University Press.

CHAPTER XIX

THREE YOUNG ROMANTICS



WHEN the fires of the French Revolution died down, it almost seemed as if the struggle had been in vain. The ideals of the visionaries and reformers lay in ashes. Monarchy and ferocious despotisms were restored, not only in France, but in other European countries, Italy, Greece, and Spain. In this country, also, reaction set in. Wordsworth and Coleridge forgot their young shining enthusiasms and ceased to sing of liberty. But a little band of idealists, a little company of poets who still had courage to dream and love, stood firm. They maintained the cry of freedom and held fast to their faith in democracy. Two such eager spirits were Byron and Shelley. Together with Keats, they form the younger group of romantics.

The work of the older group of romantics came from Wordsworth and Coleridge in the Lake District, and from Lamb and Hazlitt in London. The three younger poets fled their native land and, at different times, each sought a home in Italy, where his best work was done. The remains of two of them, Shelley and Keats, lie in the English cemetery at Rome, and Byron died upon a foreign field.

LORD BYRON

In his own day the most popular of these three poet was Byron. Not only was he the idol of his countrymen, but his fame spread abroad. The delight of European countries, especially Italy and Germany, in this young romantic and his poetry, was the beginning of that interest which European countries have since shown in English literature, especially in Shakespeare. To-day, however, Byron is not so much read, but at the time he wrote people were dazzled both by his poetry and by the brilliance of his strange, wild personality.

Born in 1788, he succeeded at the age of ten to his title and to the possession of Newstead Abbey. While still very young he published his first volume of poems, and, in the controversy that immediately took place about its merits, he wrote a fierce satire pouring contempt on the work of Wordsworth and Coleridge, and declaring himself a follower of Dryden and Pope. But, despite this declaration, he belongs to that school of writers that we have called the Romantics. He shares their love for the strange and wonderful, and he has their keen sense of natural beauty, as will be seen below in the extracts from *Childe Harold*, his first long poem. This he wrote after spending a few years' travel in the Mediterranean. The poem contains four parts or cantos, but these were not all published at the same time. When cantos i. and ii. appeared they created such a commotion that Byron says: 'I woke one morning to find myself famous.' This work contains many famous descriptions of the romantic scenery that he saw on his journeyings through southern Europe. As an illustration of his style and metre, take the first

of the stanzas that describe a moonlight night at Venice:—

‘ The moon is up, and yet it is not night—
 Sunset divides the sky with her—a sea
 Of glory streams along the Alpine height
 Of blue Friuli’s mountains ; heaven is free
 From clouds, but of all colours seems to be—
 Melted to one vast Iris of the West,
 Where the day joins the past Eternity ;
 While, on the other hand, meek Dian’s crest
 Floats through the azure air—an island of the blest ! ’

Both Wordsworth and Byron were poets of nature, but, whereas Wordsworth far oftenest depicts the calm, Byron depicts the wild aspects of the scenes he contemplates. As he says himself:—

‘ Sky, mountains, river, winds, lake, lightnings ! ye !
 With night, and clouds, and thunder, and a soul
 To make these felt and feeling, well may be
 Things that have made me watchful : the far roll
 Of your departing voices is the knoll
 Of what in me is sleepless.’

And one of his finest passages, from which we quote two stanzas, is that in which he describes the ocean:—

‘ Roll on, thou deep and dark blue Ocean—roll !
 Ten thousand fleets sweep over thee in vain ;
 Man marks the earth with ruin—his control
 Stops with the shore ; upon the watery plain
 The wrecks are all thy deed, nor doth remain
 A shadow of man’s ravage, save his own,
 When, for a moment, like a drop of rain,
 He sinks into thy depths with bubbling groan,
 Without a grave, unknell’d, uncoffin’d, and unknown.

His steps are not upon thy paths,—thy fields
Are not a spoil for him,—thou dost arise
And shake him from thee ; the vile strength he wields
For earth's destruction thou dost all despise,
Spurning him from thy bosom to the skies,
And send'st him, shivering in thy playful spray,
And howling to his gods, where haply lies
His petty hope in some near port or bay,
And dashest him again to earth.'

On his return from the Mediterranean Byron wrote many highly coloured Eastern tales, which were very popular at the time, but are not now much read.

Byron's triumph did not last for many years. The worship that he had won turned to denunciation, for there were circumstances in his life that proved him something quite different from the hero that popular imagination had made of him. In disappointment and bitterness he left England for ever. After a period spent in Geneva, he passed on to Italy, where he became one of Shelley's most intimate friends. Finally, in 1824, in that passionate sympathy he had always shown for the oppressed, he flung himself into the cause of the Greeks, who were fighting against the Turks for their freedom, and perished of fever in the marshes of Missolonghi.

During these last years of exile Byron wrote his best work. It is not so disfigured by bombast, and has more sincerity than his earlier verse. His best known poem, *The Prisoner of Chillon*, belongs to this period, as do also the two dramas, *Manfred* and *Cain*, the last two cantos of *Childe Harold*, and the unfinished *Don Juan*. Through them all the fierce discontent of this revolutionary rushes like a torrent. He bitterly denounces the existing order of things ; the world is a sorry

place ; all governments are vile ; all society is rotten, and he would sweep them to destruction. But he had nothing to put in their place. He was a rebel, but only a destructive rebel. In his friend Shelley we have another rebel, a rebel who is also a dreamer, a revolutionary who is at the same time an idealist.

PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY

Shelley is the real voice of the French Revolution. Freedom is the soul of his writing. His life was one long battle with oppression, whether the iron heel of government or the tyranny of religion. A young man at Oxford, 'the mad Shelley,' as he was called, was expelled from the University for publishing and distributing a pamphlet on *The Necessity of Atheism*. His own religion was that of the enthusiast and visionary, a religion of universal love and liberty. He loved freedom and he loved beauty, and his poetry is the story of his lifelong quest for both.

Byron was the poet of the intellect, but Shelley is the poet of the imagination, the imagination aflame. The one destroyed without building ; the other destroyed only to build anew. It is true that most of what he fashioned was of the nature of dream castles, for he was ever looking forward to the dawn of a new age, to a land overflowing with love and joy ; but such dreams are inspirations that lead men onward in the search for better things.

' The world's great age begins anew,
The golden years return,
The earth doth like a snake renew
Her winter weeds outworn ;
Heaven smiles, and faiths and empires gleam
Like wrecks of a dissolving dream.

Oh cease ! must hate and death return ?
 Cease ! must men kill and die ?
 Cease ! drain not to the dregs the urn
 Of bitter prophecy.
 The world is weary of the past,
 Oh ! might it die or rest at last.'

This son of a Sussex squire was born in 1792. Eton and Oxford could not tame his rebellious spirit, and when, expelled from the University, the young aristocrat went out into the world, it was to live a strange and unconventional life. In 1818, unable longer to breathe the air of his native land, he went into exile in Italy, where, as the friend of Byron and Keats, he spent the rest of his days. The death of Keats in Rome was the occasion of that beautiful elegy, *Adonais*, written on the model of Milton's *Lycidas*, and one of the best of Shelley's poems. He summons up various spirits to lament the death of *Adonais*, but—

' Peace, peace ! he is not dead, he doth not sleep—
 He hath awakened from the dream of life—
 'Tis we, who, lost in stormy visions, keep
 With phantoms an unprofitable strife,
 And in mad trance, strike with our spirit's knife
 Invulnerable nothings.—We decay
 Like corpses in a charnel ; fear and grief
 Convulse us and consume us day by day,
 And cold hopes swarm like worms within our living clay.

He has outsoared the shadow of our night ;
 Envy and calumny and hate and pain,
 And that unrest which men miscall delight,
 Can touch him not and torture not again ;
 From the contagion of the world's slow stain
 He is secure, and now can never mourn
 A heart grown cold, a head grown grey in vain ;
 Nor, when the spirit's self has ceased to burn,
 With sparkless ashes load an unlamented urn.'

Later in the poem we come across the following wonderful stanza with its marvellous imagery :—

‘ The One remains, the many change and pass ;
 Heaven’s light for ever shines, earth’s shadows fly ;
 Life, like a dome of many-coloured glass,
 Stains the white radiance of eternity,
 Until death tramples it to fragments. Die,
 If thou wouldst be with that which thou dost seek !
 Follow where all is fled—Rome’s azure sky,
 Flowers, ruins, statues, music, words are weak
 The glory they transfuse with fitting truth to speak.’

In his longer poems, especially in that fantastic tale, *The Revolt of Islam*, and in the noble lyrical drama, *Prometheus Unbound*, we have Shelley’s longings for a new earth. *Prometheus Unbound* is one of his masterpieces ; in it is worked out the old Greek myth of the Titan who rebelled against Jupiter, and, as punishment, was chained to the Caucasus with the vulture gnawing at his vitals. In the poem the Titan, Prometheus, stands for mankind for ever struggling against oppression (Jupiter). In the end comes Hercules to set Prometheus free, and the last act swells to a wonderful chorus of spirit voices, celebrating the dawn of a new age.

But Shelley is at his highest in his shorter poems. Here in fine feeling, miraculous melody, and verbal magic he takes his place with the greatest of our singers. Indeed Shakespeare, Burns, and Shelley are the monarchs of the English lyric.

His word magic holds us in every verse of the poem *To a Skylark*, with its marvellous descriptive power :—

‘ Hail to thee, blithe spirit—
 Bird thou never wert—
 That from heaven, or near it,
 Pourest thy full heart
 In profuse strains of unpremeditated art.

Higher still, and higher,
 From the earth thou springest,
 Like a cloud of fire ;
 The blue deep thou wingest,
 And singing still dost soar, and soaring ever singest.
 In the golden lightning
 Of the sunken sun,
 O'er which clouds are bright'ning,
 Thou dost float and run,
 Like an unbodied joy whose race is just begun.'

In *The Sensitive Plant* Shelley completes the romantic conception of nature. To him nature and man are interdependent; they form one harmonious whole:—

' A Sensitive Plant in a garden grew,
 And the young winds fed it with silver dew,
 And it opened its fan-light leaves to the light,
 And closed them beneath the kisses of Night.'

' A lady, the wonder of her kind,' tended the flowers through the summer, but ' ere the first leaf looked brown she died,' and in the abandoned garden the flowers died also and everything fell into decay. Then comes the poet's cry for something that shall not die—for immortality itself:—

' In this life
 Of error, ignorance, and strife,
 Where nothing is, but all things seem,
 And we the shadows of the dream.

It is a modest creed, and yet
 Pleasant if one considers it,
 To own that death must be,
 Like all the rest, a mockery.

That garden sweet, that lady fair,
 And all sweet shapes and odours there,,
 In truth have never passed away :
 'Tis we, 'tis ours, are changed ; not they.

For love, and beauty, and delight,
 There is no death nor change ; their might
 Exceeds our organs, which endure
 No light, being themselves obscure.'

His lyrics are fashioned not only of beautiful words, but also of the joy and sorrow of his own heart, and his saddest songs are the sweetest ; there is, generally, beyond the mere words, a subtle suggestion of something sad. He listens to the rapture of the skylark with all the admiration that the already quoted verses reveal, but also with a tinge of sadness at the heart that rises to the surface in a later stanza of the same poem :—

' We look before and after,
 And pine for what is not :
 Our sincerest laughter
 With some pain is fraught ;
 Our sweetest songs are those that tell of saddest thought.'

In 1822 Shelley, only thirty, was drowned off the Italian coast. The body was washed ashore and cremated, and the ashes were buried, near the grave of Keats, in the English cemetery at Rome.

A modern poet, Francis Thompson, in an essay on Shelley, perhaps the finest piece of writing in our language, says that, of the poet, as of the child, ' the universe is his box of toys. He dabbles his fingers in the day-fall. He is gold-dusty with tumbling amidst stars. He makes bright mischief with the moon. The meteors nuzzle their noses in his hand. He teases into growling the kennelled thunder, and laughs at the shaking of its fiery chain. He dances in and out of the gates of heaven : its floor is littered with his broken fancies. He runs wild over the fields of ether. He chases the rolling world. He gets between the feet of the horses of the sun. He stands in the lap of patient

nature, and twines her loosened tresses after a hundred wilful fashions, to see how she will look best in his song.'

JOHN KEATS

Among the imperishable things of English poetry is the slender volume that holds the verse of Keats, who died at Rome, at the early age of twenty-six, whilst on a journey to Italy in search of health. The poems of Keats show the most perfect workmanship and reveal him as the climax of the romantic movement. But he in no way resembles Byron or Shelley. There is not that bitter discontent with the scheme of things as they are, nor the passion to frame the world anew. In the beautiful world of his artistic senses, that trumpet call, *Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité*, is stilled. To him poetry has no traffic with philosophies, politics, or revolutions. As he says in *Lamia* :—

' Do not all charms fly
At the mere touch of cold philosophy ?
There was an awful rainbow once in heaven :
We know her woof, her texture ; she is given
In the dull catalogue of common things.
Philosophy will clip an angel's wings,
Conquer all mysteries by rule and line,
Empty the haunted air and gnomed mine —
Unweave a rainbow, as it erewhile made
The tender-person'd *Lamia* melt into a shade.'

Finding this machine-made world hard and cold, he seeks escape into the kingdom of beauty within his own mind. In the famous opening lines of *Endymion* he declares his message :—

' A thing of beauty is a joy for ever ;
Its loveliness increases ; it will never
Pass into nothingness ; but still will keep
A bower quiet for us ; and a sleep
Full of sweet dreams, and health, and quiet breathing' ;

and in the closing lines of his ode *To a Grecian Urn*, he repeats the one and only tenet of his poetic creed :—

‘Beauty is truth, truth beauty,—that is all
Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.’

Keats found the beauty he sought, in many quarters, including Greek art and myth, tales of the Middle Ages, and in nature itself.

His passport to the beauty of Greek mythology was Chapman’s *Translation of Homer*, which he celebrates in one of his finest sonnets :—

‘Much have I travelled in the realms of gold,
And many goodly states and kingdoms seen ;
Round many western islands have I been
Which bards in fealty to Apollo hold.
Oft of one wide expanse had I been told,
That deep-browed Homer ruled as his demesne,
Yet did I never breathe its pure serene
Till I heard Chapman speak out loud and bold :
Then felt I like some watcher of the skies
When a new planet swims into his ken ;
Or like stout Cortez when with eagle eyes
He stared at the Pacific—and all his men
Looked at each other with a wild surmise—
Silent, upon a peak in Darien.’

Out of the Greek myths he drew the material for *Endymion*, the story of the beautiful young shepherd, beloved of Diana, and for *Hyperion*, the story of the defeat of the Titans. This last poem is an unfinished fragment, but the student should not fail to read it for its gorgeous imagery and dazzling language.

• Out of the romances of the Middle Ages he drew the material for *Isabella* and *The Eve of St. Agnes*, but he retold the legends in language full of rich and vivid colouring. The following lines are taken

from the second of these poems, and describe a room :—

‘ A casement high and triple-arch’d there was,
 All garlanded with carven imageries,
 Of fruits and flowers, and bunches of knot-grass,
 And diamonded with panes of quaint device,
 Innumerable of stains and splendid dyes,
 As are the tiger-moth’s deep-damask’d wings ;
 And in the midst, ’mong thousand heraldries,
 And twilight saints, and dim emblazonings,
 A shielded scutcheon blushed with blood of queens and
 kings.’

In these lines we have the luxuriance of sensation and of language that mark all the verses of Keats. It is only natural that a poet who could write in this rich fashion of a room should show the same characteristics when he wrote of nature. He does not reason ; he sings, and, in one of his letters, he exclaims : ‘ Oh, for a life of sensations rather than of thoughts.’ He is the poet of the senses, and, when he treats of nature, it is his impressions of sight, sound, and perfume that crowd upon the senses rather than explanations or reflections that appeal to the colder intellect. His ode *To Autumn* opens :—

‘ Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness,
 Close bosom-friend of the maturing sun ;
 Conspiring with him how to load and bless
 With fruit the vines that round the thatch-eaves run ;
 To bend with apples the moss’d cottage trees,
 And fill all fruit with ripeness to the core ;
 To swell the gourd, and plump the hazel shells
 With a sweet kernel ; to set budding more,
 And still more, later flowers for the bees,
 Until they think warm days will never cease ;
 For Summer has o’erbrimmed their clammy cells.

.

And full-grown lambs loud bleat from hilly bourn ;
 Hedge-crickets sing, and now with treble soft
 The redbreast whistles from a garden-croft,
 And gathering swallows twitter in the skies.'

The ode *To a Nightingale*, perhaps the finest lyric in our language, is the greatest of the poet's achievements. We give the last two verses :—

' Thou wast not born for death, immortal Bird !
 No hungry generations tread thee down ;
 The voice I hear this passing night was heard
 In ancient days by emperor and clown :
 Perhaps the self-same song that found a path
 Through the sad heart of Ruth, when, sick for home,
 She stood in tears amid the alien corn ;
 The same that oft-times hath
 Charm'd magic casements, opening on the foam
 Of perilous seas, in faery lands forlorn.

Forlorn ! the very word is like a bell
 To toll me back from thee to my sole self !
 Adieu ! the fancy cannot cheat so well
 As she is fabled to do, deceiving elf.
 Adieu ! adieu ! thy plaintive anthem fades
 Past the near meadows, over the still stream,
 Up the hill-side ; and now 'tis buried deep
 In the next valley-glades :
 Was it a vision, or a waking dream ?
 Fled is that music :—do I wake or sleep ? '

OTHER BOOKS TO READ

Poems. Byron. Golden Treasury Series.
 Selected Poems. Shelley, edited by Thompson. Cambridge University Press.
 Poems. Keats. World's Classics.
 Shelley. Francis Thompson. Burns and Oates.
 Shelley : the Man and the Poet. Clutton Brock. Methuen.
 Records of Shelley and Byron. Trelawney. Routledge.
 Keats. Colvin. English Men of Letters Series.

CHAPTER XX

ESSAYS



THE Romantic Age is one of poetry rather than of prose, and the greatest books are the poems of Wordsworth and Coleridge; but there is also much interesting work by critics and essayists.

Modern journalism began with Defoe, Addison, and Steele. During the years of tumult through which they lived the newspaper made great strides, and before the end of the eighteenth century *The Times*, *The Morning Post*, and *The Morning Chronicle* had all been launched. The beginning of the next century saw a further development of journalism in the foundation of the modern critical review and magazine. Among the first of these to be established were *The Edinburgh Review*, *The Quarterly*, *Blackwood's Magazine*, and *The London Magazine*, and among the men who wrote for *The London Magazine* were Hazlitt, De Quincey, and Lamb. Of these the greatest was Lamb.

Lamb was born in that romantic part of London known as the Temple, in the year 1775. At the early age of seven he became a scholar at Christ's Hospital, where he remained seven years, made the acquaintance and won the affection of his young schoolfellow, Coleridge. At fourteen, he became a clerk, and, at fifty, retired on a com-

fortable pension, granted him by the East India Company, whose service he had entered thirty-three years before. Thenceforward he was free to dream over old plays and old books and to write as many new ones as he pleased. That, in very brief, is the story of Lamb—he was born, bred, and died a Londoner.

Lamb not only lived all his life in London ; he loved London all his life. And just as Wordsworth painted the pleasures of the country in verse that may live for ever, so Lamb depicted the delights of the town in a prose that we cannot think will ever die. In a letter to Wordsworth Lamb writes :—

‘ I have passed all my days in London, until I have formed as many and intense local attachments as any of you mountaineers can have done with dead nature. The lighted shops of the Strand and Fleet Street ; the innumerable trades, tradesmen, and customers, coaches, waggons, playhouses, all the bustle and wickedness round about Covent Garden ; the very women of the Town ; the watchmen, drunken scenes, rattles ; life awake, if you awake, at all hours of the night ; the impossibility of being dull in Fleet Street ; the crowds, the very dirt and mud, the sun shining upon houses and pavements, the print-shops, the old bookstalls, parsons cheapening books, coffee-houses, steams of soups from kitchens, the pantomimes—London itself a pantomime and a masquerade—all these things work themselves into my mind, and feed me, without a power of satiating me. The wonder of these sights impels me into night walks about her crowded streets, and I often shed tears in the motley Strand from fullness of joy at so much life. All these emotions must be strange to you ; so are your rural emotions to me. But consider, what must I have been doing all my life, not to have lent great portions of my heart with usury to such scenes.’

In connection with the above extract, it is interesting to notice that London has been the

birthplace or home of nearly all our great writers. Our two chief literary shrines are London and Stratford-on-Avon, but the latter has only Shakespeare, while there is no telling the tale of London's possessions—Chaucer, Spenser, Milton, Ben Jonson, Pope, Gray, and Blake.

The romantic movement in literature, and the political movements that came to a climax in the French Revolution, are but two aspects of one thing—'the passion for simplification and for a return to nature as a refuge from the artificial complexities of society.' At first literature represents the turmoil of the age; later, when the work of reform was begun, it became the preacher of dreams and ideals, tried to create rather than to destroy, and gave us the poets considered in the last chapter and the prose writers to be considered in this.

A great deal of the new prose arose out of a new interest in old writings, the writings of that earlier period of Romance, the Elizabethan. Its forgotten treasures were unearthed and spread out in rich abundance for the readers of the more popular magazines and reviews. It was partly this interest in the past that produced the *Tales from Shakespeare*, published in 1807, of which Lamb's sister Mary wrote the comedies, while he told the tragedies.

But Lamb's greatest work is the *Essays of Elia*, the delight of all readers for all time; it is the most human and the most engaging book ever written. To read it is to listen to the charming gossip of its writer. He begins in the first essay, *The South-Sea House*, by telling of his life at the office, amusing us with quaint pictures of his fellow-clerks; in *Christ's Hospital Five-and-thirty Years Ago* he talks of his schooldays and his boy friend

Coleridge. Listen to this, as Lamb draws his chair up closer and confides in you by his fireside :—

‘ I told how good she was to all her grandchildren, having us to the great house in the holidays, where I in particular used to spend many hours by myself, in gazing upon the old busts of the twelve Cæsars, that had been emperors of Rome, till the old marble heads would seem to live again, or I to be turned into marble with them ; how I never could be tired with roaming about that huge mansion with its vast empty rooms, with their worn-out hangings, fluttering tapestry, and carved oak panels, with the gilding almost rubbed out ; sometimes in the spacious old-fashioned gardens, which I had almost to myself, unless when now and then a solitary gardening man would cross me ; and how the nectarines and peaches hung upon the walls, without my even offering to pluck them, because they were forbidden fruit, unless now and then—and because I had more pleasure in strolling about among the old melancholy-looking yew-trees or the firs, and picking up the red berries and the fir-apples, which were good for nothing but to look at, or in lying about upon the fresh grass with all the fine garden smells around me, or basking in the orangery, till I could almost fancy myself ripening too along with the oranges and the limes in that grateful warmth, or in watching the dace that darted to and fro in the fish-pond at the bottom of the garden, with here and there a great sulky pike hanging midway down the water in silent state, as if it mocked at their impertinent friskings. I had more pleasure in these busy-idle diversions than in all the sweet flavours of peaches, nectarines, oranges, and such-like common baits of children.’

In these essays we see Lamb in all his moods. In the *Dream-Children*, from which the previous quotation is taken, we have one extreme—deep pathos ; in the one that follows, from the *Dissertation on Roast Pig*, we have the other extreme—whimsical humour :—

‘ The art of roasting, or rather broiling (which I take to

be the elder brother) was accidentally discovered in the manner following. The swine-herd, Ho-ti, having gone out into the woods one morning, as his manner was, to collect mast for his hogs, left his cottage in the care of his eldest son Bo-bo, a great lubberly boy, who being fond of playing with fire, as youngsters of his age commonly are, let some sparks escape into a bundle of straw, which kindling quickly, spread the conflagration over every part of their poor mansion, till it was reduced to ashes. Together with the cottage (a sorry antediluvian makeshift of a building, you may think it), what was of much more importance, a fine litter of new-farrowed pigs, no less than nine in number, perished. China pigs have been esteemed a luxury all over the East, from the remotest periods that we read of. Bo-bo was in the utmost consternation, as you may think ; not so much for the sake of the tenement, which his father and he could easily build up again with a few dry branches, and the labour of an hour or two, at any time, as for the loss of the pigs. While he was thinking what he should say to his father, and wringing his hands over the smoking remnants of one of those untimely sufferers, an odour assailed his nostrils, unlike any scent which he had before experienced. What could it proceed from ?—not from the burnt cottage—he had smelt that smell before—indeed this was by no means the first accident of the kind which had occurred through the negligence of this unlucky young firebrand. Much less did it resemble that of any known herb, weed, or flower. A premonitory moistening at the same time overflowed his nether lip. He knew not what to think. He next stooped down to feel the pig, if there were any signs of life in it. He burnt his fingers, and to cool them he applied them in his booby fashion to his mouth. Some of the crumbs of the scorched skin had come away with his fingers, and for the first time in his life (in the world's life, indeed, for before him no man had known it) he tasted—*cracking!* Again he felt and fumbled at the pig. It did not burn him so much now, still he licked his fingers from a sort of habit. The truth at length broke into his slow understanding, that it was the pig that smelt so, and the pig that tasted so delicious ; and surrendering himself up to the new-born pleasure, he fell to tearing up whole handfuls of the

scorched skin with the flesh next it, and was cramming it down his throat in his beastly fashion, when his sire entered amid the smoking rafters, armed with retributory cudgel, and finding how affairs stood, began to rain blows upon the young rogue's shoulders, as thick as hailstones, which Bo-bo heeded not any more than if they had been flies. The tickling pleasure, which he experienced in his lower regions, had rendered him quite callous to any inconveniences he might feel in those remote quarters. His father might lay on, but he could not beat him from his pig, till he had fairly made an end of it, when, becoming a little more sensible of his situation, something like the following dialogue ensued :—

“ You graceless whelp, what have you got there devouring ? Is it not enough that you have burnt me down three houses with your dog's tricks, and be hanged to you ! but you must be eating fire, and I know not what—what have you got there, I say ? ”

“ O father, the pig, the pig ! do come and taste how nice the burnt pig eats.”

‘ The ears of Ho-ti tingled with horror. He cursed his son, and he cursed himself that ever he should beget a son that should eat burnt pig.

‘ Bo-bo, whose scent was wonderfully sharpened since morning, soon raked out another pig, and fairly rending it asunder, thrust the lesser half by main force into the fists of Ho-ti, still shouting out, “ Eat, eat, eat the burnt pig, father, only taste—O Lord ! ”—with such-like barbarous ejaculations, cramming all the while as if he would choke.

‘ Ho-ti trembled in every joint while he grasped the abominable thing, wavering whether he should not put his son to death for an unnatural young monster, when the crackling scorching his fingers, as it had done his son's, and applying the same remedy to them, he in his turn tasted some of its flavour, which, make what sour mouths he would for a pretence, proved not altogether displeasing to him. In conclusion (for the manuscript here is a little tedious), both father and son fairly set down to the mess, and never left off till they had despatched all that remained of the litter.

‘ Bo-bo was strictly enjoined not to let the secret escape,

for the neighbours would certainly have stoned them for a couple of abominable wretches, who could think of improving upon the good meat which God had sent them. Nevertheless, strange stories got about. It was observed that Ho-ti's cottage was burnt down now more frequently than ever. Nothing but fires from this time forward. Some would break out in broad day, others in the night-time. As often as the sow farrowed, so sure was the house of Ho-ti to be in a blaze ; and Ho-ti himself, which was the more remarkable, instead of chastising his son, seemed to grow more indulgent to him than ever. At length they were watched, the terrible mystery discovered, and father and son summoned to take their trial at Peking, then an inconsiderable assize town. Evidence was given, the obnoxious food itself produced in court, and verdict about to be pronounced, when the foreman of the jury begged that some of the burnt pig, of which the culprits stood accused, might be handed into the box. He handled it, and they all handled it ; and burning their fingers, as Bo-bo and his father had done before them, and nature prompting to each of them the same remedy, against the face of all the facts, and the clearest charge which judge had ever given—to the surprise of the whole court, townsfolk, strangers, reporters, and all present—without leaving the box, or any manner of consultation whatever, they brought in a simultaneous verdict of Not Guilty.

‘ The judge, who was a shrewd fellow, winked at the manifest iniquity of the decision : and when the court was dismissed, went privily and bought up all the pigs that could be had for love or money. In a few days his lordship's town-house was observed to be on fire. The thing took wing, and now there was nothing to be seen but fires in every direction. Fuel and pigs grew enormously dear all over the district. The insurance offices one and all shut up shop. People built slighter and slighter every day, until it was feared that the very science of architecture would in no long time be lost to the world. Thus this custom of firing houses continued, till in process of time, says my manuscript, a sage arose, like our Locke, who made a discovery that the flesh of swine, or indeed of any other animal, might be cooked (burnt, as they called it) without the necessity of

consuming a whole house to dress it. Then first began the rude form of a gridiron. Roasting by the string or spit came in a century or two later, I forget in whose dynasty. By such slow degrees, concludes the manuscript, do the most useful, and seemingly the most obvious, arts make their way among mankind.

‘Without placing too implicit faith in the account above given, it must be agreed that if a worthy pretext for so dangerous an experiment as setting houses on fire (especially in these days) could be assigned in favour of any culinary object, that pretext and excuse might be found in Roast Pig.’

COLERIDGE AND HAZLITT

Lamb and his friends Coleridge and Hazlitt belong to the Golden Age of English criticism. Before their time criticism proper—that is, the art of judging things by principles, and not by mere personal likes and dislikes—scarcely existed. The critic needs two things—knowledge and sympathy, and Lamb and his friends had rich stores of the former and were richly endowed with the latter. The critics not only concerned themselves with literature, but also with painting and the theatre; they founded the modern school, of art and dramatic critics, that occupies so much space in all the best of our newspapers and journals to-day. Both Coleridge and Hazlitt gave public lectures on Shakespeare and on poetry which were afterwards published in book form.

The limited size of this book prevents long quotations from the works of either, and we shall have to be content here with two extracts from Hazlitt. He is a very vigorous critic; of a combative nature, he seems to have quarrelled with everybody, even with the gentle Lamb. But the essays of this born fighter should be read for

the brilliance of their criticism. Speaking of the English poets, he says :—

‘Poetry is the language of the imagination and the passions. It relates to whatever gives immediate pleasure or pain to the human mind. It comes home to the bosoms and businesses of men ; for nothing but what comes home to them in the most general and intelligible shape can be a subject for poetry. Poetry is the universal language which the heart holds with nature and itself. It is not a mere frivolous accomplishment (as some persons have been led to imagine), the trifling amusement of a few idle readers or leisure hours ; it has been the study and delight of mankind of all ages.

‘Poetry is not a branch of authorship ; it is the stuff of which our life is made.’

Then hear what he has to say of Coleridge :—

‘I may say of him here, that he is the only person I ever met who answered to the idea of a man of genius. He is the only person from whom I ever learnt anything. There is only one thing he could learn from me in return, but that he has not. He was the first poet I ever knew. His genius at that time had angelic wings, and fed on manna. He talked on for ever ; and you wished him to talk on for ever. His thoughts did not seem to come with labour and effort ; but as if borne on the gusts of genius, as if the wings of his imagination lifted him from off his feet. His voice rolled on the ear like the pealing organ, and its sound alone was the music of thought. His mind was clothed with wings ; and raised on them, he lifted philosophy to heaven. In his descriptions, you then saw the progress of human happiness and liberty in bright and never-ending succession, like the steps of Jacob’s ladder, with airy shapes ascending and descending, and with the voice of God at the top of the ladder. And shall I, who heard him then, listen to him now ?—Not I ! That spell is broke ; that time is gone for ever, that voice is heard no more : but still the recollection comes rushing by with thoughts of long-past years, and rings in my ears with never-dying sound.’

It is difficult to bring this chapter to a close, for nothing has been said of De Quincey and his strangely fascinating book, *Confessions of an Opium-Eater*, written in a kind of prose that is almost poetry; of Walter Savage Landor and his *Imaginary Conversations*, in which the speakers, characters taken from history, ancient and modern—Hannibal, Lady Godiva, Anne Boleyn, and Cromwell, to mention a few—give us their ideas on life.

All these and many other writers offer an uninterrupted and varied feast of good things; the reader has but to open the door and sit down at the table.

OTHER BOOKS TO READ

Tales from Shakespeare. Lamb.

Essays of Elia. Lamb. Everyman's Library.

Biographia Literaria. Coleridge. Everyman's Library.

Essays. Hazlitt. Volumes in World's Classics.

Confessions of an Opium-Eater. De Quincey. Everyman's Library.

Imaginary Conversations. Landor. World's Classics.

Lamb. E. V. Lucas. Methuen.

CHAPTER XXI

NOVELS



THE most popular form of literature to-day is the novel; into this mould are the creations of the imagination now most frequently poured. Byron flung his discontent, Shelley his visions, into verse; the modern thinker, revolutionary, or dreamer, writes novels.

There was, perhaps, never a time when men did not tell stories. To discover the origin of the narrative element we should have to go back a long way, for there was, doubtless, story-telling even in the time of the cave-men. In our search for beginnings it will be sufficient to hark back to the stories of certain Elizabethan writers, like Sidney and Lyly. These stories are made up of a series of incidents, and no attempt was made to portray character. The dramatists, on the other hand, especially Shakespeare, were as much concerned with character as incident, and the plays of Shakespeare reveal an understanding of the hidden springs of human conduct not to be found elsewhere. Under these circumstances the drama made a greater appeal to human hearts and minds, and story-writing soon died out. It was not till the books of Bunyan appeared that narrative-writing again became popular.

Bunyan was followed by the long, detailed narratives, such as *Robinson Crusoe* and *Gulliver's*

Travels, and the character sketches of Addison and Steele; and these in turn were followed by the modern novel with its double interest of action and motive. Thus, when the drama passed from popular favour, the novel stepped in and took its place, so that, in the latter part of the eighteenth century, the story was, to the general public, what the theatre had been to earlier generations.

It is interesting to note, not only the growth of the novel in form, as indicated above, but also the change in the stuff of which it is made. The Elizabethan romances told of aristocrats and of shepherds. Defoe drew cut-throats and adventurers. With the eighteenth-century writers the novel takes as its subject the daily life of ordinary men and women, the poor as well as the rich, the high as well as the low.

The earlier novelists—Richardson, Fielding, Smollett, and Sterne—produced a huge mass of fiction of real excellence, but its excellence is not for the young. In fact, there are probably few adults who could read their long-winded books from end to end without a great effort. The serious student of literature must make their acquaintance, and will certainly find much pleasure in their company, but, for the mass of the people, writings of a later date are to be preferred as examples of the art of the novelist.

JANE AUSTEN

In 1811 appeared *Sense and Sensibility*, which Jane Austen had written some years before, in 1786. It was followed during the next few years by five other novels, *Pride and Prejudice*, *Mansfield Park*, *Emma*, *Northanger Abbey*, and *Persuasion*. These six fascinating books reveal their author as

one of the finest artists in English fiction. Although she wrote at the same time as Wordsworth and Coleridge, there is no reflection in her work of the stirring events of the time. The great river of life sweeps by this daughter of a clergyman, living in the quiet backwater of Steventon, a little town in Hampshire, and seems never to affect the course of her own life. Her plots are very slender. The tattle of the tea-table, a ball, amateur theatricals, a journey to Bath—these are her materials. She takes the life of a middle-class family of the southern counties, and within this small circle she paints the men and women with such clearness that we feel we really know them. Thus she draws for us one type of the domestic life of the period.

It is in the creation of characters, especially of women, that Jane Austen reaches the front rank in English fiction. She is the perfect artist. The sphere of her work was not extensive, but within its narrow limits she worked with the skill of a portrait painter. She compares her work to 'two inches of ivory' on which she worked with a fine brush.

Her greatest gift was her gentle humour and delicate irony. She smiles at human weakness, but she smiles kindly, and passes on. Her favourite portrait of this kind is the male egoist; she loves to portray a man puffed up with pride. In her scorn of cant and hypocrisy the delicate sarcasm becomes very telling satire.

Not every reader, however, is at first attracted by her delightful miniatures. They are not exactly exciting, delightful as they are. Yet the youngest student should certainly read one of them, say *Pride and Prejudice*, and try to catch something of the spirit of her delicate art. Scott and

Macaulay praised her unreservedly ; Charlotte Brontë, another famous woman novelist, says what has to be said on the other side :—

‘ She does her business of delineating the surface of the lives of genteel English people curiously well. . . . She ruffles her reader by nothing vehement, disturbs him by nothing profound. The passions are perfectly unknown to her ; she rejects even a speaking acquaintance with that stormy sisterhood. . . . Her business is not half so much with the human heart as with the human eyes, mouth, hands, and feet. What sees keenly, speaks aptly, moves flexibly, it suits her to study ; but what throbs fast and full, though hidden, what the blood rushes through, what is the unseen seat of life and the sentient target of death—this Miss Austen ignores. Jane Austen was a complete and most sensible lady, but a very incomplete and rather insensible (not senseless) woman. If this is heresy, I cannot help it.’

As an example of her skill in portrait painting we must be content with the following extract from *Pride and Prejudice* which describes how the Rev. Mr. Collins proposed to Miss Elizabeth. The reader should remember that Jane Austen at this time was not yet one-and-twenty—

‘ Mrs. Bennett and Kitty walked off, and as soon as they were gone, Mr. Collins began :—

“ ‘ Believe me, my dear Miss Elizabeth, that your modesty, so far from doing you any disservice, rather adds to your other perfections. You would have been less amiable in my eyes had there not been this little unwillingness ; but allow me to assure you, that I have your respected mother’s permission for this address. You can hardly doubt the purport of my discourse, however your natural delicacy may lead you to dissemble ; my attentions have been too marked to be mistaken. Almost as soon as I entered the house, I singled you out as the companion of my future life. But before I am run away with by my feelings on this subject, perhaps it would be advisable for me to state my reasons for

marrying—and, moreover, for coming into Hertfordshire with the design of selecting a wife, as I certainly did.”

‘The idea of Mr. Collins, with all his solemn composure, being run away with by his feelings, made Elizabeth so near laughing, that she could not use the short pause he allowed in any attempt to stop him farther, and he continued :—

“My reasons for marrying are, that I think it a right thing for every clergyman in easy circumstances (like myself) to set the example of matrimony in his parish ; secondly, I am convinced it will add very greatly to my happiness ; and thirdly—which perhaps I ought to have mentioned earlier—that it is the particular advice and recommendation of the very noble lady whom I have the honour of calling patroness. Twice has she condescended to give me her opinion (unasked too !) on this subject ; and it was but the very Saturday night before I left Hunsford—between our pools at quadrille, while Mrs. Jenkinson was arranging Miss De Bourgh’s footstool—that she said, ‘ Mr. Collins, you must marry. A clergyman like you must marry. Choose properly—choose a gentlewoman for *my* sake ; and for your *own*, let her be an active, useful sort of person, not brought up high, but able to make a small income go a good way. This is my advice. Find such a woman as soon as you can, bring her to Hunsford, and I will visit her.’ Allow me, by the way, to observe, my fair cousin, that I do not reckon the notice and kindness of Lady Catherine de Bourgh, as among the least of the advantages in my power to offer. You will find her manners beyond anything I can describe ; and your wit and vivacity, I think, must be acceptable to her, especially when tempered with the silence and respect which her rank will inevitably excite. Thus much for my general intention in favour of matrimony ; it remains to be told why my views were directed to Longbourn instead of my own neighbourhood, where I assure you there are many amiable young women. But the fact is, as I am to inherit this estate after the death of your honoured father (who, however, may live many years longer), I could not satisfy myself without resolving to choose a wife from among his daughters, that the loss to them might be as little as possible, when the melancholy event takes place—which, however,

as I have already said, may not be for several years. This has been my motive, my fair cousin, and I flatter myself it will not sink me in your esteem. And now nothing remains for me but to assure you in the most animated language of the violence of my affection. To fortune, I am perfectly indifferent, and shall make no demand of that nature on your father, since I am well aware that it could not be complied with ; and that one thousand pounds in the 4 per cents., which will not be yours till after your mother's decease, is all that you may ever be entitled to. On that head, therefore, I shall be uniformly silent ; and you may assure yourself that no ungenerous reproach shall ever pass my lips when we are married."

"It was absolutely necessary to interrupt him now.

" "You are too hasty, sir," she cried. "You forget that I have made no answer. Let me do it without further loss of time. Accept my thanks for the compliment you are paying me. I am very sensible of the honour of your proposals, but it is impossible for me to do otherwise than decline them."

" "I am not now to learn," replied Mr. Collins, with a formal wave of the hand, "that it is usual with young ladies to reject the addresses of the man whom they secretly mean to accept, when he first applies for their favour ; and that sometimes the refusal is repeated a second or even a third time. I am therefore by no means discouraged by what you have just said, and shall hope to lead you to the altar ere long."

" "Upon my word, sir," cried Elizabeth, "your hope is rather an extraordinary one after my declaration. I do assure you that I am not one of those young ladies (if such young ladies there are) who are so daring as to risk their happiness on the chance of being asked a second time. I am perfectly serious in my refusal. You could not make *me* happy, and I am convinced that I am the last woman in the world who would make *you* so. Nay, were your friend Lady Catherine to know me, I am persuaded she would find me in every respect ill-qualified for the situation."

" "Were it certain that Lady Catherine would think so," said Mr. Collins very gravely—"but I cannot imagine

that her ladyship would at all disapprove of you. And you may be certain that when I have the honour of seeing her again, I shall speak in the highest terms of your modesty, economy, and other amiable qualifications.”

WALTER SCOTT

Scott created the historical novel, as Jane Austen had invented the novel of manner. There is no need to direct a reader to the novels of Scott. Who has not gone for wonder and delight to the stories of this supreme teller of tales, whether in prose or in verse—for he was also a poet? Indeed, in his poetry and prose the whole romantic movement culminates.

Scott was writing poetry at the same time as Wordsworth and Coleridge, but while their work appealed only to a small section of the people, his verse stories were eagerly read by the nation at large. After these his novels swept the land in a storm of enthusiasm.

Scott was born at Edinburgh in 1771. As a boy he loved romantic stories, and his favourite book was Percy's *Reliques*. He became a lawyer, but his heart was in the books of ballads and songs, not in the musty tomes of law, and he learned German that he might study ballads in that language. He was for ever collecting old ballads, which he finally published, together with some of his own, in the *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border*.

His first poem was *The Lay of the Last Minstrel*, a story of Border feud and chivalry. It is written as if told by an old minstrel, and gives a vivid picture of Lowland life and mediæval times. The story took Scotland and England by storm, as did also *Marmion*, with its brilliant description of the

battle of Flodden, and *The Lady of the Lake*, which followed. The latter romance contains some beautiful pictures of Highland scenery; it led, and still leads, many a tourist to the Trossachs.

Scott was so popular with the public that he became a rich man, abandoned law, and entered into a secret partnership with the printing house of James Ballantyne. He built the beautiful house of Abbotsford on the Tweed, where he settled. Although his romances in verse had been so wonderfully successful, the publication of Byron's *Childe Harold* revealed a dangerous rival in that field, and Scott, shrewdly judging his own limited power as a poet, forsook verse, and with *Waverley* entered upon a long and brilliant career as a romantic novelist.

This was not a leap from verse to prose so much as a natural growth. Scott's poems were stories full of action; amid all their many and varied incidents his interest in character slowly developed. So the transition to prose as the medium for the combining of the historical story and the tale of manners was a natural one.

Moreover, the tales of Maria Edgeworth, with their vivid pictures of the characters and manners of the Irish people, suggested to Scott the possibility of his doing something the same for Scotland. He therefore set to work on a manuscript, begun many years before and forgotten. This he soon completed, and in 1814 appeared, anonymously, *Waverley*, the first of a long series of novels.

In 1826 the house of Ballantyne failed, bringing Scott to ruin. In disaster the novelist revealed a great and vigorous character; he assumed personal liability for the firm's debts, and set to work to satisfy all the creditors. By herculean efforts he had actually paid the greater part of

them, when he broke down under the pressure and died in 1832.

THE NOVELS

Scott created the historical form, and lifted the English novel to its greatest height. Not only England, but Europe, fell beneath the wizard's spell. In France he prepared the way for Victor Hugo and Dumas. He takes us back to the past and spreads the pageant of history before our eyes. In the following novels is all Scottish history: *Waverley*, *Guy Mannering*, *The Antiquary*, *Old Mortality*, *Rob Roy*, *The Heart of Midlothian*, *The Monastery*, *The Abbot*, *The Legend of Montrose*, *The Fair Maid of Perth*, *The Bride of Lammermoor*.

The fortunes of the Young Pretender in 1745 fill *Waverley*; in *Old Mortality* it is the Covenanters' Rebellion; in *The Abbot*, Mary Queen of Scots. To know Scotland and the Scots one must read these stories of their history.

With *Ivanhoe* Scott turns to English history and the Middle Ages. In *Kenilworth* we follow the Elizabethan court. *The Fortunes of Nigel* is the story of James I. *Woodstock* is of the period of the Civil War, while *Peveril of the Peak* takes us to the court of Charles II.

Foreign scenes form the background of *The Talisman* and *Quentin Durward*, the latter giving us a fine portrait of Louis XI.

It would be well to begin with one novel from each group, say *Old Mortality*—perhaps the greatest of all his novels—*Kenilworth*, and *The Talisman*.

There are passages that may weary, but, on the whole, he is an unfortunate reader who, after the perusal of, say, only these three books, cannot agree with Carlyle when he says: 'The historical

novels have taught all men this truth, which looks like a truism, and yet was so good as unknown to writers of history and others till so taught : that the bygone ages of the world were actually filled by living men, not by protocols, state papers, controversies, and abstractions of men.'

Go to that world where move king, knight, and crofter ; pass with them through cathedral and dungeon, over the purple hills and by the lonely lake ; and in the end you will say with Victor Hugo that the reader becomes to the novelist what the autumn leaf is to the wind.

OTHER BOOKS TO READ

Jane Austen's and Walter Scott's Novels. Everyman's Library or World's Classics.

Life of Scott. Lockhart. Everyman's Library.

CHAPTER XXII

VICTORIAN POETS



THE death of Scott in 1832 may be taken as marking the close of the Age of Romance and the beginning of the Victorian Age, though the two periods cannot be rigidly divided, as they merge gradually the one into the other. Wordsworth still lived on, but all his fire was spent; he was no longer anything but an official Laureate. Byron, Shelley, and Keats were all dead. We stand on the threshold of yet another epoch.

The Victorian Age is an age of astounding changes, political, social, and intellectual, in which life moves forward at an alarming rate. Reflecting the hurrying development of the period is a vast and varied literature. Indeed its diversity is bewildering; books tumble from the Press in a never-ceasing torrent.

In politics the change may be described as the progress of democracy. The Reform Bill of 1832 had given the vote to the middle classes; but the cry was still for further extension of the franchise, and not till the Reform Bills of 1867 and 1884 had enfranchised the industrial and agricultural populations, could the Government be considered at all democratic. The country was now, theoretically, ruled by the representatives of the people in the House of Commons.

A democratic spirit was abroad and old prejudices were crumbling. Slaves had been freed, yet industrial slavery remained, and the conditions in many a factory were little better than those on the African coast, where men had been bought and sold. Brotherhood was the watchword of the reformer, and there was a growing sympathy between man and man. This sympathy is written large across the books of the time. Hood's *Song of a Shirt* wakened the consciences of men, and Mrs. Browning's *Song of the Children* strengthened the hand of Lord Shaftesbury in his fight for the Factory Acts. The romantics had studied nature and the past; the Victorian writers found their subjects in the daily lives of the men and women with whom they came in contact. Much of the newly awakened sympathy with the lowly and much of the preaching which that sympathy brought forth found its expression in the novel. Thus Charles Kingsley, Charles Reade, and Mrs. Gaskell all made social studies, while Walter Besant took his readers to the East End of London.

Further, a rapid series of marvellous inventions altered the face of the land. The steamboat and the railway, the telegraph, the telephone, and electric power—all these changed the spirit of the people, indeed of the whole world, and in its turn they affected literature.

Alongside these remarkable inventions went the discoveries of the men of science. Darwin's book, *The Origin of Species* (1859), completely revolutionised men's ideas of the universe and altered their ways of thinking. This book sets out the doctrine of evolution, a theory which declares that in all forms life is but the continual struggle forward of development, with the survival only of

the fittest. This evolutionary theory, continued in Darwin's *Descent of Man*, came into conflict with old faiths, and men were troubled to reconcile what appeared to be the conflicting doctrines of science and religion. Their doubts and their mental and spiritual struggles are all set forth in the literature of the period.

The two chief poets of the age are Alfred Tennyson and Robert Browning.

LORD TENNYSON

Alfred Tennyson was born in the rectory at Somersby, Lincolnshire, in 1809. At Cambridge, where he was one of a brilliant circle, he began writing poetry. He published a volume of poems soon after leaving Cambridge, but it was the *Poems*, published in 1842, which established him as the first poet of the day. One of these (see p. 217), *Break, break, break*, tells of Tennyson's sorrow at the loss of his friend Arthur Hallam, who died at Vienna while travelling Europe with his father. This profound grief finds fuller expression in that wonderful elegy, *In Memoriam*, the work of sixteen years, which appeared in 1850. In the same year Tennyson was appointed Poet Laureate in succession to Wordsworth. An ardent, though insular patriot, he wrote many a stirring ballad in this office—*The Ballad of the Fleet*, *The Charge of the Light Brigade*, and *The Revenge*, for examples.

Tennyson now settled at Farringford, near Freshwater, in the Isle of Wight, where he wrote *Maud* and *The Idylls of the King*. Raised to the peerage, he came to live at Aldworth, near Haslemere, in Surrey, where he died in 1892. He was buried in Westminster Abbey.

Tennyson is one of the greatest poetic artists in

our literature. His vision of beauty is suggested in exquisite melody with a mastery of language. Phrases, sometimes simple, often gorgeous, haunt the memory long after the poem is read. He vies with Keats in his power to paint a richly coloured picture, and looks at nature through the eyes of an artist. He tells us :—

‘ There was a period of my life when, as an artist, Turner, for instance, takes rough sketches of landskip, etc., in order to work them eventually into some great picture, so I was in the habit of chronicling in four or five lines or more whatever might strike me as picturesque in nature. I never put these down ; many and many a line has gone away on the north wind, but some remain, e.g. :

“ A full sea glazed with muffled moonlight.”

When some emotion crystallises in one of these nature images we get such a poem as—

‘ Break, break, break,
On thy cold grey stones, O Sea !
And I would that my tongue could utter
The thoughts that arise in me.

O well for the fisherman’s boy,
That he shouts with his sister at play !
O well for the sailor lad,
That he sings in his boat on the bay !

And the stately ships go on
To their haven under the hill ;
But O for the touch of a vanish’d hand,
And the sound of a voice that is still !

Break, break, break,
At the foot of thy crags, O Sea !
But the tender grace of a day that is dead
Will never come back to me.’

But it is as the voice of Victorian England that Tennyson catches our ear. During his long life

he recorded in his popular poetry the restless spirit of the times. An aristocrat and a lover of law and order, he nevertheless tried to understand everyday affairs and ordinary people. Something of a recluse, he looked down upon the fever and ferment of the hurrying century, as one might watch a play. Thus in his *Locksley Hall* he muses on social conditions, commerce, and science :—

‘ For I dipt into the future, far as human eye could see,
Saw the Vision of the world, and all the wonder that
would be ;

Saw the heavens fill with commerce, argosies of magic
sails,
Pilots of the purple twilight, dropping down with costly
bales ;

Heard the heavens fill with shouting, and there rain’d a
ghastly dew
From the nations’ airy navies grappling in the central
blue ;

Far along the world-wide whisper of the south-wind
rushing warm,
With the standards of the peoples plunging thro’ the
thunderstorm ;

Till the war-drum throb’d no longer, and the battle-
flags were furl’d
In the Parliament of man, the Federation of the world.’

The Princess is a long poem dealing with women’s rights ; but the political stuff is bepearled with some amazing songs of which we can quote but one :—

‘ The splendour falls on castle walls
And snowy summits old in story :
The long light shakes across the lakes,
And the wild cataract leaps in glory.
Blow, bugle, blow, set the wild echoes flying,
Blow, bugle ; answer, echoes, dying, dying, dying.

O hark, O hear ! how thin and clear,
And thinner, clearer, farther going !
O sweet and far from cliff and scar
The horns of Elfland faintly blowing !
Blow, let us hear the purple glens replying :
Blow, bugle ; answer, echoes, dying, dying, dying.

O love, they die in yon rich sky,
They faint on hill or field or river :
Our echoes roll from soul to soul,
And grow for ever and for ever.
Blow, bugle, blow, set the wild echoes flying,
And answer, echoes, answer, dying, dying, dying.

But the most wonderful of all Tennyson's poems is that supreme elegy, *In Memoriam*. In the poet's shaken faith we see the nation's crumbling beliefs. The poet's personal sorrow at the loss of his friend becomes the cry of humanity in its every desolation. There must be golden streets up yonder, cry a thousand stricken hearts. The night passes ; doubt goes ; in a dawn of optimism the poet and the nation are convinced of immortality and feel the presence of God :—

' Strong Son of God, immortal Love,
Whom we, that have not seen thy face,
By faith, and faith alone, embrace,
Believing where we cannot prove ;

Thine are these orbs of light and shade ;
Thou madest Life in man and brute ;
Thou madest Death ; and lo, thy foot
Is on the skull which thou hast made.

Thou wilt not leave us in the dust :
Thou madest man, he knows not why ;
He thinks he was not made to die ;
And thou hast made him : thou art just.

Thou seemest human and divine ;
The highest, holiest manhood, thou ;
Our wills are ours, we know not how ;
Our wills are ours, to make them thine.'

His other great work is *The Idylls of the King*, built on the Celtic legends of King Arthur and his knights of the Round Table, as gathered in Malory's *Morte d'Arthur*. The poet's plan was an epic ; but he produced rather a succession of poems, each a separate episode or idyll, linked by the shining personality of Arthur. There is also an allegory showing 'the sense at war with the soul'—that is, the struggle between the animal and spiritual natures of man. Arthur gathers round him—

' A glorious company, the flower of men,
To serve as model for the mighty world,
And be the fair beginning of a time.
I made them lay their hands in mine and swear
To reverence the King, as if he were
Their conscience, and their conscience as their King,
To break the heathen and uphold the Christ,
To ride abroad redressing human wrongs,
To speak no slander, no, nor listen to it,
To honour his own word as if his God's,
To lead sweet lives in purest chastity,
To love one maiden only, cleave to her,
And worship her by years of noble deeds.'

But the kingdom of chivalry perishes ; the knights desert their King ; his Queen, Guinevere, fails him ; and Modred, the traitor, takes up arms against him. And so—

' The old order changeth, yielding place to new,
And God fulfils Himself in many ways.
Lest one good custom should corrupt the world.
Comfort thyself : what comfort is in me ?

I have lived my life, and that which I have done
May He within Himself make pure ! but thou,
If thou shouldst never see my face again,
Pray for my soul. More things are wrought by prayer
Than this world dreams of. Wherefore let thy voice
Rise like a fountain for me night and day.
For what are men better than sheep or goats
That nourish a blind life within the brain,
If knowing God, they lift not hands of prayer
Both for themselves and those who call them friend ?
For so the whole round earth is every way
Bound by gold chains about the feet of God.'

ROBERT BROWNING

Tennyson is first and foremost an artist ; Browning is a philosopher and teacher. His poetry has not the melody, grace, and sweetness of Tennyson's work ; it is vigorous and rugged ; but it has much strength and beauty. With a cry of courage upon his lips and an unquenchable optimism in his heart, Browning plunges into the impenetrable thickets of life, calling upon the pessimist to leave his shadows, to take courage, to challenge the devil and to fight. It was long before the world would listen, longer still before it would follow where he called.

Browning takes all human experience for his material. His are not pretty poems ; they are of life's agonies, its disappointment, disillusion, dismay. Great is his gallery of portraits. Landor says :—

' Since Chaucer was alive and hale,
No man hath walked along our road with step
So active, so inquiring eye, or tongue
So varied in discourse.'

When towards the end of his life he was asked if he were a Christian, a thundered ' No ' came back. But Browning was more Christian than he

knew. He believed in what Stevenson called 'the ultimate decency of things.' His was a robust faith that looked life in the eyes. He fought on with cheerful courage, and, in the end, the world recognised him and followed. In the words of his first poem :—

‘ I go to prove my soul !
I see my way as birds their trackless way.
I shall arrive ! what time, what circuit first,
I ask not : but unless God sends His hail
Or blinding fireballs, sleet or stifling snow,
In some time, His good time, I shall arrive.
He guides me and the bird. In His good time.’

To-day he has arrived. For long he was neglected because of the obscurity of his style. Tennyson declared that of the poem, *Sordello*, he understood only the first and last lines, and they were both lies. There is something to be said for the charge. Intellect, heart, and imagination chase each other across his pages with bewildering swiftness. He has much to say ; to him the manner does not matter. He follows mental trains at a pace his reader cannot keep, mustering details dug from the inexhaustible depths of his varied knowledge, and huddling them in the stream of a lively talk.

Browning was born in London in 1812. Like Tennyson, he devoted the whole of his life to poetry, his first poems appearing in 1833 and his last volume on the very day of his death in 1889.

In *Pauline*, his first book, he pays tribute to Shelley :—

‘ Sun-treader, life and light be thine for ever !
Thou art gone from us ; years go by and spring
Gladdens, and the young earth is beautiful,
Yet thy song comes not, other bards arise,
But none like thee.’

This was followed by *Paracelsus* and a play, *Strafford*, written for the famous actor, Macready. It was for Macready's son that Browning wrote that charming badinage, *The Pied Piper of Hamelin*.

With *Bells and Pomegranates* he commences the series of dramatic poems the first of which was *Pippa Passes*, a powerful and graceful poem. Pippa, the little Italian silk-weaver, goes out to enjoy her one holiday of the year. She imagines herself, in turn, in the places of the famous people whose houses she passes singing :—

‘ The year ’s at the spring,
And day ’s at the morn ;
Morning ’s at seven ;
The hill-side ’s dew-pearled ;
The lark ’s on the wing ;
The snail ’s on the thorn ;
God ’s in His heaven ;
All ’s right with the world ! ’

The sound of the silver rain of this falling song comes to the ear of those who are hesitating between good and evil. Good prevails, and Pippa returns home at night, the unknowing messenger of Heaven.

After the appearance of *Bells and Pomegranates*, Browning married Elizabeth Barrett, who, as a poet, was better known than her husband. They made their home in Italy for fifteen years, until, on the death of his wife, he returned to England. These Italian years are the period of his best work, *Men and Women*, *Dramatis Personæ*, and *Dramatic Idyls*. These poems show intense dramatic power. ‘ My stress,’ says Browning, ‘ lay upon the development of the soul. Little else is worth studying.’ In speeches or dramatic lyrics he gives soul studies ; he does not express

his own emotions, but makes the characters speak, explain their actions, and reveal the motives that lie behind them. Thus *Abt Vogler* reveals the musician's soul ; *Muleykeh* gives the soul of an Arab ; *Fra Lippo Lippi* the soul of the painter.

In his masterpiece, *The Ring and the Book*, the longest poem written in the English language, there is no plot. In a succession of speeches the different actors tell their story of a murder and reveal at the same time their own characters. The most interesting of the actors are Count Guido, the murderer ; Caponsacchi, a young priest, Pompilia, and the Pope.

These dramatic monologues are a far cry from the simple freshness of—

‘ Oh, to be in England now that April ’s there,
And whoever wakes in England sees, some morning,
unaware,
That the lowest boughs and the brushwood sheaf
Round the elm-tree bole are in tiny leaf,
While the chaffinch sings on the orchard bough
In England—now !

And after April, when May follows,
And the white-throat builds, and all the swallows !
Hark, where my blossomed pear-tree in the hedge
Leans to the field and scatters on the clover
Blossoms and dewdrops—at the bent spray’s edge—
That ’s the wise thrush ; he sings each song twice over,
Lest you should think he never could recapture
The first fine careless rapture !
And though the fields look rough with hoary dew,
All will be gay when noontide wakes anew
The buttercups, the little children’s dower
—Far brighter than this gaudy melon-flower !’

In the last volume, *Asolando*, published on the very day the poet died in the Palazzo Rezzonico

in Venice, much of this early freshness comes back, but it is still the same creed of

‘ One who never turned his back, but marched breast forward,
 Never doubted clouds would break,
 Never dreamed, though right were worsted, wrong would triumph,
 Held we fall to rise, are baffled to fight better,
 Sleep to wake.

No, at noonday in the bustle of man’s work-time
 Greet the unseen with a cheer !
 Bid him forward, breast and back as either should be,
 “ Strive and thrive ! ” cry “ Speed, fight on, fare ever,
 There as here ! ” ’

Matthew Arnold, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, William Morris, and Swinburne are other singers of the Victorian Age, and then come the Georgians, Rupert Brooke, Walter de la Mare, and James Elroy Flecker. No language in the world is so full of good things as ours.

OTHER BOOKS TO READ

Oxford Book of Victorian Verse. Quiller-Couch.

Poems. Tennyson. Globe.

Alfred Lord Tennyson : A Memoir, by Lord Tennyson.
 Macmillan.

Poems. Browning. Globe.

Selections. Browning. Smith Elder.

Browning : How to Know him. Phelps. Macmillan.

Browning. G. K. Chesterton. English Men of Letters
 Series.

Poems of To-day. Sidgwick and Jackson.

CHAPTER XXIII

VICTORIAN ESSAYISTS



THE prose writers of this age are almost numberless. Leaving the novelists aside for a moment, we propose to glance at the three greatest of the Victorian essayists—Macaulay, Carlyle, and Ruskin. In verse the voice of the Victorian Age is Tennyson. In prose Macaulay stands out as typical of his time, though he has not the imagination of Carlyle nor the spiritual depth of Ruskin; yet more than either of the others is he representative of his period. He may be considered the spokesman of Victorian England.

THOMAS BABINGTON MACAULAY

Macaulay was born in 1800. As a boy he read with extraordinary eagerness any book upon which he could lay his hands. Endowed with a tenacious memory—he had only to read a poem or essay once to know it by heart—he found in this voluminous reading, material for the illustration of any subject about which he might be speaking or writing. Macaulay, as well as being a writer, was also a man of affairs. On leaving Cambridge he went to the Bar, and, later, entered Parliament as member for Calne. He soon made a reputation as a statesman and orator. A Whig, his speeches were among the

most effective in the passage of the Reform Bill. Appointed legal adviser to the Supreme Council of India, Macaulay spent some years in India. On his return to England he continued his rapid progress in the political world, and was finally raised to the peerage as Baron Macaulay of Rothley.

This sketch of Macaulay's political path is necessary if we are to understand the meaning of his books and the manner in which they reflect the life of Victorian England. He is a man of affairs first, and a writer afterwards. All his literary work—and it is pretty extensive—was done at the beginning or end of a busy day. It has therefore a practical character, and it was the practical nature of his writings that attracted the average man of the day, who did not care to listen to the burning words of Carlyle or the liquid eloquence of Ruskin.

Macaulay's historical and literary criticisms were widely read by people who had little leaning to literature. His *Essays* may be said to have given to many an enthusiasm for literature, which had otherwise been left unnoticed by them. The first of these wonderful essays was the *Essay on Milton*, published in *The Edinburgh Review* for August 1825. It took the readers of *The Review* by storm, and henceforward Macaulay's essays were eagerly awaited and read. They were afterwards collected in *Critical and Historical Essays*, a work which is in itself a passport to Bookland. Among the literary essays are those on Milton, Bunyan, Dryden, Addison, Johnson, Goldsmith, and Byron.

Macaulay treated his subjects in a manner new to the age. The literary men of whom he wrote were more than mere makers of books. They were shown as part of the life of their time, sharing

in the events of their age and reflecting them in their work. Thus Milton is the Puritan and politician as well as the poet. Macaulay made of Milton a hero, for whom he had an enthusiastic admiration. This admiration and enthusiasm he transmits with marvellous skill to the reader.

It is the same with his historical writing. Just as no more interesting essays have ever been written, so there is no book of history which grips so powerfully as his *History of England from the Accession of James II.* Among the historical essays are those on Pitt, Frederick the Great, Clive, Warren Hastings, Machiavelli, and Mirabeau. These and the *History of England* are sometimes biased and inaccurate, but they are intensely interesting. Nothing equals the impressive picture of Warren Hastings' impeachment in Westminster Hall, from which we may quote an example of the historian's style :—

'The grey old walls were hung with scarlet. The long galleries were crowded by an audience such as has rarely excited the fears or the emulation of an orator. There were gathered together, from all parts of a great, free, enlightened, and prosperous empire, grace and female loveliness, wit, and learning, the representatives of every science and of every art. . . .

'The Serjeant made proclamation, Hastings advanced to the bar and bent his knee. The culprit was indeed not unworthy of that great presence. He had ruled an extensive and populous country, had made laws and treaties, had sent forth armies, had set up and pulled down princes. And in his high place he had so borne himself, that all had feared him, that most had loved him, and that hatred itself could deny him no title to glory, except virtue. He looked like a great man and not like a bad man.'

The *History of England* begins with 1688, and is a study of the rise in power of the Whigs. The lively

narrative, with its many vivid pictures, holds the reader from the start and carries him along more entrancingly than any novel. So deep a study had Macaulay made of his subject, that we seem to be listening to the words of one who was an eye-witness of the scenes he describes and the friend of the heroes he brings to life again. The secret may be found in those words of Thackeray : 'Macaulay reads twenty books to write a sentence, and travels a hundred miles to make a line of description.' And there is also the spell of the style. Short, sharp sentences and antithetical clauses give to Macaulay's paragraphs the finish and brilliance of wrought bronze.

THOMAS CARLYLE

While the fashionably enlightened were reading the sane, practical essays of Macaulay, the thunder and lightning of the volcanic Carlyle were in vain. His was the burden of the mystery of life, and men were impatient of the mysterious. It was better, they said, to turn to business, to the practical activities of a work-a-day world. Macaulay was the product of his age ; men could read and understand him. But Carlyle stood on the bank, watching the current of affairs sweep by ; he was a prophet and a stranger. He hated, with a fierce hatred, the materialism and comfortable optimism of commercial England — 'pig philosophy,' he called it. He had no faith in democracy, which to him was 'the rule of the worst rather than the best.'

Carlyle was born at Ecclefechan, in Dumfries, in 1795. Returning from Edinburgh University to his native county, he spent some years in

teaching. At the same time he contributed to the magazines a series of studies in which he sought to popularise German literature, especially the work of his favourite writer, Goethe. With the publication of his *Life of Schiller* he gave up teaching. Soon after this he married Jane Welsh, a very brilliant woman, who must have found the sour, crabbed pessimist 'gey ill to live wi'.' For some years their home was a farm, away up on the dreary moors of Craigenputtoch. At this lonely farmhouse, far from the world, was written the most remarkable book of the century, *Sartor Resartus*. It is the life and opinions of an imaginary German, Diogenes Teufelsdröckh. This German professor works out a 'philosophy of clothes,' at the same time telling the story of his life, and expressing opinions on all manner of subjects by the way. The book is autobiography—that is, the life is Carlyle's, and the notions of the imaginary old German are really his own. One cannot do better than quote the concluding words of the wonderful chapter, 'Natural Supernaturalism,' as an example of the wild, graphic style, so different from the finished oratory of Macaulay :—

' Thus, like some wild-flaming, wild-thundering train of Heaven's Artillery, does this mysterious Mankind thunder and flame, in long-drawn, quick-succeeding grandeur, through the unknown Deep. Thus, like a God-created, fire-breathing Spirit-host, we emerge from the Inane ; haste stormfully across the astonished Earth ; then plunge again into the Inane. Earth's mountains are levelled, and her seas filled up, in our passage : can the Earth, which is but dead and a vision, resist Spirits which have reality and are alive ? On the hardest adamant some footprint of us is stamped in ; the last Rear of the host will read traces of the earliest Van. But whence ?—O Heaven, whither ? Sense

knows not ; Faith knows not ; only that it is through Mystery to Mystery, from God and to God.

“ We are such stuff
As Dreams are made of, and our little Life
Is rounded with a sleep.”

That is typical of the man's magnificent and inimitable rhetoric. He cannot reason calmly. Emotions and passion flame up into scorn, irony, prophecy, and eloquence. At last people listened. Carlyle came to London, settling in that famous house in Cheyne Row, Chelsea, which became one of the literary centres of London. Here the virile Chelsea prophet lived the rest of his life.

Now appeared his *French Revolution*, a most magnificent piece of descriptive writing. It is not history as we ordinarily understand it. Carlyle chooses men and scenes. Thus striking figures, like Mirabeau, Robespierre, and Danton, are presented to us with that tremendous vividness that only his burning words can give. In a blaze of colour great scenes are painted, suggesting in their sudden brilliance the emotions that inflamed the actors in the great drama. The reader joins the mob and storms the Bastille ; he rushes to Versailles ; he looks on at the death of Louis XVI. and sees and feels all the horrors of the Reign of Terror.

Carlyle now began to give public lectures. ‘ I hate lecturing,’ he said ; ‘ I can only gasp and writhe, a spectacle to gods and fashionables—being forced to it by want of money.’ From these lectures sprang his most widely read book, *On Heroes and Hero-Worship*. It is the biography of great men, prophets, poets, priests, kings, and soldiers ; history to Carlyle meant great men.

This theory of history is further worked out in *Cromwell's Letters and Speeches* and the voluminous

History of Frederick the Great. Fame came at last. But fate dealt a blow from which he never recovered. In 1866 his wife died. For fifteen years he lived on, a lonely old man, haunting Chelsea Embankment and the neighbourhood, but he wrote no more. 'All of sunshine that remained in my life went out in that moment ; all of strength, too, seems to have gone,' he said. In 1881 he died, and was buried, not in Westminster Abbey, but at Ecclefechan, as he had wished.

When we get past the pictorial splendour and volcanic eloquence of the style to the teaching of it all, we find Carlyle's creed to consist of three tenets—mysticism, the might of the hero, and the majesty of labour. To him the material world is the visible vesture of the invisible God, just as man's own body is the garment of his soul. The only worship is work. 'Do thy little stroke of work ; this is Nature's voice, and the sum of all the commandments to each man.'

JOHN RUSKIN

We come next to our greatest artist in prose, John Ruskin.

Ruskin was born in London in 1819. Although the son of wealthy parents, his early upbringing was as puritan in character as that of Carlyle had been. 'The conceited and troublesome little monkey,' he calls himself, was compelled to read his Bible every day and to get long passages of it by heart, a practice which is later reflected in the noble simplicity and beautiful colour of his style. The story of this childhood in the South London home (now Ruskin Park) is told in his last and most interesting book, *Præterita*.

Leaving Oxford, Ruskin spent two years travel-

ling in Italy in search of health. The fruit of this travel is *Modern Painters*. In the first volume he makes himself the interpreter of Turner, the landscape painter, whose pictures had been severely criticised. The book revolutionised the art theories of the country. Then, in a second volume, the young art critic made a study of Italian painters, following this up with further volumes, setting forth the principles of art in general. The work throughout is remarkable for its wonderful descriptive prose. Thus the painter's dreams of Venice are translated into prose :—

‘ Many coloured mists are floating above the distant city, but such mists as you might imagine to be ætherial spirits, souls of the mighty dead breathed out of the tombs of Italy into the blue of her bright heaven, and wandering in vague and infinite glory around the earth that they have loved. Instinct with the beauty of uncertain light, they move and mingle among the pale stars and rise up into the brightness of the illimitable heavens, whose soft, sad blue eye gazes down into the deep waters of the sea for ever—that sea whose motionless and silent transparency is beaming with phosphor light, that emanates out of its sapphire serenity like bright dreams breathed into the spirit of a deep sleep. And the spires of the glorious city rise indistinctly bright into those living mists, like pyramids of pale fire from some vast altar ; and amidst the glory of the dream there is, as it were, the voice of a multitude entering by the eye—arising from the stillness of the city like the summer wind passing over the leaves of the forest, when a murmur is heard amidst their multitude.’

To his enthusiasm for painting was, later, added a further enthusiasm for mediæval architecture, which found expression in *Seven Lamps of Architecture* and *The Stones of Venice*.

These three books, *Modern Painters*, *Seven Lamps of Architecture*, and *The Stones of Venice*,

made Ruskin the art critic of a continent. He was elected Professor of Art at Oxford. But his influence was as much popular as professional. He roused, among people outside the University, a love of Italian painters and of Gothic architecture. He urged that art should be a copy of nature. He looked on the pageant of nature, sky, cloud, sea, rock, plant, and field, and painted its scenes in a wonderful style with a wealth of gorgeous phrasing.

Like Keats, Ruskin is an apostle of beauty, but unlike Keats, who fled to fields of fancy and of legend, Ruskin finds it in the world around him. He had a very fine power of observation.

Consideration of the abstract problems of art was leading the art critic to thoughts on life and conduct. Thus *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* were Sacrifice, Truth, Power, Beauty, Life, Memory, and Obedience. He came more and more under the influence of Carlyle, and, finally, turned from the criticism of art to the criticism of life. With his master he went out into the desert of economics and politics, travelling its dreary wastes of sand for the rest of his life. In *Unto this Last*, four essays on wealth and labour, we have Ruskin's declaration as a socialist.

He protested bitterly against the ugliness and sordidness of a commercial age which worshipped wealth. He wanted to bring some beauty into the lives of the people, but realised that some effort was needed first to raise them from the poverty and misery in which they were plunged. All his powers, his wealth, even, went to the service of the poor. Henceforward, his books, *The Ethics of the Dust*, *Time and Tide*, and the like, deal with social and industrial questions.

The last years of his life, spent at Brantwood, on

Coniston Lake, were given up to the autobiographies, *Fors Clavigera* and *Præterita*.

The best introduction to the books of Ruskin is his *Sesame and Lilies*. This book consists of three parts. In the first, 'Of Kings' Treasuries,' we have much wisdom on books and their reading. The second lecture, 'Of Queens' Gardens,' is a study of woman's sphere; while the last, 'The Mystery of Life,' sums up Ruskin's saddening philosophy.

OTHER BOOKS TO READ

Macaulay's, Carlyle's, and Ruskin's Books in Everyman's Library or World's Classics.

Life and Letters of Macaulay. Trevelyan.

Life of Carlyle. Froude. Longmans.

Life of Ruskin. Cook. Allen.

CHAPTER XXIV

VICTORIAN NOVELISTS



JUST as we have taken only one or two of the chief poets and essayists, so, in dealing with the great crowd of novelists, we must similarly limit ourselves to one or two of the outstanding figures.

If ever a writer was the product of his age, that writer was Charles Dickens. In poetry the Victorian Age produced Tennyson; in prose its great gift was Macaulay. Its most complete expression, however, was Charles Dickens and his novels. In general, he was the voice of the Victorian Age; in particular, he was the product of the life and character of London.

For a few years after the death of Scott the most important books written were the poems of Tennyson and Browning, but stories soon became popular again. People turned to novels for amusement, purely for the entertainment of the tale, and writers, seeing in this form of book an easy path to the hearing of the multitude, cast their criticisms of life and society into that form. They chose this method of attack in their war on the abuses of the time. In the meagreness of the many and the impudent fatness of the few, was found the matter of the Victorian novel, a novel with a purpose; to this class most of the tales by Dickens belong.

From Dickens to Thomas Hardy we have a long succession of brilliant novelists who have left no aspect of life untouched, and the novels of this age give the best pictures of the many-sidedness of the time. They often dedicate, as it were, a single book to one aspect of life, either high life, middle-class life, or low life. Sometimes they even limit themselves, more or less, to a single geographical region. Dickens is the Londoner, Hardy paints the Wessex country, while Eden Phillpotts takes us to Dartmoor.

CHARLES DICKENS

Dickens, who has been called 'the giant Cockney of the forties,' was born at Portsea in 1812, but came to London in 1821. His early life in the great city provided him with most of the stuff of his tales; it is the memory of those years of poverty that makes his best books. His father, the original of Micawber, was imprisoned for debt, a circumstance which accounts for the number of pictures of debtors' prisons Dickens gives us. At an early age he went to work in a blacking factory, spending his spare time in the company of the poor and outcast of the streets. This experience gave the colours of *David Copperfield*, which is practically autobiography.

A change in the father's fortunes made it possible for the son to be sent to a boarding-school, probably the original of the ghastly 'Dotheboys Hall' in *Nicholas Nickleby*. Then followed two years in a solicitor's office, when were stored up the impressions which were often set down in the portraits of lawyers. As a reporter on the staff of *The Morning Chronicle*, Dickens next journeyed up and

down the country, staying at inns that we afterwards see in the pages of his stories.

Now appeared his first book, *Sketches by Boz*, followed very soon by *Pickwick Papers*, which was published in parts. The rollicking humour, characters, and adventures of this novel established Dickens as a humourist, and he became the most popular writer of the day. Then followed a painfully pathetic tale, *Oliver Twist*, which was written to expose the suffering produced by the harsh administration of the Poor Laws. The strands of humour and pathos are again woven together in *Nicholas Nickleby*, also written with a purpose.

These three novels, *Pickwick Papers*, *Oliver Twist*, and *Nicholas Nickleby* are a good way of approach to the books of Dickens. While they entertain in themselves, they also show the gradual development of the art that culminates in the first group of novels, *Martin Chuzzlewit*, *Dombey and Son*, *David Copperfield*, and *Bleak House*.

Dickens was a man of tremendous energy. Journalist and novelist, he now became editor. Whilst writing his novels he began editing a weekly periodical called *Household Words*, for which other novelists, notably Mrs. Gaskell, also wrote. At the same time he began to give dramatic readings from his own books. The fame of his later novels, *Little Dorrit*, *A Tale of Two Cities*, *Great Expectations*, and *Our Mutual Friend*, and of these dramatic readings, took him to America, where he was enthusiastically received. But he wore himself out and died in 1870, leaving one novel, *Edwin Drpod*, unfinished.

The two great qualities of Dickens are his humour and his character portrayal. It is sometimes said that many of his characters are over-

emphasised, like Ben Jonson's 'humours'—that is, the character is exaggerated into a caricature. But his creations, set forth by their London background, have a wonderful vividness, and only Shakespeare has given us more names that have become part and parcel of our humorous tradition. For it is his humour that has set Dickens at the head of our novelists. He loved laughter, and his farcical fun is irresistible. He does not laugh at people; he laughs with them. G. K. Chesterton has said that Dickens, as a creator, is never quite at ease with any character with whom he has not laughed. Often, through his laughter, gleams the mist of tears, for his books are compounded of tears and laughter. Sunshine and shadow chase one another across the pages. In his scenes of pathos he sometimes becomes too theatrical; but then Dickens was always an actor, and we must not forget his humanitarian purposes.

Though chiefly the novelist of London's mean streets, he also wrote two historical novels, *Barnaby Rudge* and *A Tale of Two Cities*, which give vivid pictures of the times they depict. The latter, especially, with its central character, Sidney Carton, calls up the spirit of the Reign of Terror.

WILLIAM MAKEPEACE THACKERAY

Thackeray portrays for us a widely different world from that depicted by his friend Dickens. The latter went to the masses for his material, while Thackeray moved observantly through the world of the club and of the drawing-rooms of the rich. Dickens's subject was low life; Thackeray's society. Moreover, they approached their subjects in different temper. It has been said that Dickens

was the kind humourist, Thackeray the unkind satirist. Satirist he certainly was, but not unkind.

Thackeray was born at Calcutta in 1811. His father, an Indian official, died, and the boy was brought to England to the Charterhouse, of which we get a picture in *The Newcomes*. The same book gives us the description of the life of an art student, coloured, no doubt, by the writer's experiences in Paris, whither he went from Cambridge to study art. Realising that he had small chance of success as an artist, he returned to England and attempted literature, contributing to *Punch* and to *Fraser's Magazine*. Among these contributions are many satirical studies, but it was not till his social satire, *Vanity Fair*, began to appear, in 1846, that Thackeray became famous as a novelist. Then followed *Pendennis*, *Henry Esmond*, *The Newcomes*, and *The Virginians*. These five novels set Thackeray next to Dickens among the Victorian novelists.

Like Dickens, he gave courses of public lectures, both in this country and in America, one on *The English Humourists of the Eighteenth Century* and another on *The Four Georges*. These delightful studies reveal an accomplished satirist. In taking satire as his form, Thackeray went for his models to the writers of the eighteenth century, Swift, Addison, and Steele. In his sketches of these men he pictures for us the life and manners of that century. He does the same thing in his ironical talk about the four kings and their courts.

His deep knowledge of the history and literature of the eighteenth century went to the making of that masterpiece, the historical novel, *Henry Esmond*. This is a peculiarly attractive tale and one of our best historical novels. It gives a wonderful picture of life under the reign of Queen

Anne. The time and its atmosphere are subtly suggested, even the style reproducing the eighteenth-century manner of Addison and Steele, who both appear as characters in the book. *The Virginians* is the sequel to *Henry Esmond*.

Thackeray's best-known books, however, are his novels of manners or social satires, *Vanity Fair*, *Pendennis*, and *The Newcomes*. The title of his most characteristic book, *Vanity Fair*, is taken from *Pilgrim's Progress*, and expresses his view of the society he paints. The sub-title, *A Novel without a Hero*, is an ironic comment on the methods of the novelists of the time, who dealt in romantic heroes and forced sentiment. The satirist would have none of these. Instead of a hero he gave us a heroine, Becky Sharp. Heartless, shameless, virtueless, she nevertheless shines brilliantly by the side of the feeble, virtuous Amelia. Thackeray has a wonderfully sure sense of character, and Becky is his greatest creation. The same power of portraying character is seen in all his novels. *Esmond*, *Lady Castlewood*, *Beatrice*, and *Colonel Newcome*, are all real living creatures, not caricatures.

The cynical tone of *Vanity Fair* has given Thackeray the reputation of a cynic—that is, one who sees in life nothing but evil, and refuses to acknowledge the existence of virtue. There is no beauty, he declares, nothing but the ugliness of vice. But this sharp tone soon softens into the melancholy of *Pendennis* and of *The Newcomes*. The intense yet restrained piece of pathos, the description of the death of Colonel Newcome, is certainly the work of a very tender cynic. Like another later cynic, Samuel Butler, the author of *Erewhon*, the novelist hid beneath the cloak of his wit and waywardness a beating heart, sensitive

to the pity and pathos of life. Cynicism is so often the refuge of the sensitive, who seek to hide beneath it their real feelings.

All Thackeray's books are written in a charming style, colloquial yet pure and simple.

MARY ANN EVANS (GEORGE ELIOT)

Foremost among the women novelists of the Victorian Age is Mary Ann Evans, who used George Eliot as her *nom de plume*. She represents a third tendency in fiction. Dickens had been the humanitarian; Thackeray was a satirist; but George Eliot brings philosophy into the story. Again, Dickens's world was the London streets; Thackeray drew his material from the clubs and drawing-rooms of society; in George Eliot's novels, however, we have reflected the life and manners of the country villages of the Midlands.

George Eliot was born at a farm in Warwickshire, and spent her early life in country villages round about Coventry. Later, she came to London to act as assistant editor to *The Westminster Review*, a magazine to which she had already contributed articles. In London she became the friend of Herbert Spencer, the philosopher, and of George Henry Lewes, the author of a *Life of Goethe*. On the advice of Lewes, George Eliot began writing fiction, and her first book, *Scenes from Clerical Life*, soon appeared, to be followed by *Adam Bede*, *The Mill on the Floss*, and *Silas Marner*.

These are the best of her books. Their scenes are taken from those Midland villages she had come to know so well in her childhood, and the everyday life of this quiet countryside is told with marvellous

skill, clearly revealing the characters of the village folk. It is in the gradual revelation of character, rather than in the unravelling of a plot, that the power of her early novels lies. They are real products of the novelist's art, different from the later group of books, which includes *Romola*, a tale of Savonarola and Florence, and *Daniel Deronda*. These are overloaded with philosophy and detail, which make them difficult reading.

But there is nothing in literature more attractive than the scenes of Midland novels, beginning with *Scenes from Clerical Life* and culminating in *Silas Marner*. No one who reads *Adam Bede*, for example, ever forgets that group of simple village characters—Adam, the hero, Bartle Massey, the village schoolmaster, the Squire, the Rector, and, above all, Mrs. Poyser of the sharp tongue.

George Eliot suggests comparison with Jane Austen. They both give pictures of life and manners in country regions. But there the likeness ends. Jane Austen writes only of surface appearances. George Eliot digs down beneath the surface, searching for the roots of action in the depths of the soul. She looks down below the loves and the hatreds to find their origins. She is a great thinker, a philosopher. It is this philosophy that, in her later novels, escapes restraint and clogs the story with analysis, psychology, and science.

More charming than *Adam Bede* is the tenderness of *The Mill on the Floss*, the story of Maggie Tulliver, George Eliot's best-known heroine, and probably a picture of the authoress herself.

Silas Marner is the perfect novel. The gloom and despair of the unhappy weaver are turned to light and life by the coming of little Eppie. In this book we listen to many a humorous con-

versation in farm and village inn. Though there is a fine sense of humour in all her books, their final impression is one of sadness. George Eliot sees tragedy in the grim affair of life, and she sets it down with all the realism of her art.

MINOR NOVELISTS

The tragedy of life is also the staple of the novels of the Brontë sisters, Charlotte, Emily, and Anne. The loneliness and tragedy of their lives, passed in the Haworth Vicarage, on the edge of the bleak, wind-swept Yorkshire moors, colours their books. Charlotte is the greatest of the three, although in none of her books does she reach the tragic intensity of *Wuthering Heights*. This one novel of Emily, with its sweep of tragedy and wild landscape, recalls the passionate poetry of Byron.

Charlotte's first novel, *Jane Eyre*, is based on her own experiences, and caused a great sensation at the time, because, in its bold baring of inmost thoughts and feelings it was something new in fiction. Then followed *Villette*, mainly autobiography, dealing with the years Charlotte Brontë spent at a school in Brussels and giving a picture of the interesting M. Paul Emanuel. Her last novel, *Shirley*, is based on the life of her favourite sister, Emily, who had just died.

The tragic story of these sisters has been told by another woman novelist, Mrs. Gaskell, in her *Life of Charlotte Brontë*. Mrs. Gaskell is best known, however, by *Cranford*, a charming story of quiet life in an old-fashioned Cheshire town. In its delicacy and light humour it resembles Miss Mitford's *Our Village*. Mrs. Gaskell also wrote stories reflecting the dark side of industrial England—*Mary Barton* and *North and South*—

both of which deal with industrial discontent and strikes.

With the Brontë sisters and Mrs. Gaskell we are in the company of the minor novelists, whose names are legion. To mention but a few—there are Kingsley, author of *Westward Ho!* and the social studies, *Yeast* and *Alton Locke*; Charles Reade; Blackmore, author of the Exmoor romance, *Lorna Doone*; Robert Louis Stevenson; George Meredith, and Thomas Hardy, the greatest modern novelist.

Writers are now so numerous, and their works so varied, that a short account has a tendency to degenerate into a mere list of names and labels. Our last chapters have become scrappy, but in them we have been nearer our own times, and there will be few readers who are not already familiar with some of the writers of whom such brief mention has been made.

From Chaucer to Hardy we have travelled a long road and have peeped up not a few of the by-ways. Had we paused to mention even the names of all the flowers by the wayside, we should never have reached the end of the journey. There is no such garden of literature in any language in the world as that of England. It has variety infinite, colour pale or resplendent, light and shade in every degree. All the wanderers in the garden will not be equally fond of the same flowers, but there are flowers for all.

Or, if we change the picture, our literature is a long gallery of great men—the greatest men. And says Ruskin:—

‘These are all at your choice; and Life is short. . . . Will you go and gossip . . . when you may talk with queens and kings; or flatter yourself that it is with any worthy consciousness of your own claims to respect, that

you jostle with the hungry and common crowd for *entrée* here, and audience there, when all the while this eternal court is open to you, with its society, wide as the world, multitudinous as its days, the chosen, and the mighty, of every place and time? Into that you may enter always; in that you may take fellowship and rank according to your wish; from that, once entered into it, you can never be an outcast but by your own fault; by your aristocracy of companionship there, your own inherent aristocracy will be assuredly tested, and the motives with which you strive to take high place in the society of the living, measured as to all the truth and sincerity that are in thee, by the place you desire to take in this company of the Dead.'

SOME USEFUL DATES

HISTORY.

- 449-547 Landing of Angles and Saxons in England.
 597 Landing of Augustine and his monks.
 871 Alfred King of Wessex.
 1066 Norman Conquest of England.
 1338 Beginning of Hundred Years' War with France.
 1349 Black Death.
 1377 Wycliff and the Lollards begin the Reformation.
 1381 Wat Tyler's Rebellion.
 1415 Battle of Agincourt.
 1455-1485 Wars of the Roses.
 1492 Discovery of America.
 1534 The Act of Supremacy.
 1558 Elizabeth.
 1577 Drake's Voyage round the World.
 1588 Defeat of the Armada.
 1642 Civil War.
 1645 Battle of Naseby.
 Puritans supreme.
 1649 Charles I. executed.

LITERATURE.

- Beowulf*
 664 Caedmon at Whitby.
 673-735 Bede.
 1137 Geoffrey's *History*.
 1200 Layamon's *Brut*.
 1300-1400 York and Wakefield Miracle Plays.
 1340 Birth of Chaucer.
 1380 Wycliff's *Bible*
 1385-1400 *Canterbury Tales*.
 1400 Death of Chaucer.
 1470 *Morte d'Arthur*. Malory.
 1475 Caxton prints the first book.
 1485 *Morte d'Arthur* printed.
 1516 More's *Utopia*
 1525 Tynedale's *New Testament*.
 1540 *The Great Bible*
 1564 Birth of Shakespeare.
 1576 First London Playhouse.
 1579 Spenser's *Shepheards Calender*.
 Lyly's *Euphues*
 1586-94 Shakespeare's early period.
 1587 Marlowe's *Tamburlaine*
 1590 Spenser's *Faerie Queene*.
 Sidney's *Arcadia*
 1594-1600 Shakespeare's middle period.
 1597 Bacon's *Essays*. First edition of ten.
 1598 Jonson's *Every Man in his Humour*.
 1599 Globe Theatre built
 1600-1609 Shakespeare's third period.
 1608 Birth of Milton.
 1611 Authorised version of the Bible.
 1614 Raleigh's *History of the World*.
 1616 Death of Shakespeare.
 1625 Bacon's *Essays*, Third Edition, 58 *Essays*.
 1632-1639 Milton's *Horton Poems*.
 1642 Browne's *Religio Medici*.
 1644 Milton's *Areopagitica*.

HISTORY.

- 1649-1660 Commonwealth.
 1660 Restoration of Charles II.
 1667 Dutch Fleet in Thames.
 1680 Rise of Whigs and Tories.
 1685 Monmouth's Rebellion.
 1688 The Revolution.
 1702 War of Spanish Succession.
 1704 Battle of Blenheim.
 1707 Union of England and Scotland.
 1721 Walpole. First Prime Minister.
 1745 Jacobite Rebellion.
 1756 War with France.
 1759 Wolfe at Quebec.
 1775 American Revolution.
 1783 Treaty of Paris.
 1789 French Revolution.
 1793 War with France.
 1805 Battle of Trafalgar.
 1807 Abolition of Slave-trade.
 1814 Congress of Vienna.
 1815 Battle of Waterloo.
 1832 Reform Bill.
 1837 Victoria.
 1846 Repeal of Corn Laws.
 1857 Indian Mutiny.

LITERATURE.

- 1653 Walton's *Compleat Angler*.
 1667 *Paradise Lost*.
 1674 Death of Milton.
 1678 *Pilgrim's Progress*.
 1681 Dryden's *Absalom and Achitophel*.
 1702 First daily newspaper.
 1704 Swift's *Tale of a Tub*.
 1709 Birth of Johnson.
 1710 Swift's *Journal to Stella*.
 1711 *The Spectator*.
 1712 Pope's *Rape of the Lock*.
 1719 Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*.
 1726 Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*.
 1726 Thomson's *Seasons*.
 1751 Gray's *Elegy*.
 1755 Johnson's *Dictionary*.
 1764 The Literary Club.
 1765 Percy's *Reliques*.
 1766 Goldsmith's *Vicar of Wakefield*.
 1779 Johnson's *Lives of the Poets*.
 1785 Cowper's *Task*.
 1789 Blake's *Songs of Innocence*.
 1791 Boswell's *Life of Johnson*.
 1798 *Lyrical Ballads*.
 1805 Scott's *Poems*.
 1807 Lamb's *Tales from Shakespeare*.
 1809 Byron's *Childe Harold*.
 1812 Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*.
 1814 Scott's *Waverley*.
 1817 Keats's first poems.
 1818 Shelley's *Prometheus*.
 1821 Lamb's *Essays of Elia*.
 Shelley's *Adonais*.
 1825 Macaulay's *Essay on Milton*.
 1830 Tennyson's first poems.
 1832 Death of Scott.
 1833 Browning's *Pauline*.
 Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus*.
 1836 Dickens's *Pickwick Papers*.
 1843 Macaulay's *Essays*.
 Ruskin's *Modern Painters*.
 1847 Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*.
 1848 Macaulay's *History*.
 1859 George Eliot's *Adam Bede*.
 Darwin's *Origin of Species*.
 1892 Death of Tennyson.

