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# NOTES ON ENGLISH VERSE SATIRE

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# NOTES ON ENGLISH VERSE SATIRE

HUMBERT WOLFE

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# CONTENTS


| CHAPTER | | PAGE |
|---|---|---|
| I. | NATURE OF SATIRE | 7 |
| II. | CHAUCER TO SKELTON | 27 |
| III. | THE ELIZABETHANS AND CAROLINES | 49 |
| IV. | THE GOLDEN AGE OF ENGLISH SATIRE | 75 |
| V. | POPE AND HIS SUCCESSORS | 96 |
| VI. | THE DAWN OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY | 115 |
| VII. | THE VICTORIANS AND OURSELVES | 134 |

# NOTES ON ENGLISH VERSE SATIRE

## CHAPTER I

### NATURE OF SATIRE

THE satirist holds a place half-way between the preacher and the wit. He has the purpose of the first and uses the weapons of the second. He must both hate and love. For what impels him to write is "not less the hatred of wrong and injustice than a love of the right and just. So much he shares with the prophet. But he seeks to affect the minds of men, not by the congruities of virtue, but by the incongruities of vice, and in that he partakes of the wit. For as laughter dispels care by showing that as one thing is, so all may be, absurd, so it attacks wickedness by robbing it of its pretensions. Let wrong be purely serious, and Don Quixote with lantern-jaws will find it impregnable as the windmill. But let Falstaff ride at it, and he will lead home captive a dozen giants in Lincoln green. This much then is certain, that the satirist shakes the foundations of the Kingdom of Hell by showing it to be a kingdom of nonsense. He will allow nothing to be serious except the right, and that will always be able to afford a smile '

It is strange that when this redoubtable means of shaming the devil has always lain to men's hands there have been so few satirists pure blood, as the Frenchmen say. Juvenal indeed observed that it was difficult not to write satire, but the contrary appears to be the truth. Very many indeed permitted themselves a happy touch of this mode but in passing. Nearly all considerable novelists have their occasions on which they use this means of routing follies or worse. So too dramatists from the writers of Elizabeth to those of our own day have their Bobadills, their Joseph Surfaces, their Earls of Warwick. But these, and the art of their description, are not their first concern, Henry Fielding sought, not to leave Squire Western in the cold shades of ridicule, but to let him breathe, live and be warm in his page. Sheridan may laugh at his Teazles, but we are to visit them as amiable acquaintances, not to stare at them uneasily as the mirror of faults in ourselves calling for correction. And this perhaps is a sign of the creative heat in these writers. They make their little worlds out of the void, and, like the First Author, wilfully ignore its defects and pronounce it good. Or else it had not been a world, but a Museum and they the sombre-coated Curators. Who would not rather create than cure ?

The task of the Satirist, therefore,, is ascetic. He is not to give life, but rather to kill the causes of spiritual death. His *is* the function of Jeremiah without the lamentation, of Isaiah without the fiery thunderbolt of divine endorsement. Conscious in himself of not a few of the follies that he

denounces, he must forcibly abstract himself, and, however human, must find most of what goes by that name as a *se alienum.* Pope cannot expect that his Dunces will walk Avalon by the side of Millamant and Miss Hardcastle. Nor could the great Dean suppose that Gulliver would share Robinson Crusoe's Happy Hunting Ground. Their aim (as their expectation) was more austere. Pope may at best have conceived that vulgar impostors would be deterred from scribbling by the example of those that he impaled, Swift that men might grow less like the ape and more like the horse. But beyond that they must content themselves with the sense of a duty performed. \The satirist is, therefore, in spirit anchorite. H^ltnay turn an eye of longing on such as Laurence Sterne, who never exposed a weakness but he claimed it as his own. It is urged, indeed, that the satirist is the creature of malice, a sour fellow venting his undigested gall on his fellow. Such a one sees all yellow because of his own streak. Disappointed he will have all share his sting. If satirists are few, the fewer of such marplots and lovers of the misfortunes of others the better.

But this is to turn his own weapon on the Satirist, and to make him the butt of laughter, not because he is true, but because he is false, to his Vocation. It is to treat him as a Lampoonist who sends his anonymous scrawl against a lady's virtue to her husband, because she has refused his solicitation. Such a writer condemns himself more than his object and Time will make it apparent. *X* Satire springing from personal malice may amuse a large

circle for a short while, a small for a longer, but in the end it must abate. For as it is the satirist's misfortune to be withdrawn from the ordinary humanities, so it is his business to be general. To be both impersonal and particular is to be a monster, like a man murdering a stranger because he put him in mind of a sheep, and he could never abide mutton.

It may, however, be questioned whether any man sets out to be a satirist, except he has some personal cause for distasting life. Either he threw away his shield, like Horace ; could not be suited with his Stella, like Swift; went crippled, like Pope ; was beat by a nobleman's flunkeys, like Voltaire ; or was outcast, like my Lord Byron. That would have weight if Horace had abused soldiers, Swift happy lovers, Pope the straight-backed, Voltaire the nobly born, or Byron those that banished him. At most it argues that a man's mind may receive a satiric cast from his personal circumstance, as he might a tan from being exposed to the sun. But the substance of his mind in the first, as the Jjne of his face in the second, remains unmodified. Satirists, like all artists, are born. They can only "be unmade by spife.

Yet there is in this argument matter not wholly to be put on the one side. "The satirist may have as his aim the amendment of mankind. But he has at his hand only that small fragment offered by time and place to his immediate observation. Juvenal cannot impeach the Inquisition, nor Rabelais celebrate Christian priests blessing the cannon that are to discharge gas-shells. The satirist indeed is divided

between two difficulties. Let him attack the particular, even in the name of individuals as did Pope in the *Dunciad,* and a dictionary will be needed to help subsequent generations to share his indignation. Let him attack the Seven Deadly Sins with capital letters, as was the habit of the fifteenth century, and they will take to themselves one other devil worse than the seven, dullness. 1 But here is the province of that extreme sensibility to general truth, which goes by the name of genius. The fool called by his own name will lend it to all similar folly, and continue to illuminate it till the end of time. Thus Churchill had only a conception of Dr. Johnson before him (and probably false at that) when he attacked him in *The Cock Lane Ghost.* But you will meet with such a Doctor anywhere between Chancery Lane and Ludgate Hill. rThe material of the Satirist is the creature of tne cerebellum, thrusting its featureless bulk through the thin veil of the higher cortical centres; That is as general and as stubborn as the nightingale of Keats or Shelley's moon "with white fire laden." Even genius may dissipate itself in local quarrels, as when Pope hewed down his army of ghostly dunces. But, as the blade swings in such a hand, it will in the end create its own flesh, and draw blood.

Some hold that Art can have no object outside itself, and must either deny the satirist the name of artist, or reject the definition of his function. But in this lies a confusion. All art has an object, but one consistent with itself. An architect who built a dwelling-house in which none could live, though it were as strange as the Indian temple

Taj Mahal, had achieved nothing, because he had failed of the purpose of architecture. Or again, a house perfectly adapted to habitation may be as offensive as the other was at first sight well. From this it appears that without its proper object an art will fail, but also that the object must be subdued to the rules of what constitutes beauty in that kind. The satirist's object, which is to reprobate weakness and folly, is not contrary to but the essential factor of his craft, as to provide room is that of the builder. But no impeachment, however lively, unless it has the general quality of art, will have succeeded. The quality here is not that of the novelist which is to find in one man or woman some emotion common to many or all, but to find some failing. The first exhibits, the second condemns, but both alike snatch from time a reality that no longer is in its power. Nor, to develop this further, is it the business of the satirist to make his creatures men and women, but rather types of their failures. The novelist, who uses his story for the purpose of the satirist, will fail as both, or certainly as one. Thus, if Swift had sought to interest us in the love-affairs of Gulliver, we had had more of a man and less of a satire. So *Martin Chuzzlewit* suffers as much as a novel by the intrusion of Sairey Gamp as satire gains. IWhich is not to say that a satirist may not have hisNcharacters or a novelist his ridicule, but with the first the second, and with the second the first must prevail. Jane Austen exposed pride and prejudice in Lady Katherine de Burgh, but her first object was the woman. Cervantes created in Don Quixote something manlike, but chiefly

he displayed the tragedy of the human moth, perishing for love, not of a star, but of a spangle. Moreover, Sairey Gamp would have drunk tea with Betsy Prig for ever in the next stall to that in which Falstaff consumes " but one halfpennyworth of bread to this intolerable deal of sack " if some Dame Quickly had pronounced an epitaph that changed her from a type into an unhappy dead woman. Dickens might have written *A Life and Death of Mrs. Gamp,* but she had then ceased to belong to satire. As if Shakespeare had never bid us weep for Sir John, the fat Knight had remained only a condemnation of gluttony and cowardice.

It is not enough, however, for a satirist to hate. Else satire were the universal possession of every tap-room gossip. The black must have a white back-cloth, or a steady candle must throw the shadows against the screen. It is a common device of the sensualist to upbraid the excesses that he loves for the joy of describing and thus re-enacting them. ; Even Juvenal for his SixthSatire has not altogetherescaped examinationon this score. There are some who think that the Roman licked his lips as he wrote, and believe him not the greatest of satirists but of hypocrites. In this, it seems to me, they go too far. The Sixth Satire reflects not so much the coarseness of the poet as the world that made him so.) Contrast Juvenal with Martial, and the difference between the moralist, a little mired by the mud through which he ploughs, and the muck-raker is instantly apparent. Nevertheless the point is well taken. Satire condemns, and a libertine, sitting in judgment on vice, is a monster

not merely in life but in art. This, indeed, is no more than to demand that the satirist, like any other artist, must be sincere."; If Keats, who held that " beauty is truth, truth beauty," had in fact occupied himself with speculation on the Stock Exchange, his poetry would have given him the lie. In the same way Pope's *Dunciad,* if it had not been inspired by a belief in such a poet as Dryden, but only by malicious hatred of rivals, might have succeeded as a pasquinade, but never as a satire. Self-interest in men, like patriotism in nations, is not enough. The satirist must have love in his heart for all that-is threatened by the objects of his satires Thus the difference between a great satirist like Swift and a lesser like Charles Churchill consists in part in the vision of that which evil endangers. Bad actors may imperil the drama, but not the soul of man. But the habits of the Yahoo deny the Holy Ghost. It is the mousing owl by the side of the eagle gripping his prey in his " crooked hands."

There is an element of satire in many other forms of art, just as a hint of caricature may be described in some faintly malicious portraits by Sergeant. But the fact that the American pilloried some of his most remunerative clients does not set him by the side of Daumier. With one it is the hint of onion in the salad, with the other there is no salad, To say of a novelist that he is " satirical " is a contradiction in terms. , He must choose between his characters and their follies. Though he may with perfect propriety emphasise weaknesses, he myst not judge them. He is not asking for

judgment but for understanding.[r] iThe satirist seeks not only for judgment, but condemnation. ]

Here it begins to be possible to distinguish satire from the allied arts of the lampoon, the parody, the burlesque and allegory. *The* essence of the lampoon is to inflict injury for the sake of mischief. The lampoonist's symbol should be that of the keyhole. He is the eavesdropper of Olympus. It follows that his art flourishes most in times of moral degeneration and languor, and that it is both furtive and transitory. Its essence is to be personal, and only by accident does it on occasion nick a higher mark. Martial, among the Romans, is the fine *fleur du maL* He scribbles a name on the front door with a bawdy epithet, rings a bell, and bolts round the corner. Time in general sponges it off with the other dirt that has accumulated. Only now and again because of some unholy knack has he burned his scribble into the grain of the wood. Then it endures as satire, not on its object, but on Martial and the failure of time.

The lampoon is a growth of Courts and of all undirected luxury. The Restoration in England was its heyday, though even Herrick had used it, and the coffee-houses under " imperial Anna " made no stranger of it 1 Its relation to satire is that of the pun to humour. As that plays upon words ,so the lampoon plays upon thoughts: Charles Lamb was diverted by the Oxford scholar who asked of the poulterer's boy whether what he carried were his own hare or a wig. Yet the only merit of such a quip was to have uttered it upon the moment. So the lampoon owes all to the circumstances of

its emission, save in the very rare cases where it is inspired neither by malice nor envy. And then it runs a danger of ceasing to be a lampoon and becoming an epigram. Everyone recalls the exchange of lampoons between the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge on the occasion of the despatch to the one of books and to the other of a troop of horse. Both are witty, and both depend solely on their dexterity for their survival. They are the " hare " i and the wig in verse. They are not satire because in neither case was the lampoonist concerned with truth but only with securing his point. But even so they lack the touch of mire which is the hallmark of the lampoon. Its aim is not to portray, but to traduce, and never is the barb so pointed as when aim d from the gutter at virtue that walks fastidiously. The lampoonist will write a verse on a birth-niark, omitting to observe the perfect loveliness of the face that it distinguishes. He will impute lechery to the pious, because he loves the first and hates the second. And, above all, he is concerned always with the individual and never with his immortal assignation. Once in a century by brilliant inadvertence a Rochester may fix in King Charles a universal trait. But that does not alter the status of the lampoon., It means •that Rochester had a moment of satirical genius. For the rest, like other lampoonists, he was content to readjust thoughts in relation to one another without affecting their substance. No such surface pastime is admissible in the satirist.

iThe parody is only satire if it be destructive of what it imitates." Of crimes none is in its ultimate

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effect more pernicious than fustian in literature. For it debauches man in the church of the spirit. It is a true object of satire to expose this blasphemy. Parody if it overwhelms a hated and hateful original writing performs the same service as that of a successful attack on original sin. But very few, if any, parodies are of this character. It was left to Macaulay to gibbet Montgomery (though I freely confess that I know not with what justice). No contemporary wit played Pyramus and Thisbe to this poet's heroical stanza. He was left to the ordinary wayside bludgeoning of a powerful intellectual rough. He was not neatly pinked with his own rapier by a gentleman of the road. More often the parodist confesses admiration rather than distaste. It has indeed beep said that none can parody what he does not love. But that is to forget hate, which clings closer than a brother, follows without stop, and understands with the savage attention of extreme love. But such hate, so expressed in literature, has been so rare as to be negligible. We must be content with *Rejected Addresses,* Calverley, and all those others who may have been willing to wound, but certainly could not strike. Parody that acts as page or lackey to the thing parodied may amuse. It cannot exalt or destroy. It must be dismissed therefore as a drawing-room firework, that may be let off in the presence of young children without damage to feelings or furniture. But satire so used would blow the house down,

Less easy to set aside is the burlesque. There is in this exercise displayed an aim and a weapon **akin**

to those of the satirist. Burlesque has been called satire without tears, but not altogether rightly so. For of those who urge that the writer of burlesque merely heightens the comic element, inviting amusement and not a verdict, it may be asked how shall we construe the *Patience* of W. S. Gilbert.! That eminent wit heartily desired to bring into disrepute an interest in beauty which had (as he thought) improperly manifested itself in England, hitherto free from such infection. Here was a mind blunt, smooth and flat, with exactly the surface and force of a jack-boot. There were things crushed by this Prussian, and we are not to be permitted to deny his work the name of satire merely because it may seem to have operated against good rather than evil. fWe may not judge art by ethics, or half the tftrones in Olympus would be vacant. If Gilbert is to rank with the writers of burlesque rather than satire, it must be, because of something implicit in the form itself. For burlesque is to satire as farce is to comedy. There is a borderline over which we cease to smile and begin to guffaw. In general that noise, not inappropriately named, is the reverberation of a wooden ball in a skittle-alley. It has no more cause than that of the idle propulsion of one piece of wood at another. But this shout of animal contentment is not always aroused only by jests that emerge still steaming from the farmyard. It may also be occasioned by immense exaggeration or distortion. You will see at Fairs mirrors, arranged so as abominably to misrepresent the persons of those reflected. In front of these all day long stand the distorted and

their friends with the inexhaustible laughter ascribed by Homer to his gods in circumstances singularly unlaughable. But distortion to that extent is not satire. There is too little truth left to be recognisable, and satire has nothing to do with lies. Turn, therefore, to Gilbert and see that his is the method of the concave and convex mirror. Observe old maids held up to contempt for being old and still maiden. Conceive men so lost as to turn from buying stocks to contemplate pictures. Irresistible will be the impulse for the ball *to* go rumbling down the skittle-alley, and rightly when such a situation is envisaged is it named Gilbertian. But satire it is not, unless the sibilant asides of Mr, Robey also deserve that title. There is something at once too loose and too loud for the strict demand of satire. Coarseness and cruelty, Gilbert's weapons faintly disguised by the hearty oaths of *the faux bonhomme* are not in themselves alien to satire. Juvenal used both. Indeed, so much that at moments he was as ugly as his object. They must fit, however, as close as the garrotter's shawl, and they should be deadly quiet. Burlesque may miss and yet, unlike a gentleman, still tell. It may roar at you, and be gentle as a sucking dove. It means no particular harm nor yet particular good. So Falstaff escaped from immortality to play the buffoon at Windsor with the wives. So Balzac shamefully droll told his rollicking *contes.* So Gilbert's chorus of lovesick maidens, hugely bounding like Doughty's camels, blew out like petticoats on a clothes-line. If a man were careless and they still wet from the wash, they might slap him smartly on the cheek with

a damp edge. But for the most part they are the very underclothes of comedy, suggesting always and never revealing. No one and nothing was a wit the worse or better. There was object enough to put farce at a distance, sufficient lack of concentration to banish satire. Nor must it be thought that burlesque is always so. It may, like an innocent caricature, be only high spirits, but some actual subject it must have. It may be no more than Old Joe—the clown—prodding the policeman with the red-hot point of a poker, which is funny because of its extreme improbability allied to a faint possibility. Aristotle is thus reversed by the burlesque. For its virtue is to be wholly improbable while remaining possible. But satire deals grimly neither with the probable nor the possible, but with the actual.

(Not much need be said of the allegory, except that it has been a favourite device of the satirist, as with Cervantes, Samuel Butler, and Dean Swift. But allegory is not the peculiar province of the satirist. Consider the parables of the New Testament, and, above all, that of the Prodigal Son. This has been hailed as the greatest allegory in the language by those who sought to atone for their lack of belief in the divinity of the Narrator by tributes (to which He would have been indifferent) to His literary capacity.1 It may be that, but at least it is no more a satire than the tale of the destruction of the Cities of the Plain. It states with economy the fruits of repentance, and, having so stated them, passes on.

One instance is enough to disprove a general

assertion. It is both possible to write satire that is not allegory and allegory that is not satire. But how are we to regard an allegory such as Meredith's *Shaving of Shagpat*? Is it satire, burlesque, plain fantasy, or something of all three? What is the sword, sharpened by the sons of Eblis, that cost the Barber all that pain to win? And what is that great and invincible hair—the Identical—in the Ordeal of Shagpat, of which the shaving was the Event stirring heaven and hell to their deeps? Is it not the search for the Holy Graal described in terms of the Comic Spirit, a Pilgrim's Progress, the voyage of Childe Rolande to the Dark Tower? Nor is comedy out of place. Bernard Shaw has pretended that the serpent was the first to laugh in Eden. If it were so, then he had overheard the voice of the Creator on the Seventh Day. Laughter goes everywhere, like the wind, and it is an ill laughter that blows nobody good. Such ill laughters there are, like the Siroccos, the Bise, and that Mediterranean gust the Mistral. Meredith's laughter was not one of these. Nor was it the laughter of satire, caustic on a wound. It was too general, too disembodied a merriment, like the laughter of a fiddle. It enchants. It does not judge. It may be a new kind of music, or an old kind of verse. But it is not satire.

So much may be said in definition of the Satire, and yet without instances much is left in doubt. A man who read this might recognize a satire as a monument from description in a guidebook. But a photograph would be clinching. The great satirists of the ancient world are Aristophanes and

Juvenal, The claim of Horace rests not first on this, and Martial is not a satirist at all. For the middle world the great names are Cervantes and Rabelais. While at the end of the list we shall inscribe Voltaire, and in our time Anatole France It will not need to take more than one from each period. Let us, therefore, linger a moment with Juvenal, Cervantes, and Anatole France,

Juvenal is admitted by the judgment of time as the master ai example. There has been question certainly of his good faith. Such gusto in the delineation of vice argued, if not taste for, at least experience in, its abominations. The Sixth Satire from this angle is difficulty Juvenal could have condemned more if he had expanded less. Ovid in the *Ars Amandi* never gave such precise instruction to lust, nor did the dramatists of the Restoration seem more odiously to leer. But the Sixth must be read with the rest, and stand or fall with them. Ethics are not limited to the sex-code, and morality is one and not divisible into separate entities. If, therefore, Juvenal's indignation against wrong in general is not feigned, it is reasonable to give him credit in the disputed particular. And if it were feigned, if great satire may be born of a sham, then the whole cause is in danger. But it is not feigned. For why should a great artist have chosen this method of expression when any other was open to him, and chosen it first of the Roman world ? Lucretius did not write so, nor Catullus, nor Vergil. These celebrated speculation, passion, or the glory of Rome. Horace ventured on this path, but how amiably, with how little passion I

Then less than a century later the thunderbolt ! Why then, and how ? Was there not ample occasion in the declension of manners at Rome ? Great Julius and great Augustus, when they assumed divinity, did not ascend to Olympus, but brought the gods to earth. There was no faith to sustain men. The doctrines of Cato died with the Republic. A Colossus arose who could do everything but pray, and Orontes continued to pour its yellow flood into Tiber. The wealth of the ancient world changed Rome from a city of brick to one of marble. The temple was made of the same stuff as the bath, and the one was as little or as much sacred as the other. The old order changed. Rich freedmen and debauched proconsuls, imperial favourites thronged and blustered. It was the age of Messalina.

Great evils creai their own scourge The sincerity of Juygnal is the cause that provoked him. " Tantae molis erat Romanam condere gentem," cried Vergil. " Facilis," Juvenal answered him in his own words, " descensus Averni." He painted the steps of the easy downward path one by one. Not Isaiah more calumniated Jerusalem. He heard the satyr crying to his fellow in Pompey's Way and on the Palatine Hill. Rome was for him populous with skeletons, and since there was no God of damnation, like that of the Jews, Juvenal invented one in his own image. No question but that the shapes of evil which he denounced were real. They are all about us now to prove it. No question that Juvenal stood next in the forum of accusation **to** the preacher. **The** only question **would be for us whether he was not like Isaiah**

and too little like the Greek Aristophanes for pure satire. He showed vice rather as loathsome than as ridiculous. But here a halt should be called. A thing may be ridiculous and yet not laughable. It may affront reason without surprising it, as it may be in the last degree witty without being funny. A manufacturer of poison-gas founding a hospital for diseases of the chest is ridiculous, but not funny. His explanation of his motive might well be funny without being ridiculous. So it may be witty to confuse a ghost and a goat, but funny to affect to see one and be butted by the other. Juvenal, at least to an English mind, is not funny, though, since nothing changes from country to country and age to age as much as humour, the Romans might well have found him so. But it is because his weapon is ridicule and not invective that he can be distinguished from a Major Prophet. In a story by H. G. Wells of the Day of Judgment ridicule is God's weapon of judgment. Hell-fire the great villains of all time proudly demand, but to have their little secret follies exposed is not to be borne. They skip like ants up the sleeve of the Recording Angel. Wells presumably agreed with Juvenal that it was the grimmest weapon of all, and might, therefore, have permitted some intercession for mankind. Not so Juvenal. He pinned his ants in their ungainliest movements and stjick them to the board so. That was satire.

The case of Cervantes is not so plain. Like Lewis Carroll's White Knight some may hold that Don Quixote rides too near to the heart for satire. Yet, though tears ill assort with this mode, pity need

not be wholly absent, as when even Sir Toby felt a qualm for cross-gartered Malvolio. It is possible to be ridiculous and negatively funny ; but it is also possible to be that and positively pitiful. A man is no less laughable who runs after his hat in the street because he believes it to be a crown, **Don** Quixote may, therefore, touch our hearts, but, if he is to remain a figure of satire, he must not storm them.

We must here distinguish between the lean knight as Cervantes drew him, and as legend has changed him. Chesterton has beautifully written :

" And he sees across a weary land a straggling road in Spain,
Up which a lean and foolish knight for ever rides in vain."

That is part Cervantes and part the genius of the later world that sets the Knight beside Christian and Standfast as one of the Paladins. But Paladin he was not for his creator. He heard no trumpets on either this side or that, but only goatherds' horns. He left no sword behind for him able to use it. He rode to the boundaries where satire marches with the land that it defends. But he climbed no Neb or to look on that land. He rode back, because he did not know it was there. In the end, as in the beginning, Don Quixote belongs to the world of satire, though he is the gentlest figure there.

juvenal used the bludgeon, Cervantes a feather—and Anatole France He, alter all, is of our time". We are near enough not to be able to see. There was a wit said that those whom the gods love die

young, but those whom the French love are born old. Anatole was certainly a Frenchman.[y] He knows everything, and understands nothing ? That is too true to be good. But as there is the satire of scorn and of despair, there is also the satire of fatigue—native in a land where the words " ennui " and " blase " were coined. But satire of this kind suffers from its universality. Not wrong only, but all things under the sun and the sun itself for so unreasonably continuing to shine, are its object. This satire prefers the smile to the laugh, the simper to a smile. It hates not like a man, but like the sort of woman that Mr. Noel Coward believes to exist, and may indeed have met when in the company of Mr. Arlen. It trickles like a thin stream of chemical upon a photographic plate. But a picture results. Nor can a charge of insincerity be lodged. France held up the world to ridicule, but he did not except himself. " What fools these mortals be," cried this Puck, adding under his hand, " and what a mortal am I ! " Nor is that cynicism. The cynic hates the world for not existing. France—a satirist—merely laughs at it. Not less than Juvenal and Cervantes he asks for a verdict. " It is necessary to live," claims mankind. " Je ne vois pas la necessite," is the judgment of the Court. Could satire go further ?

# CHAPTER II

## CHAUCER TO SKELTON

NOTHING is now certain in the theory of verse except its need of brevity. Verse rings the gong. Prose lays (and even eats) the dinner. But the signal is the exciting moment for the hungry man. Orators, recognizing this, use tags of verse almost as punctuation marks, or as an equivalent to the faithful reporter's " applause " in brackets. Verse has the hammer-note. It should therefore be, and is, the principal working-tool of the satirist. The great writers in prose swing slowly. The horse of indignation must wait long for his shoe. But verse is both furnace and hammer. It strikes as it melts. How many days in the smithy must the prosaist labour before he can drive the nails in as did Nicharchus in two lines of scorn for doctors :

> " τοῦ λιθίνου Διὸς ἐχθὲς ὁ κλινικὸς ἥψατο Μάρκος
> καὶ λίθος ὢν καὶ Ζεὺς, σήμερον Ἐκφεμέται,"

which has been rendered :

> " Last night the Doctor saw this marble bust.
> To-day, though marble and a god, it's dust."

Or how can even the preacher that cries " Vanity,

Vanity, all is Vanity " compare with Juvenal when he writes :

> " Finem animae quae res humanas miscuit olim,
> Non gladii, non saxa dabunt nee tela, sed ille
> Cannarum vindex et tanti sanguinis ultor
> Anulus. I demens et saevas curre per Alpes
> Ut pueris placeas et declamatio fias " ?

The lampoonist knew this power of verse to summarize and strike. The object of satire is not to please, but to eat like vitriol. The acid of prose is diluted with many words. It is below proof, and has a sluggish current. Verse bites clean and sudden. No doubt both the sapper and the gunner have their place in the assault on the trenches of folly and injustice. But let prose dig never so deep, it is the shells of verse that carry the day. Nor is this odd. Verse can expand by reason of its structure as wide as the Pleiades, and contract as cold and sharp as the iron mask. Being in itself a sublimation, a drop of it, like attar of flowers in scent, can serve to sweeten a whole room. But prose needs the whole flower-border and does not stop at the wire-gate that leads to the kitchen-garden.

This is so true that an indifferent versifier may write a satire that drives home further and outlasts a masterpiece of prose. Alexander Barclay, surely no poet, translated *Das Narren Schyff* from the German in 1509 as *The Shyp of Folys of the Worlde.* See how such a one even in translation nicked *The Boke-Fole*:

" Still am I besy bokes assemblynge
For to have plenty it is a pleasaunt thynge
For my conceyt and to have them any in honde
But what they mene do I not understonde,"

which you may compare in its economy with what Thomas Nashe wrote in his *Pierce Peniless his Supplication to the Dive ly* of Sloth, a stationer. " If I were to paint Sloth," says he, " by Saint John the Evangelist, I sweare, I would draw it like a stationer that I knowe with his thumb under his girdle : who if a man come to his stall to aske him for a booke never stirres his head, or looks upon him, but stands stone still and speakes not a word : only with his little finger poynts backwards to his boy, who must be his interpreter, and so all the day gaping like a dumbe image he sits without motion, except at such times as hee goes to dinner or supper : for then he is quicke as other three, eating sixe times everie day." Surely prose here confesses some affinity to the character that is derided. How it limps by the side of John Skelton when in *The Manner of the World Nowadays* he wrote :

" So many women blamed
And righteously defamed,
And so little ashamed
Saw I never :
Widows so soone wed
After their husbands be dead,
Having such haste to bed,
Saw I never."

Satire indeed is in haste because its first business is "to destroy. Rome, that could not be built in a

day, might well, as the Goths showed, be sacked in one. So, therefore, such a couplet as—

> " I do not like thee, Doctor Fell,
> The reason why I cannot tell,"

pillories that possibly estimable man more damnably than all Cicero's invective could Catiline.

If this be so, it may be asked with reason why so few great poets have turned satirist. It is, first, because it is a lower flight than that of pure poetry, as the hawk stoops to her business while the lark rises in hers. The poet would rather make a world with God than pillage it with Satan. ; Yet, when life is out of joint, it does not become the poet, most ardent of its champions, to fiddle in a cool grot. Poetry may be emotion remembered in tranquillity ; it must never be emotion avoided by tranquillity. Thus the young Milton might still have lingered by the leaves of Vallombrosa when the summons to England and Civil War came. Had he so, he might have written a purer lyric but never *Paradise Lost.* Though poetry may afford an escape from life, the poet himself must never be a refugee. He must not play the role of a concert-party for mud-stained combatants. He can either plunge into affairs, as did Milton, and make the supreme sacrifice of silence, or like Sassoon, in our own times, he can both fight and flay. It remains the poet's duty to hold a torch to truth. If contemporary truth be a world where the abominations of the Claudian and Flavian Caesars are still lively in men's minds, it is the moment not for an *Mneid* but for Juvenal.

Some may perhaps urge that the greatest of all will point to the eternal shape of right behind the fleeting shadow of the wrong. For these Plato is a greater than Aristophanes. Both saw Athens fallen from her high estate. Plato, things being so, directed men's minds to the unflinching types laid up in heaven. Aristophanes lashed their terrene parodies. But that is only to repeat that satire is the second and not the first flight, as to hate is less than to love, to destroy than to build. Moreover, it is one of the curiosities of history that great periods of action produce great spirits, and that when the general life grows cool the poets cool no less. iEschylus, it is believed, saw the Persians founder at Salamis. Not for him despair when the barbarous dark was (he supposed) for ever rolled back. After Civil War Vergil was witness of the calm triumphs of Augustus Caesar. The Eagles never flew higher. Was Vergil to trace the infinitesimal shadow of their wings ? Nor was it only Armada weather that made the frequenters of *The Mermaid* so hugely content with living. It did not need a Drake or a Shakespeare to crowd on full sail to the winds of their time. Think of Sir Humphrey Gilbert that led the expedition to the Arctic Eldorado that we know as Klondyke. On his return he was overtaken by a tempest, but would not change his little frigate of ten tons burthen, *The Squirrel,* for the larger *Golden Hinde.* " For," said he, in the large language of his day, " I will not forsake my little company going homeward, with whom I have passed so many stormes and perils;" adding," we are a9 neare to heaven by sea or by land."

But the cold fit follows. " These things happened in Sicily " writes Thucydides, most restrained of historians, at the end of his description of the downfall in that island of Athens. " And these ' cried Aristophanes, crowing hoarsely, " were happening in Athens at the time." So Juvenal, in what seemed a gathering dark, wrote :

> " Festinat enim decurrere velox
> Flosculus angustse miserasque brevissima vitae
> Portio."

So Dryden looked in and not out when the spacious times of Elizabeth narrowly contracted with Charles.

This may both range satire and explain in what times it flourishes. It still leaves unproved the claim of verse to surpass or even to supersede prose in this art. How are we to maintain this contention against Thomas Harman Wilson,[2] Guevara,[8] Sir John Davies, Edward Guilpin, John Marston, and Samuel Rowlands, to name some of the smaller prose practitioners, or Swift in Gulliver, Thackeray, and Dickens in patches almost the greatest satirist of them all ?; Is it perhaps better (and more honest) to abandon the struggle, admitting that there is room for each, even that sometimes the tortoise outstrips the hare ?

It would be to deny the evident facts to protest that great satire cannot be written in prose. Rabelais,

[1] Author of *Caveat or Warening for Common Cursitors commonly called Vagabones.*

[8] Author of *Art of Rhetorique.*

[8] Author of *Mirror of Man's Life.*

Swift, and Voltaire are brooks in that course too broad for escaping. But there is still the difference between great verse satire and great prose satire that the two media impose. Verse by its severe economy says more by leaving more unsaid. How many pages of prose had even the great Dean to write in description of sycophants, and still fall short of what he himself expressed in four lines :

> " So, naturalists observe, a flea
> Has smaller fleas that on him prey ;
> And these have smaller still to bite 'em,
> And so proceed ad infinitum."

Perhaps, too, since satire works through ridicule, it has something of the quality of a joke that is best when its point is quickest reached. Something too there is in the mere mnemonic character of verse. The *Marseillaise* is not the only proof of the saying anent the making of songs and of laws. A tune or a rhyme is carried in the head and repeated in the heart long after the most golden eloquence or sermon has perished. , The orator may inflame his audience, the preacher turn their hearts, but the poet and the song go home with them.

" Verba scripta manent," but those sung do not merely remain, they multiply. So that it was less ill for Cope to have lost his battle than to be sung in the Border satire :

> " Johnny Cope, are you waukin' *yet.*
> And are your drums a' beatin' yet,"

as all Marlborough's other victories were less than to be the hero and the occasion of *Malbrouck s'en va fen guerre.*

For these reasons, and also for the plain reason that a writer may have his weakness, and mine is for verse, these notes will occupy themselves only with English verse satire. There should be enough even so to serve our need.

We must set Chaucer at the head of our list in satire as in most excellencies of verse. It will appear, and this may be objected, that he is much beside a satirist. But the title of sculptor will not be denied to the great Italian Michel Angelo, because he rivalled Vauban in the building of siege works. It is a later habit to specialize. The men of an earlier day, bolder and less embarrassed by example, may grapple all. As Bacon in *The Advancement of Learning* took all knowledge for his province, so Chaucer all verse, and, in its time and place, satire.

' Chaucer would hate but only as it were between one friendship and another.! His circumstances and (perhaps) his times were too easy for him to rage like Langley in *Piers Plowman.* He felt, indeed, towards the world some of the indulgence of its creator. " I made you," he can say, " so let you pass for a man—or a woman." » He inclines to the school of Theophrastus rather than that of Juvenal. He is the first of the English to write " characters "—the form of literature that culminated in Ben Jonson and Sir Thomas Overbury. His art in this mode ranges from affectionate admiration, through ironic indulgence, to as plain satire as any

may care to read. He begins on the side of the angels with his knight :

> " And of his port as meeke as is a mayde
> He never yet no vileynye ne sayde,
> In al his lyf, unto no maner wight.
> He was a verray parfit, gentil knyght,"

and his Poure Persoun of a Toun that—

> " Cristes loore, and his Apostles twelve
> He taughte, but first he folwed it hymselve."

This is Satire in Heaven before the Fall, bright as Lucifer. Then to indulgence, laughing without judging, as of the Prioresse :

> " And Frenssh she spak ful faire and fetisly
> After the scole of Stratford-atte-Bow,
> For Frenssh of Parys was to hire unknowe " ;

or the Sergeant of the Lawe:

> " Nowher so bisy a man as he ther nas,
> And yet he semed bisier than he was."

(An immortal stroke on the verge of the satire that has its echo five hundred years later when the boy with the blue bag assists the attorney in *Pickwick Papers.)* From this, that prepares the way, advance is made to direct satire with the cheerful villains of the piece, the Frere and the Good Wyf of Bathe.

First the Frere, who, like other notable delicate

priests after him, has in especial cure the souls of the rich :

> " He knew the tavernes well in all the toun
> And everich Hostilier and tappestere
> Bet than a lazar or a beggestere ;
> For unto swich a worthy man as he
> Acorded nat, as by his facultee,
> To have with sikc lazars aqueyntaunce."

Is that not pure ? And is there no fashionable young sprig offering pardons through his teeth in Mayfair to-day, who holds that it is as difficult for a poor (and ill-born) man to enter the kingdom of heaven as for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle ? But above all for satire that great sinner the Wyf of Bathe :

> " She was a worthy womman al hir lyve,
> Housbondes at chirche dore she hadde *fyve,*
> Withouten oother compaignye in youthe."

This was the lady that said in spite of her not inconsiderable experience :

> " Lo, heere the wise kyng daun Salomon 5
> I trowe he hadde wyves mo than oon ;
> As, wolde God, it leveful were to me
> To be refresshed half so ofte as he ! ' "

It may perhaps be objected (with reason) that Chaucer lost not the man in the immortal failing, but hallo'd after the man, and let immortality, good or ill, look to itself. That is admitted in general.

But is more needed than what has been already cited to prove that he could be, when he chose, absolute in the first way too ? ' A peacock does not lose his tail, because he folds it, nor Chaucer cease to be the poet capable of writing :

> " The contrarie of al this is wilfulnesse.
> Why grucchen we, why have we hevynesse,
> That good Arcite, of chivalrie flour,
> Departed is, with duetee and honour,
> Out of this foule prisoun of this lyf ? "

in the accent of Hamlet bidding Horatio—

> " absent thee from felicity awhile,"

because he also wrote :

> " We olde men, I drede, so fare we ;
> Til we be roten lean we nat be rype.
> We hoppen any whil that the world will pype,
> For in oure wyl ther styketh ever a nayle,
> To have an hoor heed and a grene tayl
> As hath a leek."

Chaucer, because he has written satires, is not, therefore, to be dubbed first a satirist. But he is in so many ways the actual fountain-head of all succeeding verse that, unless he be studied, such deliberate satirists as Lydgate in *London Lackpenny*, Robert Henryson in *Moral Fabelles of Esop* and, above all, Skelton cannot be rightly understood. Naturally his imitators are influenced more by the author of *The Romaunt of the Rose* and *Troilus and Criseyde*

than by Chaucer in this stricter vein. The royal Scot that wrote *The King's Quair* trod the rose path. Henryson too—another Scot—sought to complete his master's tale with *The Testament of Cresseid* using the seven-line stanza with propriety, thus :

> " God wait, gif all that Chaucer wrait was trew,
> Nor I wrait nocht gif this narratioun
> Be authoreist, or finyeit, of the new.
> Be sum poet throw his inventioun
> Maid to report the Lamentatioun
> And wofull end of this lusty Cresseid
> And guhat distress scho thoillit, and guhat did."

Nor need we wonder at Chaucer's influence. It is not only that he was a poet capable of divinely writing :

> " Seynt Valentyn, that art ful hy on lofte,
> Thus syngen smale foules for thy sake
> Now welcom, somer, with thy sonne softe,
> That hast this wintres weders overshake.
> Wele han they cause for to gladen ofte,
> Sith ech of hem recovered hath his make ;
> Ful blisful mo we they ben when they awake.
> Now welcom, somer, with thy sonne softe,
> That hast this wintres weders overshake
> And driven a-wey the longe nyghtes blake."

It is that he brought the Renaissance to England and made it his own. His technical accomplishment was almost incredible. He was dealing with a raw and shifting language. He contrived to subdue it. What his difficulties were and how insuperable to any but genius is plain if we examine

the prosody of Lydgate and Occleve. These two painstaking writers make a ploughed field of what with Chaucer is smooth turf. No poet for the next two centuries but went to him as to the model by which their form, and often their matter, must be regulated.

This is true of the satirists for another reason. Chaucer's pilgrimage was as literary form a variation of the method adopted in the Decameron. It became, however, wholly Chaucer's own in the sense that, side by side with the stories, emphasis is laid on the "characters" of the story-tellers. These characters remain with him purely subsidiary to the verse and the tales. But they contain the germ of that form of satirical writing which was to receive a renewed impulse when Alexander Barclay translated Brand's *Narrenschyff* as *The Shippe of Folys.* Chaucer supplied one model for satire on this basis. In his *Parlement of Foules* he gave Occleve occasion for *The Horse, Sheep, and the Goose,* and encouraged Henryson in the tradition of Æsop. The same poem points the allegorical path to the rebuke of wickedness that is followed equally in Dunbar's *The Dance of the Seven Deidle Synnes,* and Skelton's *The Bowge of Court.*

Here is the small bright spring in the hills which, descending into the plains and mingling with a thousand tributary streams from Germany, France, and Italy, is to form the river of English satire. Names of those that follow Chaucer and precede Skelton have already been mentioned. They are, let it be admitted, interesting rather as monuments than as living poetry. ! Lydgate and Occleve are

noticeable primarily as showing the triumph of Chaucer and not in themselves.

Read for example, the lumbering progress through the furrow of such writing as this :

> " Then to the Chepe I began me drawne,
> Where mutch people I saw for to stand ;
> One offered me velvet, sylke and lawne,
> Another he taketh me by the hande,
> Here is Parys thred, the fynest in the land ! '
> I never was used to such things indede,
> And wanting money, I might not spede."

It is true that by happy accident Lydgate surprised himself by writing :

> " And he that made the high and crystal heaven,
> The firmament and also every sphere :
> The Golden ax-tree and the starres seven,
> Citherea so lusty for to appere,
> And riddle Marse with his sterne here."

But in general he and Occleve deserve the harsh commentary of Taine, who cried : " Must we quote all these good people, who speak without anything to say ? "

Taine, if just to the English, unjustly slighted the Scottish Chaucerians. Dunbar, in particular, has his place, if not one of much resort, by the side of Skelton. And, on the whole, if slighted by the Frenchman, Dunbar has little of which to complain. Nobody, it is true, reads him, but perhaps for that reason he is mentioned always with respect. It may be that a touch of national pride has contributed

to this favourable mention. The Scots are not prepared to let the English have all their own way, and if Dunbar is neglected may that not be mere Southern prejudice ? Who knows that some day Dunbar, as little read by his countrymen, and as much toasted as Burns, may not, like his successor, afford a further occasion for an annual banquet.

If this were indeed to happen Dunbar, as harsh a satirist of some aspects of his native land as Burns, might well permit himself a smile of ironical content. What would his Edinburgh readers, looking a little uneasily at the wynds on the Castle Hill, have to say of his address *To the Merchantes of Edinburgh* :

> " May nane pas throw your principall Gaittis
> For stink of haddockis and of scaittis ;
> For cryes of carlinges and debaittis ;
> For fensum flyttingis of defame ;
> Think ye nocht schame,
> Befoir strangeris of all estaittis
> That sic dishonour hurt your Name ! "

An Edinburgh burgess peering into the Canongate might well rub his chin a little ruefully at this ! Nor is there sting wanting in the *Tydingis fra the Sessioun.* How unlike the Assembly was the state of affairs at Dunbar's " Sessioun " when

> " Religious men of divers placis
> Cummin their to wow, and se fair facis."

Scurrilous Dunbar, and not less so in his *Testament*

*of Mr. Andro Kennedy*', in which that worthy is traduced into saying :

> " Nunc condo testamentum meum,
> I leiff my saull for evermair,
> Per omnipotentem Deum,
> Into my Lordis wyne cellaer."

There are, of course, reasons for Dunbar's comparative neglect in spite of these obvious excellencies. His language, mixing a sort of middle English with Scots, is difficult. His occasions have a knack of being local. But perhaps he has suffered most from his self-indulgence in allegory. Nothing less than Spenser could carry that heavy load, and even he walks the slower because of it. When to this handicap is added that of the apparent uncouthness of his medium, his survival at all is sufficient tribute to his merit.

| Time, on the whole, is a trusty critic. Not frequently, nor for long periods, will he slight a great talent. On the rare occasions that he does full atonement is made, as with Herrick, whose star burns ever brighter after a dusky first ascension. Of diamonds he is as expert a cutter as those of Holland, though he may sometimes permit a semi-precious stone to be mislaid among featureless pebbles. But John Skelton is one of Time's errors, and he must be sternly impeached for this lack. In a book claiming some authority, *The English Poets,* edited by Thomas Ward, Mr. Churton Collins writes thus of Skelton : " Skelton's claims to notice lie not so much in the intrinsic excellence of his work as in the complete originality of his style,

in the variety of his powers, in the peculiar character of his satire, and in the ductility of his expression when ductility of expression was unique." He continues with amiable condescension, "These poems [the Satires] are all written in that headlong voluble breathless doggerel . . . often caustic and pithy, and sometimes rising to a moral earnestness which contrasts strangely with their uncouth and ludicrous apparel." But lest we should concede too much to the rogue, Mr. Collins notably concludes in respect of *Elinore Rummynge* that "In this sordid and disgusting delineation of humble life he may fairly challenge the supremacy of Swift and Hogarth." In his mild and obscure way Mr. Collins seeks to do for Skelton what Morley with greater publicity did for Swinburne. But the task of Collins was easier, because his was the less heroic task of flogging a dead lion.

It is not difficult to understand why Victorian shabby gentility waved a black-gloved hand severely at this shameless friend of naked truth. The period which substituted "too much of nothing" for the Greek "nothing too much" could not but have sought to damn him with faint praise. But why did the Elizabethans ignore him, why had he no place in the Augustan age, and why is he still known only to the learned and the curious ?

Something must, as with Dunbar, be due to the mere difficulty of his language, though it is nearer to us than that of the Scots poet. But more to the inopportunity of his birth. The dates of his birth and death are conjecturally placed at the middle of the fifteenth and at the end of the third decade of

the sixteenth century. He was born, therefore, in the queasy time of the Yorkists, was in the twenties when Richard fell at Bosworth, and lived to see the eighth Henry, and what is even more to the point, bitterly to attack the great Cardinal Wolsey. These were times too unsettled for the poet. Civil War and Reformation are not nurses of the "Arts. It was his misfortune to be one of the strong that had lived before Agamemnon. The Elizabethans, beginning with Marlowe, seemed to step ready-armed from the head of the virgin Queen. They were too dazzled with the light of their own splendour to look back to the preceding dark. Their eyes were on Italy and on Spain. They might (as Shakespeare often did) hear echoes of country chanties. But for the rest Italy and the Renaissance served their need.

Skelton suffered too because he was as English as Hogarth, and as great a master of his craft. Mr. Collins makes the comparison almost by way of cursing. But any writer (or painter) who can sustain that comparison is blessed indeed. Skelton, when all were for foreign examples, was unshakably English. That would not commend him. But more than that he was a sturdy innovator in verse forms. What Mr. Collins calls headlong doggerel is on the contrary a quite startling mastery of prosody. Not only had nobody before Skelton used the form he so brilliantly applied in such poems as those against Garnesche, but no one has been able completely to master it since. Doggerel ? What is the test of a verse-form ? That it should fit the matter and express the mind of the maker, and that it should both move and sing. Did ever

any verse more completely fulfil these criteria than such as this in the lament on Philip Sparrowe ?—

" Some ty me he wolde gaspe
When he saw a waspe ;
A fly or a gnat
He wolde fly at that ;
And prettily he wolde pant
When he saw an ant ;
Lord ! how he would pry
After the butterfly !
Lord ! how he wolde hoppe
After the gressop ! "

Every trick, not excluding that of enjambement, is there. This is not writing about the sparrow. It is the sparrow in a verse that jerks it as neat as his two strutting feet. Nor does it fit only the rapid narrative. It can be slow in denunciation, as :

" That vengeaunce I ask and crye
By way of exclamacyon
On all the hole nacyon
Of cattes wild and tame !
God send them sorrow and shame ! "

And it can even rise to a certain mock-heroic tragedy with :

" Farewell, Phillyp, adeu !
Our Lorde thy soule reskew !
Farewell, without restore !
Farewell for evermore ! "

Doggerel 1 I wish that we had more English poets capable of writing it.

As an innovator he was, however, doubly unfortunate. All such are opposed in their beginnings, but it happens often that they become the dogma of the succeeding age. Skelton suffered from the strange accident that he was immediately succeeded by innovators as violent as himself, and of greater genius. It seemed, indeed, as though Fate itself had decided that to be three times Laureate was not merely an end but a termination in itself.

Professor Collins, in the passage dismissing " the intrinsic excellence " of Skelton's work, calls attention among instances of its lack of intrinsic excellence to " the peculiar character of his satire." The adjective is not ill-chosen. Like the rest of his work Skelton's satire is " peculiar " in the sense that he was the first Englishman to write so. Chaucer, his master in the form of such a poem as *The Bowge of Court,* could and indeed did teach him nothing in the form of *Colin Chute,* While Dunbar—the best of his predecessors—hit the mark with a cross-bow, Skelton was rattling away with a machine-gun. His is the very ecstasy of vituperation, but with a mock breathlessness for ever regaining its second wind. If ever a man hated heartily and honestly, if ever a man had the gift to brand that clearly and ringingly, that man was Skelton. Hear him *Against the Scottes*—

> " Kynge Jamy, Jemmy, Jocky my jo,
> Ye summoned our kynge, why did ye so ?
> To you nothing it did accorde
> To summon our kynge, your soveraygne lord.
> A kyng, a sumner ! It was great wonder
> Know ye not suger and solt asunder ?

" Ye thought ye dyd yet valyauntly,
Not worth three skyppes of a pye ;
Syr skygalyard, ye were so skyt,
Your will than ran before your wyt."

Or in the tremendous denunciation of *Colin Cloute* that hits all the harder for the scornful laughter implicit in its very form :

" Ye are so puffed with pryde,
That no man may abyde
Your high and lordely takes."

" Brought up of poore estate
With pryde inordinate,
Sodaynly upstarte
From the donge carte,
The mattock and the shule
To reygne and rule,
And have no grace to thynke
How ye were wonte to drynkc
Of a leather bottell
With a knauysshe stoppell."

" But qui se estimat stare
Let him well beware
Lest his fote slyp,
And have such a tryp
And falle in such dekay,
That all the worlde may say,
Come down, in the devyll way."

And still another and harsher mood let Parotte " s'en va complayndre " :

" So many thevys hangyd and thevys never the lesse ;
So myche imprisonment for matyrs not worthe an hawe;
So myche papers weryng for ryghte a small exesse ;
So myche pelory pagauntes undyr colower of good la we ;
So myche tournyng on the cooke stole for every guy-gaw ;
So myche mokkyshe making of statutes of array j—
Syns Dewcalyons flodde was nevyr, I dare say."

This is unhappily not the place to deal with Skelton's qualities as a lyric poet. Professor Collins is good enough to observe that he " deserves mention" in this regard. He does. Here it is sufficient to let his satires mention themselves—in no uncertain tone.

At the end of one of the most barren periods in all English verse Skelton is the sown at the edge of the desert. Unhappily time has permitted the sand-storms behind to overwhelm him. In front in brilliant contrast stretch the green uplands of Elizabeth. That is his great misfortune, but ours is greater still if we permit it to continue. We cannot claim that he influenced the course of literature after this time. His immediate successors—Wyatt and Surrey—wrote as though Skelton had never existed. Nor is there a trace in Hall and Marston—the Elizabethan satirists—of his influence. He remains unique. There are worse fates.

## CHAPTER III

## THE ELIZABETHANS AND CAROLINES

SKELTON died probably in the year 1529. In 1595 Thomas Lodge published *A Fig for Mornus*, and two years later Joseph Hall gave his *Virgidemiarum* to the world. So complete was poor Skelton's obscuration that Hall does not even appear to have known his name. Indeed, he says of himself with modest conviction :

> " I first adventure, follow me who list,
> And be the second English satirist."

So strange has this mode become that Hall finds himself constrained to defend both the content and the manner of his work in a preface. Of the first, he says that he will certainly be exposed to envy, " Sith faults loathe nothing more than the light, and men love nothing more than their faults, and therefore, what through the nature of the faults and fault of the person, it is impossible so violent an impeachment should be quietly brooked." As to the manner he confesses to a limping imitation of great Roman originals, pleading in extenuation of his failure, " First therefore, I dare boldly avouch that the English is not altogether so natural to a satire as the Latin." And in support of this he advances surely the oddest argument ever con-

ceived. " In their [i.e. the modern] poesies," he says, " the fettering together the series of the verses, which the bonds of like cadence or disinence of rhyme, which if it be unusually abrupt, and not dependent in sense upon so near affinity of words, I do not know what a loathsome kind of harshness and discordance it breedeth to any judicial ear. . . . Whereas the Roman numbers tying but *one foot* to another, offereth a great freedom of variety, with much more delight to the reader."

This is the odder because his own example and later experience prove that it is precisely because of the hammer of rhyme that verse satire strikes a cleaner blow than prose. But, apart from this curious lapse, Hall's belief that he was the earliest English satirist is venial. The Elizabethans threw up such a dust, full of the sound of trumpets, that all that preceded them sank with a sigh into the Middle Age. Not Skelton only was lost behind that screen, but Chaucer no less. So much indeed, that Dryden sought to rescue him by dressing him in his own left-off clothes. Not only was Hall the first satirist. He was *primus inter prirnos*—Surrey and Wyatt—the first lyric poets, Marlowe, the first dramatist, and perhaps Sydney the first great gentleman. Here was a storm of dragon-flies. The humbler bees, brown-suited honey-makers of a quieter day, could not live in that gay multitude.

Satire, moreover, belonged not to this period of exaltation. Why carp and be pitiful when every day men were coming home with armfuls of Hesperidean apples ? This was the moment to be

climbing those trees with young Love. It was natural therefore that Satire—least creative of the modes of verse—should languish. Wyatt had attempted a mild couplet or two. Sackville had made a courtly bow to *The Seven Deadly Sins* in the *Mirror for Magistrates,* Only of serious performers is Hall preceded by Gascoigne, whose *Glas of Stele,* published in 1576—twenty-three years before Hall's satires—is by no means a negligible work.

It would almost seem as if Hall had not known of Gascoigne's existence. Gascoigne wrote in blank verse, and therefore in part at least escaped the handicap of rhyme, which Hall resented in his preface. If Hall had, in fact, studied the earlier poet he would have discovered that, whatever other merits blank verse has, its very lack of terminal stress is inimical to the epigrammatic necessity of satire. Consider this from the Epilogus :

> " Behold, my lord, what monsters muster here,
> With angels face, and harmful hellish hearts,
> With smiling looks and deep deceitful thoughts,
> With tender skins, and stony, cruel minds,
> With stealing steps, yet forward feet to fraud,
> With God, with kind, with any help of Art,
> But curl their locks with bodkins and with braids,
> But dye their hair with sundry subtle sleights,
> But paint and sleek till fairest face be foul."

This is proud stuff, but not even plentiful alliteration can drive it home. Satire needs hooks to grapple the mind, such hooks as mere beauty can away with. Hall forged the heroic couplet, and, while bemoaning

the need, established it. Skelton had no successors, and all but perished for lack of them. Hall was almost smothered by the army that arose from the dragon's teeth that he sewed.

The subjects of Hall's satire, like his theories of the art, are strange. The bishop-to-be throws a queer reflected darkness on the imagination of poet of twenty-three. His first book of satires is directed against the degeneracy of poetry, as though a man should complain of the want of gold in Golconda, or of lucidity in a clear moon . He cries in 1597 :

> " Now is Parnassus turned to a stews,
> And on bay-stocks the wanton myrtle grews,
> Cytheron's hill become a brothel bed,
> And Pyrene sweet turned to a poison'd head
> Of coal-black puddle, whose infectious stain
> Corrupteth all the lowly fruitful plain."

Here is good Roundhead fervour—excited by what ? A grave annotator suggests by Marlowe's erotic romance of *Hero and Leander* and that unprincipled fellow W. Shakespeare's *Venus and Adonis* which had " given great offence to the graver readers of English verse." If these were indeed the occasions of Hall's disgust, it is not surprising that he found so much else to gall him in the Elizabethan world. A man whom Marlowe and Shakespeare could drive to write satire would 'criticize the musical quality of the last Trump. Truly Hall's distaste is easily and constantly stirred, and his satire has therefore, for all his surface venom, a borrowed and transitory air. Nevertheless

he ranged the heroic couplet and could on occasion anticipate or point the way to Pope with such lines as :

> " Fond fool ! six feet shall serve for all thy store,
> And he that cares for most shall find no more."

Nothing is more galling than to be anticipated in invention. Poor Marston, that had meant to burst upon the world as the first true satirist, published his *Satyres* in 1598, a year too late. Hall had snatched the title. This perhaps explains his outburst against his rival in the Tenth Satire of *The Scourge of Vilainie*—

> " Playing the rough part of a satyrist,
> To be perus'd by all the dung scum rable—
> Of thin-brained idiots, dull, incapable,
> For mimicke apish schollers, pedants, guls,
> Perfum'd inamoratoes, brothell truls."

He might have saved himself all this fury. His enemy was not Hall, but his own incompetence. He could never manage either the heroic couplet or his temper. Often one and generally both had the better of him. He sought to atone with violence for what he lacked in strength, as though an ass braying through a megaphone should hope to outroar a lion. In fact, the soul of satire was not in him. He deserves the criticism, falsely directed against Juvenal, that his indignation was often feigned, and for the most part the fruit not of anger but spite. It is not that he was coarse and wanton in his language and thought. That merely labels him Elizabethan. Hot blood disturbs

the surface of the skin of the mind. It is that the coarseness is not a by-product, but has the same importance for the satirist as the object on which it is turned. He did not necessarily love what he appeared to reprobate, but he did not hate it. He was satirist through disappointment, chagrin, or by deliberate choice, and not because he sought to change or amend his times. He is conscious of this himself, and his only amiable trait is that of laughing at himself. In the fifth satire of *The Scourge of Vilainie* he flogs himself into a fine heat of simulated passion ending upon this severe and ascetic note :

> " Fair age !
> When tis a high and hard thing t'have repute
> Of a compleat villaine, perfect, absolute ;
> And roguing vertue brings a man defame,
> A parkstaffe epethite and scorned name."

Here speaks a second Cato, but only to turn round on himself with a rueful grin, crying :

> " Fie, how my wit flagges ! How heavily
> Me thinks I vent dull spiritless poesie !
> What cold black frost congeales my nummed brain !
> What envious power stops a satyres vaine."

. Mars ton raged against Hall, and both, so far as the art of the satirist is concerned, were put aside by Time with a careless gesture on the top and dustiest shelf. But they have their revenge. For, being dead, they still speak in the line of Dryden and Pope. These great performers were probably

unaware of the shambling
haunted them with strange whispered echoes of an infant art. Nevertheless they have their shadowy half-spectral place in the history of English verse.

Satire was not happy in so fortunate an age. Fate, however, which planned the Stuarts, prepared to remedy this defect. Indeed, Samuel Butler cost no less than a king's head. But before Time and genius had conspired to create the second great English satirist (Skelton being the first), George Wither and no less a person than. John Donne had attempted something in this sort.

The history of Donne's reputation is curious. Worshipped " barely this side idolatry" in life, he fell rapidly into decline. Dryden—no mean critic (whose opinion on his satires is quoted below) —thought him the greatest English wit rather than poet. He found him subtle and difficult, qualities which naturally enraged Doctor Johnson. " Metaphysical," the " great Cham " called him, peering moodily through the bulldog legs of his mind. Metaphysical he remained, and even Coleridge and de Quincey, who should have loved him for that very failing, remained cool. His great and angry star took long to complete its ascension, but now it fills its own quarter of the astronomer's heaven. As for the clouds of ravishing absurdities with which he chose to veil himself, they are a sort of pickle for his radiance, preserving it virgin against time. The outer husk thickens, may even peel here and there. But the heart is undiminished.

Being such and no less he condescended to Satire. Dryden, who rewrote Chaucer, had a complaint to

make of him. The calm lord of verse was engaged in addressing adulation to the Earl of Dorset. " Donne ' says he majestically, " alone of all our countrymen had your talent, but was not happy enough to arrive at your versification, and were he translated into numbers, and English, he would yet be wanting in dignity of expression." This is very well, and Dryden is right. The author of

" All kings and all their favorites
All glory of honors, beauties, wits "

could never, try as he would, attain the dignity of expression so powerfully shown in —

" To all you Ladies now at land
We men at sea indite ;
But first would have you understand
How hard it is to write ;
The Muses now, and Neptune too,
We must implore to write to you."

So much for my lord, and now to business.' Coming to grips Dryden, as serious criticism, observes that Donne " affects the metaphysics " in his satires, and finds this not to agree with the subject. This is nearer the mark. To translate Donne into numbers more numerous than his own, English more absolute, has tasked an Archangel

" new-lighted on a heaven-kissing hill."

But it is mere truth that satire like the life of man must be short, if not nasty and brutish. It must

ring the bell once and withdraw. This bluntness, this lack of subtlety, was not Dotfne's. All the wit in the world he had, as Carew rightly said :

> " Here lies a king that ruled as he thought fit,
> The universal monarchy of wit."

But how did he think fit ? With an infinite fastidiousness that packed a dictionary into a verse as in *The Flea* :

> " Marke but this flea, and mark in this,
> How little that which thou deny'st me is ;
> It suck'd me first, and now sucks thee,
> And in this flea our two bloods mingled bee j
> Thou know'st that this cannot be said
> A sinne, or shame, or loss of maidenhead,
> Yet this enjoyes before it wooe,
> And pamper'd dwells with one blood made of two ;
> And this, alas, is more than we would do."

That is wit, but so just and profound as to challenge beauty in her place. It is not to be had for the asking, but only as a reward of speculation. It is magnificent, but it is not the way of satire.

Thus he is too apt to be splendidly a poet, and too little an avenger as when he writes in Satyre I :

> " Though poetry indeed be such a sinne
> As I thinke that brings dearths, and Spaniards in,
> Though like the Pestilence and old fashion'd love,
> Ridlingly it catch men ; and doth remove
> Never till it be sterv'd out ; yet their state
> Is poore, disarm'd, like Papists, not worth hate."

He could write straighter and easier, as witness :

> " Crantz to such braves Loves will not be enthrall'd,
> But loves her onely, who at Geneva is call'd
> Religion, plaine, simple, sullen, yong,
> Contemptuous yet unhansorne ; as among
> Lecherous humours, there is one that judges
> No wenches wholesome, but course country drudges."

But even here is too much involution for the more pedestrian need of satire. It is possible that Donne could not have sunk his genius to this need, more likely that he did not care. At least it is certain that his successors imitated him in everything but satire. Suckling, Denham, Herbert, Crashaw, Cleveland, and Cowley, all submitted to that influence which Sir Edmund Gosse with his sly distaste for greatness thought malign. These recognized unconsciously, what de Quincey stated overtly, that Donne's peculiar glory was the combination of dialectical subtlety with the weight and force of passion. But satire calls for the clear stream, not the various splendour of the cataract. Donne, therefore, is a bright episode but not a landmark in this mode.

fWe come now to the author of *Hudibras* by way of Ben Jonson and George Wither. Here is not much room for either, Jonson because he outsoars, and Wither because he does not reach the stature of satirist. It may, indeed, be claimed that *Every Man in his Humour, Every Man out of his Humour,* and *The Silent Woman* are great strokes of satire.? Will not the advocate of this view quote Asperf saying :

" I fear no mood stamp'd on a private brow,
When I am pleased t'unmask a public vice,
I fear no strumpet's drugs, nor ruffian's stab,
Should I detect their hateful luxuries ;
No broker's, usurer's, or lawyer's gripe,
Were I disposed to say they are all corrupt.
I fear no courtier's frown, should I applaud,
The easy flexure of his supple hams."

If Jonson went no further than that, the case were proved. But he goes much further. In the earlier play Captain Bobadill, Master Stephen, and Master Matthew are all drawn in a satirist vein. But the two last step out of the page as lively as Sir Toby Belch and Sir Andrew Aguecheek. The first is one of the few comic figures of the stage that might have met Falstaff and not utterly quailed. " Sir," says he, " I must tell you this, I am no general man ; but for Master Wellbred's sake (you may embrace it at what height of favour you please) I do communicate with you, and conceive you to be a gentleman of some parts ! I love few words." That is not a mockery of life, but life mocking itself. Francis Beaumont, indeed, says the last word on this when, writing on *The Silent Woman* he said :

" Where he that strongly writes, although he mean
To scourge but vices in a labour'd scene,
Yet private faults shall be so well exprest,
As men do act 'em, that each private breast,
That finds these errors in itself, shall say,
He meant me, not my vices, in this play."

The most that can be said, on the other hand,

of Wither is that his *Abuses Strip and Whip* (published in 1613) must have meant more to his contemporaries than they can to us. The proof is that he was imprisoned in the Marshalsea on their account. That must be his reward because verse has none to offer. But his gentle failures serve as a foil to Butler's roaring victories.

Butler was all that Donne was not—blunt, direct, eagerly engaged by facts rather than by their thought-shadows, and, above all, a heaven-inspired epigrammatist. His sturdy genius, despite his immense parade of erudition, was wholly British, and went straight to Dr. Johnson's heart. "The Poem of Hudibras," he says, "is one of those compositions of which a nation may justly boast; as the images which it exhibits are domestic, the sentiments unborrowed and unexpected, and the strain of diction original and peculiar. . . . ,if inexhaustible wit could give perpetual pleasure, no eye could ever leave half-read the work of Butler for what poet has ever brought so many remote images that were never found before. . . . Butler had not suffered life to glide by him unseen and unobserved. He had watched with great diligence the operations of human nature, and traced the effects of opinion, humour, interest, and passion. From such remarks proceeded that great number of sententious distichs, which have passed into conversation, and are added as proverbial axioms to the general stock of practical knowledge. . . . The mode of versification has been blamed by Dryden, who regrets that the heroic measure was not rather chosen. To the critical sentence of Dryden the highest reverence

would be due, were not his decisions often precipitate and his opinions immature. When he wished to change the measure he probably would have been willing to change more. If he intended that when the numbers were heroic the diction should remain vulgar, he planned a very heterogeneous and unnatural composition. If he preferred a general stateliness both of sound and words, he can only be understood to wish Butler had undertaken a different work. . . ."

There never was a better critic than Johnson when his subject chimed with his prejudices. Impatient of what was fantastic and odd in essence, he was not deceived by the outward appearance of these qualities. All that was plain, honest, and immediate in him responded directly to the same virtues in Butler. In the extracts quoted from his essay he has said the last word on bis subject, tracing the main lines of Butler's claim to that extent that all that remains is to fill in the sketch by indicating Butler's relation to what preceded and followed him in English verse satire.

[ Butler is as startlingly original in his time as Sfelton in the fifteenth century. *Hudibras* was, in fact, not published till 1663, but it is certain that it had occupied many years in the writing. It belongs, therefore, to the same half-century as the writings of Hall, Marston, and Wither, and is yet entirely unaffected by them. It is not only that he did not use the heroic measure, but that, above all, he escaped the blighting influence of the classical examples, which embarrassed even

Donne. He is throughout his own man and, above all, his own Englishman?! He does not, as far as I can trace, ever make a Reference to Skelton, and it cannot be alleged, therefore, that he was the triple Laureate's disciple. He has, nevertheless, the same rapid eagerness that exhibits itself in almost breathless verse ; he cares—like him—for nothing but his immediate subject ; he makes the form perfectly fit the matter, and he too in his wildest flights remains with both feet firmly planted on English earth. If, therefore, there is no direct relation between the two poets, then the explanation of their kinship lies in the possession by both of a peculiarly English genius in both cases excited to the lively apprehension of satire by outward events not wholly dissimilar. The times of Skelton, as those of Butler, were such as encourage the satirist, and both reacted to them with that curious British indignation that lies always so near to laughter.

FButler's form as his matter appears thus to be personal and underived except from the facts of his being English and living at a time of religious and civil discord. But Pope will not allow him this originality. He suggests that Butler founded his style on the *Musarum delict ) or Wit's Recreation,* that appeared in 1655. It is true that *The Epitaph on James Duke of Hamilton* (ascribed to Marchamont Needham), as the letter of Sir John Mennis replying when the Parliament denied the King money to pay his army, are in the eight-syllable couplet of Butler, Moreover, such a passage as—

" 'Twas he patched up the new Divine
Part Calvin and part Catiline,
Could too transforme (without a spell)
Satan into Gabriel "

has a most Butler-like flavour. Even more in the matter of rhyme does this couplet suggest our satirist :

" Since Portugall by Duke Braganza
Was cut from Spaine without a handsawe,"

But this is not to be immediately accepted. *The Delias* appeared eight years before *Hudibras,* but there is no reason in the world to suppose that Butler waited till he was forty-three to start his great work. His case is certainly like that of Herrick, who published in 1648—in his fifty-seventh year—poems at which he had been working throughout his lifetime. Indeed, if the view is correct that Sir Samuel Luke, of Cople Hoo, was the original of *Hudibras,* then it is likely that the poem was put in hand many years before 1663, when he was resident under that knight's roof. It seems, indeed, a likelier conjecture that the authors of the *De ici e* were influenced by Butler than he by them. At any rate, between 1682 and 1715, a perfect tumult of direct imitations of *Hudibras* appeared, as *Butler's Ghost Hogan Moganides or the Dutch Hudibras, The Irish Hudibras,* and so on, proving how deep a mark Butler had made.

We may, therefore, grant Butler the originality in form which even Pope could not deny him in

matter. If Butler borrowed, it was, of course, from Cervantes, since Hudibras, like Don Quixote, is equipped with a squire, Ralph, who, as Butler observes when the exigencies of scansion permit or demand, goes by the name of Sir Ralpho.[1] The idea of a knight and his squire setting out on a fool's pilgrimage is the Spaniard's, but the rest is all Butler. Cervantes, by far the greater of the two, like Milton, fell in love with his villain, and it is thus that Don Quixote rides in the avenues of the heart. But for Butler Hudibras and Ralph remained throughout two ridiculous and abominated types of the Puritan faction that he detested. He does not pretend to invest them even with the semblance of humanity. They are two disagreeable clowns, mouthing the words which the Revolution has written for them. The result, therefore, is satire in its strict form, and since Butler both honestly hated and could crack a whip, like a ringmaster, it is satire of the first order.

As Dr. Johnson says, much of *Hudibras* has passed into the language, but it will not be out of place to quote a few of Butler's more brilliant sallies at random, adding these two observations. First, that, except for Shakespeare, no Englishman has become so much a part of current speech, and secondly, that for every one phrase quoted fifty more, and as good, are to be found in his page. Moreover, in every case they are an aspect of truth

[1] " Though writers for more stately tone
Do call him Ralpho, 'tis all one ;
And when we can, with metre safe,
We'll call him so ; if not plain Ralph."

flowering into wit, and never wit imposed on a reluctant object.

" He could raise scruples dark and nice
And after solve 'em in a trice ;
As if divinity had catch'd
The itch, on purpose to be scratch'd j
Or, like a mountebank, did wound
And stab herself with doubts profound,
Only to show with how small pain
The sores of Faith are cured again."

All the Schoolmen, observe, caught in eight lines I

" For breaking of an oath and lying
Is but a kind of self-denying,
A saint-like virtue ; and from hence
Some have broke oaths by Providence.
Some, to the Glory of the Lord,
Perjur'd themselves and broke their word ;
And this the constant rule and practice
Of all our late apostles' acts is."

" Oaths were not purpos'd, more than law,
To keep the Good and Just in awe,
But to confine the Bad and Sinful,
Like mortal cattle in a pinfold."

" For Saints may do the same things by
The Spirit, in sincerity,
Which other men are tempted to,
And at the devil's instance do ;
And yet the actions be contrary
Just as the Saints and Wicked vary."

Here, hypocrisy, the prime subject of satire, is

hit as hard as Dickens hit with Pecksniff, and as convincingly with wisdom and wickedness

" For witnesses, like watches, go
Just as they're set, too fast or slow."

" But as these pultroons that fling dirt
Do but defile, but cannot hurt."

" To swallow gudgeons ere they're catch'd,
And count their chickens ere they're hatched."

" So Spanish heroes with their lances
At once wound bulls and ladies' fancies j
And he acquires the noblest spouse
That widows greatest herds of cows."

" What makes all doctrines plain and clear ?
About two hundred pounds a year.
And that which was prov'd true before
Prove false again ? Two hundred more."

" And mongrel Christians of our times
That expiate less with greater crimes."

This trick is Butler's supreme gift that even Pope at his most brilliant could not surpass. He had another weapon in his armoury, which Pope either could or would not use—the ridiculous rhyme. This was a talent to make the words themselves clowns that has never been equalled. Instances abound in every page, as for example :

" There was an ancient sage philosopher
That had read Alexander Ross over."

" That Latin was no more difficile
Than to a blackbird 'tis to whistle."

" His fiddle is your proper purchase
Won in the service of the Churches."

" Us'd him so like a base rascallion
That old Pyg (what d'ye call him) malion."

" Some writers make all ladies purloin'd,
And knights pursuing like a whirlwind."

" What magical attracts and graces
That can redeem from Scire facias ! "

It is all so abundant, so spontaneous, so instinct with the breath of life that none can deny it the name of genius. It is almost as loud as Rabelais, and like Rabelais has a foundation not only of resolute piety, but even of a greater poetical quality deliberately discarded as unfit for his subject. He writes thus, for example, of dawn :

" The sun had long since in the lap
Of Thetis taken out his nap,
And, like a lobster boiled, the morn
From black to red began to turn."

That quite marvellous simile is avowedly comic, but like Chesterton's " the wind came round the corner like a cab " is illuminating with real poetic grip. Indeed, in modern verse it would proudly claim to be wholly serious. But, if he had cared,

he could have written charming conceits with the best of them as witness :

> " Where'er you tread, your foot shall set
> The primrose and the violet j
> All spices, perfumes, and sweet powders,
> Shall borrow from your breath their odours ;
> Nature her charter shall renew,
> And take all lives of things from you :
> The world depend upon your eye,
> And when you frown upon it die.
> Only our lives shall still survive,
> New worlds and Natures to outlive,
> And like to herald's moons, remain
> All crescents, without change or wane."

Butler died in poverty, and unrewarded by the Court for the immense service he had done them in the exposure of the anti-royal cause. His misfortunes rather than his greatness attracted the notice of the poets that succeeded. But Oldham, in his satire against poetry, did not altogether overestimate him when he said :

> " On Butler, who can think without just rage,
> The glory and the scandal of the age ? "

The figure of Dryden begins now to bulk at the end of the avenue like that of a periwigged general amply surveying a conquered world. But there are one or two others to be fleetingly conned on the way to the Colossus. Rochester, Dorset, Oldham, and Marvel, these are all in a manner satirists, though two of them were very great ruffians, and one a very great poet, Rochester has his own

niche in the temple of infamy. Hell must have languished while its ablest citizen wasted his talents on earth. Yet it must be observed that, if like Dorset, he touched nothing that he did not suborn, he still had the courage to be very violent against his sov'ran Lord the King. The famous epigram is a caress compared with that blistering (and blistered) document headed in the old edition as " Satire which the King took out of his pocket," or the satire on " The Restauration " of which one of the only verses that bear quotation reads as follows :

" In all affairs of Church and State
He very zealous is and able.
Devout at pray'rs, and sits up late,
At the Cabal and Council Table.
His very dog, at Council Board,
Sits grave and wise as any Lord."

One of his satires, indeed, earned his banishment from Court. It is difficult to imagine why. It is both silly and obscene.

The imagination faints when Dryden's encomium of Dorset is remembered. To read my Lords of Rochester and Dorset requires a strong stomach, and a plentiful sprinkling of disinfectant. If these were noblemen, give me a decent ape scratching for fleas. Nor need we even feel indignant were it not for Dryden's abominable prostration of his genius at the foot of men who seemed to know only four words in the English language, each of Miich aptly described their own spirit. Both, of course, had a certain native glibness, and what

passes for wit in tap-rooms. And each, it is true, could be surprised into something far surpassing their own expectation or merit, as Rochester's epigram and Dorset's poem already quoted. Nor in the case of the latter is *Madame MaintenorCs Advice to the King of France* wholly without merit. The last verse is both neat and pointed :

> " Let Boufflers, to secure your fame,
> Go take some town, or buy it ;
> While you, great Sir, at Notre-Dame,
> Te Deum sing in quiet"

And even better is :

> " As skilful divers to the bottom fall
> Sooner than those that cannot swim at all
> So in this way of writing without thinking
> Thou hast a strange alacrity in sinking."

But taken together the principal interest of Rochester and Dorset is not literary but ethnological.

Oldham, on the other hand, is a good professional hack, whose principal merit is to have sympathized with Butler. His heroic couplets jog along most Rosinante. The ribs stick out, one ear hangs down, the other sticks up, and the poor knees knock together audibly. He disliked Jesuits and wrote of them :

> " When the first traitor Cain (too good to be
> Throughout patron of this black fraternity)
> His bloody tragedy of old designed
> One death alone quenched his resentful mind,
> Content with but a quarter of mankind.

Had he been Jesuit, and but put on
Their savage cruelty, the rest had gone j
His hand had sent old Adam after too,
And forced the Godhead to create anew."

It does no harm—at any rate to the Jesuits—and to nobody else, since none reads it. But Oldham's persistence in spite of his manifest lack of ability and interest indicates how fashionable satire had become. We stand, indeed, at the threshold of the Golden Age in England.

Before the threshold is crossed there remains only Andrew Marvell to be considered. Like Donne, his greatness and his fame rest not on his excursion in this art. The interest of his satire is not intrinsic : much that he wrote of this kind was done as well by Sir John Denham. It is rather to see how civil broil and foreign war can distort even the sweetest of spirits from its proper balance. When he wrote as poet—and if he had only written more in that vein English verse would have been incomparably richer—he was moved by the genius of compassion and beauty not merely to pity but to exalt his enemies. No Royalist ever made so noble a picture as his on Charles, and that in a poem celebrating Cromwell. Nor was this the furthest height to which his true inspiration carried him. Could he not, did he not, when so minded take creation, turn it over in his hands, and restore it annihilated—

" To a green thought in a green shade."

That accomplished there was no further to go or do. But as a pastime or as a vent for humours

in him, which great verse did not allay, he had recourse to satire. In this manner he wrote much more than in the lyric, and, though some is spirited, much well-written, most could have been spared. Oddly, this poet of almost absolute loveliness occupied himself twice with Jingo attacks on England's enemies. He abused the Dutch in his poem, *The Character of Holland,* the Spaniards in his celebration of Blake's victory at Santa Cruz. Nobody could accuse this Roundhead of loving every country better than his own, nor could he justly have been labelled pacifist ! Yet what was amiable and lovely in his mind could not be wholly obscured by an occupation so ambiguous. The second of the poems has few redeeming features, but the first is illuminated by certain endearing conceits that remind us of Marvell rather than of Andrew. He is indignant with Holland for being a mere dump of sand washed up negligently by the sea. That, of course, is a grave charge to make against any continent : " Holland ' he says—

> " Holland that scarce deserves the name of land
> As but th'off-scouring of the British sand."

> " This undigested vomit of the sea
> Fell to the Dutch by just propriety.
> Glad then as miners who have found the ore,
> They, with mad labour, flsh'd the land to shore ;
> And div'd as desperately for each piece
> Of earth, as if't had been of ambergreece."

That is delicate foolery, and there is real poetic wit in the account of the Dutch navy's defeat :

" Yet of his vain attempt no more he sees
Than of case butter-shot, and bullet cheese ;
And the torn navy staggered with him home,
While the sea laugh'd itself into a foam."

Nothing of this quality is in the later poem, the last lines of which must be among the least distinguished that a great fantastic poet ever wrote. Nor are *Britannia and Raleigh or An Historical Poem,* or, longest of all, *Instructions to a Painter about the Dutch Wars,* of great moment. They show great courage in attacking the Court, but not more than shown by Rochester. They are as little gross as was to be expected in their time and place, and they are not wanting in occasional couplets of real force. As when he writes of the scapegoat Pett—a great ship-designer :

" After this loss to relish discontent
Some one must be accused by Parliament,
Of our miscarriages so Pett must fall,
His name alone seems fit to answer all.
Whose counsel first did this mad war beget ?
Who all commands sold thro' the navy ? Pett.
Who would not follow when the Dutch were beat ?
Who treated out the time at Bergen ? Pett.
Who the Dutch fleet with storms disabled met ?
And rifling prizes, them neglected ? Pett.
Who with false news presented the Gazette,
The fleet divided, writ for Rupert ? Pett.
Who all our seamen cheated of their debt,
And all our prizes who did swallow ? Pett.
Who did advise no navy out to set ?
And the forts left unprepared ? Pett.

Who to supply with powder did forget
Languard, Sheerness, Gravesend and Upnor ? Pett.
Who all our ships exposed in Chatham net ?
Who should it be but the fanatick Pett ?
Pett the sea-Architect in making ships
Was the first cause of all our naval slips."

That is good, but set beside it :

" Here at the Fountain's sliding foot
Or at some fruit-tree's mossy root,
Casting the body's vest aside
My soul into the boughs doth glide 5
There, like a bird, it sits and sings,
Then whets and claps its silver wings,
And till prepared for longer flight,
Waves in its plumes the various light."

That various light is wanting in the satires. For my part I would willingly have exchanged them all for another thought in such another garden.

# CHAPTER IV

# THE GOLDEN AGE OF ENGLISH SATIRE

Satire has always shone among the rest,
And is the boldest way, if not the best,
To tell men freely of their foulest faults,
To laugh at their vain deeds and vainer thoughts.
In satire too the wise took different ways,
To each deserving its peculiar praise.
Some did all folly with just sharpness blame,
While others laugh'd and scorn'd them into shame.
And of the two the last succeeded best,
As men aim rightest when they shoot in jest."

So wrote the authors of *The Essay on Satire* which is attributed to the Earl of Mulgrave, but in which Dryden had a hand. The last couplet may perhaps be regarded as the object that Dryden set himself when in his fiftieth year he deserted the drama, in which he had only partially succeeded, for satire in which he was to establish himself as the greatest of the English. The period of his life, embracing as it did the Civil War, the Commonwealth, the Restoration, and the Revolution, was stormy. It was moreover a time when literary hatreds and rancours reached a degree of unparalleled intensity. Dryden himself was the focus of savage attacks led by Rochester, and indeed culminating in his being attacked

and beaten by a gang of roughs. ,A play, *The Rehearsal*—the work of Villiers, and a group of sycophantic wits —was put on the boards successfully with the express object of deriding the heroic drama in his person. Pamphlets,[2] lampoons, and every form of bitterness that scurrility and jealousy could suggest, were levelled against him. But the man, who could stoop villainously to flatter Dorset, in this remained true to his genius and his object. He hit hard, when attacked, but he never permitted himself to be betrayed into spite and personalities—the doom of the satirist. He destroyed his enemies by revealing them as types of wickedness and folly. They might seek to deny that they belonged to the type, but they could not refute the searching justice of its exposure.

lt has become the fashion to regard Dryden and Pope as great poets. This is a part of the general contemporary reaction against romance, and on that score may be partially discounted. But since exactly the qualities in these great writers are chosen for praise which are least ostensibly poetical, it is germane to our purpose to examine this point of view, Satire is the product of the cool mind ; there is not flame in it, but steel tempered by flame. It is the immediate result not of acceptance but of refusal. The satirist of all creators is nearest to the critic, because he assays and does not of set purpose build. Organic satire—as distinct

[1] Among others Sprat, later Bishop of Rochester, and Clifford.

[2] *The Censure of the Rota' on Mr. Dryden's " Conquest of Granada" A Description of the Academy of Athenian Virtuosi, A friendly Vindication of Mr. Dryden.*

from spurts of animal humour or of spite—therefore comes late in literary history. The first impulse is to imitate, the second to analyse life. This first impulse blazes up and flags in keeping with the temper of its environment, and by a law of compensation languor follows energy with perfect regularity. The period of Victoria was, one in which, as men were or seemed well-satisfied, the impulse was at fever-heat. It burned itself out in flickering absurdities of sentimentality, as did the Elizabethan in wild excesses of absurdity. The protest against the latter crystallized itself in the persons of Dryden and Pope, against the former in the contention that these two were as true poets as Donne or Marvell. But if this belief be well-founded, then the whole estimate of satire, advanced in these notes, is vicious. An attempt has been made to discriminate the satirist's quality from that of the poet proper. It has been urged that he uses the form and not the spirit of poetry, because that form, even in fetters, has a giant's strength. His purpose, it was urged, is not like that of the poet's to compose, but to challenge. He must strike at what is fleeting, and not seek to elevate it into the unchanging. A great satirist is not great by what he builds, but in what he destroys. The destruction itself may have a permanent significance, but its beauty will bear the same relation to that of poetry as does that of a forest in flames to that of the same forest in tljLe early green of spring,

' "To claim, therefore, on their satires that Dryden and Pope are great poets is to deny the valid dis-

tinction between satire and verse. Is it not reasonable to suppose that the view is the result of gratitude to two men who were supreme artists in their medium, and who were not guilty of self-deception ? In a time of lassitude and discouragement, optimism and sentiment are hard to abide, and combined with technical weakness, impossible. Dryden—the satirist—never blundered into anything that had a touch of either the vague or the pitiful. He was crisp, he was clear, he was absolute. His lines were parallel, and did not aim at infinity, believing in the older geometrical theory that even at that point there was no meeting-place. There was nothing between them to conjure the bewitched mind in that direction. If the art of poetry is to speak with the authority of a High Court Judge pronouncing unambiguous sentence, he was the perfect poet.

Before bowing to that conclusion, it is legitimate to ask in what prose-satire differs from that written in verse ? It has the same object, and it produces the same effect. The difference is that between the long-distance runner and the sprinter, but both are set towards, and both ultimately breast, the same tape. It would almost seem to follow that if pure poetry can be written in this field, then here at any rate the distinction between verse and prose has disappeared, which, if not a *reductio ad absurdum* is something very like it. Is it not rather the truth that to claim Dryden and Pope for poetry is not so much a belief as a challenge ? Beauty that is easy, or appears so, is fiercely denied its own name, and its devotees are branded heretic. So a touch

of softness, even though it were the softness of a leaf, is a fatal indictment to which not only Tennyson is exposed, but even perhaps Marvell. No such complaint lies against Dryden the satirist. There is no " eye in a fine frenzy rolling," no rapture, no mystery. Dryden conceives his object as the delineation of folly or knavery with the utmost economy and clarity. Donne, whose versification he reproved, would naturally seem to him an ineffective satirist, precisely because of the qualities that made him a great poet. Wonder and divine surprise have no place in satire. The business of the satirist is with the mind and not with the heart, nor even with the two in harmony He is like a man shooting at a target. It will avail him nothing if the bullet be of gold or silver, if he misses the bull.

Dryden rarely misses the bull. His heroic couplets, in the first place, are as great an advance on anything that preceded them as Shakespeare's blank verse over its predecessors. He took a ragged, dog-mouthed blunderbuss and changed it into a nickel-plated rifle. He not only re-doubled the accuracy of the weapon, but immensely increased its range. All that was needed for complete success was a suitable object and, as with Adam,

" The world was all about him where to choose."

It was an age of violent partisanship and yet one polite enough to be immediately affected by literature. A great satirist in 1681 (the year of *Absalom and Achitophel)* had more influence

than, or at least as much as the whole London press. It was not a democratic age. Power lay with small groups of men, to whom it mattered extremely if the greatest writers of the age were for or against them. Dryden's adhesion to one side or the other was, therefore, a matter of capital importance. He has been reproached for his violent progress from Cromwellian sympathies in *Heroic Stanzas on the Death of Oliver Cromwell* to the most full-blooded royalism in *Astr a Redux.* The charge only lies if the change was due to a desire of personal advantage and not to a sincere change of conviction. But all that matters for our purpose is that the pWect object for the perfect instrument was achieved when *Absalom*—the greatest of all political satires—saw the light of day.

It is perhaps worth while in passing to quote what Sir Walter Scott said of Dryden's genius in his *Life of Dry den. '* " The distinguishing characteristic of Dryden's genius seems to have been the power of reasoning and of expressing the result in appropriate language. This may seem slender praise ; yet these were the talents that led Bacon into the recesses of philosophy and conducted Newton to the cabinet of nature."- This is very shrewd criticism, incompatible indeed with his later exclamation—" In lyrical poetry, Dryden must be allowed to have no equal." But in the first utterance spoke the voice of criticism : in the second the voice of tradition. *it* is true that Dryden in his satires possesses in a higli degree the virtues of great prose—extreme lucidity, masculine strength, and the power to make the rules of syntax steps

rather than barriers. It was a short pace from this discovery to the conviction that Dryden was the father of modern prose rather than verse. That was the extreme (and foolish) romantic view to which is opposed the extreme contemporary view that these prosaic qualities in him constitute him a great poet. His general verse is not here under discussionj but only deafness could regard his satires as a branch of prose, while it is reserved for blindness to see them as the bright fount of poetry.

A man may be a great master of the form of verse, and yet a less poet than a mumbler. The master, however, may perform greater service to the cause of poetry by preparing a mould into which later genius can pour its molten ore. Such service Dryden abundantly offered to all English poetry after him. Before Dryden a man who stumbled in the ten-syllable line might have the excuse of the pioneer, who wears thick boots as he hacks his way through the jungle. After Dryden there was a path, which anyone could tread in dancing-slippers. In the unending contest between every language and those who seek to subdue it for the purpose of beauty, one round had been definitely won. Consider, apart from its formidable satiric impulse, the mere effortless certainty of style, beat, and construction in the opening attack on Shadwell in *MacFlecknoe*—

" Shadwell alone my perfect image bears,
Mature in dulness from his tender years 5
Shadwell alone of all my sons is he,
Who stands confirm'd in full stupidity.

6

The rest to some faint meaning make pretence
But Shadwell never deviates into sense.
Some beams of wit on other souls may fall,
Strike through, and make a lucid interval ;
But Shadwell's genuine night admits no ray,
His rising fogs prevail upon the day."

Is this not a revolution in the handling of metre almost as startling as that which caused the disappearance of Skelton ? The old poet was the last voice of the Middle Age, Wyatt, Marlowe, and Surrey the first of the heroic period of Elizabeth, but Dryden's is the first authentic accent of the modern world.

It has been debated elsewhere in these notes how far the type or the individual should be the object of satire. It was concluded (an obvious conclusion) that the ideal was the individual raised to the power of the type. Dryden in selecting in *Absalom and Achitophel* a'" political portrait-gallery never painted a type without individual significance, or an individual that was not hugely typical. He was as far removed from the nebulous denunciation of the Seven Deadly Sins as from the personal objurgation of Rochester and in less degree Pope. Let us take as examples the portraits of Sin. Slingsby Bethel, Shadwell, and Bishop Burnet

" Shimei, whose youth did early promise bring
Of zeal to God and hatred to his king—
Did wisely from expensive sins refrain,
And never broke the Sabbath but for gain ;
Nor ever was he known an oath to vent,
Or curse, unless against the Government."

" During his office treason was no crime,
The sons of Belial had a glorious time,
For Shimei, though not prodigal of pelf,
Yet loved his wicked neighbour as himself.
When two or three were gathered to declaim
Against the monarch of Jerusalem,
Shimei was always in the midst of them."

1 Here the decalogue and the prayer-book are by brilliant paradox prayed-in-aid to fix by their immortal line the timeless engraving of a traitor. Bethel may have been such, but if so, he lent his private fortune to endow the university of treachery. And more. As in all Dryden's great gallery, we should be hardly a penny-piece the poorer if the name had been torn from the frame. Anyone with eyes would recognize the subject. But for Dryden the hot spur of individual presentation added the last touch of eternal verisimilitude :

" A double noose thou on thy neck dost pull
For writing treason and for writing dull ;
To die for faction is a common evil,
**But** to be hanged for dulness is the devil.
Hadst thou the glories of the King exprest,
Thy praises had been satires at the best."

" **But** of King David's foes be this the doom,
May all be like the young man Absalom ;
**And** for my foes may this their blessing be,
To call like Doeg,[1] and to write like thee."

Here in the very instant of dissolution is held to undying ridicule the last vestige of talent. The

[1] Elkanah Settle, who had written a reply to *Absalom and Achitopbel*, entitled *Absalom Senior, or Acbitophel Transported,*

final insult that hurt the devil as much as his Fall was to be called stupid. Here are all his offspring caught in full fall and suspended for ever between the Heaven of wit and the Hell of effective evil—a punishment worse than any that Dante ever dreamed. ;

And, finally, Bishop Burnet :

" Broad-backed and brawny built for love's delight
A prophet formed to make a female proselyte.
A theologue more by need than genial bent ;
By breeding sharp, by nature confident ;
Interest in all his actions was discerned ;
More learned than honest, more a wit than learned."

" His praise of foes is venomously nice.
So touched, it turns a virtue to a vice."

" Prompt to assail, and careless of defence,
Invulnerable in his impudence.
He dares the world and eager of a name,
He thrusts about and jostles into fame.
So fond of loud report, that not to miss
Of being known (his last and utmost bliss)
He rather would be known for what he is."

This wrings the withers not only of the bishop, but of a whole roomful of impostors—the candid friend, the thruster, and, above all, those types that will even commit murder for the notoriety of the scaffold. When satire had gone so far, it could only change its fashion, but never its heart. Johnson, who found in Dryden the perfect model of a poet, concluded of him—" What was said of

Rome, adorned by Augustus, may be applied by an easy metaphor to English poetry embellished by Dryden, Lseteritiam invenit, marmoream reliquit " This is abundantly true of his satire. Of the rest let it be, at least, admitted that marble is not the material best fitted for the building of poetry's

" Cloud-capped towers, and gorgeous palaces."

Here stuff hewn out of no earthly quarry is needed, and used. But what can be done with marble—a noble and exact instrument—Dryden has completely achieved.

This is the golden age of English satire. From Dryden we turn to Swift only less than him if the claim is accepted that on the whole verse better than prose attains the satiric aim. If it be not, then the author of *The Tale of a Tub* and *Gulliver's Travels* takes his place on equal terms by Dryden's side. It is the disadvantage of these notes that Swift can only be considered *on* his verse which, if it had stood alone, would never have admitted him to the first rank. Dryden is reputed to have observed, after reading Swift's early poetical effort, *Ode to the Athenian Society* "Cousin Swift, you will never be a poet."

Swift is believed to have been mortally injured, and his attacks on Dryden are traced to that casual verdict. But though he wrote three volumes of verse, Swift never wholly proved that Dryden was wrong. For if ever there was a man whose genius, lowering and savage, was utterly opposed

to that of the poet, it was Swift. Dryden and Pope could on occasion find inspiration in something gentler than indignation. But Swift's Pegasus was a jade that needed a rusty spur.

Nevertheless earlier in these notes, when arguing the rival claims of verse and prose to supremacy in satire, attention was called to four lines of Swift's, which were, because of their compression, favourably compared with the effect even of his great prose satires. Nor is that argument inconsistent with the view now advanced. So great a master of English, if he chose to write in verse-form, could not fail to use it to real purpose, if that purpose were satire. Swift, to whom the whole of the poet's vision was denied, could yet handle the poet's medium, as a great orator might compel a foreign tongue to obedience by the authority of gesture and appearance.

It is in any case to be observed of Swift that he himself recognized that verse was not his first line. *The Ode,* which Dryden smoked, was written in 1691. It was not till some fifteen years later that he produced *The Problem,* symptomatic in its curious dry beastliness of one element that is never absent from his satire. This trait was in part the legacy of his age, but in part almost certainly self-mortification of something sensitive in his spirit that alarmed his pride. Life was not easy for him, and he was determined never *to* offer his heart as hostage to Fate or his enemies. When he wrote most coarsely, we may be sure that he always struck himself first.

I His satire has, in fact, three main streams—

the purely political, the anti-feminist, and—what alone has merit—the more general attack on human frailties. In the political he falls into the worst vice of all—the personal and the topical. Unlike Dry den's, these efforts have no interest apart from the subject, and the subject is often obscure and sometimes negligible. He cannot, therefore, be regarded as having written more than squibs and lampoons. Many of them were composed almost extempore, often in a heat of childish anger. Swift di(i not wait for reflection to mould and point the barb$ Like many another angry man before and after him he did not let the froth settle but tossed it off instead of the beer, leaving a stain of lees upon his mouth. Take as typical, if perhaps more violent than many, the almost maniac onslaught on Lord Allen in *Traulus* :

" And though you hear him stut-tut-tut-ter,
He barks as fast as he can utter.
He prates in spite of all impediment
While none believes that what he said he meant j
Puts in his finger and his thumb
To grope for words and out they come."

" Of brethren he's the false accuser ;
A slanderer, traitor, and seducer ;
A fawning, base, trepanning liar ;
The marks peculiar of his sire."

This is not satire ; it is plain Bedlam. But it indicates the risk that even genius runs when occupied with personal hatreds.

Nor is Swift's attitude to women much more

wholesome. It is doubtful whether In the history of verse there exists anything so wantonly brutal as *A Beautiful Toung Nymph Going to Bed.* It has always been the tap-room habit to guffaw at the fading prostitute. But Swift does not guffaw. He tears her to abominable shreds slowly, deliberately, and mirthlessly. It is a sight from which the eyes should be averted, because it can be no less than suicide repeating itself like a fit of hiccoughs. Only less tainted by the same self-persecution are such poems as *The Furniture of a Woman's Mind, The Journal of a Modern Lady,* and *The Progress of Marriage.*

> " In party furious to her power
> A bitter Whig or Tory sour ;
> Her arguments directly tend
> Against the side she would defend ;
> Will prove herself a Tory plain,
> From principles the Whigs maintain ;
> And to defend the Whiggish cause,
> Her topics from the Tories draws."

Here, again, the will to wound outruns the power to strike. Superlatives are the penny balloons of literature. They burst at the least touch of heat, leaving behind a small rubber heap. And that is most or all that remains when Swift has set his gaudy fleet bouncing and billowing against the jet of his rage.

But with the general satires we are in the world where we recognize and salute the author of *Gulliver's Travels.* Perhaps the best of all (with the exception of the poem on *The Death of*

*Dean Swift,* is *The Beast's Confession to the Priest*—written in 1729, three years after the publication of Gulliver. Here is iEsop keyed up to the adventures among the Houhynyms. Each animal, in this brilliant poem, confesses his peculiar failing to the Priest. The wolf, for example, admits that after long abstinence he has broken his fast. Says the ass :

" A wag he was, he needs must own,
And could not let a dunce alone :
Sometimes his friend he would not spare ;
And might perhaps be too severe ;
But yet the worst that could be said,
He was a wit both born and bred."

The swine, on the other hand :

" allowed
His shape and beauty made him proud
In diet was perhaps too nice,
But gluttony was ne'er his vice."

While the goat could not but confess :

" 'Tis true he was not much inclin'd
To fondness for the female kind ;
Not as his enemies object,
From chance or natural defect ;
Not by his frigid constitution,
But through a pious resolution."

The moral is applied with damnable exactitude

to the human species, culminating in the statesman who :

" tells you with a sneer,
His fault is to be too sincere,
And having no sinister ends
Is apt to disoblige his friends.
The nation's good, his mastery's glory,
Without regard to Whig or Tory,
Were all the schemes he had in view,
Yet he was seconded by few."

This is the true matter, which greatly culminates in this poem on his own death. Here he permits himself for once in his life, if not to feel, at least, not to resent a genuine emotion. The famous extract cannot be too often requoted :

" My female friends, whose tender hearts
Have better learn'd to act their parts,
Receive the news in doleful dumps.
The Dean is dead. (Pray what is trumps ?)
Then, Lord have mercy on his soul.
(Ladies, I'll venture for the vole).
Six deans, they say, must bear the pall
(I wish I knew what king to call.) "

And the last lines not without a touch of genuine self-criticism and appraisal :

" As for his works in verse and prose,
I own myself no judge of those.
Nor can I tell what critics thought them ;
But this I know that people bought them ;
As with a moral view design'd
To please and to reform mankind ;

And, if he often miss'd his aim,
The world must own it to their shame,
The praise is his, and theirs the blame.
He gave the little wealth he had
To build a house for fools and mad ;
To shew by one satiric touch,
No nation wanted it so much.
That Dryden he hath left a debtor ;
I wish it soon may have a better.
And since you dread no further lashes,
Methinks you may forgive his ashes."

" Much will be forgiven him because he hated much. What an epitaph, and how astonishingly true 1

Before Pope—the third member of the Trinity is reached—there is Young to be briefly considered. We need not linger with either Prior or Gay—the first because you cannot write satire with a powder-puff, the second because you cannot write it standing on your head. Prior is too much of a May-fly, Gay of a Christy minstrel to warrant serious inclusion.,, But Young is of different metal, and may fitly be the penultimate name in the era that reached its consummation in Pope. At the beginning of Young's Second Satire occur those two lines, abundantly true of their author's own work :

" Heroes and gods make other poems fine ;
Plain satire calls for sense in every line."

And in Young's case it hardly ever calls in vain. So cool, so imperturbable, and in some ways so

generous is Young that it is difficult to believe that he belongs to the same age as Swift. So much is this the case that his work suggests the uncomfortable reflection that the coarseness of the great Dean is more the product of his own nature than his age. It is true that Young had only genuine talent to set beside Swift's genius, and that, while talent is a park hack, genius is always a broncho. Yet it is equally true that talent more than genius reflects and is coloured by its period. When, therefore, we find hardly a line or a phrase in all Young's seven satires which would offend the most fastidious modern taste, the inference as regards Swift is all too obvious. Something is no doubt due to Young's comparatively easy life, and the fact that talent is not, like genius, a lightning-conductor. Still we are ruefully driven to admit that it was possible to write effective satire in the age of Swift without the touch of the tar-brush. And we may, therefore, be fortified in the conclusion that Swift's violence was at certain points definitely a pathological symptom.

There is nothing of the " case " about Young. No man ever wrote plainer, or with more modest competence. His satires have their obvious weaknesses. They are marred by a sycophantic adulation of the great, and by sententiousness. They never take fire or even suggest its neighbourhood. But, on the other hand, they are never dull, often wise, always mature, and not seldom witty Skelton and Butler have been singled out in these notes as eminently English. They are, but they are

richly and racily so distinguished. Young is English of another sort, the gentle, indulgent, and, above all, sensible uncle of the Trollope kind. Such a man finds much to deplore and to surprise, but nothing to drive him foaming through the streets of time. For him vices are dangerously like foibles, and sins like follies. But at that unpretentious level he, like Trollope, is wholly admirable, and, since his work is hardly known or read, a few typical extracts, which indicate his considerable excellence, follow :

44 Of folly, vice, disease, men proud we see ;
And (stranger still !) of blockheads' flattery ;
Whose praise defames ; as if a fool should mean,
By spitting in your face, to make it clean."

(This is Young's nearest approach to coarseness !)

" When men of infamy to grandeur soar,
They light a torch to shew their shame the more.
Those governments which curb not evil, cause !
And a rich knave's a libel on our laws."

" Fools grin on fools, and, stoic-like, support
Without one sigh, the pleasures of a Court."

u Unlearned men of books assume the care
As eunuchs are the guardians of the fair."

" False names are vain, thy lines their author tell ;
Thy best concealment had been writing well."

**And in the next quotation Young** rises **to** some

thing with a genuine touch in it. Addressing himself he cries :

" Thou too art wounded with the common dart,
And love of fame lies throbbing at thy heart ;
And what wise means to gain it hast thou chose ?
Know fame and fortune both are made of prose ?
Is thy ambition sweating for a rhyme,
Thou unambitious fool, at this late time ?
While I a moment name, a moment's past ;
I'm nearer death in this verse than the last :
What then is to be done ? Be wise with speed :
A fool at forty is a fool indeed."

In contrast with Dryden and Pope see how forbearing and yet how trenchant he is with his critics :

" Your work is long,' the critics cry. 'Tis true,
And lengthens still to take in fools like you."

" Critics on verse, as squibs on triumphs wait,
Proclaim the glory, and augment the state ;
Hot, envious, noisy, proud the scribbling fry
Burn, hiss, and bounce, waste paper, stink and die.
Rail on, my friends ! what more my verse can crown
Than Compton's smile, and your obliging frown."

Or again, what could be neater than these stocks **for** the trembling atheist and the poetaster :

-, who makes so merry with the Creed,
He almost thinks he disbelieves indeed
But only thinks so ; to give both their due,
Satan, and he, believe, and tremble, too."

" Bad metre, that excrescence of the head,
Like hair, will sprout, altho' the poet's dead.[1]'

Again, his magnificent railing sanity on women is in happy contrast to Swift's diseased malice :

" We grant that beauty is no bar to sense,
Nor is't a sanction for impertinence."

" Though sick to death abroad they safely roam,
But droop and die, in perfect health, at home :
For want—but not of health, are ladies ill ;
And tickets cure beyond the doctor's pill.

" Let the robust, and the gigantic carve,
Life is not worth so much, she'd rather starve ;
But chew she must herself ah cruel fate !
That Rosalinda can't by proxy eat."

" With skill she vibrates her eternal tongue,
For ever most divinely in the wrong."

" To wreck her quiet, the most dreadful shelf
Is if her lover dares enjoy himself."

This is Young's level, and let its critic find, outside the Olympians, half a dozen other writers who can attain and keep it. He did all that talent could do. It was left to Pope to show what genius could effect with the same material.

## CHAPTER V

## POPE AND HIS SUCCESSORS

POPE, after suffering the cold airs of the Romantic revival, is again the touchstone of verse. It is declared, in certain quarters, that not to acknowledge Pope as a great poet is not to recognize poetry. His obvious shallowness, his blindness to all natural exaltation, his defects of temper and of scope, are all forgiven the possessor of a style, against whose impregnable glass the storm-tossed gulls of romance beat in vain. The untroubled light pierces the wrack ; the sea-birds circling wildly disappear in the night and the spray.

Since these claims bear directly on the contention that he ranks as the first of satirists, they must be, if briefly, considered. We need not argue again his precise relation to Dryden. Johnson, who admired them both, perhaps said the last word, though some of the adjectives used are a little dubious. " Of genius," says Johnson, " that power which constitutes a poet : that quality without which judgment is cold, and knowledge is inert : that energy, which collects, combines,, amplifies and animates : the superiority must with some hesitation, be allowed to Dryden." He adds what some to-day might be prepared to accept and what to me is wholly unacceptable.

" It is not to be inferred that of this poetical vigour Pope had only a little, because Dryden had more, for every other writer, since Milton, must give place to Pope."

In what, then, resides this supreme virtue, which suffers Pope to be mentioned in the same breath as Milton ? jfA modern philosopher, Prof. Whitehead, has institttted a most fertile comparison between *Paradise Lost, The Essay on Man, The Excursion,* and *In Memoriam,* as four poems at their different periods expressing the general attitude to religious and ethical experience. It would be foreign to the purpose of these notes to follow the development of this thesis by Professor Whitehead. But it is legitimate so far to borrow his light as to compare a great passage from *Paradise Lost* with a passage from the end of *The Dunciad* originally intended for *The Essay on Man*—a passage which Pope himself could never read without emotiorr. The two passages are particularly suitable for comparison because both deal with light and darkness. Hear Milton first.

" Hail, holy light, offspring of heaven first-born,
Or of th' eternal co-eternal beam.
May I express thee unblamed ? since God is light,
And never but in unapproached light
Dwelt from eternity, dwelt then in thee,
Bright effluence of bright essence increate.
Or hearest thou rather, pure ethereal stream,
Whose fountain who shall tell ? Before the sun,
Before the heavens thou wert, and at the voice
Of God, as with a mantle, didst invest

The rising world of waters dark and deep,
Won from the void and formless infinite.
Thee I revisit now with bolder wing,
Escap'd the Stygian pool, though long detained
In that obscure sojourn, while in my flight
Through utter and through middle darkness borne,
With other notes than to th' Orphean lyre,
I sung of Chaos and eternal Night,
Taught by the heav'nly Muse to venture down
The dark descent, and up to reascend,
Though hard and rare ; thee I revisit safe,
And feel thy sov'reign vital lamp j but thou
Revisit'st not these eyes that roll in vain
To find thy piercing ray, and find no dawn.
So much the rather thou, celestial light
Shine inward, and the mind through all her powers
Irradiate ; there plant eyes, all mist from thence
Purge and disperse, that I may see and tell
Of things invisible to mortal sight."

I purposely omit the supreme passage that culminates—

" Or sight of vernal bloom, or summer's rose,
Or flocks, or herds, or human face divine,"

because even Pope's stoutest supporters do not claim that he was moved by a vivid response to natural beauty. It is right that the two concepts should be set one against the other in their purity, unadorned by any concession to immediate loveliness. Hear Pope then :

" In vain, in vain—the all-composing hour
Resistless falls, the Muse obeys the power.

She comes 1 she comes ! the sable throne behold
Of Night primeval, and of Chaos old !
Behold her, Fancy's gilded clouds decay,
And all its varying rainbows die away.
Wit shoots in vain its momentary fires,
The meteor drops and in a flash expires.
But one by one at dread Medea's strain
The sickening stars fade off th' ethereal plain,
As Argus' eyes, by Hermes' wand opprest,
Clos'd one by one to everlasting rest.
Thus at her felt approach, and secret might,
Art after art goes out and all is night.
See skulking truth to her old cavern fled,
Mountains of casuistry heaped on her head !
Philosophy, that lean'd on heaven before,
Shrinks to her second cause, and is no more.
Physic of Metaphysic begs defence
And Metaphysic calls for aid on sense !
See Mystery to Mathematics fly !
In vain ! They gaze, turn giddy, rave and die.
Religion, blushing, veils her sacred fires,
And unawares Morality expires.
No public flame, no private, dares to shine :
Nor human spark is left, nor glimpse divine !
Lo ! thy dread empire, Chaos ! is restored ;
Light dies before thy uncreating word !
Thy hand, great Anarch ! lets the curtain fall :
And universal darkness buries all."

Both poets are attempting the highest flight possible to the human mind, the direct vision of the sources of light and dark. Skill, mastery of verse, supreme accomplishment will nothing avail them here. They are stripped of all the brilliant aids of the mind. The soul is speaking, and all is hushed

to hear. The faces of the listening multitude are turned up to the mountain. What does the prophet bring back from his bright encounter beyond the furthest pine ?

What has Pope to offer at the instant of crisis? Pope, the child of his age, does not listen to an inner voice. There is no need. He repeats without examination formulas that reason has approved. The dictionary of current knowledge is ransacked, and page after page torn out and dropped, leaving a trail in the one paper-chase from which the Hound of Heaven turns wearily aside. Art, Truth, Casuistry, Philosophy, Physic, Metaphysics, Sense, Mystery, Religion, and Morality litter the ground, but the hungry sheep look up and are not fed on abstractions that are the labels of books which the poet has not opened. Each of these high words has a significance for the soul of man, but he cannot guess the shape and scent of flowers, reading in winter Latin names tied to a stick supporting either nothing, or at most a piece of dead wood. To read this passage is to marvel at unrivalled skill, but the skill of a skater miraculously making figures on ice, while the dark water beneath remains unplumbed, uncharted, and unknown. The spirit is not enlarged or changed, but, like the ice, is sensible only of a swift and effortless movement. Nothing has stirred in the deep below.

• Pope speaks like a lecturer, but Milton is praying. With slow passionate intensity the beautiful words make way for the aspiring thDughts to which even their loveliness is a barrier. It

lies not with human speech exactly to express the approach to the inmost and the highest. Here the soul walks alone, for, like death, this communion is solitary. But, as Milton releases his own soul, the shadow of the miracle falls upon ours. We too desperately seek to lay aside the masks of language, and haltingly share, after the dark adventure down, the reascent. We cannot see the invisible upon which Milton is gazing, but we observe beating about him the brightness that veiled the face of Moses returning from Sinai. It is as near as we may come to the source of light. He who brings us so far, and he alone, is at the heart of poetry.

fThe difference thus demonstrated between Milton and Pope is no doubt partly one of the ages in which they lived. It is the distinction between an age of almost savage belief and one that held itself to be wholly dominated by reason. Pope could not have written like Milton in the eighteenth century, nor Milton in the seventeenth like Pope. But the difference strikes deeper than this. Poetry shares with religion a certain fundamental unreason. )It is aware of, and seeks to express in its highest moments, what is not wholly subject to the laws of thought. It does not abandon reason, or it becomes nonsense. But it has traffic with what lies beyond it. To claim, therefore, for Pope, who never wrote a word that had not a precise and usual significance, rank as among the greatest poets, is to degrade the essential meaning of poetry. It is also to suggest that satire is entitled to take its place beside the poetry of

revelation. It is because the view of Pope current in certain circles leads us to that conclusion that I have not thought it ctiit of place to argue the matter in these notes. there is a genius of satire, which Pope possessed in high degree. But it is the genius of analysis and not of synthesis

If this is admitted, we may address ourselves to a consideration of the great writer, accepting neither the foolish depreciation which marked the revolt from his manner at the beginning of the nineteenth century, nor the equally unjust estimate advanced in his own time, and in some quarters in ours. It is in the first place not open to question that Pope has so decisive a mastery over the couplet that his verse, like that of Racine, acquires in the bulk some of the majesty of a natural process. Almost alone of the habitual users of this metre he can be read with continuous satisfaction, and even with a sense of excitement. The reader may be sure that he will find nothing that would have surprised an eighteenth-century drawing-room : he may be equally certain that he will find nothing that would have disappointed it. This is no mean compliment at a time when writing was with many the second, and with a few the first, interest in life. One may go further and say that Taste under Queen Anne had some of the constructive severity associated with the dictatorship of the French Academy. Britain was indeed recovering from a debauch of genius. The Elizabethans, with the possible exception of Ben Jonson, had for the succeeding age a little the air of magnificent savages. Hercules had his merits when there

were dragons to be subdued, but in the polite world of Whigs and periwigs a well-turned ankle and an equally well-turned couplet were a tribute to the growing forces of civilization. Pope observed :

" We conquer'd France, but felt our captive's charms ;
Her arts victorious triumphed o'er our arms,
Britain to soft refinements long a foe,
Wit grew polite, and numbers learn'd to flow."

We need not accept the smug belief of the Augustans that they first studied the principles of art to recognize how important an advance their serious pre-occupation with form registered. Dryden, it might be supposed, had done everything that could be done with the heroic couplet, short of making poetry of it. Pope, subject to the same reservation, was still able to improve upon Dryden by finding a subject and a mind perfectly adapted to the limitations of the form. Dryden, though he mastered it, could not always bear to be confined by it. His was not a small soul cpntent to hang quietly all day in one small; bell. Now and again he felt " immortal longings "; that strained the form almost to breaking-point. But Pope was no denizen of the middle-air. All that he had and all that he was could move at ease in that little room. When, as in the passage quoted from the end of *The Dunciad,* he attempted something greater, he did not strain the form, but only his mind ill-adapted to heavenly enterprise. But when he observed his world of Reason and

Wit, when he laughed (always with a touch of the wasp), and when he scolded, the three unities were perfectly achieved. The Time the Place, and the Loved One were all together.

In his essay on Pope Mr. Lytton Strachey rebukes those critics, like Matthew Arnold, who condemn the poet for failing to do what he never attempted or wished to achieve. Pope, he says, was pre-eminently a satirist, and a critic of manners. It is absurd to arraign him on the charge of not having been Milton,- seeing that he never claimed that *alias.* It is no doubt absurd criticism of Pop6, but not of many of his champions. These are not content to accept him as a master-player with the rapier of heroic couplet. They will have him pure poet, and by that contention necessarily alarm those who believe that poetry is in essence fundamentally constructive. Those who take that view would not quarrel with Mr. Strachey's general estimate of poet, nor even differ violently from his estimate of the very passage which I have quoted above. Mr. Strachey merely points to the extreme technical skill which " by a most learned accumulation of accents and quantities " produces a massive effect. He said nothing, nor could he justly find anything to say, of the poetic significance underlying the metrical virtuosity. There is in fact none. But'Pope himself, and not a few of his contemporaries, believed that these lines were not only brilliantly' written, but were poetry in the highest sense. They were not, and it is only to expose Pope to undeserved ridicule to pretend so. Pope's level was that of comedy in the

Shakespearean sense of the word. (He had no acquaintance with the deeper springs of life, nor with the solemn movement that is called tragic. His attitude to reality was his attitude to the Greek tongue. He ventured to translate Homer with but a fragmentary knowledge of the original. He must have been content to take him at second-hand, but even so, with bewildering accomplishment, produced what Bentley very rightly said was very pretty, " but you must not call it Homer." So when he essays an ultimate vision of life equally at second-hand, we are justified in saying, " Very pretty, Mr. Pope, but you must not call it poetry."'

Once these injurious pretensions are dismissed, Pope may be considered, with one serious reservation, by a mind delivered wholly to admiration. The exception is occasioned by a weakness in the poet's character as radical as that in his mind. He was not a large, just, and generous hater. He was a mean, spiteful little wretch. Private ethics have little to do with art unless, as in Pope's case, they are violently reflected in his work ' When the street-urchin in the poet was roused, he was invariably and immediately personal. He throws the nearest and dirtiest stone, screams, and suffers public convulsions of disgust. Too often the subjects which excite this exhibition are wholly negligible, nor does Pope's handling of them lend them any saving quality of immortal contemptibility. - *The Dunciad,* for example, as to almost three parts is simply and plainly unintelligible without a contemporary equivalent of " Who's Who." Dryden's *MacFlecknoe* is in

general a satire on dulness and pretension, and needs nothing but a knowledge of human nature for its apprehension. But Pope is so occupied with his obscure aversions that, except for a sprinkling of that brilliance which never fails him, the poem, as a whole, is proof of Pope's moral weakness rather than of his satirical greatness. ]

And now to praise. The *Essap on Criticism* appeared in 1711, when Pope was twenty-three. De Quincey writes of it : " The Essay is a mere versification, like a metrical multiplication table of commonplaces, the most mouldy with which criticism has baited its rat-traps." This estimate is completely beside the mark. Pope in this poem is not seeking to do more than English Boileau's *Ars Poetique,* with such adjustments and additions as his own precocious mastery of verse suggested. He is obviously writing with the absurd superficiality of a boy when he writes :

" Be Homer's works your study and delight,
Read them by day, and meditate by night 5
Thence form your judgment, thence your maxims bring,
And trace the Muses upward to their spring."

The precept is, of course, conventional nonsense. But when he speaks out of his own knowledge of " numbers " he deserves (and has received) universal audience :

" True ease in writing comes from art, not chance,
As those move easiest who have learn'd to dance.
'Tis not enough no harshness gives offence ;
The sound must seem an echo to the sense."

This is the essence of his own creed, one that English genius too constantly and at a high price neglects. But the poem is not remarkable only for much first-rate sense. It establishes its author already as the terrible possessor of a little blow-pipe that can lightly blow a poisoned thorn. The wound is no bigger than the prick of a pin, but it is mortal. Here, already almost perfect, is the form which gives *The Essay on Man* and the Horatian satires their just and unchallengeable eminence.

It is not necessary to quote widely, because Pope, like Butler, is a part of the language. Choose half a dozen phrases at random from *The Essay on Man,* and you discover with surprise that when you thought you were speaking English you were, in fact, speaking'Tope :

" Vice is a monster of so frightful mien
As to be hated needs but to be seen ;
Yet seen too oft, familiar with her face,
We first endure, then pity, then embrace."

" Behold the child, by Nature's kindly law,
Pleas'd with a rattle, tickled with a straw."

" If poets allure thee, think how Bacon shin'd,
The wisest, brightest, meanest of mankind !
Or ravish'd with the whistling of a name,
See Cromwell damned to everlasting fame."

" That virtue only makes our bliss below,
And all our knowledge is—ourselves to know."

Keats, it will be remembered, asserted that all our knowledge was that truth and beauty were one. That was true for him, as it was equally true for Pope that it was self-knowledge. Each of these poets at his own level had come upon the secret of his own genius, and strongly acted on it. Pope mapped the little empire of his soul, and found that all his age fitted neatly within its frontiers. He could thereafter at leisure distinguish the principal natural features with the assured distinction of an inspired cartographer.

The map when completed at the end of the Horatian satires is a permanent guide to the Augustan age. There are no mountain ranges, nor huge, tidal rivers. It is a countryside of smooth meadows, populous with elegant cities. It is inhabited by a polite multitude. Some of these graceful figures are the poet's friends. They have the amiable immortality of sylvan statues. Many are his enemies. They are the most polished rogues that ever breathed. Only here and there does Pope change the note which scarified Addison in :

> " Damn with faint praise, assent with civil leer,
> And without sneering, teach the rest to sneer ;
> Willing to wound, and yet afraid to strike,
> Just hint a fault, and hesitate dislike,"

for the downright trouncing of Lord Hervey :

> " Yet let me flap this bug with gilded wings,
> This painted child of dirt, that stinks and stings ;
> Whose buzz the witty and the fair annoys,
> Yet wit ne'er tastes, and beauty ne'er enjoys."

" Whether in florid impotence he speaks,
And, as the prompter breathes, the puppet squeaks ;
Or at the ear of Eve, familiar toad,
Half froth, half venom, spits himself abroad,
In puns, or politics, or tales, or lies,
Or spite, or smut, or rhymes, or blasphemies,
His wit all see-saw, between that and this,
Now high, now low, now master up, now miss,
And he himself in vile antithesis."

We can leave Pope at that point. It has not been reached again, nor will. Pope not only spoke for his age, he was his age. It had its obvious demerits. But, at least, it had the civilization of rigid artistic taste. It was self-sufficient, because it was sufficient in itself, and Pope was made by nature and by art to mirror it because he was its prototype. It is not his fault that he was not born in the age of Elizabeth with the soul of Shakespeare. It is rather his great good fortune (and ours) that he lived in the age of Anne with the soul of Pope.

Pope died in 1744. The great Hanoverian anarch was letting Shadwell's own curtain of dulness universally fall. In Satire, apart from the bright expiring taper of Charles Churchill, who deserves consideration, there is nothing to find. To discover the industrious poetic insects of the period we shall have to lift the stone in *The Dunciad* and watch them anonymously scuttle into an unfamiliar light. Cook, author of *The Battle of the Poets* (in which Swift and Pope were routed by Philips and Welsted), Dunton, author of *Neck or Nothings*

Tulchin, editor of *The Observatory,* Eliza Haywood, authoress of *The Court of Carimania* and *The New Utopia,* Welsted, author of *The Triumvirate,* a satire on Pope and his friends,[1] and Goode, author of *The Mock Msop,*—all these faintly crawl into a rushlight which they help to occult by their native obscurity. Their number is proof of the vogue of satire ; their failure proof of the genius of Pope. Hardly more distinguished, though here and there with a lingering verse or two to their credit, are Abel Evans, who wrote the famous Vanbrugh epitaph :

> " Under this stone, reader, survey
> Dead Mr. John Vanbrugh's house of clay.
> Lie heavy on him, Earth, for he
> Laid many heavy loads on thee,"

James Bramston, James Miller, and John Byrom. But all of them at most yield a few stray couplets or an occasional poem to the anthologist. No wonder that Pope had the authentic presence of a great star by the side of these penny tapers.

[1] Welsted inspired this admirable lampoon :

> " Dear Welsted, mark, in dirty hole,
> That painful animal, a mole ;
> Above ground never born to grow,
> What mighty stir it keeps below !
> To make a molehill all this strife !
> It digs, pokes, undermines, for life.
> How proud a little dirt to spread,
> Conscious of nothing o'er its head.
> Till labouring on for want of eyes
> It blunders into light, and dies."

Their primary interest is that they show that in Britain there was once an age when verse was almost as current a mode of intellectual exchange as it was (and perhaps is) in Japan. The whole polite world lisped (or perhaps stammered) in numbers, not because they came, but because they ought to have come.

Charles Churchill, on the other hand, contrived in the brief thirty-three years that Fate vouchsafed him, to show himself the last, if the least, of the genuine satirists of the great age. His most celebrated piece is the *Rosciad*—a *Dunciad* of the stage. It suffers even more than the original from its topicality. A poor writer may leave behind some fragment, however pathetic, to justify or rebuke criticism. But an actor dies with the footlights. His shadow in history is that of a ghost's ghost, and it was on this cobwebby material that Churchill chose to work.

In his own estimate of his powers, found in *The Prophecy of Famine* he under-rated himself, though the passage shows an unusually shrewd self-knowledge :

" Me, whom no muse of heavenly birth inspires,
No judgment tempers when rash genius fires ;
Who boasts no merit but mere knack of rhyme,
Short gleams of sense, and satire out of time,
Who cannot follow where trim Fancy leads,
By ' prattling streams,' o'er flower-empurpled ' meads :
Who often, but without success, have prayed
For apt alliteration's artful aid :
Who would, but cannot, with a master's skill,
Coin fine new epithets, which mean no ill—

Me, thus uncouth, thus every way unfit
For pacing poesy, and ambling wit,
Taste with contempt beholds, nor deigns to place
Among the lowest of her favoured race ! "

Not wholly with contempt, Mr. Churchill, if it be a sound taste. Nor are your gleams of sense as brief as you suggest, nor your satire out of time. On the contrary, it is in time, just in time. It does not belong to the age of Johnson and Goldsmith. It looks back to Dryden and not forward to Sheridan and the wits of the Third George. It closes a period, but it does not close it ignobly.

Let us take in illustration two portraits—one of Yates, an actor whom we cannot know except by description, and the other in *The Cock Lane Ghost* of Johnson, whom we shall not fail to recognize, though in caricature :

" In characters of low and vulgar mould,
Where nature's coarsest features we behold,
Where destitute of every decent grace,
Unmannered jests are blurted in your face,
There Yates with justice strict attention draws,
Acts truly from himself, and gains applause,
But when to please himself, or charm his wife,
He aims at something in politer life."

" Fond of his dress, fond of his person grown,
Laugh'd at by all, and to himself unknown,
From side to side he struts, he smiles, he prates,
And seems to wonder what's ] come of Yates."

The last two lines are feeble. Pope would have made a far better thing of them, but there is sufficient real force and point, well enough expressed on the whole to justify the applause that *The Rosciad* excited. Now hear him on "the great Cham":

> "Pomposo, insolent and loud,
> Vain idol of a scribbling crowd,
> Whose very name inspires an awe,
> Whose every word is sense and law.
> Whose cursory flattery is the tool
> Of every fawning, flattering fool;
> Who wit with jealous eye surveys,
> And sickens at another's praise;
> Who, proudly seized of learning's throne,
> Now damns all learning save his own:
> Who scorns those common wares to trade in,
> Reas'ning, convincing and persuading.
> But makes each sentence current pass
> With 'puppy,' 'coxcomb,' 'scoundrel,'' ass.'
> (For 'tis with him a certain rule
> That folly's proved when he calls 'fool.')
> Who to increase his native strength
> Draws words six syllables in length,
> With which, assisted with a frown,
> By way of club, he knocks us down."

This, in spite of its echoes of Pope, is a very admirable piece of satire. It only needs to dye Boswell's unreasonable worship with a tinge of criticism to produce a very tolerable, if one-sided, likeness. The man who could write thus was not unworthy of his period. It is true that he constantly flags, that there are long tracts of desert

between the oases. **But** the desert-journey is not ill-rewarded. From the last oasis we can look back to the sun setting on the gilded vanes of the age of Anne, and forward to its first morning gleam where it rises on Byron and the nineteenth century.

# CHAPTER VI

## THE DAWN OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

A DAME'S school of poets arose in the 'nineties, who turned back with loving regret to the elegant confidence of the eighteenth century. Austin Dobson was their leader, and he, lost in an age that alarmed his gentle spirit, never recovered from a delicate homesickness. We have seen enough in these notes of the habits and characters of the leading figures of that period not to share Dobson's regret. Their attitude to women is enough to turn the strongest stomach. They brawled like a pack of wolves, and tippled like fishes in the deep. They were both, in fact and word, bullies, sworders, and champions of the horsewhip. And yet in their devotion to Art they were as nearly civilized as the English have ever been. It is this strange virtue in them that won Dobson's heart, and it is that which induces a pang when one turns from their neat, manageable, if violent, world to the beginnings of the intellectual sprawl that is the gift of industrialism to the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

The transition is more abrupt in appearance than in fact, if we confine ourselves to the satirists. If we had the world of general verse and prose to

survey, we should have Collins, Gray, and Cowper as ferrymen from one side of Acheron to the other. We should have Sheridan with most of the eighteenth-century wit, and hardly any of its savagery. We should have, above all, Laurence Sterne to lead us in this Unsentimental Journey, which I may, perhaps, be forgiven for imagining thus :

" Unsentimental, said my Uncle Toby, is a hard word, Trim. I do not know of it, said he, but the rogue made a mouthful of it. 'Tis a hard, glassy, satirical word, said my Uncle Toby. We could have found a use for it in Flanders, said Trim. I do not think it satirical, said my father. Satire is quite another thing. What kind of a thing ? asked my uncle. My father rose to his feet. Brother, said he, I will read you a passage from the Poetick Art of the Sabine poet. I know no Latin, said my uncle. It will not matter, said my father. Satire is common to all languages. Like swearing, said Trim, with a respectful bow. My father frowned. My uncle leaned back in his chair, bidding Trim to remember to look to the culverin. 'Twill rust in the rain, if it be not brought within doors. I was thinking, said Trim, that I might raise the carriage. 'Tis pointed too low. My uncle looked at my father doubtfully. If Trim altered the carriage, the piece might be spoiled. But my father was busy searching for his place. Very well, Trim, said my uncle with a half-sigh, but go quickly and I will follow. What, said my father, reading some twenty lines, could be a nobler proof that satire was all sentiment

than this ? I had thought, said my uncle shifting in his seat, that a satirist must be dead to all but hate. Such a man, said my father, would be a monster. There was a loud noise of cracking in the garden. Good God ! cried my father, what is Trim about ? Moving the culverin, said my uncle. 'Tis the soldier, and not the satirist, that is dead to all but hate. Trim never hated a soul in his life, save the Frenchman that killed the dog. Then, said my father, he is a monster, too. 'Tis a satire to call him so, said my Uncle Toby."

But these notes may not avail themselves of all this wealth. They must set their face sternly to satire, and they will find that in the beginning of the nineteenth century satire means Burns, Shelley, but, above all, Byron. Let us, therefore, without too much ado, doff our wigs and embroidered coats, and put on clothes, and manners, suggestive not of candle-light and a fancy-dress ball, but of gas-light and Throgmorton Street.

Burns, the natural bard of Scotland, has by a century of criticism been accepted as a serious, even as a great poet. His directness, his simplicity, his touch with mother-earth contrast with the Age of Pope as radically as would the figure of a ploughman against a Wessex sky with the Daphnis of a Court elegiac. The sense of open-air blowing into a silk-hung chamber heavy with stale scent has carried the critics far, indeed, in their welcome to the Scotsman. Matthew Arnold, for example, the gentler Dr. Johnson of Victoria, saluted him

among the masters. He quotes, indeed, the lines :

" Had we never loved sae kindly,
Had we never loved sae blindly,
Never met or never parted,
We had ne'er been broken-hearted,"

among those by which all verse may be tested. For him, and perhaps for the world at large, the part-author of *My luv is like a red red rose,* and the author, with the full credit, of the address to an evicted mouse, is free of the company of Keats and Shelley.

Fortunately it is not incumbent upon me here to examine this doctrine. Were it so, I should have to inquire how it is that, whenever Burns abandons Scots, his verse resembles nothing so much as a bather whose clothes have been stolen. What is one to make of this that appears *to* speak the mind of Felicia Hemans in the accent of Thomas Gray at his worst ?—

" O enviable early days,
When dancing thoughtless pleasure's maze,
To care, to guilt unknown !
How ill exchang'd for riper times,
To feel the follies and the crimes
Of others, or my own !
Ye tiny elves that guiltless sport,
Like linnets in the bush,
Ye little know the ills ye court
When manhood is your wish !
The losses, the crosses
That active man engage ;
The fears all, the tears all
Of dim declining age."

It is possible to argue (and with truth) that this is not Burns but the Countryman imitating his moral inferiors—the urban fops. But a worse doubt even creeps in when we come in that brilliant poem *The Cottar s Saturday Night* on this passage :

" O Scotia, my dear, my native soil I
For whom my warmest wish to heaven is sent !
Long may thy hardy sons of rustic toil
Be blest with health, and peace, and sweet content !
And O ! may heaven their simple lives prevent
From Luxury's contagion, weak and vile."

Some contagion both weak and vile has crept over the vigorous hand of Burns to that extent that a sinister possibility begins to suggest itself. Can it be that this sententiousness is taking cover behind the Scots tongue, as might a thistle behind a briar bush, and gleam through the tangle as a false native rose ?

It is not the place of these notes to examine this possibility, the mere suggestion of which would warrant the writer's effect being exposed at least to " roup " and civil diligence. But some consolation is afforded by considering two epitaphs that follow one another in the Centenary Edition :

*On an Innkeeper named Marquis.*

" Here lies a mock Marquis, whose tides were shamm'd,
If ever he rise, it will be to be damn'd."

*On Grizzel Grimme.*

" Here lyes with Dethe auld Grizzel Grimme
Lincluden's ugly witche.
O Dethe, an what a taste hast thou
Cann lye with siche a bitche."

The feeble vacuity of the English rhyme disappears in a whifT of smoke beside the ringing force of the Scots. Marquis never need fear damnation, for anything Burns wrote, but poor Grizzel will lie ugly and ashamed till the God of gentleness releases her from the savage weight of the lampoon under which her poor bones lie.

tin that mood, and with that diction, Burns challenges Dryden on his own ground. He knows his own world as pungently as the Caroline, and he need never be betrayed by pomp or glitter into falsehood. He is as much nearer the native human soul as the daisy is nearer the ground than some tall rose. He can watch,, nay, he can almost hear, the small unchanging processes of the common grass. To grumble and to deride is a popular habit. Each country has its own mode, the English being a little less dry than the Scottish. Burns is the popular voice, taking a form as permanent as that in any Shakespearean clown The witnesses in support are legion. Take the famous *Holy Willie s Prayer* :

" Maybe Thou lets this fleshly thorn
Buffet thy servant e'en and morn,
Lest he owre proud a nd high should turn
That he's sae gifted j
If sae, Thy han maun e'en be borne
Until Thou lift it."

" Lord, bless Thy chosen in this place,
For here Thou hast a stubborn race !
But God confound their stubborn face
An' blast their name,
Who brings Thy Elders to disgrace
An open shame."

Or the equally trenchant observations of " Caesar " in *The Twa Days* :

" There at Vienna or Versailles,
He rives his father's auld entails j
Or by Madrid he takes the rout,
To thrum guitars and fecht wi' nowt;
Or down Italian vistas startles
Where—hunting amang groves and myrtles,
Then bowses drumlie German-water,
To make himsel look fair an' fatter
And clear the consequential sorrows,
Love-gifts of Carnival Signoras."

Or best of all in its savage sincerity and truth :

" Tarn Samson's weel-worn clay here lies :
Ye canting zealots, spare him !
If honest worth in Heaven rise,
Ye'll mend or ye win near him,"

which challenges, and sustains, comparison with—

" O churlish priest,
A ministering angel shall my sister be
When thou liest howling."

It needs no more quotation to show that Burns was a satirist of the purest, whatever else he may

or may not have been. Nor need that surprise us. If his claim to be a great poet in the sense that Shelley was such is open to serious dispute, it is not open to question that he was a great man. He has written fifty poems of Scottish life that will hardly lie still on the page, so strongly do his *Jolly Beggars* and the rest wish to be up and jigging. He has the native art of Chaucer, the same appetite for life, and the same impeccable digestion.

> " Sae rantingly, sae wantonly,
> Sae dauntingly gaed he,
> He play'd a spring, and danc'd it round
> Below the gallows-tree."

But not only he " gaed it dauntingly " but all the humours of his age danced with him. Time erected his cruel gibbet at the town-end, and one by one Jumpin' John, The Dusty Miller, Sweet Tibbie Dunbar, John Anderson, and a hundred others went their way inevitably to the appointed end. And in their path they meet the plough-boy. What is he at, the creature ? Why, fiddling :

> " The Deil's awa', the DeiPs awa',
> The Deil's awa' wi' th' Exciseman !
> He's danced awa', he's danced awa',
> He's danced awa wi' th' Exciseman."

If the Deil can take the Exciseman, Burns can awa' with the gallows. They join hands and dance death awa to his tune. He and Time had better hang themselves on their own gibbet.

It is this fury of life that turns on the object of its hatred with a tiger-pounce. Lord Breadalbane had devised ways and means to frustrate five hundred Highlanders who were so audacious as to attempt an escape from their lawful lords. Cries Burns :

" But smash them ! crush them a' to spails,
An' rot the dyvors an' the jails !
The young dogs, swinge them to the labour :
Let wark and hunger make them sober !
The hizzies, if they're aughtlins fawsont,
Let them in Drury Lane be lesson'd !
An' if the wives an' dirty brats
Come thiggin' at your doors and yetts,
Get out a horsewhip or a jowler,
The langest thong, the fiercest growler
An' gar the tatter'd gypsies pack
Wi' a' their bastards on their back.

" Go on, my Lord ! I lang to meet you
An' in my house at hame ' to greet you.
Wi' common lords ye shanna mingle :
The benniest neuk beside the ingle,
At my right han' assigned your seat
'Tween Herod's hip an' Polycrate.

" A seat, I'm sure ye're weel deserven't,
An' till ye come—your humble servant.
Beelzebub."

The great Court wits, yes even Dryden, may take off their hats while the ploughman walks past with his tam-o'-shanter cocked on his head. This is no personal voice. It is the common people—

slow, but terrible to anger—speaking. It is the sort of satire that storms the Bastille.

I Shelley is only included because he himself regarded some of his writings as satires. He wrote *Peter Bell the Third* and *Swellfoot the Tyrant* as deliberate essays in the art. He wrote the poem *To the Men of England,* beginning :

> " Men of England, wherefore plough,
> For the lords who lay ye low ?
> Wherefore weave with toil and care
> The rich robes your tyrants bear,"

which has almost become an English " Red Flag." He pilloried Sidmouth and Castlereagh in the poem that ends :

> " Are ye, two vultures sick for battle,
> Two scorpions under one wet stone.
> Two bloodless wolves whose dry throats rattle,
> Two crows perched on the murrained cattle,
> Two vipers tangled into one."

But all this was not Shelley. It is not his nature to bespatter. He enshrouds the object of destruction in his own bright glory. Ugliness on fire is not ridiculous; it has the borrowed splendour of the spark that flies upward. Shelley's true splendour of hate was the flame-note of *Adonais.*

> " Our Adonais has drunk poison—oh,
> What deaf and viperous murderer could crown
> Life's early cup with such a draught of woe ?
> The nameless worm would now itself disown ;
> If felt, yet could escape the magic tone

Whose prelude held all envy, hate and wrong,
But what was howling in one breast alone,
Silent with expectation of the song
Whose master's hand is cold, whose silver lyre unstrung."

Thus the Quarterly Reviewer is given a pyre that an emperor might have envied, and his detested flesh helps to speed the beaco i not liable to wind or storm. Shelley deserved' Matthew Arnold's hackneyed phrase when he set the fire of his soul playing on a slag-heap. But when he burned by his true light, he was indeed beautiful as an angel, but as effectual as the flash of Michael's sword.

He knew or learned this himself. In *A Satire on Satire* written in 1820, he considers the strength and limitation of the Art :

" If Satire's scourge could wake the slumbering hounds
Of conscience, or erase the deeper wounds, ,
The leprous scars of callous infamy."

" If," he adds, rising to his own full stature,

" If it could make the present not to be,
Or charm the dark past never to have been,
Or turn regret to hope."

But it cannot, it will not. There is a higher and more fiery duty for verse.

" Suffering makes suffering, ill must follow ill,
Rough words beget sad thoughts, and beside
Men take a sullen and a stupid pride
In being all they hate in other's shame,
By a perverse antipathy of fame."

Farewell to satire ? There is another, and the truer Shelley :

> " Life of life ! thy lips enkindle
> With their love the breath between them ;
> And thy smiles before they dwindle
> Make the cold air fire—then screen them
> In those looks, where whoso gazes
> Faints, entangled in their mazes."

Those were his lips and thus enkindled.

|There was every reason why satire should not flourish at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Verse had returned to the higher slopes after being exiled in the foothills. Mountain wind is too rare for the satirist. I He is too near the clouds ; earth and its maggot are too far below his feet. Burns wrote satire, but it was not often the bitter, dry fury of passionate indignation. There is a hint of the tavern in it. Listen closely, and you will hear the mugs rasping on the wooden tables. Sometimes, it is true, as in the Breadalbane poem, he forgets that " a man's a man for a that," and hates him as a fiend. But, in general, it is a grumble among cronies between drinks. Let a man be a devil, well, after all—

> " But fare you weel, auld Nickie ben !
> O wad ye tak a thought an' men !
> Ye aiblins might—I dinna ken—
> Still hae a stake :
> I'm wae to think upo' yon den
> Ev'n for your sake."

A man who felt so could only write satire in a puff of surplus energy, as with Shelley it would be slag left behind when the ore emerged. It needed a narrower age, a less ardent mind—unless there were an extraordinary stimulus. Byron had such a stimulus.

We shall not wish, I conceive, to engage in that now so fashionable occupation of literary espionage. The spy, unless he endangers his life, is by common agreement the least estimable of men. Compassion has not been excited by the fact that his occupation necessarily endangers his soul. He remains the pariah dog, and not the least obviously when he roots among the debris washed-off great reputations. We need not, therefore, ask ourselves what precisely was the iron that bit so deep thatJroyron was perpetually goaded by some gadfly a! potent as Io's visitor from regions even darker. Keats might die of a consumption or (as Shelley supposed) of a broken heart. Shelley might hear that his first poor girl of a wife had died by her own hand. But they bore about them some vaccine against the mortal disease of bitterness and disillusion. Not so Byron. He was infected as a boy, played with the disease as many another man has played dangerously with a weakness, and lived to find what may have been in part a pose, a stain in the courses of his blood. Others might imitate his magnificent despair. There came a time when he himself fled to death in Greece to escape it.

It happened thus that in a great creative age Etyron wrote satire of the first order and is yet not an argument against the general contention that

the two are incompatible. On the contrary he even shows that great poetry and great indignation may once in the passage of time inhabit the same fiery breast. The flame that blazed clear in

> " She walks in beauty, like the night
> Of cloudless climes and starry skies ;
> And all that's best of dark and bright
> Meet in her aspect and her eyes,"

glowered, sullen and rusty, in *Don Juan* but it is the same fire and has the same heat.

"His three most celebrated excursions in this art are *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers The Vision of Judgment,* and much of *Don Juan.* When they are examined it will be found that, like his poetry and for the same reason, they are infinitely better in the mass than in detail, Goethe,[1] who said of Byron that " Der ohne Frage als das grosste Talent des Jahrhunderts anzusehen ist," further analysed his genius as " Kuhnheit, Kichheit, und grandiositat," and, like other judgments of that great mind, it had at least the seed of truth in it. Byron does dare, he does speed, and has the greatness of his qualities, but, as Goethe also said, he had their defects too, " Sobald er reflectiert ist er ein Kind." Byron did not think ; he preferred like an aeroplane to fly. His splendour was that of motion, not of rest. In the highest moments of his lyric genius he outdistances beauty. He is constantly asking what is truth, and never staying for an answer. So much so that often in detail Byron seems to be

[1] **Quoted by Matthew Arnold in his Essay on " Byron."**

the raw material of poetry, but at the end in the great poems speed itself has welded and finished the whole. It is the unity of motion in which time and space become a single white metaphor.

For this reason even in the rhymed couplets of *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers* he never attains in individual couplets the mastery and distinction of Pope. But the poem as a whole has such a sweep that the mind prefers not to be arrested by intermediate excellencies. *J* It would be like stopping a race-horse in the Derby in order to admire his action. There is exactly the sense of wild but purposeful urgency, and the terrifying thud of splendid hoofs. When the goal is passed, the horse cannot arrest his stride immediately. He drops—sweating—into the trot of the Epilogue.

'*The Vision of Judgment* is, if only by virtue of the eight-line stanza, nearer to Byron's true genius. Though it is obviously more difficult as a matter of mere technique to write stanza after stanza in the a b a b a b c c model, yet the mere difficulty chimed with something ornate, or at least elaborate, in Byron's mind. The neat click of the couplet was too tidy, and too small for him. He not only needed room to swing a cat in, but in which, if necessary, he could hunt the tiger of beauty, shining in the jungle of the night.

It is possible (and it seems even easy) for him, having achieved this instrument, to change from :

> " And midst them an old man
> With an old soul, and both extremely blind,
> Halted before the Gate, and in his shroud
> Seated their fellow-traveller on a cloud "

to :

" But bringing up the rear of this bright host
A spirit of a different aspect waved
His wings, like thunder-clouds above some coast
Whose barren beach with frequent wrecks is paved ;
His brow was like the deep when tempest toss'd :
Fierce and unfathomable thoughts engraved
Eternal wrath on his immortal face,
And where he gazed a gloom-pervaded space."

" A gloom pervaded space" : this is language comparable to Abdiel's challenge to Lucifer, " Proud, art thou met." It is significant of the great gulf that divides Byron from Pope. Pope, to misquote Dryden, never deviates into the sense of immortality. With Byron its shadow is never absent, and its full brightness not infrequently beats impenitently through.

I It may be urged, therefore, that Byron writes better poetry but worse satire than Pope. It is, indeed, difficult to resist that conclusion. The object of satire is to kill by ridicule and not to illuminate by lightning-flashes. Byron could not, and indeed, did not, resist the temptation to play truant from the severer task. He could not help, even when he was cursing the devil, remembering how bright had been his home in heaven.

Nevertheless, except for the passage quoted, Byron holds closer to the true mission of satire in *The Vision* than in any other single poem. It may have been intended as an attack on poor blind old George. But if so, Byron, like Lucifer, went hawking for something greater than one

royal Hanoverian soul. He leads out to confront Satan's magnificent darkness :

> " A beautiful and mighty Thing of Light
> Radiant with glory, like a banner streaming
> Victorious from some world o'erthrowing fight."

He arrays these two terrific champions in the list ; and then, instead of a Miltonic shock as the tilt engages, produces a swarm of puppets to run back and forward between the two like startled tadpoles. The verse descends abruptly not only to the level of satire, but below that at times to mere riotous fooling. The contest for the soul of man ends in a pantomimic confusion when the Poet Laureate insists on reading his epic to the assembled hosts. Terrified by this appalling prospect :

> " The whole spiritual show
> Had vanish'd, with variety of scents,
> Ambrosial and sulphureous, as they sprang,
> Like lightning off, from his melodious twang."

And while the whole angelic and diabolic hosts fled in wild disarray :

> " All I saw farther, in the last confusion,
> Was, that King George slippM into heaven for one ;
> And when the tumult dwindled to a calm,
> I left him practising the hundredth psalm."

If Goethe's verdict that Byron thinks like a child is accepted, then we might conclude that the ragamuffin ran away with the satire, and that what

began as the trial of the soul of man ended in a Harlequinade. I do not believe this to be the true explanation of the wild declension into riotous fooling. Byron's vision did not contract, but it expanded till it burst into fragments of laughter. He had set the spirits of Light and Darkness side by side with the infinite littleness of man. The contrast between the forces engaged and the object of their contest was so violent that a poet must either in contemplation break his heart and write a tragedy, or burst his sides and write a farce. A truer satirist, and a lesser poet, would have steered the middle course, leaving no ragged edges either of inappropriate beauty or exceptionable mirth. But as it is *The Vision of Judgment,* swaying between heights and deeps of which Pope would have been equally incapable, is, if not as great a satire as *The Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot* a far greater commentary on the vanity of human life.

Byron's indulgence in buffoonery is not Rabelaisian. It is not the result of enormous physical, but of unbounded spiritual vitality. Byron does not roar and rattle like the great Frenchman. He is merely exceeding the speed-limit of thought, and he is constantly being involved in ludicrous collisions. He is bitterly aware of the abominations of war :

> " Cockneys of London ! Muscadins of Paris !
> Just ponder what a pious pastime war is !
>
> Think how the joys of reading a Gazette
> Are purchased by all agonies and crimes j

Or if these not move you, don't forget,
Such doom may be your own in after-times.
Meantime the taxes, Castlereagh, and Debt,
Are hints as good as sermons, or as rhymes.
Read your own hearts and Ireland's present story,
Then feed her famine fat with Wellesley's glory."

And so to :

" But still there is unto a patriot nation,
Which loves so well its country and its king,
A subject of sublimest exaltation,
Bear it, ye Muses, on your brightest wing."

Pegasus has the bit between his teeth, is clearly bolting, and will certainly run into something round the next corner of the skies. As he does :

" How e'er the mighty locust, Desolation,
Strip your green fields, and to your harvest cling,
Gaunt famine never shall approach the throne,
Though Ireland starve, great George weighs twenty stone."

Byron cannot be measured by the ordinary wind-gauge of satire. It is always gale-force with him and not infrequently he rides the hurricane. But it is the good wind that does everybody good. It strips rubbish, falsehood, and vice in its huge fingers. It leaves all that is gentle, delicate, and fair unspoiled and untouched. It comes with a shout, and passes in a tempest of laughter. It may not be, indeed is not, great satire in the true tradition, but it is very great writing

## CHAPTER VII

## THE VICTORIANS AND OURSELVES

BEFORE we cross the satiric desert of Victoria to our own times, a word must be said of the wits —Sheridan and the brothers Smith, and of that great poet Walter Savage Landor. It need not be repeated here that wit and satire are distinguishable, but it is perhaps worth observing that satire —the wilder flower—has a habit of declining into the more formal garden-product of wit. The incomparable Sheridan's wine was all champagne : there was not a headache nor a heartache in a magnum. It had no medical qualities, and would indignantly have repudiated them. It sparkled and set the heart beating faster.) What more could mortals demand ? If they-"did seek for more, then let them be reminded of what Sherry is reported to have said, when he sat on the night of February 24th, 1809, at the Piazza Coffee House drinking his bottle of wine, while he watched Drury blazing to heaven with his fortunes : "A man," said he, to one who commented on his calmness—" A man may surely take a glass of wine by his own fireside." The story may not be true, but what it suggests is borne out by all that is known of Sheridan's life. His was that true wit which is the perfect sense of proportion, the English equivalent of the Athenian *firjoev auyav.*

But it is not satire, nor do the brilliant parodies of the brothers Smith in *Rejected Addresses* justify that name.[1] Earlier in these notes it was suggested that parody could only be called satire if it actually destroyed the shoddy material against which it was directed. Wordsworth, Byron, Tom Moore, and Walter Scott could afford to laugh as heartily at their caricatures as any other intelligent reader. Attention is only drawn to their idiosyncrasies : no serious criticism of their merit is offered. It has been hinted that several authors who read themselves in Max Beerbohm's " Christmas Garland " were never sure afterwards whether they were writing their own work or a proof of it. But no such feeling would have assailed the Georgian worthies. It is admirable fun, but even as parody it is infinitely less good than the early work of Owen Seaman and E. V. Knox in our times. But it was almost the last sound of laughter to be neard before, taking off our hats, we subside decorously into our places in a Victorian drawing-room, where serious-minded gentlemen are making God in •the image of an intellectual undertaker.

But before we are immersed in that tepid gloom we may linger for a moment with Landor and Hellas. Landor, who has not yet received his proper recognition, will ultimately take his place as one of the clearest altos that ever sang in the English choir. His is not a *basso prof undo,* but the voice of youth mellowed to the lips of man. He is described as having quarrelled his way through

[1] **James Hogg in *The Poetical Mirror* seems to me not so much to paxody as to plagiarize.**

life, but, if that be true, he must have been straining *off* the dross in his soul in order to leave the gold virgin for his writing. He wrote a certain body of satire, but, though pungent, it is never ill-tempered. On the contrary it goes back for its model to the Greek Anthology and imports some of the classic purity of reproof.

Let us consider a few of his epigrams, observing that in their chiselled ease they owe nothing to any English predecessor, but all, to the spirit of Greece :

" Clap, clap, the double nightcap on !
  Gilford will read you his amours,
Lazy as Scheld and cold as Don ;
  Kneel, and thank heaven they are not yours."

" Tell me not what too well I know
About the bard of Sirmio . . .
  Yes, in Thalia's son
Such stains there are . . . as when a Grace
Sprinkles another's laughing face
  With nectar, and runs on."

" Alas ! tis very sad to hear,
You and your Muse's end draws near ;
I only wish, if this be true,
To lie a little way from you.
The grave is cold enough for me
Without you and your poetry."

*The Duke of York's Statue.*

" Enduring is the bust of bronze
And thine, O flower of George's sons,
Stands high above all laws and duns.

As honest men as ever cart
Convey'd to Tyburn took thy part,
And rais'd thee up to where thou art."

" A paraphrase on Job we see
By Young : it loads the shelf.
He who can read one half must be
Patient as Job himself."

" You ask me what I see in Dickens—
A game-cock among bantam chickens."

And finally his own perfect judgment on himself and on his satire :

" There may be scornfulness, there may be wrong
Which never rises to the proud man's tongue."

There may be, said President Wilson, such a thing as being too proud to fight. There may also be such a thing as being too proud to hate.

And now for respectability and eminence, those two archangels that wear flannel next the skin of theii; soul. Nietzsche said that if Christ had lived to be older he would have learned to laugh. The Victorians would have had to live to reach their second childhood before they could laugh at anything, and to their third before they could laugh at themselves. With the great exceptions of Dickens and Browning they were born serious " in a wale " as Mrs. Gamp observed, " and all their lives bore about them the consekwences of having been born in sech a sitiwation." Wordsworth had sternly banished wit from verse, Macaulay

from prose. It only remained for industrialism to hound it out of life. And industrialism was not found wanting.

In all the Victorian Cities of the Plain, you will search with a microscope for *ten* Unjust Men, and, if you accept their own valuation, you will not find them. It was an age where every chestnut was a horse-chestnut, every gooseberry a giant. It was a rank, if also a splendid growth, and it was all as solemn as a Mute's funeral. We, who belong to a lighter age, may wonder at such titanic smugness, but we must recognize that gravity is not incompatible with a great period of literature. Ruskin, on one occasion, is reputed to have gone so far as to commend Edward Lear. It was, however, with the air of God commending a mayfly. But it was not unnatural that the reaction from Victorianism should have been crazy. The only possible weapons were those of nonsense wielded by Carroll and Lear. Satire would have been stifled in rolls of red blanket.

n erse Satire ! Who are the poets ? Lord Tennyson, Browning, Matthew Arnold, Arthur Hugh Clough, and Charles Kingsley. Excepting Browning, they share nothing but their fanatical seriousness. We have produced nothing to surpass, if anything to equal, Tennyson and Arnold in genius and beauty, but we do know of them that the one thing of which we are capable, and they incapable, is laughterA Tennyson so far forgot himself on occasion as *o* rebuke the times, as when **he** drew attention to the indefensible **action of the House of Lords** in suggesting conduct

likely to avert war, or, as in *Locksley Hall Revisited,* when he cast aspersions on Chinese civilization. But his immortal business was elsewhere with *The Lady of Shallott* and *Mariana in the Moated Grange.* Matthew Arnold's sweet and sensitive mind was too delicately poised for satire. Standing between two worlds,

" one dead, one powerless to be born,'

he swayed wistfully between the beauty that could not be recaptured and that not yet risen. He stood in no man's land, and though he was not unvisited there by certain gods he remained its only human inhabitant. Clough, like the other two, was weighed down by a sense of overwhelming responsibility to a world which he could not control, and could indeed very little understand. " Felix opportunitate mortis," Thyrsis escaped, before the high midsummer pomps, to find with the Scholar-Gipsy beyond the two Hinckseys the stripling Thames at Babelockhithe. He was made free of the kills behind Cumnor. He need no longer concern himself with mortality and the dark dubieties of the flesh. Kingsley, not a man, but a Nor'-Easter, blew gaily across England. He was very like an old picture of Boreas with puffed cheeks and open mouth. But his eyes were dead serious above the blast. The champion of the chimney-sweeper's boy was not blind to social evils, but he believed with Pippa that God was in his heaven, and that therefore ultimately all was right with the world. Like the others, he was

very partial to a joke, and like them without a sense ofhumour.

rThere remains the greatest of them—Robert Browning. He, like Ben Jonson, is not a satirist because his objects, whether of hate or love, are precisely what he called them—Men and Women. " Fra Lippo Lippi " and " The Grammarian " are the brothers of " Mr. Sludge, the Medium," and the Bishop who ordered his tomb. Browning is not holding them up to contempt or to ridicule. He is leaning down to look at them,

> " human at the red-ripe of the heart," *J*

and whether good or evil, saint or sinner, they are equally illuminated with

> " Some whiteness which, I judge, thy face makes proud,
> Some wanness where, I think, thy foot may fall."

These are the poets, and our business is not to examine whether Thackeray and Dickens supplied the savage note of self-criticism that the Victorian Age otherwise so plentifully lacked. fHad it been the function of these notes we should have had to admit that Thackeray, if rather with the air of an indulgent great-uncle lecturing to subdued nephews and nieces, did pillory pomp, snobbery, and everything except the real evils of the age. Dickens, on the other hand, stands beside Rabelais as one of the few great satirists whose work can actually be proved to have altered the abuses which it reviled Chancery, Yorkshire schoolmasters, the Poor Eaw System, and the nursing service, all

these were shaken by Dickens till their teeth rattled in their heads. He was a very great novelist, but he was also one of the greatest reformers in all our history.

But even this is cold comfort for the compiler of Notes on English Verse Satire. He must wait for the rebellion against stuffiness and self-satisfaction, as equally for the decline of great creative genius, for the cooling spray of ridicule. The first attack on verse was not on that side. Rossetti and Morris, and finally Swinburne, pelted the Victorians with roses and raptures. This was offensive to them, but they knew how to distinguish between licence and freedom, slowly broadening down till it had become completely flat. Mr. Morley was commissioned to extinguish Mount Etna with an anonymous squirt. Unhappily his soul, like the body of Empedocles, fell in during the rite, but it did not matter because neither he nor his generation noticed the loss.

Meanwhile, Etna, which had been smoking fiercely, began to erupt. The Victorians quite properly averted their eyes. The shameless lava responded by filling them with dust and ashes. The Romantic revolution was in full activity.

But it was still too lively to encourage the deliberate return to satire. Extreme solemnity had already made Lear and Carroll explode into nonsense to avoid lunacy. But no one had arisen sufficiently blasphemous to doubt the divinity of the Victorian Age. Mill and Huxley would have rolled the whites of their eyes and held up their black-mittened hands at a criticism of Victorianism.

God was another affair. The true atheist was the man who failed to believe in Mill and Huxley

What could Morris do except to dream of Socialism and look for a cithern ? What Rossetti but fling *The Blessed Damozel* at the head (and the heart) of the British public ? They might write their confidential lampoons and limericks, but satire has no use for dark lanterns. Nor was Swinburne, for all his hatred of kings and tyrants, likely to make the next in the succession to Byron. Swinburne lived too far away from any recognizable world either to love or to hate it. His kings were bogies. He saw life as a battle between a Christ, pale and lovely as a lily, and paganism in the form of Aphrodite Anadyomene —fair in the fearless old fashion. All other strife, evil, and doubt were secondary to that secular controversy of the lily and the rose. He could not see the hateful figures of the huckster and the slum for the Battle of Flowers.

A sterner time was coming. Even the worst enemies of the Victorian era had not been able to deny it success. It was true that they had found England a land of marble, and left it a welter of shoddy brick. It was true that for some inscrutable reason the Englishman found himself the detestation of the world. It was true that the Established Church had only lived down the doctrines of Darwin by imitating the intellectual attitude of the ancestors that the bishops repudiated. But what of that ? There was freedom, there was the Empire, but, above all, there were trade, industry, and wealth.

But were there ? The poor pale 'nineties were so concerned with their own decadence that they did not observe how trifling it was compared with the general decay. When Oscar Wilde observed that " All art is useless ' he believed that he had started a new age, when he was merely reviving an old fashion. If he had said, " All business is useless," and gone on to preach the doctrine of " Money for money's sake," they might have hanged him in Reading Gaol for having murdered the Victorian era. They would never have imprisoned him for having succumbed to it.

The Boer War was the first great satirist after Byron, the Boer War which did for England something of what the Dreyfus case did for France. Before that celebrated misadventure it was possible to believe that a century of industrialism was merely a stage in the progress to the angel. The nation knew that the war was being muddled. That mattered little : indeed, they had grown to recognize war by the mistakes which occurred in it. They were not perfectly clear of its object, but were led to suppose that they had been provoked and threatened by a terrific antagonist. As Mr. Kipling beautifully observed, Tommy Atkins was—

> " out on active service, wiping something off a slate,
> and he's left a lot of little things behind him."

He had—quite. a lot—honour, integrity, and a nation's soul. The English woke from a sodden Sunday afternoon dream, propagated by a century of roast beef and Yorkshire, to a relentless afternoon sun. The hatred of the world whistled round

their ears. They were winning, but how and to what end ? When Mafeking fell, they burst into a drunken orgy in an attempt to disguise their own feelings. But after Vereeniging there was quiet. They had suffered a great purgation through terror and pity, and in the dark hour they had looked back on the fruits of Victorianism. And they had not found them good. It was the hour of G. K. Chesterton and Hilaire Belloc.

> " When all church bells were silent, our cap and bells were heard,"

said Chesterton in one of the most gallant of all his forlorn hopes. He was addressing that brilliant wit Edmund Cherrihew Bentley. But he had rather exaggerated their isolation. From the delicate company of fastidious rebels who chose yellow for their colour, had emerged one figure apparently most languid of them all—a dandy flicking a perfumed cane, a prince of fops—one Max Beerbohm. He had written—what had he written ?—an eighteenth-century trifle called *The Happy Hypocrite.* He had claimed a high salary as a dramatic reviewer on the ground of his inexperience, and the consequent labour that his duties would involve. And even Mr. Key—the hatter of St. James's Street—doubted whether his establishment could induce the polish on his top-hat, which the young man required. He himself, however, had no doubts : he polished words and phrases till a whole generation could see its pleasantly distorted reflection in their tiny brilliance. The world began by chuckling : it ended by being

a trifle scared. Whither had fled the seriousness of Queen Victoria's age? Mr. Kipling had industriously kept it going. Tennyson, author of *Form, Riflemen, Form,* would have recognized under the Cockney disguise a brother in arms. Mr. Kipling, the bard of empire, took liberties, but he never had any truck with freedom. The All Red Route alternated with the Thin Red Line as the expression of the soul of a people upon which the sun never set—because it had apparently never risen. Then there appeared a drawing by Mr. Beerbohm of Mr. Kipling and Britannia on 'Ampstead 'Eath. They had exchanged hats. Britannia—Mr. Kipling's girl—was wearing his billycock. Mr. Kipling was a little submerged in her helmet. The age of satire had returned.

It is to be regretted that Mr. Beerbohm has not thought fit to use the vehicle of verse to clinch his triumph. In his only public effort, *Savonarola Brown* he has written the only effective parody on Shakespeare in existence. There are, moreover, certain privately circulated excursions which Charles IJ[ would have welcomed, but which are not believed to be safe for democracy. But there is not enough to permit us to include him in our list of satirists. He and the earlier Mr. Shaw must be content to take their place by the side of Rabelais and Anatole France. Mr. Chesterton was justified in claiming that all church-bells were silent, but if satire be cap and bells he must admit that others beside himself and Mr. Belloc were tossing their heads. The sound of these bells rang clearer than the others because they were

rung in the carillons of verse, but they are part of the same tocsin about jwhich Mr. Beerbohm and Mr. Shaw were busy. J

Mr. Chesterton has scored so many points that he himself has tended to obscure his eminence as a satirist. Novelist, essayist, historian, publicist, playwright, and poet—in each of these capacities he fights and fills his corner. But in each of them he has competitors. Only in verse satire he is unrivalled in our age, or, had he but written more, in any age save by Dryden himself. In appreciating his satire, it must be borne in mind that, like Byron, he is a great poet who boils over into anger. But, as with Byron, the anger has always the clear bitterness of genuine fire. He does not singe the objects of his indignation with little Pope-like spurts of acid prepared in a laboratory. He blasts them to Hell with its own flame.

His greatest individual satire is *Antichrist, or the Reunion of Christendom: an Ode.* By the side of it Dryden's attack on Shaftesbury, and Pope's on Lord Hervey, pale into compliment. Nor does it only excoriate its subject, but ij exhibits and derides for all time one general aspect of spiritual blindness ;

" A Bill which has shocked the conscience of every Christian community in Europe."—MR. F. E. SMITH, on the Welsh Disestablishment Bill. •

" Are they clinging to their crosses,
F. E. Smith,
Where the Breton boat-fleet tosses,
Are they, Smith ?

Do they fasting, tramping, bleeding,
Wait the news from this our City ?
Groaning,' That's the Second Reading ! '
Hissing,' There is still Committee !'
If the voice of Cecil falters,
If McKenna's point has pith,
Do they tremble for their altars ?
Do they, Smith ? "

" Russian peasants round their Pope
Huddled, Smith,
Hear about it all, I hope,
Don't they, Smith ?
In the mountain hamlets clothing
Peaks beyond Caucasian pales,
Where Establishment means nothing
And they never heard of Wales,
Do they read it all in Hansard
With a crib to read it with—
c Welsh Tithes : Dr. Clifford answered.'
Really, Smith."

This ;s not cap and bells, but the Black Cap and passing Bells of deliberate (and deserved) execution. It has the rushing vehemence of the very genius of indignation : it is the verdict of conflagration. But this is not the only sham that is licked up by the fiery gust. Mr. Chesterton is regarded as paradoxical, because he dislikes rich men for being poor, poor men for being rich, sin for being virtuous, and virtue for being sinful. But that only means that he dislikes, and has had the searching genius to detect, not only conscious

but unconscious hypocrisy, which is the more deadly because the more difficult to recognize. Hear him, for example, on the Squire, that John Bull snorting and charging in a china shop :

" The people they left the land, the land,
But they went on working hard ;
And the village green that had got mislaid
Turned up in the Squire's backyard :
But twenty men of us all got work
On a bit of his motor-car ;
And we all became with the world's acclaim,
The marvellous mugs we are.
Chorus :
The marvellous mugs, miraculous mugs,
The mystical mugs we are."

Or on the benefits of Capitalism :

" I remember, my mother, the day that we met,
A thing I shall never entirely forget;
And I toy with the fancy that, young as I am,
I should know her again if we met in a tram.
But mother is happy in turning a crank -
That increases the balances at somebody's bank ;
And I feel satisfaction that mother is free
From the sinister task of attending to me."

Or upon educational absurdities;

" When Science proved with lucid care
The need of exercise,
Our thoughtless youth was climbing trees
Or lightly blacking eyes.

To reckless idlers breaking bounds
For football or for hare and hounds,
Or fighting hard for fourteen rounds.
It came as a surprise."

It is objected against him as against Mr. Belloc that he has directed an undue share of his hatred to the address of the Jews. But let it be observed that in his case at any rate his anger is not racial nor even primarily religious. It is excited by that aspect of commercial Judaism which is a symbol of the universal disease in the soul of the huckster. There is enough of the schoolboy in every abundant genius to betray him into scrawling transitory abuse on the blackboard. Mr. Chesterton has done this in his time, but on the whole even his Anti-Semitism is in fact a denunciation not of an ignorant mob that chose Barabbas nearly two thousand years ago, but of a whole world that continues to make that choice daily. He may write :

" A straight line is straight
And a square mile is flat.
But you learn in trigonometries
A trick worth two of that.

" Two straight lines
Can't enclose a space.
But they can enclose a Corner
To support the Chosen Race:

" For you never know what Dynamics do
With the lower truths of Statics :
And half of two is a touring car
In the Higher Mathematics."

He also wrote :

" Their dead are marked on English stone, their lives on English trees,
How little is the prize they win, how mean a coin for these—
How small a shrivelled laurel-leaf lies crumpled here and curled.
They died to save their country, and they only saved the world."

Mr, Chesterton has not saved the world, because each new age has its own chosen damnation from which it requires rescue. But the other side of his hatred is unmeasured love, and the two flash together shining beyond good and evil in his own epitaph on his own spirit that will never lie under any stone :

" Men grow too old to woo, my love,
Men grow too old to wed :
But I shall not grow too old to see
Hung crazily overhead
Incredible rafters when I wake
And find I am not dead."

Yes, he will find that, and posterity will find it after him.

Mr. Belloc is a more professional satirist than Mr. Chesterton ' He ought for that reason to be the greater of the two. He is not, and it is difficult to say why. He is a brilliant epigrammatist, a great wit, and at times a genuine poet,

and he knows far more of contemporary life than the most innocent soul that ever wrote a detective story. It is perhaps precisely that knowledge which constitutes Mr. Belloc's weaknes . If Mr. Chesterton knows too little, he understands a great deal. Mr. Belloc, by the law of compensation, understands in inverse ratio to his knowledge.- He would never, for example, have been guilty of the ignorance of Parliamentary procedure which reduces the end of *The Flying Inn* to absurdity. But, on the other hand, he would never have understood the importance of the dog Quoodle. Mr, Chesterton could not have written *Mr. Clutterbuck's Election* because he is magnificently unaware of the humdrum facts of politics and finance. But if he had tried, Mr. Clutterbuck would have unveiled the standard of Notting Hill on the Terrace, and emerged from Palace Yard, shouting to the astonished police constables :

> " Chant valedictory. Who is for Victory ?
> Who is for victory, who goes home? "

But if Mr. Belloc does not reach the height of unbridled genius, he can hold his own with all but the greatest. Here are a couple of epigrams that Pope might have been glad to write.

> " Here richly, wiflh ridiculous display,
> The Politician's corpse was laid away.
> While all of his acquaintance sneered and slanged,
> I wept. For I had longed to see him hanged "

and :

" The accursed power which stands on privilege
(And goes with Women and Champagne and Bridge)
Broke—and democracy resumed her reign
(which goes with Bridge and Women and Champagne).'

Nor is his skill limited to the rapier. He can swing a sabre as when he writes :

" Prince, may I venture (since it's only you)
To speak discreetly of the Crucified ?
He was extremely unsuccessful too.
The Devil didn't like Him, and He died."

Or a little more vehemently :

" John Calvin, whose peculiar fad
It was to call God murderous,
Which further led that feverish cad
To burn alive the Servitus.
The horrible Bohemian Huss,
The tedious Wycliffe, where are they ?
But where is old Nestorius ?
The wind has blown them all away."

Not entirely. For they are all plastered in a long flattened row against the town-wall at Geneva. But the fact that they look as though

"A Marble Bust -
Of Abraham"

has knocked them flat, may not be unconnected with the breeze generated by this verse.

The complaint of Mr, Belloc's excessive pre-occupation with Jews is perhaps better justified than the same criticism of Mr. Chesterton. His hatred has often the appearance of malice, and when he deals with

> " Lord Swaythling, whom the people knew
> And loved as Mr. Montagu "

he is less audible than he should be because he has twisted his mouth and is talking sideways. But when the Jews symbolize something rotten as, for example, the Boer War, he rides clean over the personal into the abiding, as when he cries :

> " We also know the sacred height
> Upon Tugela side,
> Where those three hundred fought with Beit
> And fair young Wernher died.
>
> " The daybreak in the failing force
> The final sabres drawn :
> Tall Goltman, silent on his horse,
> Superb against the dawn."

! Mr. Chesterton and Mr. Belloc pointed the way to a new Augustan age of satire. Has the way reached to the horizon, or is it foundering in a bog ? Like all other ways it was temporarily lost in the universal morass bf war. At first it seemed a wholly inappropriate path for Crusaders and the New Elizabethans to tread. What had laughter and scorn and hatred to do with the new Pilgrimage to the Holy Land ? Satire, if not interned, was

naturally regarded at the outset as no better than a Conscientious Objector.

But as the mists of the splendid self-delusion of the young, and ugly self-congratulation of the old, began to grow thinner, a few voices were heard directing the clean wind of satire against the poison-gas of war hysteria. They were naturally not welcome at first : indeed, to be a satirist at any time between 1914 and 1918 was as dangerous as to be a Christian. Still Mr. Ewer contrived to say a word or two, and Mr. Squire's memorable

" 'O God,'" said God, ' I've got my work cut out' "

was as gallant as it was incisive. But, presently, to the disgust of the most pugnacious of the non-combatants, the heroes themselves began to doubt the Divine Right of what was so clearly diabolically wrong. Siegfried Sassocm, Wilfrid Owen, Robert Graves, Robert Nicholls, and Osbert Sitwell began to present a picture of war which shocked all those who have never fought in it. But their work was, taken together not so much true satire as invective and rebellion. They wished to expose the abominations of war, but they were too grimly in earnest to be able to use the weapon of ridicule.

Owen did not live to mature his vision. Robert Nicholls, in that brilliant prose satire *Fantastica,* showed of how considerable a satirist the drama and the films had robbed the world. Robert Graves abandoned satire to devote himself to verse and to laying the foundations of a Critique

of Pure Poetry, Siegfried Sassoon and Osbert Sitwell alone of that group continued to develop the vein of satire. Neither has yet fully succeeded though for different reasons. Sassoon's is too pensive and withdrawn a spirit for the service of this blunt drill-sergeant art. He will not rap out the words of command contumaciously enough, nor bully his thoughts into docility. He is too apt to write rather thus in *Fantasia in a Wittelsbach Atmosphere* :

" Fountains upheave pale plumes against the sky,
Murmuring,' Their Majesties came sauntering by—
Was it but yesterday ? Proud fountains sigh
Toward the long glades, in golden foliage clad,
Kurfiirsts could do no wrong.' And the woods reply,
Take them for what they were, they weren't so bad,' "

rather than in *Founder's Feast*—

" But on the Provost's left, in gold and blue,
Sat . . . O my God ! great Major-General Bluff.
Enough, enough, enough, enough, enough."

Alas ! it is not enough, it is just not enough.

Osbert Sitwell is far from suffering the same nostalgia that is for ever drawing Sassoon back to poetry as he fringes the threshold of satire. In his account of Mrs. Kinfoot and her circle he is seeking to kill by ridicule, and yet, effective as the stroke is, it appears a little to hang on the air. It seems almost as though just before he drove the blade home he returned it to the scabbard, murmuring to himself, " Are they, after all, worth

it ?" and perhaps even " Is anything worth it ? " In his prose works *Triple Fugue* and *Before the Bombardment* his attitude is even less emphatic. It seems as though either he forgave his victims, or was disarmed by their ultimate defencelessness. But satire does not permit its exponent to practise the virtues of a gentleman. It needs either a cad or a fanatic, and perhaps prefers a combination of the two. He has approached nearer to the true business of satire in the preface to *All at Sea.* But even there he displays a readiness to see his opponent's point against which he should be solemnly warned. The satirist must always be a violent partizan, and should, if possible, be grossly unfair. It has, believe me, often been found possible.

f The charge of impartiality cannot be levelled against the post-war prosaists, who have been attracted to satire by the path of cynicism. The characters drawn by Mr. Aldous Huxley—if they recognized themselves—could not complain of undue tenderness. It is unlikely that Americans residing in Main Street will pass a resolution censuring Mr. Sinclair Lewis or Mr. Mencken for having been over-scrupulous of their feelings. Anglo-Indians will not find in Mr. E. M. Forster a heartier and more indulgent Kipling. Mr. Laurence Housman will not, we may assume, be chosen as the historian of the House of Windsor. Mr. David Garnett is in no danger of being elected Chairman of the Marylebone Cricket Club on the ground of his excessive affection for what is heartiest in the British character. Miss Macaulay will not be

reproached by the Primrose League for her almost morbid devotion to the view that a woman's proper place is the home. Nor are the biographers liable to attack for too filial an admiration of their subjects, seeing that the new biography is primarily designed to expose rather than reveal the past. Mr. Strachey will not need to resist the laurels tendered by the spiritual successors of Cardinal Manning. Mr. Philip Guedalla need not fear to enter Republican France, lest he be arraigned of unbridled Imperialism. And in the theatre, as we know, dirty linen is not merely washed, but riotously mangled, in public. No class of society, except perhaps the manufacturers of the ingredients of cocktails, will feel themselves in the debt of Mr. Noel Coward, and Mr. C. K. Munro will not be appointed at the unanimous wish of the shareholders to the Board of any of the larger armament firms. Jfc

Much of this writing is not pure satire. Most of the novelists named are guilty of creating men and women, the biographers history, and the dramatists situations. But the note throughout has exactly that quality of disillusion which has always led in the past, if these notes have truly diagnosed the facts, to satire in verse. May we, then, hope for (or should we fear ?) the appearance of a new satirist in verse ?

At the moment, it must be confessed, there seems no ground for excessive expectation. The best war-poets are either suggesting a retreat from spiritual agony int6 quiet, like Mr. Edmund Blunden, or like Mr. T. S. Eliot and Mr. Herbert Read, commenting with despair but not with

indignation on the atrocious muddle in which we are involved. Mr. Prufrock is not an invective but a lament, and except in *The Happy Warrior* Mr. Read has recorded without criticizing. Edith and Sacheverell Sitwell draw further and further into a world accessible only to the light, and not to the darkness of anger. Are we then to assume that poetry, as in the Shakespearean age, has reached, or is reaching, a point of creative fulness that will not abide the lesser impulse of satire. It would be gallant to believe so, and let those who dare, accept that comfort. For the rest, seeing in what a world how misused we live, let them pray heartily for a great satirist in verse in our time. For who (or what) else fights or can fight for us ?