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LIFE IN ENGLISH LITERATURE

An Introduction

L. A. G. STRONG AND MONICA REDLICH

PART I

Chaucer to Ben Jonson



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FOREWORD

THE AIM of this book is not to provide a complete outline of English Literature, but simply to arouse interest. For this reason, the subject has been approached from the human angle only. Character has been made its basis, and our one principle in selecting authors and extracts has been to put before the beginner only what he or she is likely to find interesting.

Beginners are still too often alienated by being obliged to study an author before they are ready for him. We have an accurate memory of our own school days, and one of us since had twelve years' school practice in starting young beginners upon English Literature. Both experiences have been used in making this book. Its sins of omission may and must be grievous: but what it does contain has stood the test of actual practice. Whatever else it does to the beginner, it ought not to bore him.

Our plan has been, solely from the beginner's point of view, to leave the dull authors out, and put the interesting ones in. Many authors who are absorbingly interesting at a later stage have been omitted, as have many of historical importance. The selections and grouping are entirely arbitrary, and sometimes unrepresentative. Still, if we have produced what is, in the terms of our endeavour, a live and interesting book, we are unrepentant.

L. A. G. S.
M. R.

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INTRODUCTION

WHY BOTHER to read English Literature at all?

This is a perfectly fair question, and deserves a fair answer. The reason for reading is not to pass examinations, or secure any sort of cash advantage, neither is it to "improve our minds." Reading is an end in itself. Socrates, after he had been condemned by the Athenians, said that death would be no hardship to him. Either it would be one continual dreamless night, or if, as was maintained, there were an after life, it would give him the opportunity to meet all the most interesting people who had been on the earth before him.

This literature enables us to do, without the necessity of dying first. A great many of the most interesting people who had lived have left some sort of a record, whether in the form of stories, plays, essays, or poetry, of how they felt and what they thought. The object of reading, then, is simply to increase our capacity for pleasure.

"Yes," someone may object: "but I get all the pleasure I want out of thrillers and the daily paper."

This, again, is perfectly fair: but not quite as sensible as it sounds. It is very much the same as saying "I like being in Shrewsbury, so I don't ever want to go anywhere else": or, at a restaurant, "I know I like that, because I have it at home: so I won't try anything new." It is a timid, self-satisfied attitude: and to persist in it is short-sighted and silly. It is silly because, in the long run, what is good is more enjoyable than what is less good. By reaching what is good (always provided that we begin

with something we can like and understand) we *increase* our power of enjoyment, until we can enjoy the best that is to be found: and there is much more enjoyment, and more interest, in the best than in what is second-rate, third-rate, and tenth-rate.

Reading simply for pleasure, then, we have no ulterior purpose, and can read as naturally as we should read any story of our own choosing.

Why do we read stories? What interests us in them? Presumably, it is the way in which the story is worked out, and it is the characters: what they do, how they feel, and what they think. Their actions, thoughts, and feelings show that they are human beings like ourselves. We make friends with them. If they are well described, and the kind of people we like, we may make friends who will last us all our lives.

"Yes," says the same objector, "that is all very well. I can recognise and like the characters in a modern story. They belong to the world I live in. But the characters in what you call 'literature' do not belong to my world, or to anything like it: and that is why I cannot take the same interest in them."

It is to answer this very sensible objection that this book has been written. The great difficulty, in reading about characters who lived in the past, is to realise that they had thoughts and feelings like our own. As soon as we have realised this, we are over nearly all our difficulty. All that is left will be differences of speech.

The *actions* of characters in books written long ago must of necessity be unlike our own, because almost all the surroundings and circumstances of their lives were different. It is through their thoughts and feelings that

we get to know them. In this book, therefore, passages have been chosen from the various authors which will show

WHAT THE CHARACTERS THOUGHT: and HOW THEY FELT.

Its one aim, from start to finish, has been to pick out what is interesting from this point of view. Literature is a live subject. The pleasures, the happiness, the friendship it can give are infinite. Too many people are put off it by approaching the wrong authors and the wrong books first. Confronted with something which does not interest them, they naturally lose hope, and resolve to direct their search for pleasure elsewhere: to make friends with characters who are easier to recognise.

Once we have realised that ordinary human feelings and ideas are little changed, we shall have broken down the highest barrier that divides us from literature and from the past, and the way to untold enjoyment and pleasure will lie open before us.

CHAPTER I

CHAUCER

1

GEOFFREY CHAUCER, the first English writer whose language we can readily recognise as our own, was born in or about 1340, and died on October the 25th, 1400. This means that he lived in Edward the Third's reign, through Richard the Second's and a fraction of Henry the Fourth's: that he heard, as a child, the news of the Battle of Crécy, and escaped the Black Death in the same year: that he fought in the Hundred Years' War, and lived to comment (we can only guess how) upon the deposition and death of Richard. The English of the poems we shall read is therefore more than five hundred years old. That in itself would prepare us to find great differences: yet almost the first thing that will strike us is its likeness to our own English, and the likeness of the people it describes to the people we know to-day.

The first definite knowledge we have of Chaucer is a mention of him, when he was some twenty-seven years old, as serving in the household of the wife of Lionel, Duke of Clarence. In 1359 he was with the English army in France, and had the misfortune to be taken prisoner. Here he stayed nearly a year. After being ransomed, he was promoted to the King's household to be a "yeoman of the chamber," and, later, to be an Esquire. Then he was engaged in what we should now call the Diplomatic Service, visiting Italy, France, and Flanders. In 1374 he received a Customs House appointment in the Port of London, and we hear of a small yearly pension being paid to him by John of Gaunt. The years 1385-86 brought him

to the height of his public career, for in them he was made a Justice of the Peace (a magistrate) and Knight of the Shire. Later, he was for two years Clerk of the Works at Westminster, and in the last years of his life he received a pension from Richard II, and the promise of a bigger one from Henry IV.

It is important to know this much about him, in order to realise that he was an active, competent, and busy man, to whom serious matters were entrusted, and who at the end of his life was so well recognised and respected that both Richard and Richard's enemy were concerned to look after his welfare. The popular idea that poets make poor men of affairs is certainly not borne out in Chaucer's case. Very often, a writer's life has little bearing upon his work, and we do not need an account of his life in order to understand why he wrote as he did. A knowledge of Chaucer's life, however, throws a real light upon his writings. A number of slight and charming poems, for instance, were written when Chaucer was at the Court, to please benefactors or to commemorate special occasions. That he should translate long poems from French and Italian is not surprising, when we know that he visited both France and Italy, and had to learn each language. Nor is it surprising that, during the latter part of his life, he should devote himself to the completion of his peculiarly English work, the *Canterbury Tales*.

Historians of literature usually divided Chaucer's life as a writer into three "periods": the first, while he worked under French influence; the second, under Italian; the third, when his work was purely English. This is a useful rough division, but we must be careful not to take it too literally. It does not mean that Chaucer woke up one morning and said "I am not going to be under French influence any longer. From to-day on, I

am going to copy the Italians." None of our lives can be divided into watertight compartments. All that can safely be said is that we tend to grow out of one set of interests into another. So, a writer's interest shifts: and Chaucer, after translating the *Roman de la Rose* and other poems from the French, turned his attention to the works of the Italian story-teller Boccaccio. From Boccaccio he got *Troilus and Criseyde*—not a translation, for he uses less than half of the original, and adds a great deal which is entirely his own. Besides this, one of the finest of the *Canterbury Tales*, that assigned to the Knight, is an altered and much compressed version of Boccaccio's *Teseide*.

2

In this first approach to Chaucer's work, we shall look at the *Canterbury Tales* alone. The plan is simple. A number of people, from almost every walk of life, are setting out from the Tabard Inn, Southwark, to make the pilgrimage to the shrine of St. Thomas à Becket at Canterbury. They have agreed to travel together, both for safety against robbers, and for good company. The Host, or landlord, of the inn proposes that, to pass the time on the journey, they shall all tell stories; and the teller of the story which is judged the best shall be given a feast at the others' expense, when they return to the Tabard. This thread connects the various stories, making them into a single work.

The company number twenty-nine, without the Host. On the road they are joined by another, the Canon's Yeoman. Here is the full list:—The Knight, the Squire, the Yeoman, the Prioress (head of a nunnery), the second Nun, the Nun's Priest, the Monk, the Friar, the Merchant, the Clerk, the Sergeant-at-Law (a title now disused), the Franklin (a rich country householder who

held his lands without having to pay either by rent or military service), the Haberdasher, the Webbe (weaver: cf. the surname Webster, which means weaver), the Dyer, the Tapycer (carpet maker), the Cook, the Shipman (a sailor), the Doctor of Medicine, the Wife of Bath, the Parson, the Ploughman, the Miller, the Manciple (servant of one of the inns of court, who did the catering under the instruction of the steward), the Reeve (steward of a big estate), the Summoner (officer of the Bishop's court), the Pardoner (travelling clerk in holy orders, licensed to sell "pardons"), Chaucer himself, the Host (his name was Harry Bailly), and the Canon's yeoman.

The thirty pilgrims between them give us an excellent idea of the state of society at the time. They do not include noblemen, and they do not include robbers, tramps, or outcasts: but they represent a thorough, sound section of the community, and in their arguments, their agreements, and their likes and dislikes of one another, we recognise them at once as living people like ourselves.

The Host's original plan was that each member of the company should tell four stories, two on the way to Canterbury, and two on the way back. This plan had to be modified – possibly some of the company could not live up to it. At any rate, when they are well on their way, the Host reminds the Franklin that each of them must tell "atte leste a tale or two": and, later on still, before the Parson's Tale, he limits the number of stories to "oon" each. Even so, the total of tales is not made up, and the pilgrims do not get as far as Canterbury.

They drew lots, and the telling of the first story fell to the Knight. This pleased everyone, for he was the chief man among the pilgrims, and they all liked him. Very possibly the Host so arranged it that he *should* draw the

first lot: he felt responsible for the success of the story-telling scheme, and was anxious for the journey to pass pleasantly, with as many good stories as possible.

The Knight was modest, gentle, and courteous to all. He had fought many battles in the East, against the enemies of Christendom, and had three times fought in single combat, and "ay slayn his foo":[1]

And though that he were worthy, he was wys,
And of his port[2] *as meeke as is a mayde.*
He never yet no vileynye ne sayde,[3]
In all his lyf, unto no maner wight.[4]
He was a verray parfit,[5] *gentil knyght.*

Before going any farther, we must decide how we are going to read Chaucer's verse. The lines above will show you certain differences from present-day English. Others will soon appear, of which the most important is that in Chaucer's time the final -e of a word was sometimes sounded as a separate syllable. Thus we have to be always on the lookout, in reading his verse, as otherwise many lines will seem to be one, two, or even three syllables short. The easiest way will be to mark each -e that has to be sounded with a ·. For instance:—

This ilkė[6] *worthy knyght hadde been also*
Sometymė with the lord of Palatye.[7]

The final -e of "ilke" and "sometyme" must be sounded. It is a short syllable: not "ilkee," but "ilk-e." Sometimes, too, as in the first of these two lines, the accent falls on the last syllable of a word: not "also," as we say it, but "alSO."

[1] Killed his opponent each time. [2] Behaviour. [3] Never said anything rough or coarse. [4] To any sort of person. [5] Perfect. [6] Same. [7] In Asia Minor.

Here are two more lines, to get us used to sounding final -e's:—

This ilkė Monk leet oldė thyngės pace,
And heelde after the newė world the space.[1]

With the Knight was his son, the young Squire, a strong, handsome, curly-haired young man of twenty.

Embrouded[2] *was he, as it were a meede*[3]
Al ful of freshė flourės whyte and reede;[4]
Syngynge he was, or floytynge,[5] *al the day;*
He was as fressh as is the monthe of May.
Short was his gowne, with sleevės longe and wyde;
Wel koude he sitte on hors and fairė[6] *ryde;*
He koudė songės make and wel endite,[7]
Juste[8] *and eek daunce and wel purtreye*[9] *and write.*
So hoote[10] *he lovede that by nyghterdale*[11]
He sleep namoore[12] *than dooth a nyghtyngale.*
Curteis he was, lowely and servysable,[13]
And carf biforn his fader[14] *at the table.*

We have no room to go through all the company in detail, but must content ourselves with looking at a few of the more striking pilgrims. High on the list stands the Prioress. She was an accomplished and gentle lady, and her table manners, though nowadays they seem only what is to be expected, were of a delicacy which caused comment in those ruder times.

And she was clepėd[15] *madame Eglentyne*
Ful weel she soong the servicė dyvyne,
Entunėd in hir nose[16] *ful semėly;*

[1] This same monk let old-fashioned things go their own way (for all he cared). He held by the ideas of the new and up-to-date world.
[2] Embroidered. [3] Meadow. [4] Red. [5] Playing the flute. [6] Skilfully. [7] Compose. [8] Joust. [9] Draw. [10] Hotly. [11] At night-time. [12] Slept no more. [13] Willing to serve. [14] Carved before his father. [15] Called. [16] This was evidently the right way to intone!

And Frenssh she spak ful faire and fetisly,[1]
After the scole of Stratford-attė-Bowe,[2]
For Frenssh of Parys was to hire unknowe.
At metė[3] *wel y-taught*[4] *was she with-alle;*
She leet no morsel from hir lippės falle,
Ne[5] *wette hir fyngrės in hir saucė depe.*[6]
Wel koude she carie a morsel and wel kepe,
Thát no drope ne fille upon hire breste;
In cuteisie was setful muchel hir leste.[7]
Hire over-lippė wypėd she so clene,
That in hir coppe ther was no ferthyng sene
Of grecė, when she dronken hadde hir draughte.[8]

She was also exceedingly tender-hearted.

She was so charitable and so pitous
She woldė wepe, if that she saugh a mous
Kaught in a trappe, if it were deed or bledde.[9]
Of smalė houndės hadde she[10] *that she fedde*
With rosted flessh, or milk and wastel[11] *breed;*
But soore wepte she if oon of hem[12] *were deed,*
Or if men smoot it with a yerdė smerte;[13]
And al was conscience[14] *and tendre herte.*

The Monk did not let his sacred office weigh heavily on his spirits. He was fat and well liking.

His heed[15] *was balled that shoon as any glas,*
And eek his face as he hadde been anoynt.[16]
He was a lord ful fat and in good poynt.[17]

[1] Cleverly. [2] That is to say, her accent was very good, even though it was not Parisian. The Queen's sister was at this convent of Stratford-at-Bow, and the slightly Flemish French which was spoken by her circle was, as Chaucer well knew, fashionable at the time. [3] Meat (i.e. table) [4] Old form of the past participle. [5] Nor. [6] Deeply. [7] She took great pleasure in courtesy. [8] i.e. There was no morsel ("farthing") of grease to be seen in her cup when she had finished drinking. [9] Dead or bleeding [10] She had some little dogs. [11] Bread made of especially fine flour [12] Them. [13] Hit it with a stick. [14] Sensibility. [15] Head. [16] As if he had been anointed. [17] In good condition.

The Friar was very popular with the ladies:—

Ful swetely herdė he confessioun,
And plėsaunt was his absolucioun.

The description of the Clerk (Scholar) of Oxford, called here by its original name of Oxenford, gives us a clear picture of the difference between a university now and five hundred years ago.

A Clerk ther was of Oxenford alsó,
That unto logyk haddė longe y-go.[1]
As leenė was his hors as is a rake,
And he nas nat[2] *right fat, I undertake,*
But lookėd holwe,[3] *and ther-to sobrely;*
Ful thredbare was his overeste courtepy;[4] . . .
For hym was levere[5] *have at his beddes heed*
Twenty bookės, clad in blak or reed,
Of Aristotle and his philosophie,
Than robės riche, or fithele, or gay sautrie:[6]
Of studie took he moost cure[7] *and moost heede,*
Nought o[8] *word spak he moorė than was neede*
And that was seyd in forme and reverence,
And short and quyk and ful of hy sentence.[9]
Sownynge[10] *in moral vertu was his speche*
And gladly wolde he lerne and gladly teche.

The Cook was clever at his business. Unfortunately, he suffered from an ulcer on his shin.

A Cook they haddė with hem for the nones,[11]
To boille the chiknės with the marybones,[12]
And poudrė-marchant tart and galyngale.[13]

[1] Had studied logic for a long time. [2] Was not. [3] Hollow-eyed. [4] Top cape. [5] He would rather. [6] Fiddle or small harp. [7] Care. [8] One. [9] Serious meaning (Latin *sententia*). [10] Eloquent. [11] For the occasion. [12] Marrowbones. [13] Flavouring powder and spice.

Wel koude he knowe a draughte of Londoun ale;
He koudė rooste and sethe and boille and frye,
Máken mortreux[1] *and wel bake a pye.*
But greet harm was it, as it thoughtė me,[2]
That on his shyne a mormal[3] *haddė he.*
For blankmanger,[4] *that made he with the beste.*

The Shipman came from Devon, as did so many after him. Chaucer suggests that he lived at Dartmouth; and as a group of Dartmouth seamen were at that time making themselves notorious as pirates, it is highly probable that Chaucer's Shipman was drawn from one of these actual men.

The hootė somer hadde maad his hewe al brown;
And certeinly he was a good felawe.
Ful many a draughte of wyn hadde he y-drawe
Fro Burdeux-ward,[5] *whil that the chapman sleepe.*
Of nycė conscïence took he no keepe.
If that he faught, and hadde the hyer hond,[6]
By water he sente hem hoom to every lond.[7]
But of his craft to rekene wer his tydes,
His stremės and his daungers hym bisides,
His herberwe and his moone, his lode-menage,
There was noone swich from Hullė to Cartage.[8]
Hardy he was, and wys to undertake:[9]
With many a tempest hadde his berd been shake.
He knew wel alle the havenes, as they were,
From Gootlond to the Cape of Fynystere,[10]
And every cryke in Britaigne[11] *and in Spayne.*
His barge y-clepėd was the Maudėlayne.

[1] A kind of stew. [2] Seemed to me. [3] Ulcer. [4] Blancmange. [5] Coming from Bordeaux. Merchants used to fetch wine from there, and if one of them was asleep, the Shipman would steal some of his wine on the voyage. [6] The upper hand. [7] He threw his prisoners into the sea. [8] There was no sailor from Hull to Carthage who was better able to calculate the tides, the currents, harbourage, the moon, or pilotage. [9] In making bets. [10] He knew all the harbours from the South of Sweden to the North of Spain. [11] Brittany.

The Doctor was first and foremost an astrologer, since all medicine at the time was held to depend upon a knowledge of the heavens. He was learned in the works of the old physicians, and made a very good living out of his patients. The Wife of Bath was a lively and outspoken lady who had had five husbands. She was a little hard of hearing, but otherwise excellent company. She wore a very good linen, and was more skilful in cloth-making than those of Ypres and Ghent. The parson practised what he preached:

And though he hooly were and vertuous,
He was to synful man nat despitous,[1]
Ne of his speché daungerous ne digne,[2]
But in his techying discreet and benygne.[3]
To drawen folk to hevene by fairnesse,
By good ensample, this was his bisynesse:
But it[4] *were any persone obstinat,*
What so he were, of heigh or lough estat,[5]
Hym wolde he snybben[6] *sharply for the nonys.*[7]
A bettre preest I trowe that nowher noon ys.

The Miller was a regular Hercules.

The Millere was a stout carl[8] *for the nones,*
Ful byg he was of brawn and eek of bones; . . .
He was short-sholdred, brood, a thikké knarre,[9]
Ther nas no dore that he nolde heve of harre.[10]
Or breke it at a rennyng with his heed.
His berd, as any sowe, or fox, was reed,
And therto brood, as though it were a spade.

[1] Scornful. [2] Domineering or disdainful. [3] Benign. [4] If. [5] High or low degree. [6] Snub, reprove. [7] "For the nones"—for the occasion. It is put in 2 lines further down more for the sound than for the meaning. [8] A stout fellow. [9] A thick-set fellow. [10] Would not heave off its hinges.

Upon the cope[1] *right of his nose he hade*
A werte,[2] *and theron stood a toft of herys,*
Reed as the brustles of a sowes erys:[3]
His nosethirlès[4] *blakė*[5] *were and wyde;*
A swerd and a bokeler[6] *bar he by his syde;*
His mouth as wyde was as a greet forneys,[7]
He was a janglere[8] *and a goliardeys*[9] . . .
A baggė pipe welkoude he blowe and sowne,
And therwithal he broghte us out of towne.

The party had other music, for the Pardoner sang, and the Summoner "bar to hym a stif burdoun" (sang the bass part). Thus, all happy and friendly, the party set out upon their way.

3

The most important man among them was the Host. There is only a short account of him in the Prologue:

A largė man he was, with eyen stepe,[10]
A fairer burgeys is ther noon in Chepe;[11]
Boold of his speche, and wys and well y-taught
And of manhod him lakkėde right naught.[12]

Once the pilgrims were on the road, however, he took good-humoured charge of them all, decided who was to tell stories each day, and said exactly what he thought of each tale. To the Monk, for instance, who was long-winded, he said:

'Sire Monk, namoore of this, so God yow blesse!
Youre tale anoyeth all this compaignye;
Swich[13] *talkyng is nat worth a boterflye.'*[14]

[1] Top. [2] A wart. [3] A tuft of hair as red as the bristles in a sow's ears. [4] Nostrils. [5] Black. "Blake" survives to-day in the surname Blake. [6] Sword and buckler. [7] A great furnace. [8] A great talker. [9] Buffoon. [10] Bright eyes. [11] There was no better citizen in all Cheapside—the great market-place of London. [12] Of manhood he lacked nothing. [13] Such. [14] Butterfly.

There is no doubt that many of the Canterbury pilgrims were portraits of living people known to Chaucer and easily recognisable by his readers. The Host is one of these. Chaucer gives his name, Harry Bailly; and there was a real Harry Bailly at that time, who was really landlord of the Tabard Inn at Southwark, and who had a wife called Christian. Chaucer's Harry Bailly had a wife too, and was continually lamenting the fact. On the road, however, he was as cheerful as anyone. He knew, as a good landlord should, what respect was due to each person in his company. When he spoke to the gentle Prioress, he asked her "as curteisly as it had ben a mayde" if she would tell her tale next. Later, when the Monk annoyed them all, the Host said roundly, "Thou art a fool," and he turned to the Nun's Priest—the Prioress' chaplain and secretary—and asked him to tell them something cheerful.

'Com neer, thou preest, com hyder,[1] *thou sir John.*
Telle us swich thyng as may oure hertės glade;[2]
Be blithė, though thou ryde upon a jade.
What thogh thyn hors be bothė foule and lene?
If he wol serve thee, rekkė nat a bene;[3]
Looke that thyn herte be murie[4] *evermo.'*

This is the tale that the Nun's Priest told.

The Nun's Priest's Tale of the Cock and Hen.

Once in a poor widow's farmyard there lived a handsome cock named Chauntecleer, and his favourite hen, the courteous, discreet and debonair Pertelote. Chauntecleer crowed more beautifully than any other cock in the land:

[1] Hither. [2] Something that will cheer us up. [3] Why worry?—compare the modern "Don't give a bean!" [4] Merry.

His voys was murier than the murie organ
On messė dayes that in the chirchė gon[1] . . .
His coomb was redder than the fine corál,
And batailled[2] *as it were a castle wal;*
His byle[3] *was blak, and as the jeet it shoon;*
Lyk asure[4] *were his leggės and his toon.*[5]

Early one morning, Chauntecleer began groaning in his sleep. Pertelote woke him, and he confessed that he had had a terrifying dream about a fox. Pertelote, after abusing him roundly for a coward, proceeded to prove to him, by quoting from the classics, that dreams were "vanitee." She displayed uncommon learning, but he was a match for her, citing Cicero, Homer, and the Bible.

This argument over, they walked in the sun with the other hens, and Chauntecleer began to sing. It happened that a wily fox was lying in a vegetable-patch near by. He complimented Chauntecleer on his excellent voice, and begged him to sing again. Chauntecleer, who had been frightened at first to hear the fox speak, was flattered by this praise: but his vanity was his undoing:

This Chauntėcleer stood hye upon his toos
Strecchynge his nekke, and heeld his eyen cloos,[6]
And gan to crowė loudė for the nones,[7]
And daun Russell,[8] *the fox, stirte up atones,*[9]
And by the gargat hentė Chauntėcleer,[10]
And on his bak towards the wode hym beer.[11]

[1] That plays on mass days in the church. [2] Battlemented. [3] Beak. It shone like jet. [4] Azure. [5] Toes. [6] Shut his eyes. [7] For the nones: see p. 23 note 6. This phrase used to be "for then (the) once," but the "n" of "then" was transferred to the following word. The opposite has happened in "umpire" and "apron," which used to be "numpire" and "napron." [8] "Russell" and "Reynard," both meaning "red," are names frequently given to the fox. [9] Jumped up at once. [10] Seized Chauntecleer by the throat. [11] Carried him off.

Immediately the farmyard was in an uproar. The poor hens began to shriek, and the widow and her two daughters came hurrying out of their house, and they all gave chase. "Out! harrow!" they cried, and "Weylaway":

'Ha! ha! the fox!' and after him they ran,
And eke with staves many another man;
Ran Colle, our dogge, and Talbot, and Gerland
And Malkyn, with a dystaf in her hand;
Ran cow and calf, and eke the verray hogges,
So were they fered for berkynge of the dogges,[1]
And shoutyng of the men and wommen eke;
They ronnė so hem thoughte hir hertė breek.[2]
They yollėden,[3] *as feendės doon in helle;*
The dokės cryden, as men wolde him quelle.[4]
The gees, for feerė, flowen over the trees;
Out of the hyvė cam the swarm of bees.

Here is a farmyard scene that might happen to-day.

Chauntecleer had his wits about him, however, and he was able to save himself. He spoke to the fox, who was carrying him in his mouth. "Sir," he said, "if I were you, I should turn and tell all these people that they may as well go home again, since you are determined to eat me." The fox thought this an excellent plan; but when he opened his mouth to speak, Chauntecleer broke skilfully from him, and flew away to safety.

The Host and all the company were delighted with this tale. On the next day's journey they had another which also pleased them very much. The doctor's tale had depressed them, and the Host, after commenting indignantly upon the cruel fate of Virginia, complained:

[1] They were so frightened of the barking of the dogs. [2] They ran until they thought their hearts would break. [3] Yelled. [4] The ducks quacked as if they were going to be killed.

'*But wel I woot thou doost myn herte to erme*[1]
That I almoost have caught a cardynacle.[2]
By corpus *bonès! but I have triácle,*[3]
Or elles a draughte of moyste and corny ale,
Or but I heere anon[4] *a myrie tale,*
Myrn herte is lost, for pitee of this mayde.'

Then turning to the Pardoner, he asked him to tell them a story which would cheer them up:

'*Thou* beel amy,[5] *thou Pardoner,*' *he sayde,*
'*Tell us som myrthe, or japès,*[6] *right anon!*'

The Pardoner said he would,

'*But first,*' *quod he,* '*heere at this alè stake*
I wol both drynke and eten of a cake.'

4

The Pardoner's Tale.

The Pardoner's Tale concerned three drunkards, and he took the occasion to blend with it a fearsome sermon on the ill-effects of "dronkenesse" and "glotonye," supported by a number of learned instances, and picturesquely phrased.

Three rogues were sitting drinking in a tavern one morning, when they saw a dead man being carried to his grave. "Go and find out who that is," said one of them to his boy. "I can tell you, sir," said the boy. "He used to be one of your friends, and he was killed suddenly, last night, by a thief called Death."

The three drunkards were indignant when they heard this, and when they thought of all the other people Death

[1] You make my heart grieve so much. [2] Stomach-ache, heartburn. [3] Unless I have some treacle. [4] At once. [5] *Beel ami*—"my good friend." [6] Jests.

had killed that year. "He lives quite near here," said one. "Let us go and kill him."

'Herkneth,[1] falowès, we three been al ones,
Lat ech of us holde up his hand till oother,[2]
And ech of us bicomen otheres brother,
And we wol sleen[3] this falsè traytour, Deeth.'

They set off at once, and before they had gone half a mile they met an old man. They greeted him rudely, asking him why he bothered to live. The old man, after mildly rebuking them for their bad manners, explained that Death would not take him. The drunkards then accused him of being in league with Death:

'For soothly thou art oon of his assent[4]
To sleen us yongè folk, thou falsè theef!'

"Tell us where Death is," they demanded, and the old man pointed up a crooked path to a grove of trees. "Se ye that ook?" he said. "Right there ye shal hym fynde."

They hurried immediately to the oak, but when they reached it they found something which made them forget all about Death. There on the ground lay no less than seven bushels of shining gold florins. They sat down at once beside it. "This is ours," they said, "for we found it." It would not be safe, however, to carry so much money home to their houses in broad daylight.

'Men woldè seyn[5] that we were thevès stronge,
And for our owene tresor doon us honge.[6]

Accordingly, they decided to wait till nightfall, and sent the youngest off to the town to fetch bread and wine. As he went, he thought out a way of killing the other two

[1] Listen. [2] To the other. [3] Slay. [4] Plot. [5] Say. [6] Have us hanged.

and keeping all the treasure himself. He decided to poison them:

And forth he gooth, no lenger wolde he tarie,
Into the town, unto a pothecarie,[1]
And preydė hym that he hym woldė selle
Som poysoun, that he myghte his rattes quelle.[2]

He put the poison into some bottles of wine, and went back to the wood. But the other two rogues had had the same idea: they did not mean to share the treasure, and as soon as he arrived, they stabbed him.

And whan that this was doon thus spak that oon:
'Now lat us sitte and drynke, and make us merie,
And afterward we wol his body berie.'

They took up the bottles of wine, drank the poison, and died. Thus, as the old man had said, they found Death under the oak tree.

When he had finished, the Pardoner offered his pardons for sale, and suggested that the Host should buy the first.

'I redė[3] *that oure Hoost heere shal bigynne,*
For he is moost envolupėd in synne.'[4]

Not unnaturally, this annoyed the Host, especially as the Pardoner, before he began his tale, had gleefully explained that his holy relics were all fakes, and that the objects which he showed the "lewed (simple) folk" were in reality "pygges bones" and the like. The Host replied hotly, but the Knight made peace, and "anon they kiste and ryden forth hir weye."

It would take too long to tell all the stories of the

[1] Chemist. [2] Kill. [3] Advise. [4] Enveloped—sunk in sin.

Canterbury pilgrims. Some were amusing, and some very dull: and one of the dullest of all, the Tale of Melibeus, Chaucer slily puts into his own mouth. When the Host asked him to tell his story, he laughed at him for his timid looks and shyness. This is Chaucer's own account:

Bihoold the murye wordes of the Hoost to Chaucer.

Whan seyd was al this miracle, every man
As sobrė was that wonder was to se,
Til that oure Hoostė japen tho bigan,[1]
And thanne at erst[2] *he looked upon me,*
And seydė thus: 'What man artow?'[3] *quod he;*
'Thou lookest as thou woldest fynde an hare;
For ever upon the ground I se thee stare.

Approchė neer, and looke up murily.
Now war yow[4] *sires, and lat this man have place;*
He in the waast[5] *is shape as wel as I;*
This were a popet in an arm tenbrace[6]
For any womman, smal and fair of face.
He semeth elvyssh by his contenaunce,
For unto no wight dooth he daliaunce.[7]

Say now somwhat, syn oother folk han sayd;[8]
Tellė us a tale of myrthe, and that anon,'
'Hoostė,' quod I, 'ne beth not yvele apayd,[9]
For oother talės certės kan I noon,
But of a rym I learned longe agoon.'
'Ye[10] *that is good,' quod he, 'now shul we heere*
Some deyntee thyng, me thynketh by his cheere!'

[1] Began to make jokes. [2] For the first time. [3] Art thou. [4] Take care. [5] Waist. [6] Puppet, doll, for a woman to embrace. [7] He does not talk pleasantly to anyone. [8] Since other folk have had their say. [9] Don't be angry. [10] Yes.

It is no "deyntee thyng" that they hear, however, and the Host is justly rude about Chaucer's powers of story-telling. It is to the real Chaucer's powers of story-telling, though, that we owe the Host himself and the Pilgrims and all the Canterbury Tales, which are some of the best stories in English Literature. Chaucer may have seemed to "stare upon the ground," but he missed nothing, and could see the funny side of everyone, including himself. For humour, vigour, and sheer enjoyment, there is nothing to equal the Canterbury Tales, until we come to the great comic scenes in Shakespeare: and both give us that understanding and enjoyment of ordinary, everyday English character which is the richest part of our natural heritage. We could meet and talk to Harry Bailly or the Wife of Bath, as we could meet and talk to Falstaff or Justice Shallow, with an immediate recognition of qualities which the passing of centuries has done nothing to change.

CHAPTER II

THE PASTON LETTERS

1

THE CANTERBURY Pilgrims were men and women away from home, meeting and travelling and talking in public. The Paston Letters show us what home life was like in those days, and tell us the everyday affairs of a large and busy family. They are five centuries old, but as we read them we see that people then thought and felt almost exactly as we think and feel to-day, and that families were very much the same, quarrelling, and making friends, writing home for new clothes and for more pocket-money.

The Paston Letters are a large collection from all kinds of people, named after the Norfolk family whose life they chiefly concern. They were written in the reigns of Henry VI, Edward IV, and Richard III, in the midst of the Wars of the Roses. But, although they mention the Wars and political troubles in their letters, they are much more interested in their own family affairs. The first thing that Sir John Paston tells his mother about the battle of Barnet, where his brother fought, is that that brother (also called John) "is hurt with an arrow in his right arm beneath the elbow; and I have sent him a surgeon which hath dressed him, and he telleth me that he trusteth that he shall be all whole within right short time." Some time after this, in the same letter, he just mentions that "Item, my lord archbishop is in the Tower. . . . There are killed upon the field, half a mile from Barnet, on Easter Day, the Earl of Warwick, the Marquis Montagu, Sir William Tyrell, Sir Lewis Johns, and divers other esquires."

The Pastons were determined that their children should be well brought up. There is a paper (not a letter this time) headed "Errands to London of Agnes Paston, the 28th day of January, 1457, the year of King Henry VI, the 36th." These were her errands:—

"To pray Greenfield to send me faithfully word by writing how Clement Paston hath done his endeavour in learning.

"And if he hath not done well, nor will not amend, pray him that he will truly belash him till he will amend; and so did the last master, and the best that ever he had at Cambridge . . .

"Item, to see how many gowns Clement hath, and they that be bare, let them be raised[1] . . .

"He hath a short green gown. And a short muster-develers[2] gown, were never raised. . . .

"And a side[3] russet gown furred with beaver was made this time two years. . . .

"Item, to do make me[4] six spoons of eight ounces of troy weight, well fashioned and double gilt.

"And say Elizabeth Paston that she must use herself to work readily, as other gentlewomen do, and somewhat to help herself therewith.

"Item, to pay the Lady Pole 26*s.* and 8*d.* for her board.

"And if Greenfield hath done well his deboir to Clement, or will do his devoir, give him the noble.[5]

AGNES PASTON."

We are not told if Clement was doing his work well, or whether Greenfield had to "belash" him. Agnes Paston believed that if you spared the rod you spoiled the child.

[1] Let them have a new nap set upon them. [2] Probably "Mestier de Velours," French, a half velvet. [3] Probably a long gown. [4] Get made for me. [5] 6*s.* 8*d.*

She was very fond of her children; but when Elizabeth (mentioned in the above "errands" as living in the house of Lady Poole as a lady-in-waiting) showed signs of not wanting to marry the man her mother intended for her, she was "beaten once in the week or twice, and sometimes twice on a day, and her head broken in two or three places."

The pleasanter and more usual side of the children's bringing up is seen in a letter from young William Paston, a boy at Eton, to "his worshipful brother John Paston." He suggests an exeat, and that he needs, among other things, two shirts and a pair of slippers.

"Right reverend and worshipful brother, I recommend me unto you, desiring to hear of your welfare and prosperity, letting you weet[1] that I have received of Alweder a letter and a noble in gold therin; furthermore my creanser[2] Master Thomas (Stevenson) heartily recommended him to you, and he prayeth you to send him some money for my commons, for he saith ye be 20*s.* in his debt, for a month was to pay for, when he had money last; also I beseech you to send me a hose cloth, one for the holydays of some colour, and another for the working days how coarse soever it be it maketh no matter, and a stomacher, and two shirts, and a pair of slippers: and if it like you that I may come with Alweder by water, and sport me with you at London a day or two this term time, then ye may let all this be till the time that I come, and then I will tell you when I shall be ready to come from Eton by the grace of God, who have you in his keeping. Written the Saturday next after All-hallows day with the hand of your brother,

WILLIAM PASTON."

[1] Know. [2] Creditor: in this case, his housemaster.

Here is a fuller letter, from the same boy, which relates among other things the beginning of a romance.

"Right reverend and worshipful brother, After all duties of recommendation I recommend me to you, desiring to hear of your prosperity and welfare, which I pray God long to continue to his pleasure and to your heart's desire; letting you weet that I received a letter from you, in the which letter was 8*d.* with the which I should buy a pair of slippers.

"Farthermore certifying you as for the 13*s.* 4*d.* which ye sent by a gentleman's man for my board, called Thomas Newton, was delivered to mine hostess, and so to my creanser, Mr. Thomas Stevenson; and he heartily recommended him to you; also ye sent me word in the letter of 12 lb. of figs and 8 lb. of raisins;[1] I have them not delivered, but I doubt not I shall have, for Alweder told me of them, and he said that they came after in another barge.

"And as for the young gentlewoman, I will certify you how I first fell in acquaintance with her; her father is dead, there be two sisters of them, the elder is just wedded; at which wedding I was with mine hostess, and also desired[2] by the gentleman himself, called William Swan, whose dwelling is in Eton. So it fortuned that mine hostess reported on me otherwise than I was worthy,[3] so that her mother commanded her to make me good cheer, and so in good faith she did; she is not abiding where she is now, her dwelling is in London; but her mother and she came to a place of hers five miles from Eton where the wedding was, for because it was nigh to the gentleman which wedded her daughter; and on Monday next coming, that is to say, the first Monday

[1] For him to eat in Lent. [2] Invited. [3] Beyond what I was worthy of.

of Clean Lent,[1] her mother and she will go to the pardon[2] at Sheene,[3] and so forth to London, and there to abide in a place of hers in Bow Churchyard; and if it please you to inquire of her, her mother's name is Mistress Alborrow, the name of the daughter is Margaret Alborow, the age of her is, by all likelyhood, eighteen or nineteen years at the farthest; and as for money and plate, it is ready whensoever she were wedded; but as for the livelihood, I trow not till after her mother's decease, but I cannot tell you for very certain, but you may know by inquiring.

"And as for her beauty, judge that when you see her, if so be that ye take the labour; and specially behold her hands, for and if it be as it is told me, she is disposed to be thick.

"And as for my coming from Eton, I lack nothing but versifying, which I trust to have with a little continuance.

Quare, Quomodo. Non valet hora, valet mora.
Unde di

Arbore jam videas exemplum. Non die possunt
Omnia suppleri, sed hi illa mora.

And these two verses aforsaid be of mine own making. No more to you at this time, but God have you in his keeping.

"Written at Eton the even of Saint Mathias the Apostle, in haste, with the hand of your brother.

WILLIAM PASTON, Junior."

It does not take any great acquaintance with "versifying" to see that William was an optimist.

Even when they were grown up, the Pastons had to write home for clothes and for money. Clothes were

[1] An old name for Lent. [2] Festival of the patron saint of a church, at which pardons were granted. [3] Richmond.

made to last many years in those days, and getting new ones was a serious matter; and as for money, although the Pastons were some of the wealthiest people in Norfolk, and owned a great deal of land, ready money was always scarce, and sometimes Sir John himself had to write and ask his mother for ten shillings. Another John, "John Paston the youngest" as he signs himself, clearly had neither money nor stockings when he wrote home:—

"Also, mother, I beseech you that there may be purveyed some mean that I might have sent me home by the same messenger two pair of hose, one pair black and another pair of russet, which be ready made for me at the hosier's with the crooked back, next to the Black-Friars'-Gate within Ludgate; John Pampynge knoweth him well enough I suppose, and[1] the black hose be paid for he will send me the russet unpaid for; I beseech you that this gear be not forgotten, for I have not an whole hose for to don; I trow they shall cost both pair 8*s*."

At Christmas families like the Pastons used to have a very good time, with charades ("disguisings") and songs and games. This letter from Margery Paston to her husband tells how, out of respect for the recent death of the head of the house, some of their friends kept Christmas quietly. It was written on Christmas Eve 1484.

"Right worshipful husband, I recommend me unto you: please it you to weet[2] that I sent your eldest son to my Lady Morley to have knowledge what sports were used in her house in Christmas next following after the decease of my lord her husband; and she said that there were none disguisings, nor harping, nor luting, nor singing, nor none loud disports; but playing at the tables,

[1] If. [2] Know.

and chess, and cards; such disports she gave her folk leave to play and none other."

2

The Paston women were all good managers, and often did much of their husbands' business with farmers and lawyers and bailiffs. Here a servant is being troublesome:—

"I pray you that you will assure to you some man at Caister[1] to keep your buttery, for the man that ye left with me will not take upon him to breve[2] daily as ye commanded; he saith he hath not used to give a reckoning neither of bread nor ale till at the week's end, and he saith he wot well that he should not condeneth,[3] and therefore I suppose he shall not abide, and I trow ye shall be fain to purvey another man for Symond, for ye are never the nearer a wise man for him.

"I am sorry that ye shall not at home be for Christmas.

"I pray you that ye will come as soon as ye may; I shall think myself half a widow, because ye shall not be at home, etc. God have you in his keeping. Written on Christmas even

By your servant and beadswoman
MARGERY PASTON."

In those troubled times, servants needed other qualifications besides those we usually expect to-day; as witness the following letter:—

"Right well-beloved brother, I commend me to you; letting you weet that I have waged,[4] for to help you and Daubenay to keep the place at Caister, four well assured and true men to do all manner of thing what

[1] One of the Paston estates. [2] Enter up his accounts. [3] Give content. [4] Hired.

they be desired to do in safeguard or inforcing of the said place; and moreover they be proved men, and cunning in war and feats of arms, and they can well shoot both guns and cross-bows, and amend and string them, and devise bulwarks, or any things that should be a strength to the place, and they will as need is keep watch and ward, they be sad[1] and well-advised men, saving one of them, which is bald, and called William Peny, which is as good a man as goeth upon earth saving a little,[2] he will, as I understand, be a little copschotyn,[3] but yet he is no brawler but full of courtesy . . ."

Many things that we look on as quite ordinary—sugar, for instance, and oranges—could not be bought in Norfolk, so, when any of the Paston men were in London they had to be commissioned to bring them back. Margaret Paston wrote to her husband for a sugar loaf, dates and almonds:—

"Also I send you by the bearer hereof closed in this letter, five shillings of gold, and pray you to buy me a sugar-loaf, and dates, and almonds, and send it me home, and if ye beware[4] any more money, when ye come home I shall pay it to you again; the Holy Ghost keep you both, and deliver you of your enemies."

Her wish for their safety was no mere form, but a genuine anxiety that they should not fall into the hands of robbers. There were no regular posts in those days. Letters were sent by messengers attached to each household, and these servants were in great danger from the thieves who infested the roads. Many of the Paston Letters end on this note of anxiety. Sometimes it is for

[1] Serious. [2] But for one thing. [3] Fond of drink. [4] Lay out.

the masters themselves, although these generally rode with a company of their men, all well armed with swords and long or cross-bows. Once, after "many and great horrible robberies," and a murder in which some local priests were concerned, Margaret Paston wrote, "At the reverence of God beware how ye go and ride, for it is told me that ye be threatened of them that be naughty fellows." In another letter she tells of twenty marks (£13 6*s*. 8*d*.) which a friend had left at her house instead of sending to London, "for she dare not adventure her money to be brought up to London for fear of robbing, for it is said here that there goeth many thieves betwixt this and London."

Epidemics were as grave a danger as thieves. Sir John wrote home one day, "in haste":—

"Item, I pray you send me word if any of our friends or well-willers be dead, for I fear that there is great death in Norwich and in other borough towns in Norfolk . . .

"Wherefore, for God's sake, let my mother take heed to my young brethren that they be not in none place where that sickness is reigning, nor that they disport not with none other young people which resorteth where any sickness is . . . let my mother rather remove her household into the country."

The young Pastons were sure to have many friends with whom, when there was no "sickness," they could "disport." The Pastons were on good terms with their neighbours, and interested in all their doings. The women especially write letters full of local news. This is from Agnes Paston to her son John:—

"And as for tidings, Philip Berney is passed to God on Monday last past with the greatest pain that ever I

saw man; and on Tuesday Sir John Heveningham yede[1] to his church and heard three masses, and came home again never merrier, and said to his wife that he would go say a little devotion in his garden, and then he would dine; and forthwith he felt a fainting in his leg, and syyd[2] down; this was at nine of the clock, and he was dead ere noon."

The Pastons had many influential friends. The most powerful of all was the great Earl of Warwick, the "king-maker" who put Edward IV on the throne, and who was killed, fighting against him, at the battle of Barnet in 1471. Only two of Warwick's letters have been preserved. One of these was to a neighbour of the Pastons, asking for the loan of ten or twenty pounds—another proof of the scarcity of ready money in those days; the other was to John Paston, asking him to show "good will and favour" to his purchase of some land in his neighbourhood. The letter, which begins "Worshipful and my right trusty and well-beloved friend," proves that the Pastons were of importance outside their own local circle of friends, for no ordinary country squire would have been addressed thus by the richest and most powerful man in the kingdom.

Once when the mayor and mayoress of Norwich went to dine with Margaret Paston, they sent their own food for the dinner. This seems strange to us, but their hostess simply says:—

"The mayor and the mayoress sent hither their dinners this day, and John Damme came with them, and they dined here; I am beholden to them for they have sent to me divers times[3] since ye yed[4] hence; the

[1] Went. [2] Sat. [3] Possibly she means "have sent their dinners." [4] Went.

mayor saith that there is no gentleman in Norfolk that he would do more for than he would for you, if it lay in his power to do for you."

All these extracts, you will have noticed, are in modernised spelling. The reason for this is that the old spelling is apt to make the letters seem strange and half foreign, and that to change it takes away nothing essential from their character. The spelling of Chaucer, on the other hand, could not be modernised, for to do so would often alter the actual text and spoil the metre. Here is a final selection, in the original spelling, from a letter of Margaret Paston to her husband:—

"Ryghte worschipful husbande, I recommende mee to you, beseechynge you that ye be not displeased with me, tho my simplenesse causid you for to be displeased with mee. By my trothe yt is not my will to do nor say that which scholde cause you for to bee displeased, and if I have done (yt), I am sorry thereof and will amend yt: whereof I beseech you to forgive mee, and that ye bear none heavynesse in your hearte against mee, for your displeasure scholde bee too heavy to mee to endure with."

In the early days of English, spelling had not the importance it has for us. The Elizabethan writers spelled much as the fancy took them. Even proper names underwent surprising variations. We need not therefore feel any twinge of conscience at altering old spelling, especially as it often gives, for the modern reader, a quite false air of "quaintness" to the work so spelled, and puts it further away from us, instead of making it close and real and descriptive of people like ourselves.

CHAPTER III

SKELTON

JOHN SKELTON was born probably in 1460, and was the next poet of any modern interest after Chaucer. He was a clergyman and a courtier whose poems had not a good word for Church or Court; a vigorous and clever man, downright, vain, quarrelsome, and often abusive, but very popular. The best proof of his popularity, and of his courage, is that he wrote satires against the all-powerful Cardinal Wolsey, and that nothing happened to him. There were no laws of libel for him to break: but men who criticised those in power were in danger of losing their lives. Skelton was the only man in England who dared to say what he thought of Wolsey. He called him, among other things, "the butcher's dog."

Skelton always insisted that he should be addressed as "poet laureate." This did not mean that he was the official national poet, as Mr. Masefield is to-day. It meant that he had earned a garland of laurel by taking a degree in grammar, which he did at the three universities of Oxford, Cambridge, and Louvain. He must have been highly thought of at Court, for he was made tutor to the young Prince Henry, who was afterwards Henry VIII. Some time later he took holy orders, and then became rector of Diss, in Norfolk, where he seems to have been as lively as ever, for he "was esteemed more fit for the stage than the pew or pulpit." Little is known of his later life, except that he came up against Wolsey, which is hardly surprising, and that in 1523 he had to take sanctuary from him at Westminster.

Skelton wrote many different kinds of poems, some

charming, some amusing, some dull, and some furiously satirical. He admired Chaucer greatly, and, like Chaucer and the other poets of the Middle Ages, he wrote delightfully about birds and flowers and young girls. *Philip Sparrow* is the lament of Jane Scroupe for her dead bird:

When I remember again
How my Philip was slain,
Never half the pain
Was between you twain,
Pyramus and Thisbe,[1]
As then befell to me:
I wept and I wailed,
My tears down hailed,
But nothing it availed,
To call Philip again
Whom Gib, our cat, hath slain.

Jane calls on all the birds to come to Philip's funeral:

Lauda, anima mea, Dominum[2]
To weep with me, look that ye come,
All manner of birdes in your kind;
See none be left behind.
To mourning look that ye fall
With dolorous songs funerall,
Some to sing, and some to say,
Some to weep, and some to pray,
Every bird in his lay.
The goldfinch, the wagtail;
The jangling jay to rail,
The fleckèd pie to chatter
Of this dolorous matter;

[1] A pair of famous and ill-starred Babylonian lovers. [2] Praise the Lord, O my soul!

And robin redbreast,
He shall be the priest
The requiem mass to sing,
Softly warbeling,
With help of the reed sparrow,
And the chattering swallow,
This hearse for to hallow;
The lark with his long toe;
The spinke[1] *and the martinet*[2] *also;*
The shoveller with his broad beak;
The dotterel, that foolish peke,[3]
And also the mad coot,
With bald face to toot.[4] . . .
The lusty chanting nightingale;
The popinjay[5] *to tell her tale,*
That toteth[6] *oft in a glass,*
Shall read the Gospel at mass;
The mavis[7] *with her whistle*
Shall read there the Epistle
But with a large and a long
To keep just plain-song
Our chanters shall be the cuckoo,
The culver,[8] *the stockdoo,*[9]
With "peewit" the lapwing,
The Versicles shall sing.

This curious, short-lined verse is Skelton's most characteristic rhythm, and he uses it alike for quiet poems and for noisy ones. One of his liveliest poems, *The Tunning*[10] *of Elinor Rumming*, is in this metre. Elinor Rumming kept a disreputable inn "beside Leatherhead," and all kinds of women gathered there to drink her ale.

[1] Chaffinch. [2] Martin. [3] Wretch. [4] Peep about. [5] Parrot. [6] Peeps. [7] Song-thrush. [8] Ring-dove. [9] Stock-dove. [10] Decanting of ale from tuns (barrels).

Come who so will
To Elinor on the hill
With "Fill the cup, fill!"
And sit there by still,
Early and late.
Thither cometh Kate,
Cisly, and Sare,
With their legs bare. . . .
With titters and tatters,
Bring dishes and platters,
With all their might running
To have of her tunning.

He uses the same short line in *Colin Clout*, his satire against the priests. He is hinting at Wolsey, "so bold and so bragging, and was so basely born," when he says:

And where the prelates be
Come of low degree,
And set in majestie
And spiritual dignitie,
Farewell benignitie,
Farewell simplicitie,
Farewell humilitie,
Farewell good charitie.

Why Come Ye Not to Court was the poem which really got him into trouble with Wolsey, and it is no wonder. Wolsey had far more good points than Skelton would admit: but villain or no villain, butcher's son or prince, he was not likely to stand this kind of thing:

But this mad Amaleck,
Like to a Mamelek,[1]

[1] *Mameluke:* one of the famous Egyptian warriors. This is not put in just as a good rhyme. It was a topical reference which must have pleased Skelton's readers, for just about this time the Mamelukes, who had made themselves Sultans of Egypt, were overthrown.

He regardeth lords
No more than potshords!
He is in such elation
Of his exaltation,
And the supportation
Of our sovereign Lord,
That, God to record,
He ruleth all at will
Without reason or skill!
Howbeit, the primordial[1]
Of his wretched original,
And his base progeny,
And his greasy genealogy,
He came of the sang[2] *royall*
That was cast out of a butcher's stall.

Skelton was good at this sort of personal insult, though he himself did not welcome it from other people. He and Christopher Garnesche, Chamberlain to Henry VIII, had a long wordy warfare, partly because Henry was amused by their angry cursings and partly because they really were angry. This is an extract from Skelton's contribution:

When ye were younger of age
Ye were a kitchen-page,
A dish-washer, a drivell,[3]
In the pot your nose did snivell;
Ye fried and ye broilëd,
Ye roasted, and ye broilëd,
Ye roasted, like a fon,[4]
A goose with the feet upon;
Ye sluffered[5] *up souce*[6]
In my Lady Brewes's house.

[1] First origin. [2] Blood. [3] Drudge. [4] Fool. [5] Gobbled up noisily. [6] Tripe.

Whereto should I write
Of such a greasy knight?
A bawdy dish-clout
That bringeth the world about
With hafting[1] *and with polling,*[2]
With lying and controlling.

These "tattered and jagged" rhymes, as Skelton called them, were immensely popular with the man in the street. "Many of them," an anonymous writer has said, "were never committed to print, but learned by heart by hundreds, repeated in the roadside alehouse or at the market-cross on fair days, when dealer and customer left booth and stall vacant to push into the crowd hedging round the itinerant ballad-singer."

Skelton's poetry was slightly old-fashioned when he wrote it; the up-to-date poets were turning out quite different work, copied chiefly from Italian models. But Skelton was not the man to mind being thought out of date. He enjoyed life, and went his own way. His poetry was popular then, and it is still popular to-day, which is more than can be said for that of his contemporaries. His originality, his sturdy, uncompromising character, and the outspoken vigour of his work made him the most noteworthy and likeable figure in a rather dull century of English Literature.

[1] Lying. [2] Deceiving.

CHAPTER IV

THE ENGLISH BIBLE

1

THE BIBLE, as we know it, is a translation, the work of forty-seven men, published in 1611. This Authorised Version was sanctioned by James I himself, who took a great interest in its progress. It was first talked of in 1604. James had not been long in England when he called a Conference at Hampton Court Palace to discuss "things pretended[1] to be amiss in the church," and among these things, it was soon agreed, was the lack of a good translation of the Bible. There were other versions, but they did not satisfy everyone; and James arranged for a new one to be made by "the best learned in both the universities, after that to be reviewed by the bishops and chief learned of the Church; from them to be presented to the Privy Council; and lastly to be ratified by his royal authority; and so this whole Church to be bound into it and none other."

The forty-seven men thus chosen began their work in 1607, and finished it in two years and nine months. They worked in six groups, two at Westminster, two at Oxford, and two at Cambridge; and although there were so many different men at work on it, they achieved, not only a version so unified that it might be the work of one man, but the finest and most sustained work of all English prose.

They were not the first translators, and they owed much to their predecessors. Three men especially have left their mark on the Authorised Version. These were

[1] Said.

Wyclif,[1] Tyndale, and Miles Coverdale. Wyclif's translation of the New Testament was made in 1380, in order he said, to help his poor priests "faithfully to scatter the seeds of God's word." The English language then was very different from what it had become in 1611: but a comparison of the stories of the centurion's servant and of the Gadarene swine, as told by Wyclif and in the 1611 Bible, will show that the Authorised Version owed him some of its simplicity and straightforwardness.

Here are the two stories as we know them, from St. Matthew VIII.

"And when Jesus was entered into Capernaum, there came unto him a centurion, beseeching him, and saying, Lord, my servant lieth at home, sick of the palsy, grievously tormented. And Jesus saith unto him, I will come and heal him. The centurion answered and said, Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldest come under my roof: but speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed. For I am a man under authority, having soldiers under me: and I say to this man, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it. When Jesus heard it, he marvelled, and said to them that followed, Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel. And I say unto you, That many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven. But the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. And Jesus said unto the centurion, Go thy way; and as thou hast believed, so be it done unto thee. And his servant was healed in the selfsame hour. . . .

"And when he was come to the other side into the country of the Gergesenes, there met him two possessed

[1] Founder of the Lollards.

with devils, coming out of the tombs, exceeding fierce, so that no man might pass by that way. And, behold, they cried out, saying, What have we to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of God? art thou come hither to torment us before the time? And there was a good way off from them an herd of many swine feeding. So the devils besought him, saying, If thou cast us out, suffer us to go away into the herd of swine. And he said unto them, Go. And when they were come out, they went into the herd of swine: and, behold, the whole herd of swine ran violently down a steep place into the sea, and perished in the waters. And they that kept them fled, and went their ways into the city, and told everything, and what was befallen to the possessed of the Devils. And behold, the whole city came out to meet Jesus: and when they saw him, they besought him that he would depart out of their coasts."

The following is Wyclif's translation. The spelling in these extracts has not been modernised, as their particular interest is to show the difference in *language* between the fourteenth- and sixteenth-century versions and our own.

"Sothely when he hadde entride in to Capharnaum, centurio neigide[1] to him, preyinge hym, And said, Lord, my child lyeth in the hous sike on the palsie, and is yuel[2] tourmentid. And Jhesus saith to hym, I shal cume, and shal hele hym. And centurio answerynge saith to hym, Lord, I am not worthi, that thou entre vndir my roof; but oonly say thi word, and my child shall be helid. For whi and I am a man ordeynd vnder power, hauynge vnder me knigtis; and I say to this, Go, and he goth; and to another, Come thou, and he cometh; and to my seruant, Do thou this thing, and he doth. Sothely Jhesus, heerynge these thingis, wondride, and saide to men suynge[3] him; Trewly I say to you I fond nat so greete

[1] Drew near. [2] Evil. [3] Following.

feith in Ysrael. Sothely Y say to you, that manye shulen[1] come fro the est and west, and shulen rest with Abraham and Ysaac and Jacob in the kyngdam of heunes; forsothe the sonys of the rewme[2] shulen be cast out into vttremest derknessis; there shal be weepynge, and hcetynge togidre of teeth. And Jhesus saide to centurio, Go; and as thou hast bileeued be it don to thee. And the child was helid fro that houre. . . .

"And whan Jhesus hadde comen over the water in to the cuntre of men of Genazereth twey men hauynge deuelis runnen to hym, goynge out fro biriebs,[3] ful feerse, or *wikkid*, so that no man migte passe by that wey. And loo! thei crieden, sayinge, What to us and to thee, Jhesus the sone of God? hast thou comen hyder before the tyme for to tormente us? Sothely a floc, *or droue*, of many hoggis lesewynge[4] was nat fer from hem. But the deuelis preyeden him, seyinge, Gif thou castest out us hennes, sende us into the droue of hoggis. And he saith to hem, Go yee. And thei goynge out wente in to the hoggis; and loo! in a great bire[5] al the droue wente heedlynge[6] into the see, and thei ben dead in watris. Forsothe the hirdes fledden awey, and cummynge in to the citee, tolden alle these thingis; and of hem that hadden the fendis.[7] And loo! al the citee wente agenis Jhesu, metynge hym; and hym seen, thei preiden *hym*, that he shulde pass fro her coostis."

William Tyndale made his translation in 1526. It was not safe for him to do it in England, so he went abroad, and three thousand copies of his New Testament, which was the first English version ever to be printed, were published at Worms, in Germany. His translation was popular, as he hoped it would be. "If God spare my life," he said one day to a fellow-priest who had annoyed

[1] Shall. [2] Kingdom. [3] Tombs. [4] Feeding. [5] Speed. [6] Headlong. [7] Devils.

him, "ere many years I will cause (that) a boy that driveth the plough shall know more of the Scripture than thou dost." His language is much easier to read than Wyclif's, and much nearer to the Authorised Version. "Wepinge and gnasshing of tethe," for example, is one of the many happy phrases which James I's translators were wise enough to keep.

"When Jesus was entred in to Capernaum, there cam vnto him a certayne Centurion, besechyng him And saynge: Master, my servaunt lyeth sicke att home off the palsye, and is grevously payned. And Jesus sayd vnto him. I will come and cure him. The Centurion answered and saide: Syr I am not worthy that thou shuldest com vnder the rofe of my housse, but speake the worde only and my servaunt shalbe healed. For y also my selfe am a man vndre power, and have sowdeeres[1] vndre me, and y saye to one, go and he goeth: and to anothre, come, and he cometh: and to my servaunt, do this, and he doeth it. When Jesus herde these saynges: he marveyled, and said to them that folowed him: Verely y say vnto you, I have not founde so great fayth: no, not in Israell. I say therfore vnto you, that many shall come from the eest and weest, and shall rest with Abraham, Ysaac and Jacob, in the kyngdom of heven: And the children of the kingdom shalbe cast out in to the vtmoose dercknes, there shalbe wepinge and gnasshing of tethe. Then Jesus said vnto the Centurion, go thy waye, and as thou hast believed so be it vnto the. And his servaunt was healed that same houre . . .

"And when he was come to the other syde, in to the countre off the gergesens, there met him two possessed of devylls, which cam out of the graves, and were out of measure fearce, so that no man might go by that way. And lo they cryed out saynge: O Jesu the sonne off God.

[1] Soldiers.

what have we to do with the? Art thou come hyther to torment us before the tyme (be come)? There was a good waye off from them a greate heerd of swyne fedinge. Then the devyls besought him saynge: if thou cast us out, suffre us to go oure way into the heerd of swyne. And he said unto them: go youre wayes: then went they out, and departed into the heerd of swyne. And lo! all the heerd of swyne was caryed with violence hedlinge into the see, and perisshed in the water. Then the heerdmen fleed, and went there ways into the cite, and tolde every thyng and what had fortuned unto them that were possessed of the devyls. And lo, all the cite cam out, and met Jesus, and when they sawe him they besought him to depart out off there costes."

2

The unity of style which makes the Authorised Version so remarkable was due not to Wyclif or to Tyndale, but to Miles Coverdale. Coverdale "revised" the version of his friend Tyndale, and in so doing produced a new and characteristic translation, smoother, more careful, and of a much finer style. His version of the psalms is still printed in the Prayer Book, because it is the best for singing. His Bible, which was the first *complete* English printed Bible, came out in 1535, only nine years after Tyndale's. This is his version of the same passage from St. Matthew.

"When Jesus was entred in Capernaum, ther cam unto hym a captayn, and besought hym saying: Syr, my servant lieth sick at home of the palsy, and is grevously payned. Jesus sayde unto hym: I wyll come and heale hym. The capitayne answered and sayd: Sir, I am not worthy, that thou shouldest comme under my roofe, but speake the word only, and my servant shall be healed.

For I myself am also a man subjecte to the authoritee of an other, and have souldiours under me. Yet when I saie to one: go, he goeth: and to an other: come, he commeth: and to my servant: doo this, he dooth it. Whan Jesus herd that, he meruailed, and sayd to them that folowed hym: veryly I saye unto you: I have not founde so great fayth, no not in Israell. But I say unto you, Many shall come from the east and west, and shall rest with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kyngdome of heaven, and the children of the kyngdom shall be caste out into bitter darknesse: there shalbe wepying and gnashying of teeth. And Jesus sayde unto the capitayne: Go thy waie, and as thou beleuest, so be it unto the. And his servant was healed the same houre. . . .

"And whan he was come to the other syde into the countrey of the Gergesites, there mette hym two possessed of devyls, whyche came out of the graues, and were out of mesure ferce, so that no man might go by that waie. And beholde, they cryed out, saying: Oh Jesu, thou sonne of God what have we to doo with the? Art thou come hither to torment us before the tyme to come? And there was a good waye of from theym a greate hearde of swyne feedyng. Than the dyvels besoughte hym sayenge: If thou cast us out, suffre us to go oure waye into the hearde of swyne. And he sayd unto them: go youre waies. Than wente they oute, and departed into the hearde of swyne. And beholde, the whole hearde of swine was caried with violence headlyng into the sea, and peryshed in the water. Then the herdemen fled, and wente their wayes into the citee, and tolde euery thying, and what had fortuned unto the possessed of the deuelles. And beholde all the citee came out, and met Jesus, and whan thei sawe hym, they besought hym, for to depart out of their coastes."

All these versions of the Bible were "modern" to the men and women who read them. They were written in the ordinary, colloquial language of the day as it was spoken in the streets and palaces and at home. We have modern translations to-day also. Here is Dr. Moffatt's rendering of the two stories from St. Matthew in the language we use to-day.

"When he entered Capharnahum an army captain came up to him and appealed to him, saying, 'Sir, my servant is lying ill at home with paralysis, in terrible agony.' He replied, 'I will come and heal him.' The Captain answered, 'Sir, I am not fit to have you under my roof: only say the word, and my servant will be cured. For although I am a man under authority myself, I have soldiers under me; I tell one man to go, and he goes, I tell another to come, and he comes, I tell my servant, "Do this," and he does it.' When Jesus heard that, he marvelled; 'I tell you truly,' he said to his followers, 'I have never met faith like this anywhere in Israel. Many, I tell you, will come *from east and west* and take their places beside Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the Realm of heaven, while the sons of the Realm will pass outside, into the darkness; there men will wail and gnash their teeth.' Then Jesus said to the captain, 'Go; as you have had faith your prayer is granted.' And the servant was cured at that very hour. . . .

"When he reached the opposite side, the country of the Gadarenes, he was met by two demoniacs who ran out of the tombs; they were so violent that nobody could pass along the road there. They shricked, 'Son of God, what business have you with us? Have you come here to torture us before it is time?' Now, some distance away, there was a large drove of swine grazing; so the demons begged him saying, 'If you are going to cast us

out, send us into that drove of swine.' He said to them, 'Begone!' So out they came and went to the swine, and the entire drove rushed down the steep slope into the sea and perished in the water. The herdsmen fled; they went off to the town and reported the whole affair of the demoniacs. Then all the town came out to meet Jesus, and when they saw him they begged him to move out of their district."

Dr. Moffatt's version is valuable, as it makes us realise the direct and vivid narrative of the Bible, and the power and interest which have made it seem worth translating into English as long as there have been any English people to read it. But no translation can replace the Authorised Version. Those forty-seven men, with the help of the dead Wyclif and Tyndale and Coverdale, made a book whose inspiration has lasted, and will last, through the centuries, and which was not only the beginning and example of all great English prose, but greater and more magnificent prose itself than anything which it has since inspired.

Ecclesiastes xii. 1–7.

Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them;

While the sun, or the light, or the moon, or the stars, be not darkened, nor the clouds return after the rain:

In the day when the keepers of the house shall tremble, and the strong men shall bow themselves, and the grinders cease because they are few, and those that look out of the windows be darkened,

And the doors shall be shut in the streets, when the sound of the grinding is low, and he shall rise up at the

voice of the bird, and all the daughters of musick shall be brought low;

Also when they shall be afraid of that which is high, and fears shall be in the way, and the almond tree shall flourish, and the grasshopper shall be a burden, and desire shall fail: because man goeth to his long home, and the mourners go about the streets:

Or ever the silver cord be loosed, or the golden bowl be broken, or the pitcher be broken at the fountain, or the wheel broken at the cistern.

Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it.

CHAPTER V

THE RENAISSANCE

1

In 1453, the Turks took Constantinople. In 1492, Columbus discovered America. In 1543, a Pole called Copernicus published a book proving that the earth moved round the sun. These three events may seem to have nothing to do with each other, and still less to do with England; but without them and all that they implied we should not have had the work of Shakespeare and Spenser, of Marlowe, Ben Jonson, and the other writers of the most splendid half-century in English Literature. We should not have had the Renaissance.

The Renaissance is often thought of as the New Learning. When the Turks took Constantinople, numbers of Greek scholars were forced to leave the city. They scattered to different towns all over Europe, and, wherever they settled, the love and knowledge of Greek were revived; and thus, in various ways, Greek literature and philosophy began their immense influence on all modern literature and life.

But all that happened at the Renaissance did not happen in the mind. The exploration of new learning was paralleled by the exploration of new countries. Columbus was only one of many explorers. Drake, Frobisher, Raleigh, and the other seamen-adventurers of Elizabeth's reign opened up new continents and new seas, and fired men's minds with the hitherto unsuspected possibilities and greatness of the world they lived in. Copernicus also had his share in this. Before he published his book, men thought that the earth was the centre of the universe, fixed, created entirely for their own delight and comfort,

They now learned that they were not as important as they had thought, and that the whole universe did not revolve round them: but they found, which was far more exciting, that they were part of a magnificently ordered solar system.

So many new horizons were opening up, in learning and invention, in exploration and science, in literature and ideas, that the men and women in Elizabeth's reign had much to think about, and even more to do. It was an age of action as well as of great literature. Men lived more fully than they had realised was possible. Sir Walter Raleigh, for example, was not only an explorer, but a courtier, a historian, and a poet; and this all-round ability and many-sided interest was typical of English men and English society at the time which we call the Renaissance.

Before this time, English society was still semi-barbarous, and even now, when great heights of culture were reached, the old barbarism was by no means left behind. For a graphic picture we may turn to *Shakspere's Predecessors*, by John Addington Symonds:

"The English then, as now, were great travellers. Young men, not merely of the noble classes, visited the South and returned with the arts, accomplishments, and follies of Italian capitals. . . . But . . . the core of the nation remained sound and wholesome. Nor was the culture which the English borrowed from less unsophisticated nations more than superficial. The incidents of Court gossip show how savage was the life beneath. Queen Elizabeth spat, in the presence of her nobles, at a gentleman who had displeased her; struck Essex on the cheek; drove Burleigh blubbering from her apartment. . . . Men and women who read Plato, or discussed the elegancies of Petrarch, suffered brutal practical jokes, relished the obscenities of jesters, used the grossest

language of the people. Carrying farms and acres on their backs in the shape of costly silks and laces, they lay upon rushes filthy with the vomit of old banquets. Glittering in suits of gilt and jewelled mail, they jostled with town-porters in the stench of the bear gardens, or the bloody bullpit. The Church itself was not respected. The nave of old S. Paul's became a rendezvous for thieves. . . . Fine gentlemen paid fees for the privilege of clanking up and down its aisles in service-time. . . . It is difficult, even by noting an infinity of such characteristics, to paint the many-coloured incongruities of England at that epoch. Yet in the midst of this confusion rose cavaliers like Sidney, philosophers like Bacon, poets like Spenser; men in whom all that is pure, elevated, subtle, tender, strong, wise, delicate, and learned in our modern civilisation displayed itself. And the masses of the people were still in harmony with these high strains."

Queen Elizabeth herself shows these typical "many-coloured incongruities." Although capable of the behaviour recorded above, she was a great queen, and no mean scholar. Roger Ascham, who was her tutor, writes with real admiration of "our most noble Queen Elizabeth," who by working at Latin and Greek—

"daily without missing every forenoon, for the space of a year or two, hath attained to such a perfect understanding in both tongues, and to such a ready utterance of the Latin, and that with such a judgment, as they be few in number in both the universities, or elsewhere in England, that be, in both tongues, comparable with her Majesty."

Roger Ascham was a kind and encouraging tutor in an age when men still believed that children should be driven, or even flogged, into wisdom. In 1570 he published a book called the *Schoolmaster*, upholding his ideas

on education: and one of the best stories he tells is of how he found the unfortunate young Lady Jane Grey reading Plato in her room in preference to going hunting with her family.

"And one example, whether love or fear doth work more in a child, for virtue and learning, I will gladly report: which may be heard with some pleasure, and followed with more profit. Before I went into Germany, I came to Brodegate in Leicestershire, to take my leave of that noble Lady Jane Grey, to whom I was exceeding much beholden. Her parents, the Duke and Duchess, with all the household, Gentlemen and Gentlewomen were hunting in the Park: I found her, in her Chamber, reading Phaedon Platonis[1] in Greek, and that with as much delight, as some gentlemen would read the merry tale in Boccaccio.[2] After salutation, and duty done, with some other talk, I asked her why she would leave such pastime in the Park? Smiling she answered me: Indeed, all their sport in the Park is but a shadow to that pleasure that I find in Plato: Alas good folk, they never felt, what true pleasure meant. And how came you Madam, quoth I, to this deep knowledge of pleasure, and what did chiefly allure you into it: since, not many women, but very few men had attained thereunto. I will tell you, quoth she, and will tell you the truth, which perchance you will marvel at. One of the greatest benefits, that ever God gave me is, that he sent me so sharp and sour Parents, and so gentle a schoolmaster. For when I am in the presence either of father or mother, whether I speak, keep silent, sit, stand, or go, eat, drink, be merry, or sad, be sewing, playing, dancing, or doing anything else, I must do it, as it were, in such weight, measure, and

[1] Plato's dialogue, *Phaedo*. [2] See p. (17).

number, even so perfectly, as God made the world, or else I am so sharply taunted, so cruelly threatened, yes presently some times, with pinches, nips, and bobs, and other ways, which I will not name, for the honour I bear them, so without measure misordered, that I think myself in hell, till time come, that I must go to M. Elmer, who teaches me so gently, so pleasantly, with such fair allurements to learning, that I think all the time nothing,[1] while I am with him. And when I am called from him, I fall on weeping, because, whatsoever I do else, but learning, is full of grief, trouble, fear, and whole misliking unto me: And thus my book has been so much my pleasure, and brings daily to me more pleasure and more, that in respect of it, all other pleasures, in very deed, be but trifles and troubles unto me. I remember this talk gladly, both because it is so worthy of memory, and because also, it was the last talk that ever I had, and the last time that ever I saw that noble and worthy Lady."

Ascham's interest in education was typical of the Renaissance. Men and women then were deeply concerned to live the fullest and best lives possible, and they saw that, to do this properly, they must be taught the way when they were children. The subject was much discussed, at Court and at supper-tables and in schools, and many books besides Ascham's were written. One thing was agreed by everyone: Latin and Greek were not everything, but games, music, literature, politics, and good manners were just as necessary to make good men and women. Ascham puts it in his usual friendly way:

"And I do not mean, by all this talk, that young Gentlemen should always be poring on a book, and by using good studies should lease[2] honest pleasure and haunt no good pastime, I mean nothing less: for it is well

[1] The time seems to go by in a flash. [2] Lose.

known, that I both like and love, and have always, and do yet still use, all exercises and pastimes that be fit for my nature and ability . . .

"Therefore, I would wish, that, besides some good time, fitly appointed and constantly kept, to increase by reading the knowledge of the tongues and learning, young gentlemen should use and delight in all Courtly exercises and Gentlemanlike pastimes."

He goes on to enumerate these exercises and pastimes: and though he wrote nearly four centuries ago, we find tennis, swimming, and dancing among them:

"Therefore to ride comely;[1] to run fair at the tilt or ring: to play at all weapons: to shoot fair in[2] bow, or surely in gun: to vault lustily: to run: to leap: to wrestle: to swim: to dance comely: to sing, and play of instruments cunningly: to hawk: to hunt: to play at tennis[3] . . . be not only comely and decent, but also very necessary, for a Courtly Gentleman to use."

Sir Thomas Elyot, in a book written forty years before Ascham's, gives much the same list of necessary pastimes. He refuses to add football, which, he says, "is to be put in perpetual silence," being "nothing but beastly fury and extreme violence."

In two words, the Elizabethan ideal, both of education and of right living, was Arms and Letters. Soldiers were poets, and poets good fighters—as witness, for example, Sir Philip Sidney—and soldiers and poets and other people tried to be courteous and to take an interest in and enjoy as many aspects of life as possible. The idea of Arms and Letters came from Italy, where the Renaissance had begun long before it began in England.

[1] Well. [2] With the. [3] Not lawn-tennis, but the indoor game.

It came largely through an excellent book called *The Courtier*, written by an Italian named Castiglione, and read by everyone at Elizabeth's Court. Castiglione, like these Englishmen who followed him, wished "to ioyne learnying with cumlie exercise," and he wrote so well that Dr. Johnson, two hundred years later, spoke with high approval of "the best book that ever was written upon good breeding, *Il Cortegiano* by Castiglione."

2

Men like Sir Walter Raleigh and Sidney—and there were many such—prove that these ideals were not vain. All the Elizabethan writers show the new spirit, the enormous vigour and enthusiasm for life which came with the Renaissance. It shines most clearly in the drama; in the plays of Shakespeare and Marlowe, of Kyd and Ben Jonson, of Dekker and Beaumont and Fletcher, to name only the chief of the great company of Elizabethan dramatists. The theatre was extremely popular with all kinds of people, and these magnificent plays were acted to audiences who thoroughly enjoyed and appreciated them.

Theatre-going then was not what it is to-day, although the theatres had names much like those in London now: the Globe, for instance, the Fortune, the Curtain, and the Swan. For one thing, the theatres were in the suburbs instead of the centre of the town, for, much as everybody from the Queen downwards enjoyed plays, the city authorities disapproved, and would not allow public theatres within the city walls. Another difference was that the plays were acted in broad daylight, and in a theatre almost entirely open to the sky. The stage projected a long way into the uncovered pit, and the audience stood on three sides of it while the play was

going on. All round the walls were galleries and boxes; the theatre suggested the courtyard of some great inn, with people looking down from the windows. The Elizabethan theatres were in fact modelled on the inn-yards, for it was there that the companies used to act before they rose to the dignity of the theatres.

There was no curtain: the actors walked on, and walked off when they had finished, through three doors at the back of the stage. There was very little scenery: indoor scenes could be acted in a little curtained recess, and balcony scenes, or those on castle walls, upon a gallery just above it. The audience was willing to take its part in the make-believe, and would see, on that high, square, sunlit stage, the midnight terrors or the rich banqueting hall that the actors talked about; but this absence of scenery, curtains, lighting or any kind of illusion threw a heavy responsibility upon the playwright and the actors. They had so little to help them. A further difficulty, from the modern realistic point of view, was that it was considered improper for women to act, and all the women's parts had therefore to be taken by boys. This in part explains the readiness with which the heroines in Shakespeare's plays, and so many others of the time, change into boy's clothes.

John Addington Symonds, in the book already quoted, gives a lively description of the crowds that gathered to see a new tragedy at the Fortune in Finsbury Park.

"The flag is flying from the roof. The drums have beaten, and the trumpets are sounding for the second time. It is three o'clock upon an afternoon of summer. We pass through the great door, ascend some steps, take our key from the pocket of our trunk-hose, and let ourselves into our private room upon the first or lowest tier. We find ourselves in a low . . . building, open to the

slanting sunlight, built of shabby wood, not unlike a circus; smelling of sawdust and the breath of people. The yard below is crowded with "sixpenny mechanics," and prentices in greasy leathern jerkins, servants in blue frieze with their masters' badges on their shoulders, boys and grooms, elbowing each other for bare standing ground and passing coarse jests on their neighbours. A similar crowd is in the twopenny room above our heads, except that here are a few flaunting girls. Not many women of respectability are visible, though two or three have taken a side-box, from which they lean forward to exchange remarks with the gallants on the stage. Five or six young men are already seated there before the curtain, playing cards and cracking nuts to while away the time. A boy goes up and down among them, offering various qualities of tobacco for sale, and furnishing lights for the smokers.[1] The stage itself is strewn with rushes; and from the jutting tiled roof of the shadow,[2] supported by a couple of stout wooden pillars, carved into satyrs at the top, hangs a curtain of tawny-coloured silk. This is drawn when the trumpets have sounded for the third time; and an actor in a black velvet mantle, with a crown of bays upon his flowing wig, struts forward bowing to the audience for attention. He is the Prologue. He has barely broken into the jogtrot of his declamation, when a bustle is heard behind, and a fine fellow comes shouldering past him from the dice-room followed by a mincing page.

" 'A stool, boy!' cries our courtier, flinging off his cloak and displaying a doublet of white satin and hose of blue silk. The Prologue has to stand aside, and falters in his speech. The groundlings hiss, groan, mew like cats, and

[1] Tobacco-smoking was the latest extravagance of the day: it was said to have been brought from Virginia by Sir Walter Raleigh. [2] The slanting roof over the stage.

howl out, 'Filthy! filthy!' It may also happen that an apple is flung upon the stage, to notify the people's disapproval of this interruption. Undisturbed by these discourtesies, however, the new comer twirls his moustachios, fingers his sword-hilt, and nods to his acquaintance. After compliments to the gentlemen already seated, the gallant at last disposes himself in a convenient place of observation, and the Prologue ends."

When we come to the plays of Shakespeare, Marlowe and the rest, we have to remember that it was for such theatres and such audiences that they were written, and that much that seems to us strange, or even absurd, when we think of our own theatres, was natural and necessary at the time.

The life of Elizabethan England is like nothing so much as a crazy quilt, sewn together of every sort of material. It is bright, it is lively, it catches the eye. Some of the patches are costly and beautiful; others are tarnished or threadbare; and a few are frankly dirty. No general survey of the time can be given in a short space: it can only be represented by an apparently haphazard collection of scraps and pictures, such as this chapter.

CHAPTER VI

SPENSER

1

VERY FEW details are known about Spenser's life, and most of these have to be inferred from obscure remarks about himself in his own poetry. He is often mentioned by Elizabethan writers: but their concern is to praise his work, not to write his biography. It says much for the many-sidedness of the Renaissance that men as unlike one another as Spenser, Shakespeare, and Marlowe should each be fully representative of its spirit. After the *Shepherd's Calendar* had appeared in 1579, and the first three books of the *Faerie Queene* in 1590, Spenser's fellow-poets recognised this new spirit in his work, and acclaimed him as their leader.

He has always made a special appeal to poets. He set out with deliberate care to change the style and the language of English poetry, and he succeeded. It is not only his vivid pictures in the *Faerie Queene* and the music of his words, however, that have earned him the name of "the poet's poet." He has fired men's imagination, as he himself was fired, by his enthusiasm for beauty and for all that we call "romance"; for that poetry which is, as his friend Sidney put it "compounded of the best and honourablest things."

Spenser was most probably born in 1552, in London. He was sent to the Merchant Taylor's School, where he had as headmaster the broad-minded Richard Mulcaster, whose ideas on education were like those of Ascham. He was at Pembroke College, Cambridge, from 1569–76, and there began his friendship with the cross-grained pedant, Gabriel Harvey. Harvey's influence on Spenser was considerable, but not as great as he could

have wished. He hated the *Faerie Queene*, which he indignantly called "Hobgoblin runne away with the garland from Apollo," and would have liked Spenser to write obscure, unrhymed, unmetrical verse. Fortunately, Spenser had too much sense to obey him.

After Cambridge, Spenser came to London and entered the household of the Earl of Leicester. He admired Leicester greatly, and he admired his nephew, Sir Philip Sidney, even more. Sidney appeared to Spenser, as he appears to us, the pattern of the perfect courtier. Spenser's love and respect for him influenced both his life and his poetry.

The *Shepherd's Calendar*, which appeared in 1579, is a work of great importance in the history of English poetry, and need not detain us. It contains twelve allegorical dialogues, one for each month of the year, and in these, with carefully thought-out vocabulary and metre, a number of simple shepherds discuss, among other things, politics and the state of the Church.

In the next year, Spenser seems to have offended Lord Leicester. At any rate, he was paid the doubtful honour of being sent away to Ireland, as private secretary to Lord Grey, the new Lord-Deputy. He hated going, and hated Ireland as a "savage soil" with savage inhabitants: but he lived there, except for two short intervals in London, for the next eighteen years. In 1587 he was granted the manor and castle of Kilcolman, and 1589 he was made Clerk of the Council of Munster. Sir Walter Raleigh was also in Munster in 1589. He and Spenser soon became friends; Spenser showed him the MS. of the early part of the *Faerie Queene*, and Raleigh, immediately impressed, insisted that Spenser should bring the poem and return with him to London. He did so, and the first three books of the *Faerie Queene*, which was dedicated to Queen Elizabeth, appeared in 1590

with instant success. Neither on this visit nor his next in 1595, however, could Spenser obtain the position at Court which he hoped for as a reward. He lived quietly at Kilcolman, happily married, and writing a great deal of poetry. In 1598 disaster came upon him. Munster rose in rebellion, and Spenser's home was sacked and burnt. He and his family fled to Cork, and from there he set out on a last journey to London in December of that year. He died suddenly at Westminster in January 1599.

Spenser was described by Aubrey the biographer as "a little man, who wore short hair, little bands, and little cuffs." This is not much to go on, and though we can add that he was delicate, sensitive, and fastidious, we can never know as much of Spenser the man as we know of Spenser the poet. He has left several autobiographical poems, but the chief thing these reveal is his inveterate habit of describing events and people in the disguise of allegory. In *Colin Clouts Come Home Again*, he tells the story of himself and Raleigh and his introduction to Queen Elizabeth. He is Colin, Raleigh the Shepherd of the Ocean, and Elizabeth is Cynthia the Lady of the Sea. The tale is charming, but fantastic:

One day (quoth he) I sat (as was my trade)
Under the foot of Mole, that mountain hoar,
Keeping my sheep amongst the cooly shade
Of the green alders by the Mulla's shore[1]
There a strange shepherd chanced to find me out . . .
Whom when I asked from what place he came,
And how he hight,[2] *himself he did ycleepe*[3]
The Shepherd of the Ocean[4] *by name,*
And said he came far from the main-sea deep,

[1] Spencer is recalling his own estate of Kilcolman, to which he became deeply attached. [2] Was called. [3] Call. Spenser used archaisms such as this for deliberate effect, but in this case he has understood the word wrongly and has used an old past participle as a present. [4] Scan as three syllables.

He, sitting me beside in that same shade,
Provokèd me to play some pleasant fit;[1]
And when he heard the music which I made,
He found himself full greatly pleased at it .

Colin and the Shepherd cross the sea in a great ship "dancing upon the waters back to land," and come to Cynthia's court.

The Shepherd of the Ocean (quoth he)
Unto that Goddess' grace me first enhanced,
And to mine oaten pipe inclined her ear,
That she thenceforth therein gan take delight;
And it desired at timely hours to hear,
All[2] *were my notes but rude and roughly dight;*[3] . . .
Why? (said Alexis[4] *then) what needeth she*
That is so great a shepherdess herself,
And hath so many shepherds in her fee,
To hear thee sing, a simple silly Elf?

This affected simplicity of Spenser's was dangerous, and it says much for his sincerity and ability that he carried it through successfully in so many poems. Actually, there was nothing simple or rustic about him. He was, like most of his friends, a believer in the ideals of Castiglione, and was an excellent scholar and an accomplished courtier. That he knew how to flatter Elizabeth (an essential matter), the above extract will prove. He hated the evils of the Court more bitterly than most men, and in *Mother Hubbard's Tale* he said, under cover of allegory, exactly what he thought of them.

A Fox and an Ape, starving after various misadventures, were advised by a prosperous Mule to go to Court

[1] Section of a poem. Spenser is referring, of course, to the *Faerie Queene*. [2] Although. [3] Adorned. [4] One of the group to whom 'Colin' was telling his tale.

and make their fortunes. They made crafty preparations:—

So well they shifted, that the Ape anon
Himself had clothèd like a Gentleman,
And the shy Fox, as like to be his groom,
That to the Court in seemly sort they come;
Where the fond Ape, himself uprearing high
Upon his tiptoes, stalketh stately by,
As if he were some great Magnifico,
And boldly doth among the boldest go;
And his man Reynold, with fine counterfesance[1]
Supports his credit and his countenance.
Then gan the Courtiers gaze on every side,
And stare on him, with big looks basen wide,[2]
Wondering what mister wight[3] *he was, and whence.*

They were persuaded into believing him a fine gentleman, and Spenser describes his adventures at Court with great scorn for a place where such things could be tolerated. The bitterest outburst in all Spenser's poetry comes in *Mother Hubbard's Tale*. Reading it, we remember that he himself had three times "sued" for preferment at Court, and each time been disappointed.

Full little knowest thou, that hast not tried,
What hell it is in sueing long to bide:
To lose good days, that might be better spent;
To waste long nights in pensive discontent;
To speed to-day, to be put back to-morrow;
To feed on hope, to pine with fear and sorrow; . . .
To fret thy soul with crosses and with cares;
To eat thy heart through comfortless despairs;
To fawn, to crouch, to wait, to ride, to run,
To spend, to give, to want, to be undone.

[1] Counterfeiting, acting. [2] Widely extended, i.e. with stares of astonishment. [3] What sort of creature.

Unhappy wight, born to disastrous end,
That doth his life in so long 'tendance spend!
Who ever leaves sweet home, where mean estate
In safe assurance, without strife or hate,
Finds all things needful for contentment meek,
And will to Court for shadows vain to seek,
Or hope to gain, himself will a daw try:[1]
That curse God send unto mine enemy.

2

The six books of the *Faerie Queene* tell the adventures of six good knights, servants of Queen Gloriana, among the fair ladies, dragons, and monsters of Fairyland. Like Spenser's other long poems, the *Faerie Queene* is an allegory. It is hardly too much to say that Spenser thought in allegory: and when he came, like so many of his contemporaries, to consider the Renaissance idea of a gentleman and, as he said, "to fashion a gentleman or noble person in virtuous and gentle discipline," it was most natural for him to see the necessary virtues personified as knights. So the Red Cross Knight of Book I represents Holiness, Sir Guyon of Book II is Temperance. Sir Calidore, another knight, represents not only Courtesy, but Sir Philip Sidney; for Spenser happily complicated his story even further by bringing in real people at the Court of Gloriana, who was, of course, Elizabeth.

Fortunately, the story is thoroughly enjoyable without any reference to abstract virtues or dead-and-gone Court scandals. We gather, for instance, from various remarks, that Spenser hated disorder of any kind, and chiefly admired a well-ordered life and a well-ordered state of society. When he brings any kind of monster into

[1] Prove a jackdaw, a fool.

his knights' adventures, therefore, it is to represent disorder: but we do not need to know this to enjoy the following description of the Dragon whom the Red Cross Knight slew after a long and terrible battle.

With that they heard a roaring hideous sound,
That all the air with terror filled wide,
And seemed uneath[1] *to shake the steadfast ground.*
Eftsoones that dreadful Dragon they espied,
Where stretched he lay upon the sunny side
Of a great hill, himself like a great hill:
But, all so soon as he from far descried
Those glistring arms that heaven with light did fill,
He roused himself full blithe, and hastened them until . . .

His flaggy wings, when forth he did display,
Were like two sails, in which the hollow wind
Is gathered full, and worketh speedy way:
And eke the pennes,[2] *that did his pinions bind,*
Were like main-yards with flying canvas lined;
With which whenas him list[3] *the air to beat,*
And there by force unwonted passage find,
The clouds before him fled with terror great,
And all the heavens stood still amazed with his threat.

His huge long tail, wound up in hundred folds,
Does overspread his long brass-scaly back,
Whose wreathéd boughtes[4] *whenever he unfolds,*
And thick entangled knots adown does slack,
Bespotted as with shields of red and black,
It sweepeth all the land behind him far,
And of three furlongs does but little lack;
And at the point two strings in fixéd are,
Both deadly sharp, that sharpest steel exceeden far.

[1] Almost. [2] Feathers. [3] Pleased. [4] Folds.

But stings and sharpest steel did far exceed
The sharpness of his cruel rending claws:
Dead was it sure, as sure as death in deed,
What ever thing does touch his ravenous paws,
Or what within his reach he ever draws.
But his most hideous head my tongue to tell
Does tremble; for his deep devouring jaws
Wide gapèd, like the grisly mouth of hell.
Through which into his dark abyss all ravin[1] *fell . . .*

His blazing eyes, like two bright shining shields,
Did burn with wrath, and sparkled living fire:
As two broad Beacons, set in open fields,
Send forth their flames far off to every shire,
And warning give that enemies conspire
With fire and sword the region to invade:
So flam'd his eyne[2] *with rage and rancorous ire;*
But far within, as in a hollow glade,
Those glaring lamps were set that made a dreadful shade.

So dreadfully he towards him did pass,
Forelifting up a-loft his speckled breast,
And often bounding on the bruisèd grass,
As for great joyance of his newcome guest.
Eftsoones he gan advance his haughty crest,
As chaffèd[3] *Boar his bristles doth uprear;*
And shook his scales to battle ready dressed,
That made the Red Cross knight nigh quake for fear
As bidding bold defiance to his foeman near.

There are naturally numbers of battles in this story of the war of Good against Evil. In them, and in any pageantry or description of the actual countryside of Fairyland (which often bears a striking resemblance to

[1] Plunder, prey. [2] Eyes. [3] Chafed, i.e. attacked.

his Irish home), Spenser's powers of painting a vivid picture excel. Sir Guyon, the knight of Temperance, had his full share of adventures. This is our introduction to him and his companion, the Palmer:—

His carriage was full comely and upright;
His countenance demure and temperate;
But yet so stern and terrible in sight,
That cheered his friends, and did his foes amate:[1]
He was an Elfin born of noble state
And mickle[2] *worship in his native land;*
Well could he tourney, and in lists debate,
And knighthood took of good Sir Huon's hand,
When with king Oberon he came to Fairyland.

Him als[3] *accompanied upon the way*
A comely Palmer, clad in black attire,
Of ripest years, and hairs all hoary gray,
That with a staff his feeble steps did stire,[4]
Lest his long way his aged limbs should tire:
And, if by looks one may the mind aread,
He seemed to be a sage and sobre sire;
And ever with slow pace the knight did lead,
Who taught his trampling steed with equal steps to tread.

3

When Sir Guyon came to a Castle, "built on a rock adjoining to the seas," he found two knights quarrelling fiercely. This is Spenser's account of the strange, three-cornered fight that ensued. It is vivid and vigorous, but Spenser will not hurry; he will pause in the most exciting place to compare the knights to a bear and a tiger, or to bring in his favourite comparison of a ship in stormy seas.

[1] Terrify. [2] Great. [3] Also. [4] Steer.

But ere they could proceed unto the place
Where he abode, themselves at discord fell,
And cruel combat joined in middle space:
With horrible assault, and fury fell,
They heaped huge strokes the scornèd life to quell,
That all on uproar from her settled seat,
The house was raised, and all that in did dwell.
Seemed that loud thunder with amazement great
Did rend the rattling skies with flames of floudring[1] *heat*

The noise thereof called forth that stranger knight,
To weet[2] *what dreadful thing was there in hond;*
Where whenas two brave knights in bloody fight
With deadly rancour he enraungèd[3] *fond,*[4]
His sunbroad shield about his wrist he bond,[5]
And shining blade unsheathed, with which he ran
Unto that stead,[6] *their strife to understond;*
And at his first arrival them began
With goodly means to pacify, well as he can.

But they, him spying, both with greedy force
At once upon him ran, and him beset
With strokes of mortal steel without remorse,
And on his shield like iron sledges[7] *bet:*
As when a Bear and Tiger, being met
In cruel fight on Lybicke[8] *Ocean wide,*
Espy a traveller with feet surbet,[9]
Whom they in equal prey to divide,
They stint[10] *their strife and him assail on every side.*

But he, not like a weary traveller,
Their sharp assault right boldly did rebut,
And suffered not their blows to bite him near,
But with redoubled buffes them back did put:

[1] Thundering. [2] Know. [3] Ranged in order. [4] Found. [5] Bound. [6] Place. [7] Sledge-hammers. [8] African. [9] Weary. [10] Cease.

Whose grievèd minds, which choler[1] *did englut,*[2]
Against themselves turning their wrathful spite,
Gan with new rage their shields to hew and cut;
But still, when Guyon came to part their fight,
With heavy load on him they freshly gan to smite.

As a tall ship tossèd in troublous seas,
Whom raging winds, threatening to make the prey
Of the rough rocks, do diversely disease,[3]
Meets two contrary billows by the way,
That her on either side do sore assay,
And boast to swallow her in greedy grave;
She, scorning both their spites, does make wide way
And with her breast breaking the foamy wave,
Does ride on both their backs, and fair herself doth save.

So boldly he him bears, and rusheth forth
Betwеen them both by conduct of his blade.
Wondrous great prowess and heroic worth
He showed that day, and rare ensample made,
When two so mighty warriors he dismayed.
At once he wards and strikes; he takes and pays;
Now forced to yield, now forcing to invade;
Before, behind, and round about him lays;
So double was his pains, so double be his praise.

Strange sort of fight, three valiant knights to see
Three combats join in one, and to darraine[4]
A triple was with triple enmity,
All for their Ladies froward[5] *love to gaine,*
Which gotten was but hate.[6] *So love does reign*
In stoutest minds, and maketh monstrous war;
He maketh war, he maketh peace again,
And yet his peace is but continual jar:
O miserable men that to him subject are!

[1] Anger. [2] Which were overwhelmed with anger. [3] Distress. Prepare. [5] Wilful. [6] Which, when gained, proved to be hatred.

Later on, Guyon, guided by his Palmer, was safely rowed through the perilous channel between the Gulf of Greediness and the Rock of Vile Reproach, and came upon a new danger:—

So forth they rowèd; and that Ferryman
With his stiff oars did brush the sea so strong,
That the hoar[1] *waters from his frigot*[2] *ran,*
And the light bubbles dancèd all along,
Whiles the salt brine out of the billowes sprong.
At last far off they many Islands spy
On every side floating the floods among:
Then said the knight: 'Lo! I the land descry;
Therefore, old Sire, thy course do thereunto apply.'

'That may not be,' said then the Ferryman,
'Lest we unweeting hap to be fordone;[3]
For those same Islands, seeming now and then,
Are not firm land, nor any certain wonne,[4]
But struggling plots which to and fro do run
In the wide waters: therefore are they hight
The Wandering Islands. Therefore do them shun;
For they have oft drawn many a wandering wight[5]
Into most deadly danger and distressèd plight.

'Yet well do they seem to him, that far doth view,
Both fair and fruitful, and the ground dispread[6]
With grassy green of delectable hue;
And the tall trees with leaves apparellèd
That mote[7] *the passengers thereto allure;*
But whosoever once hath fastenèd
His foot thereon, may never it recure,[8]
But wandereth evermore uncertain and unsure . . .

[1] White. [2] Boat. [3] Unknowing chance to be destroyed. [4] Abode. [5] Person. [6] Spread. [7] May. [8] Recover.

They to him hearken, as beseemeth meet,[1]
And pass on forward: so their way does lie,
That one of those same Islands, which do fleet
In the wide sea, they needs must passen by,
Which seemed so sweet and pleasant to the eye,
That it would tempt a man to touchen there:
Upon the bank they sitting did espy
A dainty damsel dressing of her hair,
By whom a little skippet[2] *floating did appear.*

Spenser was an adept at describing "dainty damsels" and all kinds of delights, from banquets to beautiful gardens. The moralist in him tried to disapprove, but fortunately the poet and lover of beauty had the upper hand. The *Faerie Queene* is read and enjoyed to-day, not as a treatise on virtue, but for those qualities by which, in the words of Sidney, poetry "may make the too-much loved earth more lovely."

[1] As is fit. [2] Boat.

CHAPTER VII

MARLOWE

1

CHRISTOPHER MARLOWE was a typical product of the Renaissance. The new learning went to his head; and he had an excellent head for it to go to.

> *Nature that framed us of four elements,*
> *Warring within our breasts for regiment,*[1]
> *Doth teach us all to have aspiring minds . . .*

he makes Tamburlaine say; and it was certainly true of himself. The elements warred within his breast, till they destroyed him. His mind aspired proudly, acknowledging no limit to its range: and in his short life he achieved enough to make it the most promising, in the history of our literature, that was ever cut short untimely.

The son of a shoemaker, Marlowe was born in Canterbury in 1564, the same year as Shakespeare. He was educated at King's School, Canterbury, and went from there to Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, taking his degree in 1583. Next to nothing is known about his life there, though he was soon to become famous as the greatest of a set of writers known as "the University Wits," who descended in a body upon the theatre of the time, carrying all before them. Their success aroused resentment, as might be expected, and when, in 1587, Marlowe's first play, *Tamburlaine*, was performed, it came under a general condemnation of those "idiot art masters[2] who intrude themselves to our ears as the alchymists of eloquence, who (mounted on the stage of arrogance) think to outbrave better pens by the

[1] Mastery. [2] Masters of Arts, i.e. university men.

swelling bombast of braggart blank verse." The University Wits made blank verse the language of the theatre for several generations, but it was Marlowe who first indicated its possibilities, expanding it from a mechanical jog-trot to be the vehicle for a noble and vigorous poetry. To realise the greatness and the sheer originality of his achievement, we have only to turn back to the earliest plays in blank verse, to compare any dozen lines of Marlowe with any dozen, for instance, from Sackville and Norton's *Gorboduc*. It may well have been Marlowe's development of the blank verse line which decided Shakespeare to use it for his plays. The two were friends, and collaborated in *Henry the Sixth*. Shakespeare's *Richard the Third* shows the influence of Marlowe, and he must have had his friend's *Edward the Second* in mind several times in writing *Richard the Second*. We can see that Marlowe, even if he had lived, would not have been another Shakespeare: but if both had died in the same year, there is no doubt who would appear the greater man. Moreover, Marlowe paved the way for Shakespeare's work in the theatre.

We do not know much about his life. The temptation of the time, for men of intellect, was to become intoxicated with the power of intellect; and with Marlowe this pride ran high. He was a freethinker, and expressed himself with a vigour which shocked his contemporaries. In 1593, he was summoned to appear before the Privy Council on a charge of blasphemy, but did not live to stand his trial. When he died, stabbed during some quarrel in a public house, there were many who pointed the moral, and regarded his death as a judgment upon him for his blasphemies. What has been apparent ever since was that a drunken serving-man's dagger cut short the career of one of the finest of English poets, whose bare ten years of work have enabled him to

take his place without any handicap for his youth, or any extra allowance for his promise, but on the sheer merit of what he actually accomplished.

His first play, *Tamburlaine the Great*, showed at once the bent of his "aspiring mind." Marlowe was fascinated by the idea of power. In *Tamburlaine* it is temporal power, the power of a conqueror. In *The Jew of Malta*, it is the power of riches. In *The Tragedy of Doctor Faustus*, his greatest play, it is occult power: the power which Satan offered Our Lord upon the mountain top. Faustus sells his soul to the powers of evil in return for a period of absolute power on Earth. It is significant that the first thing he does is to question Mephistophelis about the secrets of the universe. Intellectual curiosity came first: pleasures afterwards.

Tamburlaine expresses the desire for power in its crudest form.

TAMBURLAINE: Is it not passing brave to be a king,
And ride in triumph through Persepolis?

. . . . . .

A god is not so glorious as a king:
I think the pleasure they enjoy in heaven,
Cannot compare with kingly joys on earth;
To wear a crown enchas'd with pearl and gold,
Whose virtues carry with it life and death;
To ask and have, command and be obey'd. . . .

The conquering hero soon reaches the summit of his power, in one scene appearing in a car to which two kings are harnessed as horses.

Holla, ye pampered jades of Asía!
What, can ye draw but twenty miles a day,
And have so proud a chariot at your heels,
And such a coachman as great Tamburlaine?

The play is a riot of exaggeration and magnificent language. All that happens during the course of it is merely a series of pegs on which to hang fine sounding speeches, thunderous boasts, loud lamentations, and full-blooded curses. Two of Tamburlaine's captives, Bajazeth and Zabina, before braining themselves against the cage in which the proud Bajazeth is dragged about, curse him in the most thorough-going manner. It can be imagined how popular such a play of conquest was in the age of Hawkins, Grenville, Frobisher, and Drake, and with what delight the audience must have heard its splendid language. Tamburlaine's pride, as was prophesied by one of his earliest victims, brings about his overthrow: but he has already felt, in the loss of his favourite wife Zenocrate, the one power before which his own is nothing, the power of death. It is in vain for him to claim a mastery:

> See, where my slave, the ugly monster Death,
> Shaking and quivering, pale and wan for fear,
> Stands aiming at me with his murdering dart,
> Who flies away at every glance I give,
> And, when I look away, comes stealing on.

and he at last admits that "Tamburlaine, the scourge of God, must die."

2

From *Tamburlaine*, which so clearly expresses the youthful Marlowe, we pass naturally to *Dr. Faustus*, his masterpiece, in which are revealed the full powers of his mind. Tragedy is the struggle of the soul with an object that cannot be removed: and Marlowe, whose mind struggled fearlessly with the greatest obstacles a man can propose to himself, was possessed by a real tragic genius.

The real point about *Dr. Faustus* is that its hero, though he buys power from the devil, does not buy it for devilish ends or for mere self-indulgence. He buys it to bring within the reach of man knowledge which is otherwise unattainable. The Faust of Gounod's opera is by comparison a mere vulgarian, using magic powers to secure hobbledehoy ambitions. It is not too much to say that Marlowe's masterpiece sums up, not only himself, but the entire spirit of the Renaissance.

Dr. Faustus, a famous scholar, is dissatisfied with the fruits of learning, and turns to magic. He is pondering a book of necromancy, in his study, when a Good Angel and an Evil Angel enter to him.

GOOD ANGEL: O, Faustus, lay thy damned book aside,
And gaze not on it, lest it tempt thy soul,
And heap God's heavy wrath upon thy head!
Read, read the Scriptures:—that is blasphemy.

EVIL ANGEL: Go forward, Faustus, in that famous art
Wherein all Nature's treasure is contain'd:
Be thou on earth as Jove is in the sky,
Lord and commander of these elements.

Thus, at the outset, the problem of the play is stated. Faustus listens to the Evil Angel, and by the performance of a magic rite calls up Mephistophelis. Mephistophelis explains that he cannot serve Faustus without leave from Lucifer.

FAUSTUS: Tell me what is that Lucifer thy lord?

MEPHISTOPHELIS: Arch-regent and commander of all spirits.

FAUST.: Was not that Lucifer an angel once?

MEPH.: Yes, Faustus, and most dearly lov'd of God.

FAUST.: How comes it, then, that he is prince of devils?

MEPH.: O, by aspiring pride and insolence;
For which God threw him from the face of heaven.

FAUST.: And what are you that live with Lucifer?

MEPH.: Unhappy spirits that fell with Lucifer,
Conspir'd against our God with Lucifer,
And are you for ever damn'd with Lucifer.

FAUST.: Where are you damn'd?

MEPH.: In hell.

FAUST.: How comes it, then, that you are out of hell?

MEPH.: Why, this is hell, nor am I out of it.
Think'st thou that I, who saw the face of God,
And tasted the eternal joys of heaven,
Am not tormented with ten thousand hells,
In being depriv'd of everlasting bliss?

Soon, despite the renewed counsels of the Good Angel, Faustus has sold his soul to Lucifer, signing the deed with his blood,

On these conditions following. First that Faustus may be a spirit in form and substance. Secondly, that Mephistophelis shall be his servant, and at his command. Thirdly, that Mephistophelis shall do for him, and bring him whatsoever he desires. Fourthly, that he shall be in his chamber or house invisible. Lastly, that he shall appear to the said John Faustus, at all times, in what form or shape soever he please. I, John Faustus, of Wertenburg, Doctor, by these presents, do give both body and soul to Lucifer prince of the east, and his minister Mephistophelis; and furthermore grant unto them, that, twenty-four years being expired, the articles above-written inviolate, full power to fetch or carry the said John Faustus, body and soul, flesh, blood, or goods, into their habitation wheresoever. By me, John Faustus.

Is it perhaps a sign of uneasiness, despite his apparent confidence, that his first question is about hell? And that he presently says "Come, I think hell's a fable." "Ay, think so still," drily replies Mephistophelis "till experience change thy mind."

From then onwards, throughout the course of the play, Faustus has his will. All knowledge is his: he has Helen of Troy for his lady love: he assumes the form of a spirit, he plays practical jokes upon the Pope. Periodically he suffers from fits of remorse, and is at once encouraged by the Good Angel; but Lucifer and Beelzebub come to reinforce Mephistophelis, and bid him think only upon this world and the hell that shall follow. At last the twenty-four years are over, and Faust, on his last evening, waits in terror for Lucifer to claim his bargain. The scholars who are his friends try to comfort him. It is no use, he tells them.

FAUSTUS: But Faustus' offence can ne'er be pardoned: the serpent that tempted Eve may be saved, but not Faustus. Ah, gentlemen, hear me with patience, and tremble not at my speeches! Though my heart pants and quivers to remember that I have been a student here these thirty years, O, would I have never seen Wertenburg, never read book! and what wonders I have done, all Germany can witness, yea, all the world; for which Faustus hath lost both Germany and the world, yea, heaven itself, heaven, the seat of God, the throne of the blessed, the kingdom of joy; and must remain in hell for ever, hell, ah, hell, for ever! Sweet friends, what shall become of Faustus, being in hell for ever?

The scholars leave him, shaking their heads. He is all alone

FAUSTUS: Ah, Faustus.
Now hast thou but one bare hour to live,
And then thou must be damn'd perpetually!
Stand still, you ever-moving spheres of heaven,
That time may cease, and midnight never come;
Fair Nature's eye, rise, rise again, and make
Perpetual day; or let this hour be but
A year, a month, a week, a natural day,
That Faustus may repent and save his soul!
O lente, lente currite, noctis equi![1]
The stars move still, time runs, the clock will strike,
The devil will come, and Faustus must be damn'd.
O, I'll leap up to my God!—Who pulls me down?—
See, see, where Christ's blood streams in the firmament![2]
One drop would save my soul, half a drop: ah, my Christ!—
Ah, rend not my heart for naming of my Christ!
Yet will I call on him: O, spare me, Lucifer!—
Where is it now? 'tis gone: and see, where God
Stretcheth out his arm, and bends his ireful brows!
Mountains and hills, come, come, and fall on me,
And hide me from the heavy wrath of God!
No, no!
Then will I headlong run into the earth:
Earth, gape! O, no, it will not harbour me!
You stars that reign'd at my nativity,[3]
Whose influence hath allotted death and hell,
Now draw up Faustus, like a foggy mist,
Into the entrails of yon labouring clouds,
That, when you vomit forth into the air,
My limbs may issue from your smoky mouths,
So that my soul may but ascend to heaven!
(*The clock strikes the half-hour.*)

[1] O run slowly, slowly, horses of the night! [2] Heavens. [3] A reference to the belief of the astrologers that our lives are determined by the position of the stars in the heavens at the hour of our birth.

Ah, half the hour is past! 'twill all be past anon.
O God,
If thou wilt not have mercy on my soul,
Yet for Christ's sake, whose blood hath ransom'd me,
Impose some end to my incessant pain;
Let Faustus live in hell a thousand years,
A hundred thousand, and at last be sav'd!
O, no end is limited to damned souls!
Why wert thou not a creature wanting soul?
Or why is this immortal that thou hast?
Ah, Pythagoras'[1] metempsychosis, were that true,
This soul should fly from me, and I be chang'd
Unto some brutish beast! all beasts are happy,
For, when they die,
Their souls are soon dissolv'd in elements;
But mine must live still to be plagu'd in hell.
Curs'd be the parents that engender'd me!
No, Faustus, curse thyself, curse Lucifer
That hath depriv'd thee of the joys of heaven.

(*The clock strikes twelve.*)

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

(*Thunder and lightning.*)

O soul, be chang'd into little water-drops,
And fall into the ocean, ne'er be found!

Enter DEVILS.

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

Exeunt DEVILS *with* FAUSTUS.

[1] Pythagoras, the Greek philosopher, taught the doctrine of the transmigration of souls. The human soul, he believed, passed through many lives, including those of animals.

The striking of the clock, which compresses an hour into about five minutes, is the only thing that lessens the effect of this scene for a modern audience, accustomed to the realistic production of plays: but we realise at once that Marlowe does not mean it to be taken literally. He is concerned only to show that the last hour of life passes too terribly fast. The story of Faustus has fascinated the world: and Goethe, the great German poet, whose Faust was likewise his masterpiece, paid a fine tribute to the play upon which it was based.

3

Of Marlowe's other plays we need consider only one. *The Jew of Malta* he finished in a hurry. *Dido, Queen of Carthage*, based on the early book of Virgil's *Æneid*, was a difficult subject for the stage: and *The Massacre at Paris*, a chronicle play describing the massacre of St. Bartholomew, did not give him scope for his characteristic powers. *Edward the Second*, however, is an exceedingly fine play upon a subject close to Marlowe's heart. The problem of kingship was seldom far from his thoughts, and the story of a king who fell and was foully murdered, with his wife's full approval, was one from which he could extract the last ounce of power and pathos. The play opens at once with the theme which brought about Edward's ruin. Gaveston, the banished favourite, against whom Edward I had so fiercely warned his son, comes in reading a letter.

My father is deceas'd. Come, Gaveston,
And share the kingdom with thy dearest friend.

Edward's devotion to his favourites, whom he frankly preferred to his queen, was the cause of his fall. The favourites gave him bad advice, leading him to offend

the powerful nobles: Isabella, jealous, found favourites of her own, and plotted against her husband. It is in vain for the Earl of Lancaster to plead:

> My lord, why do you thus incense your peers,
> That naturally would love and honour you,
> But for that base and obscure Gaveston?

Edward, deep in folly, sends his favourite's enemy, the Bishop of Coventry, to the Tower, and allows Gaveston to seize his goods. Thus, in a couple of swift scenes, we see him estrange both the nobles and the Church. A few minutes later, Isabella comes in.

YOUNG MORTIMER: Madam, whither walks your majesty so fast?

QUEEN ISABELLA: Unto the forest, gentle Mortimer,
To live in grief and baleful discontent;
For now my lord the king regards me not,
And, when I come, he frowns, as who should say
"Go whither thou wilt, seeing I have Gaveston."

The nobles combine, and force Edward to banish Gaveston. He is heartbroken. Isabella, hoping to regain his love, brings him the news that Gaveston is recalled. Gaveston returns, but makes more mischief, and finally the nobles put him to death. Edward swears to be revenged, but the power is quickly taken from his hands. He is deposed, imprisoned, and subjected to every sort of indignity. Yet his spirit remains firm, amazing his gaolers.

Enter MATREVIS *and* GURNEY

MATREVIS: Gurney, I wonder the king dies not,
Being in a vault up to the knees in water,
To which the channels of the castle run,
From whence a damp continually ariseth,

That were enough to poison any man,
Much more a king, brought up so tenderly.

GURNEY: And so do I, Matrevis; yesternight
I open'd but the door to throw him meat,
And I was almost stifled with the savour.

MATREVIS: He hath a body able to endure
More than we can inflict: and therefore now
Let us assail his mind another while.

GURNEY: Send for him out thence, and I will anger him.

Then Mortimer, the Queen's favourite, sends a murderer with a message in Latin, carefully phrased so that it may be read in two ways. The gaolers have little difficulty in deciding what to do, more particularly as a postscript clearly enjoins that the messenger (Lightborn) shall himself be put to death afterwards.

KING EDWARD: Who's there? what light is that? wherefore com'st thou?

LIGHTBORN: To comfort you, and bring you joyful news.

K. EDW.: Small comfort finds poor Edward in thy looks:
Villain, I know thou com'st to murder me.

LIGHT.: To murder you, my most gracious lord?
Far is it from my heart to do you harm.
The queen sent me to see how you were us'd,
For she relents at this your misery:
And what eye can refrain from shedding tears,
To see a king in this most piteous state?

K. EDW.: Weep'st thou already? list a while to me,
And then thy heart, were it as Gurney's is,
Or as Matrevis', hewn from the Caucasus,
Yet will it melt ere I have done my tale.

This dungeon where they keep me is the sink
Wherein the filth of all the castle falls.

LIGHT.: O villains!

K. EDW.: And there, in mire and puddle, have I stood
This ten days' space; and, lest that I should sleep,
One plays continually upon a drum;
They give me bread and water, being a king;
So that, for want of sleep and sustenance,
My mind's distemper'd, and my body's numb'd,
And whether I have limbs or no I know not.
O, would my blood dropp'd out from every vein,
As doth this water from my tatter'd robes!
Tell Isabel the queen, I look'd not thus,
When for her sake I ran at tilt in France,
And there unhors'd the Duke of Cleremont.

LIGHT.: O, speak no more, my lord! this breaks my heart.
Lie on this bed, and rest yourself a while.

K. EDW.: These looks of thine can harbour naught but death;
I see my tragedy written on thy brows.
Yet stay a while; forbear thy bloody hand,
And let me see the stroke before it comes,
That even then when I shall lose my life,
My mind may be more steadfast on my God.

LIGHT.: What means your highness to mistrust me thus?

K. EDW.: What mean'st thou to dissemble with me thus?

LIGHT.: These hands were never stain'd with innocent blood,
Nor shall they now be tainted with a king's.

K. EDW.: Forgive my thought for having such a thought.
One jewel have I left; receive thou this:

(*giving jewel*)

Still fear I, and I know not what's the cause,
But every joint shakes as I give it thee.
O, if thou harbour'st murder in thy heart,
Let this gift change thy mind, and save thy soul!
Know that I am a king. Oh, at that name,
I feel a hell of grief! where is my crown?
Gone, gone! and do I (still) remain alive?

LIGHT.: You're overwatch'd, my lord: lie down and rest.

K. EDW.: But that grief keeps me waking, I should sleep;
For not these ten days have these eye-lids clos'd.
Now, as I speak, they fall; and yet with fear
Open again. O, wherefore sitt'st thou here?

LIGHT.: If you mistrust me, I'll be gone, my lord.

K. EDW.: No, no; for, if thou mean'st to murder me,
Thou wilt return again; and therefore stay. (*Sleeps.*)

LIGHT.: He sleeps.

K. EDW.: (*waking*): O, let me not die yet! O, stay a while!

LIGHT.: How now, my lord!

K. EDW.: Something still buzzeth in mine ears,
And tells me, if I sleep, I never wake:
This fear is that which makes me tremble thus;
And therefore tell me, wherefore art thou come?

LIGHT.: To rid thee of thy life.—Matrevis, come!

Enter MATREVIS *and* GURNEY

K. EDW.: I am too weak and feeble to resist.—
Assist me, sweet God, and receive my soul!

LIGHT.: Run for the table.

K. EDW.: O, spare me, or despatch me in a trice!

(MATREVIS *brings in a table.* KING EDWARD *is murdered by holding him down on the bed with the table, and stamping on it.*)

LIGHT.: So, lay the table down, and stamp on it,
But not too hard, lest that you bruise his body.
MAT.: I fear me that this cry will raise the town,
And therefore let us take horse and away.
LIGHT.: Tell me, sirs, was it not bravely done?
GUR.: Excellent well: take this for thy reward.
(*Stabs* LIGHTBORN, *who dies.*)
Come, let us cast the body in the moat,
And bear the king's to Mortimer our lord:
Away! (*Exeunt with the bodies.*)

The new king, Edward the Third, avenges his father instantly.

FIRST LORD: Fear not, my lord; know that you are a king.
K. EDW. THIRD: Villain!—
Y. MORTIMER: Ho, now, my lord!
K. EDW. THIRD: Think not that I am frightened with thy words:
My father's murder'd through thy treachery;
And thou shalt die, and on his mournful hearse
Thy hateful and accursed head shall lie,
To witness to the world that by thy means
His kingly body was too soon interr'd.
Q. ISAB.: Weep not, sweet son.
K. EDW. THIRD: Forbid me not to weep; he was my father;
And had you lov'd him half so well as I,
You could not bear his death thus patiently:
But you, I fear, conspir'd with Mortimer.
FIRST LORD: Why speak you not unto my lord the king?
Y. MORTIMER: Because I think scorn to be accus'd.
Who is the man dares say I murder'd him?

K. EDW. THIRD: Traitor, in me my loving father speaks,
And plainly saith, 'twas thou that murder'dst him.

Y. MORTIMER: But hath your grace no other proof than this?

K. EDW. THIRD: Yes, if this be the hand of Mortimer
(*Showing letter.*)

Y. MORTIMER: False Gurney hath betray'd me and himself. (*Aside to* QUEEN ISAB.)

Q. ISAB.: I fear'd as much; murder can not be hid.

Y. MORTIMER: It is my hand; what gather you by this?

K. EDW. THIRD: That thither thou didst send a murderer.

Y. MORTIMER: What murderer? bring forth the man I sent.

K. EDW. THIRD: Ah, Mortimer, thou know'st that he is slain!
And so shalt thou be too.—Why stays he here?
Bring him unto a hurdle, drag him forth;
Hang him, I say, and set his quarters up:
And bring his head back presently to me.

Q. ISAB.: For my sake, sweet son, pity Mortimer!

Y. MORTIMER: Madam, entreat not: I will rather die
Than sue for life unto a paltry boy.

K. EDW. THIRD: Hence with the traitor, with the murderer!

Y. MORTIMER: Base Fortune, now I see, that in thy wheel
There is a point, to which when men aspire,
They tumble headlong down: that point I touch'd,
And, seeing there was no place to mount up higher,
Why should I grieve at my declining fall?—
Farewell, fair queen: weep not for Mortimer,
That scorns the world, and, as a traveller,
Goes to discover countries yet unknown.

There, in Mortimer's last words, speaks Marlowe, and there speaks the very spirit of the Renaissance: the pride of intellect, that having enjoyed the world's goods, defies it to do its worst; despising the only enemy that cannot be overcome.

Besides his plays, Marlowe began a long poèm, *Hero and Leander*, which sounded a new note in English poetry, and remains to tantalise us by its incompleteness and by its hint of all he might have done if he had lived. It was completed by another poet and dramatist, George Chapman, but not, alas, as it was begun.

CHAPTER VIII

SHAKESPEARE

1

IT IS a pity that it is so seldom possible for us to discover the work of great writers for ourselves. Too often, we are solemnly warned of their greatness, and when the book is put into our hands, we are disappointed. To be told that Shakespeare is the greatest writer who ever lived, and then to start upon a play which perhaps at first conveys nothing to us, is a bewildering (and quite unnecessary) experience. We have been led somehow to expect that every sentence of every play we read will be a sample of the best writing in the world—which is, of course, nonsense. Shakespeare is the greatest writer in virtue of the *whole* of his work, the amazing sum total of it all, not because every line is perfect. Often he reaches heights which are beyond the reach of all others. Often and often he reaches heights which others could touch only now and then. But, when all is said and done, he is the king of writers because no other had so wide a range, or understood so much: and because his work is not a haphazard total of all the things he ever wrote, but a complete thing in itself: a single huge poem, developed, natural, and finished. Shakespeare did not go on writing till the day of his death, though he died in early middle age. He had definitely retired, and ceased to write, because he knew, consciously or instinctively, that his work was finished.

About his life we know very little. He was born at Stratford-on-Avon in 1564, and was possibly educated at the grammar school there. Of his studies we can

only conjecture: his friend Ben Jonson said that he had "small Latin, and less Greek." At the age of nineteen, he married Ann Hathaway, who was a few years older than himself. There were children, but the marriage was not happy, and Shakespeare ran away to London. He seems to have made at once for the theatre, but whether he at once became an actor we cannot be sure. What is certain is that by 1592, ten years after his marriage, and eight years after the birth of a twin son and daughter, he was already well known as an actor and as a playwright. We know this from an attack upon him by an older playwright, Robert Greene, who, in his pamphlet *A Groatsworth of Wit*, warned Marlowe and his "fellow Schollers" that it was no use their continuing to write plays, since there was "an upstart crow, beautified with our feathers, that with his *Tygers heart wrapt in a Players hide* supposes he is as well able to bumbast out blanke verse as the best of you: and . . . is in his owne conceit the onely Shake-scene in a countrie." In the third part of *Henry VI* occurs the line "O Tiger's heart wrapt in a woman's hide," which, with the pun "Shake-scene," makes it clear at whom Greene was hitting. That Shakespeare was well thought of is proved by the publishers' apology for the attack, which was printed a few months later. In 1594, Shakespeare appeared as an actor before Queen Elizabeth, as a member of a company known as The Chamberlain's Men. His long poems, *Venus and Adonis* (1593) and *The Rape of Lucrece* (1594) were dedicated to the Earl of Southampton. By 1597 he had made enough money to buy the biggest house at Stratford, and in the following year he was named by Meres the critic as the best playwright of his time. He retired in 1611, and died, tradition says of fever, in 1616.

Shakespeare's first work as playwright was almost undoubtedly to touch up old plays for the company to

which he belonged. In those days a play had a very short run, and there was a continual demand for new plays to keep the actors busy. Far more of Shakespeare's work consisted of revising old plays than was at first realised: but the revision, from being at first the adding of a scene here and a few lines there, developed into a complete re-writing, and the transformation of an old plot into an original work of art. We know, for instance, that there was an earlier version of *Hamlet*: but that does not in any way detract from the greatness of Shakespeare's achievement. He did not care where he got his plots. A plot, for him, was the stimulus that set his mind working. He turned the plot over in his mind, altered it, reconsidered it, joined it maybe to another, and produced from the mixture something new and splendid. He took a historical subject from North's translation of Plutarch or from Holinshead's chronicles, altering and condensing freely to bring out character, provide dramatic effect, and make a play.

The work of Shakespeare groups itself fairly naturally into four periods. Before 1594, he was learning his trade, touching up old plays like *Titus Andronicus*, an absurd Chamber-of-Horrors tragedy, and writing his first comedies. From 1594 to 1600, with the exception of a single tragedy, *Romeo and Juliet*, he was busy with comedies and plays on subjects taken from English history. Then came the eight years that gave us the great tragedies, *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *Lear*, *Macbeth*, and one or two comedies in which tragedy is not far off: and finally, from 1609 to 1611, a time in which he wrote the reflective comedies, of which the greatest is *The Tempest*. In this, as the magician Prospero, he formally bade farewell to his art, and to Ariel, the "sprite" who had inspired him and whom his mind had kept prisoner.

2

Shakespeare is so great, so rich, and so inexhaustible that it does not much matter how we first approach him. It will perhaps be best, and more in accord with the plan of the book as a whole, if we approach him first as a creator of character, rather than as a poet. The selections that follow, therefore, will almost all be taken from the comedies and histories: but first of all let us run over briefly the story of Shakespeare's first tragedy, *Romeo and Juliet.*

Two noble families of Verona, the Montagues and the Capulets, are at feud with one another. Romeo meets Juliet at a ball. He does not know that she is a Capulet, nor does she know who he is. They fall headlong in love, and are not deterred by discovering to what family each belongs. To communicate with one another they make use of Juliet's old Nurse. Here is an extract from a scene in which the Nurse returns from an important errand to Romeo:

Enter NURSE *and* PETER (a servant)

JULIET: O honey nurse! what news?
Hast thou met with him? Send thy man away.

NURSE: Peter, stay at the gate. (*Exit* PETER.)

JULIET: Now, good sweet nurse,—O Lord! why look'st thou sad?
Though news be sad, yet tell them merrily;
If good, thou sham'st the music of sweet news
By playing it to me with so sour a face.

NURSE: I am aweary, give me leave awhile:—
Fie, how my bones ache! What a jaunt have I had!

JULIET: I would thou hadst my bones, and I thy news.
Nay, come, I pray thee, speak;—good, good nurse, speak.

NURSE: Jesu, what haste? Can you not stay awhile?
Do you not see that I am out of breath?

JULIET: How art thou out of breath, when thou hast breath
To say to me—that thou art out of breath?
The excuse that thou dost make in this delay
Is longer than the tale thou dost excuse.
Is thy news good, or bad? answer to that;
Say either, and I'll stay the circumstance:
Let me be satisfied, is't good or bad?

NURSE: Well, you have made a simple choice; you know not how to choose a man: Romeo! no, not he; though his face be better than any man's, yet his leg excels all men's; and for a hand, and a foot, and a body,—though they be not to be talked on, yet they are past compare; he is not the flower of courtesy, —but, I'll warrant him, as gentle as a lamb. Go thy ways, wench; serve God.—What, have you dined at home?

JULIET: No, no: but all this did I know before.
What says he of our marriage? what of that?

NURSE: Lord, how my head aches! what a head have I!
It beats as it would fall in twenty pieces.
My back! o' t'other side:—O, my back, my back!—
Beshrew your heart for sending me about,
To catch my death with jaunting up and down.

JULIET: I' faith, I am sorry that thou art not well.
Sweet, sweet, sweet nurse, tell me, what says my love?

NURSE: Your love says, like an honest gentleman,
And a courteous, and a kind, and a handsome,
And, I warrant, a virtuous:—Where is your mother?

JULIET: Where is my mother?—why, she is within;
Where should she be? How oddly thou reply'st!
"Your love says, like an honest gentleman:—
Where is your mother?"

NURSE: O, God's lady dear!
Are you so hot? Marry, come up, I trow;
Is this the poultice for my aching bones?
Henceforward do your messages yourself.
JULIET:
Here's such a coil![1]—Come, what says Romeo?
NURSE: Have you got leave to go to shrift[2] to-day?
JULIET: I have.
NURSE: Then hie you hence to Friar Laurence' cell.
There stays a husband to make you a wife.

With the connivance of Friar Laurence, a friend of Romeo's, the lovers have arranged to get married secretly, since open marriage is impossible. Friar Laurence marries them. Soon afterwards, Romeo has the misfortune to meet Tybalt, a quarrelsome Capulet, in the streets. Tybalt insults him. The Prince has expressly forbidden fighting, under severe penalties, but this is not why Romeo returns a gentle answer. It is because Tybalt is now his kinsman. Mercutio, one of Romeo's friends, knowing nothing of the marriage, is horrified at what he considers rank cowardice, and challenges Tybalt. Tybalt kills him: and Romeo, forgetting everything, in revenge kills Tybalt.

Here is a terrible situation for the lovers. Romeo has to fly for his life, and a sentence of banishment is pronounced upon him: but worse is to come. Juliet's parents arrange for her to be married! She turns for help to the Nurse; but, alas, her old comforter fails her. Overawed by her employers, and doubtless afraid that, if the marriage to Romeo comes out, her own part in it will come out also, the Nurse placidly advises her to make the best of the position and to forget Romeo. To Juliet's agonised question, "O God! O Nurse, how shall this be

[1] Fuss. [2] Confession.

prevented? . . . What say'st thou? hast thou not a word of joy?" she replies:—

Faith, here it is. Romeo
Is banish'd; and all the world to nothing,
That he dares ne'er come back to challenge you;
Or, if he do, it needs must be by stealth.
Then, since the case so stands as now it doth,
I think it best you married with the county.[1]
O, he's a lovely gentleman!
Romeo's a dishclout to him: an eagle, madam,
Hath not so green, so quick, so fair an eye,
As Paris hath. Beshrew my very heart,
I think you are happy in this second match,
For it excels your first: or if it did not,
Your first is dead; or 'twere as good he were,
As living here and you no use of him.

JULIET: Speakest thou from thy heart?

NURSE: And from my soul too:
Or else beshrew[2] them both.

JULIET: Amen!

NURSE: What?

JULIET: Well, thou hast comforted me marvellous much.
Go in; and tell my lady I am gone,
Having displeas'd my father, to Laurence' cell,
To make confession, and to be absolv'd.

NURSE: Marry, I will; and this is wisely done. (*Exit.*)

JULIET: Ancient damnation! O most wicked fiend!
Is it more sin to wish me thus forsworn,[3]
Or to dispraise my lord with that same tongue
Which she hath prais'd him with above compare
So many thousand times?—Go, counsellor;
Thou and my bosom henceforth shall be twain.
I'll to the friar, to know his remedy:
If all else fail, myself have power to die. (*Exit.*)

[1] Count. [2] Curse. [3] Perjured, treacherous.

In her despair, Juliet consults Friar Laurence. He cannot acknowledge what has happened, any more than she can: but he hits upon a desperate solution. He gives Juliet a drug, which will make her unconscious, and produce all the apparent signs of death. At the same time he sends a letter to Romeo, who is in Mantua, explaining what has happened, and telling him to come and rescue Juliet from the vault where she will be laid.

It is a daring plan, calling for great courage on the part of Juliet. Her mother and the Nurse leave her for the night: she is to be married to-morrow.

JULIET: Farewell! —God knows when we shall meet again.
I have a faint cold fear thrills through my veins,
That almost freezes up the heat of life:
I'll call them back again to comfort me;—
Nurse!—What should she do here?
My dismal scene I needs must act alone.—
Come, phial.[1]—
What if this mixture do not work at all?
Shall I be married, then, to-morrow morning?
No, no;—this shall forbid it:—lie thou there.
(*Laying down a dagger*)
What if it be a poison, which the friar
Subtly hath minister'd to have me dead,
Lest in this marriage he should be dishonour'd,
Because he married me before to Romeo?
I fear it is; and yet, methinks, it should not,
For he hath still been tried[2] a holy man:
I will not entertain so bad a thought.
How if, when I am laid into the tomb,
I wake before the time that Romeo
Come to redeem me? there's a fearful point!
Shall I not, then, be stifled in the vault,

[1] The bottle containing the drug. [2] Proved.

To whose foul mouth no healthsome air breathes in,
And there die strangled ere my Romeo comes?
Or, if I live, is it not very like,
The horrible conceit of death and night,
Together with the terror of the place,—
As in a vault, an ancient receptacle,
Where, for these many hundred years, the bones
Of all my buried ancestors are pack'd;
Where bloody Tybalt, yet but green in earth,
Lies festering in his shroud; where, as they say,
At some hours in the night spirits resort;—
Alack, alack, is it not like, that I,
So early waking,—what with loathsome smells,
And shrieks like mandrakes[1] torn out of the earth,
That living mortals, hearing them, run mad;—
O, if I wake, shall I not be distraught,
Environèd with all these hideous fears?
And madly play with my forefathers' joints?
And pluck the mangled Tybalt from his shroud?
And, in this rage, with some great kinsman's bone,
As with a club, dash out my desperate brains?
O, look! methinks I see my cousin's ghost
Seeking out Romeo, that did spit his body
Upon a rapier's point;—stay, Tybalt, stay!—
Romeo, I come! this do I drink to thee.

(*Throws herself on the bed.*)

Now comes tragedy. Friar Laurence's letter fails to reach Romeo, and he hears the news of Juliet's death from a servant. By a cruel irony, the message reaches him when he is feeling happy for the first time.

ROMEO: If I may trust the flattering truth of sleep,
My dreams presage some joyful news at hand:
My bosom's lord[2] sits lightly in his throne;

[1] Roots shaped something like men, and believed to be alive. [2] Heart.

And all this day an unaccustom'd spirit
Lifts me above the ground with cheerful thoughts.
I dreamt, my lady came and found me dead,
(Strange dream! that gives a dead man leave to think,)
And breath'd such life with kisses in my lips,
That I reviv'd, and was an emperor.
Ah me! how sweet is love itself possess'd,
When but love's shadows are so rich in joy!

Enter BALTHAZAR (*servant to* ROMEO)

News from Verona!—How now, Balthazar!
Dost thou not bring me letters from the friar?
How doth my lady? Is my father well?
How fares my Juliet? That I ask again;
For nothing can be ill, if she be well.

BALTHAZAR: Then she is well, and nothing can be ill:
Her body sleeps in Capels' monument,
And her immortal part with angels lives.
I saw her laid low in her kindred's vault,
And presently took post to tell it you:
O, pardon me for bringing these ill news,
Since you did leave it for my office, sir.

ROMEO: Is it even so? then I defy you, stars!—
Thou know'st my lodging; get me ink and paper,
And hire post-horses; I will hence to-night.

BALTHAZAR: I do beseech you, sir, have patience:
Your looks are pale and wild, and do import
Some misadventure.

ROMEO: Tush, thou art deceiv'd:
Leave me, and do the thing I bid thee do:
Hast thou no letters to me from the friar?

BALTHAZAR: No, my good lord.

ROMEO: No matter: get thee gone,
And hire those horses: I'll be with thee straight.

(*Exit* BALTHAZAR.)

Before leaving Mantua, he buys poison from a chemist. The chemist is loth to sell it, for the law of Mantua punishes the sale of such poisons by death. Romeo, resolved upon death, laughs that a man so poor and old should fear to die.

ROMEO: Art thou so bare and full of wretchedness,
And fear'st to die? famine is in thy cheeks,
Need and oppression starveth in thine eyes,
Contempt and beggary hang upon thy back,
The world is not thy friend, nor the world's law:
The world affords no law to make thee rich;
Then be not poor, but break it, and take this.
APOTHECARY: My poverty, but not my will, consents.
ROMEO: I pay thy poverty, but not thy will.
APOTHECARY: Put this in any liquid thing you will,
And drink it off; and, if you had the strength
Of twenty men, it would despatch you straight.
ROMEO: There is thy gold; worse poison to men's souls,
Doing more murders in this loathsome world,
Than these poor compounds that thou may'st not sell:
I sell thee poison, thou hast sold me none.
Farewell: buy food, and get thyself in flesh.
Come, cordial, and not poison, go with me
To Juliet's grave; for there I must use thee.
(*Exeunt.*)

Still upheld by his mood, Romeo comes to the vault where Juliet is laid, breaks it open, and finds her. The signs of returning life are in her face, but her lover does not know it.

ROMEO: O my love! my wife!
Death, that hath suck'd the honey of thy breath,
Hath had no power yet upon thy beauty:
Thou art not conquer'd; beauty's ensign yet

Is crimson in thy lips, and in thy cheeks,
And death's pale flag is not advancèd there.
Tybalt, liest thou there in thy bloody sheet?
O, what more favour can I do to thee,
Than with that hand that cut thy youth in twain,
To sunder his that was thine enemy?
Forgive me, cousin!—Ah, dear Juliet,
Why art thou yet so fair? Shall I believe
That unsubstantial death is amorous;
And that the lean, abhorrèd monster keeps
Thee here in dark to be his paramour?
For fear of that, I still will stay with thee;
And never from this palace of dim night
Depart again: here, here will I remain
With worms that are thy chamber-maids; O, here
Will I set up my everlasting rest;
And shake the yoke of inauspicious stars[1]
From this world-wearied flesh.—Eyes, look your last!
Arms, take your last embrace! and, lips, O you
The doors of breath, seal with a righteous kiss
A dateless bargain to engrossing death!

He takes the phial of poison from his pocket.

Come, bitter conduct,[2] come, unsavoury guide!
Thou desperate pilot, now at once run on
The dashing rocks thy sea-sick weary bark!
Here's to my love! (*Drinks.*) O true apothecary!
Thy drugs are quick.—Thus with a kiss I die. (*Dies.*)

Barely has he died when Friar Laurence, hearing that his letter has gone astray, comes hurrying to the vault to rescue Juliet. She wakes at his entrance. Seeing what has happened, she sends the Friar away.

[1] See p. 96, n. 3. [2] Leader.

JULIET: Go, get thee hence, for I will not away.
(*Exit* FRIAR.)
What's here? A cup, clos'd in my true love's hand?
Poison, I see, hath been his timeless end:
O churl! drink all, and leave no friendly drop
To help me after?—I will kiss thy lips;
Haply, some poison yet doth hang on them,
To make me die with a restorative. (*Kisses him.*)
Thy lips are warm!
WATCHMAN (*within*): Lead, boy; which way?
JULIET: Yea, noise?—then I'll be brief.—O happy dagger! (*Snatching* ROMEO'S *dagger.*)
This is thy sheath; (*Stabs herself*) there rest, and let me die. (*Dies.*)

CHAPTER IX

SHAKESPEARE (*continued*)

1

NOW FOR the studies of simple life and character which Shakespeare so loved, and in which he excelled. First of all, we will take a look at Dogberry, the pompous village watchman, with his friend and toady Verges, from *Much Ado About Nothing*. Dogberry is the ancestor of the bumptious, self-important type of village policeman. In the scene that follows, he assembles his men, and gives them instructions.

DOGBERRY: This is your charge:—you shall comprehend[1] all vagrom[2] men; you are to bid any man stand, in the prince's name.

WATCHMAN: How, if a' will not stand?

DOGBERRY: Why, then, take no note of him, but let him go; and presently call the rest of the watch together, and thank God you are rid of a knave.

VERGES: If he will not stand when he is bidded, he is none of the prince's subjects.

DOGBERRY: True, and they are to meddle with none but the prince's subjects.—You shall also make no noise in the streets; for, for the watch to babble and talk, is most tolerable[3] and not to be endured.

WATCHMAN: We will rather sleep than talk: we know what belongs to a watch.

DOGBERRY: Why, you speak like an ancient and most quiet watchman; for I cannot see how sleeping should offend: only have a care that your bills[4] be not stolen.

[1] Dogberry is always using the wrong word: here he means apprehend, i.e. arrest. [2] Vagrant. [3] Intolerable. [4] Watchman's weapon.

—Well, you are to call at all the alehouses, and bid those that are drunk get them to bed.

WATCHMAN: How if they will not?

DOGBERRY: Why, then, let them alone till they are sober: if they make you not then the better answer, you may say they are not the men you took them for.

WATCHMAN: Well, sir.

DOGBERRY: If you meet a thief, you may suspect him, by virtue of your office, to be no true man; and, for such kind of men, the less you meddle or make with them, why, the more is for your honesty.

WATCHMAN: If we know him to be a thief, shall we not lay hands on him?

DOGBERRY: Truly, by your office, you may; but I think they that touch pitch will be defiled: the most peaceable way for you, if you do take a thief, is, to let him show himself what he is, and steal out of your company.

VERGES: You have always been called a merciful man, partner.

DOGBERRY: Truly, I would not hang a dog by my will; much more a man who hath any honesty in him.

VERGES: If you hear a child cry in the night, you must call to the nurse, and bid her still it.

WATCHMAN: How, if the nurse be asleep and will not hear us?

DOGBERRY: Why, then, depart in peace, and let the child wake her with crying; for the ewe that will not hear her lamb when it baas, will never answer a calf when he bleats.

While they are still talking, the watch overhear a man giving away details of a plot to a friend. They misunderstand what is said, but understand just enough to arrest the pair. Bursting with importance, Dogberry and Verges go off to give information of their discovery.

LEONATO (Governor of Messina): What would you with me, honest neighbour?

DOGBERRY: Marry, sir, I would have some confidence with you, that decerns you nearly.[1]

LEON: Brief, I pray you; for you see it is a busy time with me.

DOGBERRY: Marry, this it is, sir.

VERGES: Yes, in truth it is, sir.

LEON: What is it, my good friends?

DOGB.: Goodman Verges, sir, speaks a little off the matter: an old man, sir, and his wits are not so blunt, as, God help, I would desire they were; but, in faith, honest as the skin between his brows.

VERGES: Yes, I thank God, I am as honest as any man living, that is an old man, and no honester than I.

DOGB.: Comparisons are odorous:[2] palabras,[3] neighbour Verges.

LEON.: Neighbours, you are tedious.

DOGB.: It pleases your worship to say so, but we are the poor duke's officers; but truly, for mine own part, if I were as tedious[4] as a king, I could find in my heart to bestow it all of your worship.

LEON.: All thy tediousness on me, ha?

DOGB.: Yea, an't[5] were an thousand pound more than 'tis; for I hear as good exclamation on your worship, as of any man in the city; and though I be but a poor man, I am glad to hear it.

VERGES: And so am I.

LEON.: I would fain know what you have to say.

VERGES: Marry, sir, our watch to-night, excepting your worship's presence, have ta'en a couple of as arrant knaves as any in Messina.

[1] Concerns you closely. [2] Odious. [3] He means *pocas palabras*, the Spanish for "few words"—i.e. keep quiet. [4] Dogberry, misunderstanding, takes the word as a compliment. [5] If it.

DOGB.: A good old man, sir, he will be talking; as they say, when the age is in, the wit is out. God help us, it is a world to see! Well said, i' faith, neighbour Verges! —well, God's a good man: an two men ride of a horse, one must ride behind.—An honest soul, i' faith, sir; by my troth he is, as ever broke bread: but God is to be worshipped: all men are not alike;—alas, good neighbour!

LEON.: Indeed, neighbour, he comes too short of you.

DOGB.: Gifts that God gives.

LEON.: I must leave you.

DOGB.: One word, sir: our watch, sir, hath indeed comprehended two auspicious[1] persons, and we would have them this morning examined before your worship.

LEON.: Take their examination yourself, and bring it me: I am now in great haste, as may appear unto you.

More important than ever, the pair proceed to carry out the examination. They are resolved to do it in style.

Scene—a Prison.

Enter DOGBERRY, VERGES, *and* SEXTON, *in gowns; and the Watch, with* CONRADE *and* BORACHIO.

DOGB.: Is our whole dissembly[2] appeared?

VERGES: O, a stool and a cushion for the sexton.

SEXTON: Which be the malefactors?

DOGB.: Marry, that am I and my partner.[3]

VERGES: Nay, that's certain: we have the exhibition to examine.

SEXTON: But which are the offenders that are to be examined? Let them come before master constable.

DOGB.: Yea, marry, let them come before me.—What is your name, friend?

[1] Suspicious. [2] Assembly. [3] Another misunderstanding.

BORACHIO: Borachio.

DOGB.: Pray write down—Borachio.—Yours, sirrah?

CONRADE: I am a gentleman, sir, and my name is Conrade.

DOGB.: Write down—master gentleman Conrade.—Masters, do you serve God?

CON., BORA.: Yea, sir, we hope.

DOGB.: Write down—that they hope they serve God:—and write God first; for God defend but God should go before such villains!—Masters, it is proved already that you are little better than false knaves; and it will go near to be thought so shortly. How answer you for yourselves?

CON.: Marry, sir, we say we are none.

DOGB.: A marvellous witty fellow, I assure you; but I will go about him.—Come you hither, sirrah; a word in your ear, sir: I say to you, it is thought you are false knaves.

BORA.: Sir, I say to you, we are none.

DOGB.: Well, stand aside.—'Fore God, they are both in a tale.[1] Have you writ down—that they are none?

SEXTON: Master constable, you go not the way to examine: you must call forth the watch that are their accusers.

DOGB.: Yea, marry, that's the eftest[2] way.—Let the watch come forth.—Masters, I charge you, in the prince's name, accuse these men.

1ST WATCH.: This man said, sir, that Don John, the prince's brother, was a villain.

DOGB.: Write down—Prince John a villain.—Why this is flat perjury, to call a prince's brother villain.

BORA.: Master constable—

DOGB.: Pray thee, fellow, peace: I do not like thy look, I promise thee.

[1] They are both agreed. [2] Best, quickest.

SEXTON: What heard you him say else?

2ND WATCH.: Marry, that he had received a thousand ducats of Don John for accusing the lady Hero wrongfully.

DOGB.: Flat burglary[1] as ever was committed.

VERG.: Yea, by the mass, that it is.

SEXTON: What else, fellow?

1ST WATCH.: And that count Claudio did mean, upon his words, to disgrace Hero before the whole assembly, and not marry her.

DOGB.: O villain! thou wilt be condemned into everlasting redemption[2] for this.

SEXTON: What else?

2ND WATCH.: This is all.

SEXTON: And this is more, masters, than you can deny. Prince John is this morning secretly stolen away: Hero was in this manner accused; in this very manner refused; and, upon the grief of this, suddenly died.—Master constable, let these men be bound, and brought to Leonato's; I will go before, and show him their examination. (*Exit.*)

DOGB.: Come, let them be opinioned.[3]

VERG.: Let them be in the hands—

CON.: Off, coxcomb!

DOGB. God's my life! Where's the sexton? let him write down—the prince's officer, coxcomb.—Come, bind them.—Thou naughty varlet!

CON.: Away! you are an ass, you are an ass.

DOGB.: Dost thou not suspect[4] my place? Dost thou not suspect my years?—O that he were here to write me down an ass!—but, masters, remember that I am an ass; though it be not written down, yet forget not that I am an ass.—No, thou villain, thou art full of piety,[5]

[1] Perjury. [2] Perdition. [3] Pinioned, i.e. bound. [4] Respect. [5] Impiety.

as shall be proved upon thee by good witness. I am a wise fellow; and, which is more, an officer; and, which is more, a householder; and, which is more, as pretty a piece of flesh as any in Messina; and one that knows the law, go to; and a rich fellow enough, go to; and a fellow that hath had losses; and one that hath two gowns, and everything handsome about him.—Bring him away.—O that I had been writ down an ass!

2

The humour of Dogberry and Co. runs on simple lines. Any comic actor with a turn for pomposity and an unctuous voice can make his effect in this part. Not so with Falstaff, the next character we shall look at. Falstaff, while outwardly he is a fat man with a witty tongue and an abundant taste for drink, has a range and a subtlety which challenge the finest actor. The scenes in which he appears are among the greatest in Shakespeare. In the space at our command, we can only aim at an introduction to him and his merry company.

We meet him first in an inn, the boon companion of young Prince Hal, afterwards Henry V. He accuses the Prince of leading him into bad ways:—

FALSTAFF: Thou hast done much harm upon me, Hal,—God forgive thee for it! Before I knew thee, Hal, I knew nothing; and now am I, if a man should speak truly, little better than one of the wicked. I must give over this life, and I will give it over; by the Lord, an I do not, I am a villain: I'll be damned for never a king's son in Christendom.

P. HENRY: Where shall we take a purse to-morrow, Jack?

FALSTAFF: Where thou wilt, lad, I'll make one; an I do not, call me villain, and baffle[1] me.

[1] Insult.

P. HENRY: I see a good amendment of life in thee; from praying to purse-taking.

FALSTAFF: Why, Hal, 'tis my vocation, Hal! 'tis no sin for a man to labour in his vocation.

Poins, another member of the company, comes in, and the party are soon committed to taking a purse in earnest. They will lie in wait at Gadshill.

POINS: There are pilgrims going to Canterbury with rich offerings, and traders riding to London with fat purses: I have visors[1] for you all: you have horses for yourselves: I have bespoke supper to-morrow night in Eastcheap: we may do it as secure as sleep. If you will go, I will stuff your purses full of crowns; if you will not, tarry at home and be hanged.

As soon as Falstaff has gone out of the room, Poins plots with the Prince to keep out of the way while Falstaff, Bardolph, Peto and Co. take a purse, and then set upon them in the dark and take it from them.

P. HENRY: But I doubt they will be too hard for us.

POINS: Well, for two of them, I know them to be as true-bred cowards as ever turned back; and for the third, if he fight longer than he sees reason, I'll forswear arms.[2] The virtue of this jest will be, the incomprehensible lies that this same fat rogue will tell us, when we meet at supper: how thirty, at least, he fought with; what wards, what blows, what extremities he endured; and in the reproof of this lies the jest.

P. HENRY: Well, I'll go with thee: provide us all things necessary, and meet me to-morrow night in Eastcheap; there I'll sup. Farewell.

[1] Masks. [2] Give up fighting.

At the place of meeting, the two conspirators make an excuse to slip away. The poor travellers walk unsuspecting into the ambush.

Enter TRAVELLERS.

1ST TRAV.: Come, neighbour: the boy shall lead our horses down the hill; we'll walk afoot awhile, and ease our legs.

FALSTAFF, ETC.: Stand!

TRAVELLERS: Jesu bless us!

FALSTAFF: Strike; down with them; cut the villains' throats:—ah, caterpillars! bacon-fed knaves! they hate us youth: —down with them; fleece them.

TRAVELLERS: O! we are undone, both we and ours, for ever.

FALSTAFF: Hang ye, gorbellied knaves, are ye undone? No, ye fat chuffs; I would your store were here! On, bacons, on! What, ye knaves! young men must live. You are grand-jurors,[1] are ye? We'll jure ye, i' faith.

Exeunt FALSTAFF, ETC., *driving the* TRAVELLERS *out.* *Re-enter* PRINCE HENRY *and* POINS, *in buckram suits.*

P. HENRY: The thieves have bound the true men. Now could thou and I rob the thieves, and go merrily to London, it would be argument for a week, laughter for a month, and a good jest for ever.

POINS: Stand close; I hear them coming. (*They retire.*)

Re-enter FALSTAFF, ETC.

FALSTAFF: Come, my masters, let us share, and then to horse before day. An the prince and Poins be not two arrant cowards, there's no equity[2] stirring: there's no more valour in that Poins, than in a wild duck.

[1] Members of a special jury. [2] Truth.

P. HENRY: Your money!
POINS: Villains!

(*As they are sharing, the* PRINCE *and* POINS *rush out and set upon them.* BARDOLPH *and* PETO *run away; and* FALSTAFF, *after a blow or two, runs away too, leaving the booty behind.*)

Poins and the Prince then return post-haste to the inn, and await Falstaff's return. He comes in, a picture of righteous indignation and disgust.

POINS: Welcome, Jack: where hast thou been?
FALSTAFF: A plague of all cowards, I say, and a vengeance, too! marry, and amen!—Give me a cup of sack,[1] boy. A plague of all cowards!—Give me a cup of sack, rogue.—Is there no virtue extant?

(*He drinks.*)

. . . . You rogue, there's lime in this sack too: there is nothing but roguery to be found in villainous man: yet a coward is worse than a cup of sack with lime in it, —a villainous coward.—Go thy ways, old Jack; die when thou wilt, if manhood, good manhood, be not forgot upon the face of the earth, then am I a shotten herring. There live not three good men unhanged in England; and one of them is fat, and grows old: God help the while! a bad world, I say.

PRINCE HENRY: How now, wool-sack! what mutter you?
FALSTAFF: A king's son! If I do not beat thee out of thy kingdom with a dagger of lath, and drive all thy subjects afore thee like a flock of wild geese, I'll never wear hair on my face more. You Prince of Wales!
PRINCE HENRY: Why, you round man, what's the matter?
FALSTAFF: Are you not a coward? answer me to that: and Poins there?

[1] Wine.

POINS: Zounds! ye fat paunch, an ye call me coward, I'll stab thee.

FALSTAFF: I call thee coward! I'll see thee damned ere I call thee coward: but I would give a thousand pound I could run as fast as thou canst. You are straight enough in the shoulders, you care not who sees your back: call you that backing[1] of your friends? A plague upon such backing! give me them that will face me. Give me a cup of sack:—I am a rogue, if I drunk to-day.

PRINCE HENRY: O villain! thy lips are scarce wiped since thou drunkest last.

FALSTAFF: All's one for that. (*He drinks.*) A plague of all cowards, still say I.

PRINCE HENRY: What's the matter?

FALSTAFF: What's the matter! here be four of us have ta'en a thousand pounds this day morning.

PRINCE HENRY: Where is it, Jack? Where is it?

FALSTAFF: Where is it! taken from us it is; a hundred upon poor four of us.

PRINCE HENRY: What, a hundred, man?

FALSTAFF: I am a rogue, if I were not at half-sword with a dozen of them two hours together. I have 'scap'd by miracle. I am eight times thrust through the doublet, four through the hose; my buckler cut through and through; my sword hacked like a handsaw,—*ecce signum*![2] I never dealt better since I was a man: all would not do. A plague of all cowards! Let them speak: if they speak more or less than truth, they are villains, and the sons of darkness.

PRINCE HENRY: Speak, sirs; how was it?

GADSHILL: We four set upon some dozen——

FALSTAFF: Sixteen, at least, my lord.

[1] Backing up. [2] Behold the evidence. (He shows them his sword, which he has hacked about.)

GADSHILL: And bound them.

PETO: No, no, they were not bound.

FALSTAFF: You rogue, they were bound, every man of them; or I am a Jew else, an Ebrew Jew.

GADSHILL: As we were sharing, some six or seven fresh men set upon us,—

FALSTAFF: And unbound the rest, and then come in the other.

PRINCE HENRY: What, fought ye with them all?

FALSTAFF: All! I know not what ye call all; but if I fought not with fifty of them, I am a bunch of radish: if there were not two or three and fifty upon poor old Jack, then am I no two-legged creature.

PRINCE HENRY: Pray God, you have not murdered some of them.

FALSTAFF: Nay, that's past praying for: I have peppered two of them; two, I am sure, I have paid; two rogues in buckram suits. I tell thee what, Hal, if I tell thee a lie, spit in my face, call me horse. Thou knowest my old ward;[1] here I lay, and thus I bore my point. Four rogues in buckram let drive at me,—

PRINCE HENRY: What, four? Thou saidst but two even now.

FALSTAF: Four, Hal; I told thee four.

POINS: Ay, ay, he said four.

FALSTAFF: These four came all a-front, and mainly thrust at me. I made me no more ado, but took all their seven points in my target,[2] thus.

PRINCE HENRY: Seven? why, there were but four even now.

FALSTAFF: In buckram.

POINS: Ay, four, in buckram suits.

FALSTAFF: Seven, by these hilts, or I am a villain else.

PRINCE HENRY: Prythee, let him alone; we shall have more anon.[3]

[1] Guard, fighting position. [2] Shield. [3] In a minute.

FALSTAFF: Dost thou hear me, Hal?

PRINCE HENRY: Ay, and mark thee too, Jack.

FALSTAFF: Do so, for it is worth the listening to. These nine in buckram, that I told thee of,—

PRINCE HENRY: So, two more already.

FALSTAFF: Their points being broken,—

POINS: Down fell their hose.[1]

FALSTAFF: Began to give me ground: but I followed me close, came in, foot and hand; and with a thought, seven of the eleven I paid.

PRINCE HENRY: O monstrous! eleven buckram men grown out of two.

FALSTAFF: But, as the devil would have it, three misbegotten knaves, in Kendal green, came at my back, and let drive at me;—for it was so dark, Hal, that thou couldst not see thy hand.

PRINCE HENRY: These lies are like the father that begets them,—gross as a mountain, open, palpable. Why, thou clay-brained guts, thou knotty-pated fool, thou obscene, greasy tallow-keech,—[2]

FALSTAFF: What, art thou mad? art thou mad? is not the truth the truth?

PRINCE HENRY: Why, how couldst thou know these men in Kendal green, when it was so dark thou couldst not see thy hand? come, tell us your reason: what sayest thou to this?

POINS: Come, your reason, Jack,—your reason.

FALSTAFF: What, upon compulsion? No; were I at the strappado,[3] or all the racks in the world, I would not tell you on compulsion. Give you a reason on compulsion! if reasons were as plentiful as blackberries, I would give no man a reason on compulsion, I.

PRINCE HENRY: I'll be no longer guilty of this sin; this

[1] Poins puns upon the second meaning of points, i.e. braces. [2] Lump of fat. [3] Torture.

sanguine[1] coward, this bed-presser, this horseback-breaker, this huge hill of flesh,—

FALSTAFF: Away, you starveling, you elf-skin, you dried neat's[2] tongue, you stock-fish,[3]—O for breath to utter what is like thee!—you tailor's yard, you sheath, you bow-case, you vile standing tuck,—[4]

PRINCE HENRY: Well, breathe awhile, and then to it again: and when thou hast tired thyself in base comparisons, hear me speak but this.

POINS: Mark, Jack.

PRINCE HENRY: We two saw you four set upon four; you bound them, and were masters of their wealth.—Mark now, how a plain tale shall put you down.—Then did we two set upon you four; and, with a word, out-faced you from your prize, and have it; yea, and can show it you here in the house:—and, Falstaff, you carried your guts away as nimbly, with as quick dexterity, and roared for mercy, and still ran and roared, as ever I heard bull-calf. What a slave art thou, to hack thy sword as thou hast done, and then say, it was in fight! What trick, what device, what starting-hole, canst thou now find out, to hide thee from this open and apparent shame?

FALSTAFF: By the Lord, I knew ye, as well as he that made thee. Why, hear me, my masters: was it for me to kill the heir-apparent? Should I turn upon the true prince? Why, thou knowest I am as valiant as Hercules: but beware instinct; the lion will not touch the true prince. Instinct is a great matter; I was a coward on instinct. I shall think the better of myself and thee, during my life; I for a valiant lion, and thou for a true prince. But, by the lord, lads, I am glad you have the money.—(*To the hostess within.*) Hostess, clap to the doors:—watch to-night, pray to-morrow.

[1] Red-faced. [2] Ox-tongue. [3] Dried cod. [4] Rapier.

—Gallants, lads, boys, hearts of gold, all the titles of good fellowship come to you! What, shall we be merry? shall we have a play extempore?

For their play, they rehearse the sermon the Prince will receive the next day from his father.

FALSTAFF: Well, thou wilt be horribly chid to-morrow, when thou comest to thy father: if thou love me, practise an answer.

PRINCE HENRY: Do thou stand for my father, and examine me upon the particulars of my life.

FALSTAFF: Shall I? content:—this chair shall be my state,[1] this dagger my sceptre, and this cushion my crown. Well, an the fire of grace be not quite out of thee, now shalt thou be moved.—Give me a cup of sack, to make mine eyes look red, that it may be thought I have wept; for I must speak in passion, and I will do it in King Cambyses'[2] vein.

PRINCE HENRY: Well, here is my leg.

FALSTAFF: And here is my speech.—Stand aside, nobility.

HOSTESS: O Jesu! This is excellent sport, i' faith!

FALSTAFF: Weep not, sweet queen; for trickling tears are vain.[3]

HOSTESS: O, the father! how he holds his countenance!

FALSTAFF: For God's sake, lords, convey my tristful[4] queen;
For tears do stop the flood-gates of her eyes.

HOSTESS: O rare! he doth it as like one of these players as ever I did see!

FALSTAFF: Peace, good pint-pot! peace, good tickle-brain!—Harry, I do not only marvel where thou

[1] Throne. [2] This was the standard phrase for ranting. Cambyses was a character in an old play. [3] Falstaff breaks into pompous blank verse. [4] Sorrowful.

spendest thy time, but also how thou art accompanied: for though the camomile, the more it is trodden on, the faster it grows, yet youth, the more it is wasted, the sooner it wears. That thou art my son . . . a villainous trick of thine eye, and a foolish hanging of thy nether lip . . . doth warrant me. If, then, thou be son to me, here lies the point; why, being son to me, art thou so pointed at? Shall the blessed sun of heaven prove a micher,[1] and eat blackberries? a question not to be asked. Shall the son of England prove a thief, and take purses? a question to be asked. There is a thing, Harry, which thou hast often heard of, and it is known to many in our land by the name of pitch: this pitch, as ancient writers do report, doth defile; so doth the company thou keepest: for Harry, now I do not speak to thee in drink, but in tears; not in pleasure, but in passion; not in words only, but in woes also:—and yet there is a virtuous man, whom I have often noted in thy company, but I know not his name.

PRINCE HENRY: What manner of man, an it like your majesty?

FALSTAFF: A good portly man, i' faith, and a corpulent; of a cheerful look, a pleasing eye, and a most noble carriage; and, as I think, his age some fifty, or by'r lady, inclining to threescore; and now I remember me, his name is Falstaff: if that man should be lewdly given, he deceiveth me; for, Harry, I see virtue in his looks. If, then, the tree may be known by the fruit, as the fruit by the tree, then, peremptorily I speak it, there is virtue in that Falstaff: him keep with, the rest banish. And tell me now, thou naughty varlet, tell me, where hast thou been this month?

PRINCE HENRY: Dost thou speak like a king? Do thou stand for me, and I'll play my father.

[1] Thief.

FALSTAFF: Depose me? if thou dost it half so gravely, so majestically, both in word and matter, hang me up by the heels for a rabbit-sucker, or a poulter's hare.[1]

PRINCE HENRY: Well, here I am set.

FALSTAFF: And here I stand:—judge, my masters.

PRINCE HENRY: Now, Harry, whence come you?

FALSTAFF: My noble lord, from Eastcheap.

PRINCE HENRY: The complaints I hear of thee are grievous.

FALSTAFF: 'Sblood, my lord, they are false:—nay, I'll tickle ye for a young prince, i' faith.

PRINCE HENRY: Swearest thou, ungracious boy? henceforth ne'er look on me. Thou art violently carried away from grace: there is a devil haunts thee, in the likeness of a fat old man,—a tun[2] of man is thy companion. Why dost thou converse with that trunk of humours, that bolting-hutch of beastliness, that swoln parcel of dropsies, that huge bombard[3] of sack, that stuffed cloak-bag of guts, that roasted Manning-tree ox[4] with the pudding in his belly, that reverend Vice,[5] that grey Iniquity, that father Ruffian, that Vanity in years? Wherein is he good, but to taste sack and drink it? wherein neat and cleanly, but to carve a capon[6] and eat it? wherein cunning, but in craft? wherein crafty, but in villainy? wherein villainous, but in all things? wherein worthy, but in nothing?

FALSTAFF: I would your grace would take me with you: whom means your grace?

PRINCE HENRY: That villainous abominable misleader of youth, Falstaff, that old white-bearded Satan.

FALSTAFF: My lord, the man I know.

PRINCE HENRY: I know thou dost.

FALSTAFF: But to say, I know more harm in him than

[1] Hare in a poulterer's shop. [2] Barrel. [3] Leather Vessel. [4] i.e. Roasted whole. [5] Allegorical characters in old plays. [6] Chicken.

in myself, were to say more than I know. That he is old, (the more the pity,) his white hairs do witness it; if to be old and merry be a sin then many an old host that I know, is damned: if to be fat be to be hated, then Pharaoh's lean kine[1] are to be loved. No, my lord; banish Peto, banish Bardolph, banish Poins: but, for sweet Jack Falstaff, kind Jack Falstaff, and therefore more valiant, being, as he is, old Jack Falstaff, banish not him thy Harry's company, banish not him thy Harry's company:—banish plump Jack, and banish all the world.

[1] The lean cattle in the dream which Joseph interpreted (Genesis xli. 19).

CHAPTER X

SHAKESPEARE (*continued*)

1

FALSTAFF and the Prince are interrupted by the arrival of the Sheriff, hot foot after the robbers. The Prince pacifies him, and he goes away. When he and Poins go to call Falstaff out of hiding, he is found fast asleep behind a curtain. They search his pockets, and find a bill from the hostess.

POINS (reads): Item, A Capon . . . 2*s.* 2*d.*
Item, Sauce . . . 4*d.*
Item, Sack, two gallons . . . 5*s.* 8*d.*
Item, Anchovies, and sack after supper . . . 2*s.* 6*d.*
Item, Bread . . . ½*d.*

PRINCE HENRY: O monstrous! but one half-penny-worth of bread to this intolerable deal of sack!—What there is else, keep close; we'll read it at more advantage. There let him sleep till day. I'll to the court in the morning; we must all to the wars, and thy place shall be honourable. I'll procure this fat rogue a charge of foot[1] . . . The money shall be paid back again with advantage. Be with me betimes in the morning; and so good morrow, Poins.

Soon afterwards, Falstaff is complaining to the Hostess that his pocket has been picked.

FALSTAFF: How now, dame Partlet[2] the hen! have you enquired yet who picked my pocket?

[1] A commission in the infantry. [2] Pertelote: see p. 25.

HOSTESS: Why, Sir John, what do you think, Sir John? Do you think I keep thieves in my house? I have searched, I have enquired, so has my husband, man by man, boy by boy, servant by servant: the tithe[1] of a hair was never lost in my house before.

FALSTAFF: You lie, hostess: Bardolph was shaved, and lost many a hair; and I'll be sworn my pocket was picked. Go to, you are a woman, go.

HOSTESS: Who, I? No; I defy thee: I was never called so in my house before.

FALSTAFF: Go to; I know you well enough.

HOSTESS: No, Sir John; you do not know me, Sir John: I know you, Sir John; you owe me money, Sir John; and now you pick a quarrel to beguile[2] me of it; I bought you a dozen shirts to your back.

FALSTAFF: Dowlas,[3] filthy dowlas: I have given them away to bakers' wives, and they have made bolters[4] of them.

HOSTESS: Now, as I am a true woman, holland of eight shillings an ell.[5] You owe money here besides, Sir John, for your diet, and your by-drinkings, and money lent you, four-and-twenty pound.

FALSTAFF: He had his part of it; let him pay.

HOSTESS: He? alas! he is poor; he hath nothing.

FALSTAFF: How! poor? look upon his face;[6] what call you rich? let them coin his nose, let them coin his cheeks: I'll not pay a denier.[7] What, will you make a younker[8] of me? shall I not take mine ease in mine inn, but I shall have my pocket picked? I have lost a seal-ring of my grandfather's, worth forty mark.[9]

HOSTESS: O Jesu! I have heard the prince tell him, I know not how oft, that that ring was copper.

[1] The tenth part. [2] Cheat. [3] Coarse material. [4] Sieves. [5] Yard. [6] Bardolph has a very red face. [7] Tenth of a penny. [8] Fool. [9] A mark was thirteen and fourpence.

FALSTAFF: How! the prince is a Jack, a sneak-cup: 'Sblood, an he were here I would cudgel him like a dog, if he would say so.

At that moment the Prince and Poins march in the door.

FALSTAFF: How now, lads! is the wind in that door, i' faith? must we all march?

BARDOLPH: Yea, two and two, Newgate fashion.[1]

HOSTESS: My lord, I pray you, hear me.

PRINCE HENRY: What sayest thou, mistress Quickly? How does thy husband? I love him well; he is an honest man.

HOSTESS: Good my lord, hear me.

FALSTAFF: Pr'ythee, let her alone, and list to me.

PRINCE HENRY: What sayest thou, Jack?

FALSTAFF: The other night I fell asleep here, behind the arras,[2] and had my pocket picked.

PRINCE HENRY: What didst thou lose, Jack?

FALSTAFF: Wilt thou believe me, Hal? three or four bonds of forty pound apiece, and a seal-ring of my grandfather's.

PRINCE HENRY: A trifle, some eightpenny matter.

HOSTESS: So I told him, my lord; and I said I heard your grace say so: and, my lord, he speaks most vilely of you, like a foul-mouthed man as he is; and said, he would cudgel you.

PRINCE HENRY: What! he did not?

HOSTESS: There's neither faith, truth, nor womanhood in me else.

FALSTAFF: There's no more faith in thee than in a stewed prune: nor no more truth in thee than in a drawn fox; and for womanhood, maid Marian may be

[1] Newgate criminals were chained together. [2] Curtain.

the deputy's wife of the ward to thee. Go, you thing, go.

HOSTESS: Say, what thing? what thing?

FALSTAFF: What thing? why, a thing to thank God on.

HOSTESS: I am no thing to thank God on, I would thou shouldest know it; I am an honest man's wife: and, setting thy knighthood aside, thou art a knave to call me so.

FALSTAFF: Setting thy womanhood aside, thou art a beast to say otherwise.

HOSTESS: Say, what beast, thou knave thou?

FALSTAFF: What beast? why, an otter.

PRINCE HENRY: An otter, Sir John? why an otter?

FALSTAFF: Why? she's neither fish nor flesh; a man knows not where to have her.

HOSTESS: Thou art an unjust man in saying so. . . .

PRINCE HENRY: Thou sayest true, hostess; and he slanders thee most grossly.

HOSTESS: So he doth you, my lord; and said this other day, you owed him a thousand pound.

PRINCE HENRY: Sirrah! do I owe you a thousand pound?

FALSTAFF: A thousand pound, Hal! a million: thy love is worth a million; thou owest me thy love.

HOSTESS: Nay, my lord, he called you Jack, and said he would cudgel you.

FALSTAFF: Did I, Bardolph?

BARDOLPH: Indeed, sir John, you said so.

FALSTAFF: Yea,— if he said my ring was copper.

PRINCE HENRY: I say, 'tis copper: darest thou be as good as thy word now?

FALSTAFF: Why, Hal, thou knowest, as thou art but man, I dare: but as thou art prince, I fear thee, as I fear the roaring of the lion's whelp.

PRINCE HENRY: And why not, as the lion?

FALSTAFF: The king himself is to be feared as the lion: dost thou think, I'll fear thee as I fear thy father?

PRINCE HENRY: Sirrah, there's no room for faith, truth,

or honesty, in this bosom of thine,—it is all filled up with guts and midriff, thou impudent, embossed rascal, if there were anything in thy pocket but tavern reckonings, and one poor pennyworth of sugar-candy to make thee long-winded,—if thy pocket were enriched with any other injuries but these, I am a villain; you will not pocket up wrong. Art thou not ashamed?

FALSTAFF: Dost thou hear, Hal! thou knowest in the state of innocency, Adam fell; and what should poor Jack Falstaff do, in the days of villainy? Thou seest, I have more flesh than another man; and therefore more frailty. You confess, then, you picked my pocket?

PRINCE HENRY: It appears so by the story.

FALSTAFF: Hostess, I forgive thee: go make ready breakfast; love thy husband, look to thy servants, cherish thy guests: thou shalt find me tractable to any honest reason: thou seest, I am pacified.

2

Falstaff goes to the wars, and manages to get credit for bravery in action. When he returns, the Lord Chief Justice sees him in the street. Falstaff is anxious to avoid him, for he knows he is suspected of the robbery at Gadshill: but the Chief Justice will not be denied. He comes up to Falstaff, who pretends not to have noticed him till that moment, and to be very pleased to see him.

CHIEF JUSTICE: Sir John Falstaff, a word with you.

FALSTAFF: My good lord! Give your lordship good time of day. I am glad to see your lordship abroad: I heard say, your lordship was sick: I hope your lordship goes abroad by advice.[1] Your lordship, though not clean past your youth, hath yet some smack of age in you, some relish of the saltness of time; and I most humbly

[1] Has been allowed by your doctor to be out and about.

beseech your lordship to have a reverend care of your health.

CHIEF JUSTICE: Sir John, I sent for you before your expedition to Shrewsbury.

FALSTAFF: An't please your lordship, I hear his majesty is returned with some discomfort from Wales.

CHIEF JUSTICE: I talk not of his majesty: you would not come when I sent for you.

FALSTAFF: And I hear, moreover, his highness is fallen into this same apoplexy.

CHIEF JUSTICE: Well, heaven mend him!—I pray you, let me speak with you.

FALSTAFF: This apoplexy is, as I take it, a kind of lethargy, an't please your lordship; a kind of sleeping in the blood, a tingling.

CHIEF JUSTICE: What tell you me of it? be it as it is.

FALSTAFF: It hath its original from much grief, from study, and perturbation of the brain: I have read the cause of his effects in Galen:[1] it is a kind of deafness.

CHIEF JUSTICE: I think you are fallen into the disease; for you hear not what I say to you.

FALSTAFF: Very well, my lord, very well: rather, an't please you, it is the disease of not listening, the malady of not marking, that I am troubled withal.

CHIEF JUSTICE: To punish you by the heels,[2] would amend the attention of your ears: and I care not if I do become your physician.

FALSTAFF: I am as poor as Job, my lord, but not so patient: your lordship may administer the potion of imprisonment to me, in respect of poverty; but how should I be your patient to follow your prescriptions, the wise may make some dram of a scruple,[3] or, indeed, a scruple itself.

[1] A famous physician. [2] Put you in the stocks. [3] Dram and scruple were chemist's measures.

CHIEF JUSTICE: I sent for you, when there were matters against you for your life, to come speak with me.

FALSTAFF: As I was then advised by my learned counsel in the laws of this land-service, I did not come.

CHIEF JUSTICE: Well, the truth is, Sir John, you live in great infamy.

FALSTAFF: He that buckles him in my belt cannot live in less.[1]

CHIEF JUSTICE: Your means are very slender, and your waste is great.

FALSTAFF: I would it were otherwise; I would my means were greater, and my waist slenderer.

CHIEF JUSTICE: You have misled the youthful prince.

FALSTAFF: The young prince hath misled me: I am the fellow with the great belly, and he my dog.

CHIEF JUSTICE: Well, I am loth to gall a new-healed wound: your day's service at Shrewsbury hath a little gilded over your night's exploit on Gadshill: you may thank the unquiet time for your quiet o'erposting that action.[2]

FALSTAFF: My lord——

CHIEF JUSTICE: But since all is well, keep it so: wake not a sleeping wolf.

FALSTAFF: To wake a wolf, is as bad as to smell a fox.

CHIEF JUSTICE: What! you are as a candle, the better part burnt out.

FALSTAFF: A wassail candle,[3] my lord; all tallow: if I did say of wax, my growth would approve the truth.

CHIEF JUSTICE: There is not a white hair on your face but should have his effect of gravity.

FALSTAFF: His effect of gravy, gravy, gravy.

CHIEF JUSTICE: You follow the young prince up and down, like his ill angel.

[1] It must be "great," because I am such a fat man. [2] The Chief Justice means that the wars have distracted attention from lesser matters, such as a highway robbery. [3] A feast candle.

FALSTAFF: Not so, my lord; your ill angel[1] is light; but I hope he that looks upon me, will take me without weighing: and yet, in some respects, I grant, I cannot go,—I cannot tell. Virtue is of so little regard in these costermonger times, that true valour is turned bear-herd: all the other gifts appertinent[2] to man, as the malice of this age shapes them, are not worth a gooseberry. You, that are old, consider not the capacities of us that are young; you measure the heat of our livers with the bitterness of your galls: and we that are in the vaward[3] of our youth, I must confess, are wags too.

CHIEF JUSTICE: Do you set down your name in the scroll of youth, that are written down old with all the characters of age? Have you not a moist eye? a dry hand? a yellow cheek? a white beard? a decreasing leg? an increasing belly? Is not your voice broken? your wind short? your chin double? your wit single? and every part about you blasted with antiquity? and will you yet call yourself young? Fie, fie, fie, Sir John!

FALSTAFF: My lord, I was born about three of the clock in the afternoon, with a white head, and something a round belly. For my voice, I have lost it with hollaing, and singing of anthems. To approve my youth further, I will not: the truth is, I am only old in judgment and understanding; and he that will caper with me for a thousand marks, let him lend me the money, and have at him. For the box o' the ear that the prince gave you,[4] he gave it like a rude prince, and you took it like a sensible lord. I have checked him for it; and the young lion repents; marry, not in ashes and sackcloth, but in new silk and old sack.

[1] Angel was also the name of a coin, and a bad angel would weigh light. [2] Belonging. [3] Vanguard. [4] There is an actual legend that the Prince once struck Judge Gascoigne.

CHIEF JUSTICE: Well, Heaven send the prince a better companion!

FALSTAFF: Heaven send the companion a better prince! I cannot rid my hands of him.

3

Falstaff is due to go off again to the wars. The poor Hostess, who cannot recover any of the money Sir John owes her, is compelled at last to have him arrested for debt. With Fang and Snare, the constables, she lies in wait for him in the street.

HOSTESS: I am undone by his going; I warrant you, he's an infinite thing upon my score[1] :—good master Fang, hold him sure;—good master Snare, let him not 'scape. He comes continually to Pie Corner (saving your manhood) to buy a saddle; and he's indited to dinner at the Lubbar's Head, in Lumbert Street, to master Smooth's the silkman: I pray ye, since my exion is entered,[2] and my case so openly known to the world, let him be brought in to his answer. A hundred mark is a long one for a poor lone woman to bear: and I have borne, and borne, and borne; and have been fubbed off and fubbed off, and fubbed off, from this day to that day, that it is a shame to be thought on. There is no honesty in such dealing; unless a woman should be made an ass, and a beast, to bear every knave's wrong. (*Enter* SIR JOHN FALSTAFF, PAGE, *and* BARDOLPH.) Yonder he comes; and that arrant malmsey[3]-nose knave, Bardolph, with him. Do your offices, do your offices, master Fang and master Snare; do me, do me, do me your offices.

FALSTAFF: How now? Whose mare's dead? What's the matter?

[1] Reckoning, account. [2] Action is taken. [3] Wine.

FANG: Sir John, I arrest you at the suit of Mistress Quickly.

FALSTAFF: Away, varlets!—Draw, Bardolph: cut me off the villain's head; throw the quean[1] in the channel.[2]

HOSTESS: Throw me in the channel! I'll throw thee in the channel. Wilt thou? Wilt thou? thou rogue!—Murder, murder! O, thou honey-suckle villain! wilt thou kill God's officers, and the king's? O, thou honey-seed rogue! thou art a honey-seed, a man-queller, and a woman-queller.

FALSTAFF: Keep them off, Bardolph.

FANG: A rescue! a rescue!

HOSTESS: Good people, bring a rescue or two! Thou wo't, wo't thou? thou wo't, wo't thou? do, thou rogue! do, thou hemp-seed!

FALSTAFF: Away, you scullion! you rampallion! you fustilarian! I'll tickle your catastrophe.

Enter the LORD CHIEF JUSTICE, *attended.*

CHIEF JUSTICE: What is the matter? keep the peace there, ho!

HOSTESS: Good my lord, be good to me! I beseech you, stand to me!

CHIEF JUSTICE: How now, Sir John! what, are you brawling here?
Doth this become your place, your time, and business?
You should have been well on your way to York.
Stand from him, fellow: wherefore hang'st upon him?

HOSTESS: O, my most worshipful lord, an't please your grace, I am a poor widow of Eastcheap, and he is arrested at my suit.[3]

CHIEF JUSTICE: For what sum?

HOSTESS: It is more than for some, my lord; it is for all, all I have. He hath eaten me out of house and home; he

[1] Low woman. [2] Gutter. [3] Request.

hath put all my substance into that fat belly of his;—but I will have some of it out again, or I will ride thee o' nights, like the mare.

FALSTAFF: I think I am as like to ride the mare, if I have any vantage of ground to get up.

CHIEF JUSTICE: How comes this, Sir John? Fie! what man of good temper would endure this tempest of exclamation? Are you not ashamed to enforce a poor widow to so rough a course to come by her own?

FALSTAFF: What is the gross sum that I owe thee?

HOSTESS: Marry, if thou wert an honest man, thyself, and the money too. Thou didst swear to me upon a parcel-gilt goblet, sitting in my Dolphin-chamber, at the round table, by a sea-coal fire, upon Wednesday in Whitsun week, when the prince broke thy head for liking his father to a singing-man of Windsor; thou didst swear to me then, as I was washing thy wound, to marry me, and make me my lady thy wife. Canst thou deny it? Did not good-wife Keech, the butcher's wife, come in then, and call me gossip Quickly? coming in to borrow a mess of vinegar; telling us, she had a good dish of prawns; whereby thou didst desire to eat some; whereby I told thee, they were ill for a green wound![1] And didst thou not, when she was gone down-stairs, desire me to be no more so familiarity with such poor people; saying, that ere long they should call me madam? And didst thou not kiss me, and bid me fetch thee thirty shillings? I put thee now to thy book-oath: deny it, if thou canst.

FALSTAFF: My lord, this is a poor mad soul; and she says, up and down the town, that her eldest son is like you: she hath been in good case, and the truth is, poverty hath distracted her. But for these foolish officers, I beseech you, I may have redress against them.

[1] Bad for a fresh wound.

CHIEF JUSTICE: Sir John, Sir John, I am well acquainted with your manner of wrenching the true cause the false way. It is not a confident brow, nor the throng of words that come with such more than impudent sauciness from you, can thrust me from a level consideration: you have, as it appears to me, practised upon the easy yielding spirit of this woman, and made her serve your uses both in purse and person.

HOSTESS: Yea, in troth, my lord.

CHIEF JUSTICE: Pr'ythee, peace. Pay her the debt you owe her, and unpay the villainy you have done with her: the one you may do with sterling money, and the other with current repentance.

FALSTAFF: My lord, I will not undergo this sneap[1] without reply. You call honourable boldness, impudent sauciness: if a man will make court'sy, and say nothing, he is virtuous. No, my lord, my humble duty remember'd, I will not be your suitor: I say to you, I do desire deliverance from these officers, being upon hasty employment in the king's affairs.

CHIEF JUSTICE: You speak as having power to do wrong; but answer in the effect of your reputation, and satisfy the poor woman.

FALSTAFF: Come hither, hostess. (*Taking her aside.*)

The poor good-natured soul cannot hold out against him. She withdraws the action, and hands him more money. But his downfall is near at hand. Prince Hal becomes Henry V. There is no more time for Falstaff and nights at the inn: and, in a terrible scene, the old man is publicly disowned and turned away. The shock is too much for him. Early in the next play (*Henry V*), the Hostess and the remains of the little group meet sorrowfully.

[1] Rebuke.

HOSTESS: Pr'ythee, honey-sweet husband, let me bring thee to Staines.

PISTOL: No; for my manly heart doth yearn.—Bardolph; be blithe; Nym, rouse thy vaunting veins; Boy, bristle thy courage up; for Falstaff is dead, and we must yearn therefore.

BARDOLPH: Would I were with him, wheresome'er he is, either in heaven or in hell!

HOSTESS: Nay, sure, he's not in hell: he's in Arthur's bosom,[1] if ever man went to Arthur's bosom. 'A made a finer end, and went away, an it had been any christom[2] child; 'a parted even just between twelve and one, even at the turning o' the tide: for after I saw him fumble with the sheets, and play with flowers, and smile upon his fingers' ends, I knew there was but one way; for his nose was as sharp as a pen, and 'a babbled of green fields. "How now, sir John!" quoth I: "what, man! be of good cheer." So 'a cried out—"God, God, God!" three or four times. Now, I, to comfort him, bid him, 'a should not think of God; I hoped, there was no need to trouble himself with any such thoughts yet. So, 'a bade me lay more clothes on his feet; I put my hand into the bed, and felt them, and they were as cold as any stone; then I felt to his knees, and so upward, and upward, and all was as cold as any stone.

The charm of Falstaff, which was so deeply felt by the Hostess, whom he cheated and made use of, by Bardolph, of whose red face he was always making fun, and by Pistol, whom he once threw downstairs, is as powerful as ever to-day. We have only been able to touch upon the many scenes in which he appears: and anything less than all of him is too little.

[1] She means Abraham's bosom. [2] Christened.

CHAPTER XI

SHAKESPEARE (*continued*)

1

FOR A totally different side of Shakespeare's art, we will turn to the end of one of his tragedies, *Antony and Cleopatra*. The beauty and "infinite variety" of the Egyptian queen have so moved the great Mark Antony that he stays on with her, forgetful alike of his wife at Rome and of his duty to his country. Things come to such a pitch that Octavius Cæsar, his fellow triumvir, comes against him with a fleet and army. The Egyptians are easily put to flight. Cleopatra takes refuge inside a monument in her palace. Antony attempts to kill himself, but bungles the attempt. His guards bring him to Cleopatra.

Enter, below, DIOMEDES

CLEOPATRA: How now! is he dead?

DIOMEDES: His death's upon him, but not dead.
Look out o' the other side your monument;
His guard have brought him thither.

Enter, below, ANTONY, *borne by the guard*

CLEOPATRA: O sun,
Burn the great sphere thou mov'st in! darkling stand
The varying shore o' the world! O Antony,
Antony, Antony! Help, Charmian, help, Iras, help;
Help, friends below; let's draw him hither.

ANTONY: Peace!
Not Cæsar's valour hath o'erthrown Antony,
But Antony's hath triumphed on itself.

CLEOPATRA: So it should be, that none but Antony
Should conquer Antony: but woe 'tis so!

ANTONY: I am dying, Egypt, dying; only
I here importune death a while, until
Of many thousand kisses the poor last
I lay upon thy lips.

CLEOPATRA: I dare not, dear,—
Dear my lord, pardon,—I dare not,
Lest I be taken: not the imperious show
Of the full fortun'd Cæsar ever shall
Be brooch'd with me;[1] if knife, drugs, serpents, have
Edge, sting, or operation, I am safe:
Your wife Octavia, with her modest eyes,
And still conclusion, shall acquire no merit
Demuring upon me. But come, come, Antony,—
Help me, my woman,—we must draw thee up;—
Assist, good friends.

ANTONY: O, quick, or I am gone.

CLEOPATRA: Here's sport indeed!—How heavy weighs
my lord!
Our strength is all gone into heaviness,
That makes the weight: had I great Juno's[2] power,
The strong-wing'd Mercury[3] should fetch thee up,
And set thee by Jove's side. Yet come a little,—
Wishers were ever fools.—O, come, come, come;

(*They draw* ANTONY *up.*)

And welcome, welcome! die where thou hast liv'd:
Quicken[4] with kissing: had my lips that power,
Thus would I wear them out.

ALL: A heavy sight!

ANTONY: I am dying, Egypt, dying:
Give me some wine, and let me speak a little.

[1] I will not grace Cæsar's triumph. (Roman generals used to return in triumph to the city after a distinguished victory, proceeding through the streets with their captives and spoils.) [2] Consort of Jove, king of the gods. [3] Messenger of the gods. [4] Come to life.

CLEOPATRA: No, let me speak; and let me rail so high,
That the false housewife Fortune break her wheel,
Provok'd by my offence.

ANTONY: One word, sweet queen:
Of Cæsar seek you honour, with your safety.

CLEOPATRA: They do not go together.

ANTONY: Gentle, hear me:
None about Cæsar trust, but Proculeius.

CLEOPATRA: My resolution and my hands I'll trust;
None about Cæsar.

ANTONY: The miserable change now at my end
Lament nor sorrow at; but please your thoughts,
In feeding them with those my former fortunes
Wherein I liv'd, the greatest prince o' the world,
The noblest; and do now not basely die,
Not cowardly put off my helmet to
My countrymen,—a Roman by a Roman
Valiantly vanquish'd. Now my spirit is going;
I can no more. (ANTONY *dies.*)

CLEOPATRA: Noblest of men, woo't die?
Hast thou no care of me? shall I abide
In this dull world, which in thy absence is
No better than a sty?—O, see, my women,
The crown o' the earth doth melt:—my lord!—
O, wither'd is the garland of the war,
The soldier's pole is fallen: young boys and girls
Are level now with men; the odds is gone,
And there is nothing left remarkable
Beneath the visiting moon.

Finding that Cæsar means to carry her back to Rome in triumph, Cleopatra resolves to die. A countryman brings her a deadly snake, an asp, in a basket of figs. She calls to Charmian her servant.

Now, Charmian,
Show me, my woman, like a queen: go fetch
My best attire; I am again for Cydnus[1]
To meet Mark Antony.

When the maids return with the clothes, she is ready.

Give me my robe, put on my crown; I have
Immortal longings in me: now no more
The juice of Egypt's grape shall moist this lip:
Yare,[2] yare, good Iras; quick. Methinks I hear
Antony call; I see him rouse himself
To praise my noble act; I hear him mock
The luck of Cæsar, which the gods give men
To excuse their after wrath: husband, I come:
Now to that name my courage prove my title!
I am fire, and air; my other elements
I give to baser life. So, have you done?
Come then, and take the last warmth of my lips,
Farewell, kind Charmian; Iras, long farewell.
(*Kisses them.* IRAS *falls and dies.*)
Have I the aspic in my lips? Dost fall?
If thou and nature can so gently part
The stroke of death is as a lover's pinch,
Which hurts, and is desir'd. Dost thou lie still?
If thus thou vanishest, thou tell'st the world
It is not worth leave-taking.

CHARMIAN: Dissolve, thick cloud, and rain; that I may say,
The gods themselves do weep.

CLEOPATRA: This proves me base;
If she first met the curléd Antony,
He'll make demand of her, and spend that kiss,
Which is my heaven to have. Come, thou mortal wretch (*To the asp, which she applies to her breast*).

[1] Where the lovers first met. [2] Quickly.

With thy sharp teeth this knot intrinsicate[1]
Of life at once untie: poor venomous fool,
Be angry, and despatch. O, couldst thou speak,
That I might hear thee call great Cæsar ass
Unpolicied![2]

CHARMIAN: O eastern star!

CLEOPATRA: Peace, peace!
Dost thou not see my baby at my breast,
That sucks the nurse asleep?

CHARMIAN: O, break! O, break!

CLEOPATRA: As sweet as balm, as soft as air, as gentle,—
O Antony!—Nay, I will take thee too.—
(*Applying another asp to her arm.*)
What should I stay—— (*Dies.*)

CHARMIAN: In this wild world?—So, fare thee well.—
Now boast thee, death, in thy possession lies
A lass unparallel'd.—Downy windows,[3] close;
And golden Phoebus[4] never be beheld
Of eyes again so royal! Your crown's awry;[5]
I'll mend it, and then play.

Enter the guard, rushing in.

1ST GUARD: Where is the queen?

CHARMIAN: Speak softly, wake her not.

1ST GUARD: Cæsar hath sent—

CHARMIAN: Too slow a messenger.
(*Applies an asp.*)
O, come apace, despatch: I partly feel thee.

1ST GUARD: Approach ho! All's not well: Cæsar's beguiled.

2ND GUARD: There's Dolabella, sent from Cæsar; call him.

1ST GUARD: What work is here! Charmian, is this well done?

[1] Complex. [2] Mistaken. [3] Eyelids. [4] The sun. [5] Crooked.

CHARMIAN: It is well done, and fitting for a princess
Descended of so many royal kings.

2

To the long list of plays which Shakespeare wrote must be added several in which he collaborated with other writers. It was very common, in his day and later, for several men to join hands in writing a play. Plays were always in demand, and many of the dramatists were hard up, and glad to earn a share of the money paid for a play in the shorter time it would take to write if the labour was shared also. In considering his work, however, we can leave this out of account. Shakespeare is the universal writer. His friend Ben Jonson truly said of him that "he writ not for an age, but for all time." For all time, for all nations: yet he was careless of the fate of his manuscripts, and the first collected edition of his plays was not published till seven years after his death.

Although we now have them all in book form, it is important to remember that they are plays, and therefore that we have not experienced them till we have seen them *acted*. Fortunately, it is easy to see good performances of the best known of the plays—though there are still far too many bad ones. The modern theatre, with its scenery, etc., does not favour short scenes, and so it became the practice to cut and alter the order of scenes so as to fit them more conveniently to modern conditions. The results did great harm to the plays, and, if they had only known it, to the actors. There is only one way to see the plays, and that is as Shakespeare wrote them; quickly, scene following scene without delay in the right order. This is now almost universally realised. At the Old Vic and at Sadler's Wells, Shakespeare, swiftly and sincerely played, makes

his appeal to audiences made up of people of every kind, from the humblest to the highest, holding the attention of the navvy in the gallery as surely as that of the scholar in the stalls. Once the introduction is properly made, Shakespeare is everybody's writer.

The secret of his universal appeal is his knowledge of human nature. In other languages than English, the character of his poetry is lost. The language is different, but the spirit remains, the amazing knowledge of the human heart which has never been equalled, and which it is hard to imagine will ever be equalled again. On the Continent, Shakespeare is as popular and as highly honoured as in his own country. Centuries hence, when all our story belongs to history, to have produced Shakespeare may well be judged the greatest achievement of the English race.

CHAPTER XII

BEN JONSON

1

SHAKESPEARE had "little Latin and less Greek." For his Roman tragedies, he relied upon North's translation of Plutarch. The most important of all the dramatists who immediately followed him was well able to read both languages in the original. Whether this was an advantage to him those who have read his *Sejanus* may take leave to doubt.

Ben Jonson, a man of violent principles, and glad to fight for them, was born in 1573 at Westminster. His father, a minister, died soon after he was born, and his mother married a bricklayer. When he was twenty, Ben enlisted in the army, and fought with great credit in Flanders. Five years later he was known as a dramatist, and his play *Every Man in his Humour* had been performed in Shakespeare's own theatre. A period of prosperity followed. He not only wrote a number of successful comedies, but was continually employed in writing masques[1] for the court. In 1618 he visited Scotland, and spent a month with the poet Drummond of Hawthornden, to whom we are indebted for a lively account of Jonson's opinions and behaviour. In 1621, he received a Court post and a pension from King James I: but, upon the accession of Charles I, his fortunes fell. His plays were failures, he became ill, and, despite a gift and an increase of pension from the King, he ended his career unhappy and poor. His

[1] Spectacular entertainments, with music, dancing, and elaborate scenes, in which the courtiers themselves took part.

gravestone in Westminster Abbey bears an epitaph of four words only: "O rare Ben Jonson!"

It is impossible to disentangle Jonson's good qualities from his faults, because the one rose from the other. He was by nature a fighter, but this was partly because he held such strong opinions. The strong opinions could be some of them put down to obstinacy and to egotism: but Jonson felt as matters of conscience many things which other men were content to regard as matters of opinion. Having once convinced himself that a belief was right, he saw no alternative but to maintain it with all his might, and trounce its enemies. His conscience gave him little rest, in art or in religion. As a young man he was converted to Roman Catholicism, and remained in that faith for many years, returning to the English Church with a fervency of conviction which he signalised by draining the Communion wine at a draught. He killed an actor in a duel, and was for a while in prison. He conducted fierce quarrels with other playwrights, and his best years were taken up with a quarrel against the architect Inigo Jones, which he conducted with characteristic thoroughness.[1] Drummond's account of him shows him often domineering, over-positive, and unpleasant. "He is a great lover and praiser of himself, a contemner and scorner of others, given rather to lose a friend than a jest, jealous of every word and action of those about him (especially after drink, which is one of the elements[2] in which he liveth), a dissembler of ill parts which reign in him, a bragger of some good that he wanteth, thinketh nothing well but what either he himself or some of his friends and countrymen hath said or done, he is passionately kind and angry, careless either to gain or keep,

[1] "He said to Prince Charles of Inigo Jones, that when he wanted words to express the greatest villain in the world, he would call him Inigo" (Drummond). [2] A sly hit at the theory of the humours.

vindictive, but, if he be well answered, at himself.' Yet a good part of all his quarrelsomeness sprang from the missionary fervour with which he held to his beliefs. He had definite theories of his art, and felt that he was figuratively chastising the devil when he assailed their opponents. Deeply learned in the classics, he regarded them and their traditions as a kind of Bible. The practical and critical duties which they seemed to lay upon him as a writer he took as seriously as the duties the Bible laid upon him as a Christian.

The most important of Jonson's artistic theories was his doctrine of Humours. *Every Man in His Humour*, the first play that was entirely his own work, stated a theory and a programme for the writing of comedy. First of all, Jonson attacked the freedom of the romantic and historical plays, with their improbable plots, their action spread over many places and a number of years, and their attempts (such as the battles in Shakespeare's historical plays), to represent on the stage events too large for it. He held firm to the classical theory of "the Unities": namely, that a play should concern one central action only, that it should all happen in one place, and that it should not cover a longer space of time than a single day. The characters, moreover, were to be represented in terms of the "Humours." At that time the word "humour" had a precise meaning which it has since lost. The various elements in a man's character were regarded as due to the four elements of his body, which were called the Hot, the Cold, the Moist, and the Dry: and his temperament depended on the way in which these were blended. The purpose of Jonson's comedy, therefore, was to classify characters under their appropriate humours. Every man *in* his humour, as Jonson strove to represent it, was a man living in obedience to the harmony of the elements which were naturally upper-

most in his character. Every man *out of* humour was a man in whom, under the pressure of circumstance, one or more elements had exceeded their proper limits and were overwhelming the rest. In a word, Jonson aimed at representing upon the stage "real" life and character, as he understood it. Not only did his doctrine of the humours give rise to the style of comedy known as the comedy of manners, but he was in a real sense the ancestor of Dickens, and of the "character" actors who derive from him. Dickens' trick of labelling a character with a single characteristic, saying, or mannerism is nothing but a statement of that character's dominant "humour": and Charlie Chaplin and Mabel Constanduros, with her family of Bugginses, all subscribe necessarily to the doctrine of humours.

2

For a sample of Jonson's comedy, let us look at the opening of *Volpone: or The Fox*. The dominant note, or humour, is stated in the first lines.

VOLPONE: Good morning to the day; and next, my gold!—
Open the shrine, that I may see my saint.

(MOSCA *withdraws the curtain, and discovers piles of gold, plate, jewels, etc.*)
Hail the world's soul, and mine!

He then proceeds to a stratagem to attract gifts from other avaricious men. It is simple. He lies in bed, pretending to be very ill; and they come one after another, bringing him presents, and hoping to benefit in his will. Mosca, Volpone's servant, helps to deceive each of them. Here comes one victim of the plot.

VOLPONE: 'Tis well: my pillow now, and let him enter.
(*Exit* MOSCA.)
Now, my feigned cough, my phthisic,[1] and my gout,
My apoplexy, palsy, and catarrhs,
Help, with your forced functions, this my posture,
Wherein, this three year, I have milked their hopes.
He comes; I hear him—Uh! (*coughing*) uh! uh! uh!
O——

Re-enter MOSCA, *Introducing* VOLTORE *with a piece of plate.*

MOSCA: You still are what you were, sir. Only you,
Of all the rest, are, he commands, his love,
And you do wisely to preserve it thus,
With early visitation and kind notes
Of your good meaning to him, which, I know,
Cannot but come most grateful. Patron! sir!
Here's Signior Voltore is come——

VOLPONE (*faintly*): What say you?

MOSCA: Sir, Signior Voltore is come this morning
To visit you.

VOLPONE: I thank him.

MOSCA: And hath brought
A piece of antique plate, bought of St. Mark,
With which he here presents you.

VOLPONE: He is welcome.
Pray him to come more often.

MOSCA: Yes.

VOLTORE: What says he?

MOSCA: He thanks you, and desires you see him often.

VOLPONE: Mosca.

MOSCA: My patron!

VOLPONE: Bring him near, where is he?
I long to feel his hand.

MOSCA: The plate is here, sir.

[1] Consumption.

VOLTORE: How fare you, sir?
VOLPONE: I thank you, Signior Voltore;
Where is the plate? Mine eyes are bad.
VOLTORE (*putting it into his hands*): I'm sorry
To see you still thus weak.
MOSCA: That he's not weaker. (*Aside.*)
VOLPONE: You are too munificent.
VOLTORE: No, sir; would to heaven,
I could as well give health to you, as that plate!
VOLPONE: You give, sir, what you can: I thank you.
Your love
Hath taste in this, and shall not be unanswered:
I pray you see me often.
VOLTORE: Yes, I shall, sir.
VOLPONE: Be not far from me.
MOSCA: Do you observe that, sir?
VOLPONE: Hearken unto me still; it will concern you.
MOSCA: You are a happy man, sir; know your own good.
VOLPONE: I cannot now last long—
MOSCA: You are his heir, sir.
VOLTORE: Am I?
VOLPONE: I feel me going; Uh! uh! uh! uh!
I'm sailing to my port. Uh! uh! uh! uh!
And I am glad I am so near my haven.
MOSCA: Alas, kind gentleman! Well, we must all go—
VOLTORE: But, Mosca—
MOSCA: Age will conquer.
VOLTORE: Pray thee, hear me:
Am I inscribed his heir for certain?
MOSCA: Are you!
I do beseech you, sir, you will vouchsafe
To write[1] me in your family. All my hopes
Depend upon your worship; I am lost,
Except the rising sun do shine on me.

[1] Count me one of your family, or household.

VOLTORE: It shall both shine and warm thee, Mosca.
MOSCA: Sir,
I am a man that hath not done your love
All the worst offices?[1] here I wear your keys,
See all your coffers and your caskets lock'd,
Keep the poor inventory of your jewels,
Your plate and monies; am your steward, sir,
Husband your goods here.
VOLTORE: But am I sole heir?
MOSCA: Without a partner, sir; confirmed this morning:
The wax's warm yet, and the ink scarce dry
Upon the parchment.
VOLTORE: Happy, happy, me!
By what good chance, sweet Mosca?
MOSCA: Your desert, sir;
I know no second cause.
VOLTORE: Thy modesty
Is not to know it: well, we shall requite it.

3

The happiest example of Jonson's comedy, however, is that which is least influenced by his theory. In *Bartholomew Fair*, he sets out quite simply to record the bustle and excitement of a London fair.

Win-the-fight, wife of Littlewit, is seized with a longing to eat roast pig at the fair. The local pastor, Brother Zeal-of-the-land Busy, is called in to pronounce whether such a carnal desire may be lawfully gratified by the faithful.

PURECRAFT: O brother Busy! your help here, to edify and raise us up in a scruple:[2] my daughter Win-the-fight is visited with a natural disease of women, called a longing to eat pig.

[1] Understand "you will agree, won't you, that," etc. [2] Difficulty.

LITTLEWIT: Ay, sir, a Bartholomew Pig; and in the Fair.

PURECRAFT: And I would be satisfied from you, religiously-wise, whether a widow of the sanctified assembly, or a widow's daughter, may commit the act without offence to the weaker sisters.

BUSY: Verily, for the disease of longing, it is a disease, a carnal disease, or appetite, incident[1] to women and as it is carnal and incident, it is natural, very natural: now pig, it is a meat, and a meat that is nourishing and may be longed for, and so consequently eaten; it may be eaten; very exceeding well eaten: but in the Fair, and as a Bartholomew pig, it cannot be eaten; for the very calling it a Bartholomew pig, and to eat it so, is a spice of idolatry, and you make the Fair no better than one of the high-places. This, I take it, is the state of the question: a high-place.

LITTLEWIT: Ay, but in state of necessity, place should give place, master Busy. I have a conceit[2] left yet.

PURECRAFT: Good brother Zeal-of-the-land, think to make it as lawful as you can.

LITTLEWIT: Yes, sir, and as soon as you can; for it must be, sir: you see the danger my little wife is in, sir . . .

BUSY: Surely, it may be otherwise, but it is subject to construction, subject, and hath a face of offence with the weak, a great face, a foul face: but that face may have a veil put over it, and be shadowed, as it were; it may be eaten, and in the Fair, I take it, in a booth, the tents of the wicked: the place is not much, not very much, we may be religious in the midst of the profane, so it be eaten with a reformed mouth, with sobriety, and humbleness; not gorged in with gluttony or greediness, there's the fear: for, should she go there, as taking pride in the place, or delight in the unclean dressing, to

[1] Natural. [2] Joke: he has just made a pun.

feed the vanity of the eye, or lust of the palate, it were not well, it were not fit, it were abominable, and not good.

LITTLEWIT: Nay, I knew that afore, and told her on't;[1] but courage, Win, we'll be humble enough, we'll seek out the homeliest booth in the Fair, that's certain; rather than fail, we'll eat it on the ground.

PURECRAFT: Ay, and I'll go with you myself, Win-the-fight, and my brother Zeal-of-the-land shall go with us too, for our better consolation.

MRS. LITTLEWIT: Uh! Uh!

LITTLEWIT: Ay, and Salomon too, Win, the more the merrier. Win, we'll leave Rabbi Busy in a booth (*Aside to* MRS. LITTLEWIT). Salomon! my cloak.

Enter SALOMON *with the cloak*

SALOMON: Here, sir.

BUSY: In the way of comfort to the weak, I will go and eat. I will eat exceedingly, and prophesy; there may be a good use made of it too, now I think on't: by the public eating of swine's flesh, to profess our hate and loathing of Judaism, whereof the brethren stand taxed. I will therefore eat, yea, I will eat exceedingly.

They go to the fair, where the pigs are roasting finely:

URSULA: How do the pigs, Mooncalf?

MOONCALF: Very passionate, mistress, one of 'em has wept out an eye.

Brother Busy arrives, shepherding his little flock.

[1] Of it.

BUSY: So, walk on in the middle way, foreright,[1] turn neither to the right hand nor to the left; let not your eyes be drawn aside with vanity, nor your ear with noises.

QUARLOUS: O, I know him by that start.

LEATHERHEAD: What do you lack, what do you buy, mistress? a fine hobby-horse, to make your son a tilter?[2] a drum, to make him a soldier? a fiddle, to make him a reveller? what is't you lack? little dogs for your daughters? or babies,[3] male or female.

BUSY: Look not toward them, hearken not; the place is Smithfield, or the field of Smiths, the grove of hobby-horses and trinkets, the wares are the wares of devils, and the whole Fair is the shop of Satan: they are hooks and baits, very baits, that are hung out on every side to catch you, and to hold you, as it were, by the gills, and by the nostrils, as the fisher doth: therefore you must not look nor turn toward them . . .

WINWIFE: What flashes come from him!

They come to Ursula's booth.

LITTLEWIT (*gazing at the inscription*): This is fine verily. *Here be the best pigs, and she does roast them as well as ever she did,* the pig's head says.

KNOCKEM: Excellent, excellent, mistress; with fire o' juniper and rosemary branches! . . .

PURECRAFT: Son, were you not warn'd of the vanity of the eye? have you forgot the wholesome admonition so soon?

LITTLEWIT: Good mother, how shall we find a pig, if we do not look about for't! will it run o' the spit, into our mouths, think you, as in Lubberland, and cry, *wee, wee!*

[1] Straight on. [2] Tilting meant fighting in a tournament. [3] Dolls.

BUSY: No, but your mother, religiously-wise, conceiveth it may offer itself by other means to the sense, as by way of steam, which I think it doth here in this place —huh, huh—yes it doth. (*He scents after it like a hound.*) And it were a sin of obstinacy, great obstinacy, high and horrible obstinacy, to decline or resist the good titillation[1] of the famelic sense, which is the smell. Therefore be bold—huh, huh, huh—follow the scent: enter the tents of the unclean, for once, and satisfy your wife's frailty. Let your frail wife be satisfied; your zealous mother, and my suffering self, will also be satisfied.

Having eaten, Win-the-fight experiences a fresh longing.

PURECRAFT: Brother Zeal-of-the-land! what shall we do? my daughter Win-the-fight is fallen into her fit of longing again.

BUSY: For more pig? there is no more, is there?

PURECRAFT: To see some sights in the Fair.

BUSY: Sister, let her fly the impurity of the place swiftly, lest she partake of the pitch thereof. Thou art the seat of the beast, O Smithfield, and I will leave thee! Idolatry peepeth out on every side of thee.

(*Goes forward.*)

KNOCKEM: An excellent right hypocrite! now his belly is full, he falls a railing and kicking, the jade . . . I'll in, and joy[2] Ursula, with telling her how her pig works; two and a half he eat to his share: and he has drunk a pail-full. He eats with his eyes, as well as his teeth.

(*Exit.*)

LEATHERHEAD: What do you lack, gentlemen? what is't you buy? rattles, drums, babies—

[1] Tickling. [2] Delight.

BUSY: Peace, with thy apocryphal[1] wares, thou profane publican: thy bells, thy dragons, and thy Tobie's dogs. Thy hobby-horse is an idol, a very idol, a fierce and rank idol; and thou, the Nebuchadnezzar, the proud Nebuchadnezzar of the Fair, that sett'st it up, for children to fall down to, and worship.

LEATHERHEAD: Cry you mercy, sir; will you buy a fiddle to fill up your noise?

Re-enter LITTLEWIT *and his* WIFE

LITTLEWIT: Look, Win, do, look a God's name, and save your longing. Here be fine sights.

PURECRAFT: Ay, child, so you hate them, as our brother Zeal does, you may look on them.

LEATHERHEAD: Or what do you say to a drum, sir?

BUSY: It is the broken belly of the beast, and thy bellows are his lungs, and these pipes are his throat, those feathers are his tail, and thy rattles the gnashing of his teeth.

TRASH: And what's my gingerbread, I pray you?

BUSY: The provender that pricks him up. Hence with thy basket of property, thy nest of images, and whole legend of ginger-work.

LEATHERHEAD: Sir, if you be not quiet the quicklier, I'll have you clapp'd fairly by the heels, for disturbing the Fair.

BUSY: The sin of the Fair provokes me, I cannot be silent.

PURECRAFT: Good brother Zeal!

LEATHERHEAD: Sir, I'll make you silent, believe it.

LITTLEWIT: I'd give a shilling you could, i'faith, friend. (*Aside to* LEATHERHEAD.)

[1] Out of the Apocrypha: i.e. not sanctioned by Holy Writ.

LEATHERHEAD: Sir, give me your shilling. I'll give you my shop, if I do not; and I'll leave it in pawn with you in the mean time.

LITTLEWIT: A match, i'faith; but do it quickly then.

Exit LEATHERHEAD.

BUSY (*to* MRS. PURECRAFT): Hinder me not, woman. I was moved in spirit, to be here this day, in this Fair; this wicked and foul Fair; and fitter may it be called a Foul than a Fair; to protest against the abuses of it, the foul abuses of it, in regard of the afflicted saints, that are troubled, very much troubled, exceedingly troubled, with the opening of the merchandise of Babylon again, and the peeping of popery upon the stalls here, here, in the high places. See you not Goldylocks there, in her yellow gown and green sleeves? the profane pipes, the tinkling timbrels? a shop of relics!

(*Attempts to seize the toys.*)

LITTLEWIT: Pray you forbear, I am put in trust with them.

BUSY: And this idolatrous grove of images, this flasket of idols, which I will pull down——

(*Overthrows the gingerbread basket.*)

TRASH: O my ware, my ware! God bless it!

BUSY: In my zeal, and glory to be thus exercised.

Re-enter LEATHERHEAD, *with* BRISTLE, HAGGISE, *and other* OFFICERS

LEATHERHEAD: Here he is, pray you lay hold on his zeal; we cannot sell a whistle for him in tune. Stop his noise first.

BUSY: Thou canst not; 'tis a sanctified noise; I will make a loud and most strong noise, till I have daunted the profane enemy. And for this cause——

LEATHERHEAD: Sir, here's no man afraid of you, or your cause. You shall swear it in the stocks, sir.

BUSY: I will thrust myself into the stocks, upon the pikes of the land. (*They seize him.*)

LEATHERHEAD: Carry him away.

PURECRAFT: What do you mean, wicked men?

BUSY: Leave them alone, I fear them not.

Exeunt OFFICERS *with* BUSY, *followed by* DAME PURECRAFT

Busy is haled off, testifying vociferously, to the stocks: where we may leave him.

4

Jonson's two tragedies, *Sejanus* and *Catiline*, are heavy and correct. They keep the classical rules, and lose almost everything else. He had another side to his nature, however, a vein of pure poetry, light, graceful, and strong. Here is his epitaph on Salathiel Pavy, a boy actor and singer at the Royal Chapel:—

Weep with me, all you that read
This little story:
And know, for whom a tear you shed
Death's self is sorry,
'Twas a child that so did thrive
In grace and feature,
As heaven and nature seem'd to strive
Which owned the creature.
Years he numbered scarce thirteen
When fates turned cruel,
Yet three filled zodiacs[1] *had he been*
The stage's jewel;

[1] Full years.

And did act, what now we moan,
Old men so duly,
As, sooth, the Parcæ[1] *thought him one,*
He played so truly.
So, by error to his fate,
They all consented;
But viewing him since, alas, too late!
They have repented;
And have sought, to give new birth,
In baths to steep him;
But being so much too good for earth,
Heaven vows to keep him.

And here, in conclusion, is his famous song, one of the simplest and most happy in the language:—

Drink to me only with thine eyes,
And I will pledge with mine;
Or leave a kiss but in the cup,
And I'll not look for wine.
The thirst, that from the soul doth rise,
Doth ask a drink divine:
But might I of Jove's nectar[2] *sup,*
I would not change for thine.

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

[1] Fates who measured men's lives. [2] The drink of the gods.

Drummond tells us that Ben loved above all things to be called honest; but he must surely be contented with his epitaph, and, looking back on the mass of his work, and his sturdy, independent, quarrelsome, likeable life, we can repeat affectionately "O Rare Ben Jonson."

LIFE IN ENGLISH LITERATURE

Part II

LIFE IN ENGLISH LITERATURE

An Introduction

L. A. G. STRONG AND MONICA REDLICH

PART II

Milton to Dr. Johnson



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CHAPTER XIII

MILTON

1

PRIDE was the mainspring of Milton's character. He was proud to enter the "high calling" of poetry, proud, later, to be a servant of his country: and proud at last to be a great servant of God, singing His praise in *Paradise Lost*, an epic whose aim was no less than "to justify the ways of God to Man."

Milton knew from the first that he was destined to be a poet, and until he was over thirty circumstances combined to give him the training and opportunities he wanted. He had good health, good looks, a good education, and an untroubled life. He was born in 1608, in London, and his father, a lawyer and a Puritan, was also a man of culture and a keen lover of music. Milton went to St. Paul's School, and, in 1625, to Christ's College, Cambridge. After Cambridge, he spent six years of quiet study and preparation for poetry at his father's house at Horton, in Buckinghamshire, and he followed this up by travels in France and Italy. In those days Milton was a popular and polished young man, known as a lover of music, theatres, and society, as well as of the poetry to which he meant to devote his life.

On his return from Italy, however, he felt it his duty to enter politics. "It is fine and noble," he said, "to sing the ways of God; it is finer and nobler to fulfil them." He had already written some of his best-known poems—*L'Allegro* for instance, *Il Penseroso*, *Comus*, and *Lycidas*, an elegy for the death of his friend Edward King: but for the next twenty years he renounced his art completely, writing only prose, and producing numbers

of furious, learned pamphlets on the burning questions of the day, from politics to divorce and the freedom of the Press. For seven years he took pupils, teaching them according to his own high ideals of education. He was married three times, and his last marriage at any rate was happy. During these years of political work Milton made his supreme sacrifice. His eyesight failed: he would not give up his pamphlet-writing: and when in 1660 the Restoration set him free from politics, the poet was blind. *Paradise Lost*, *Paradise Regained*, and *Samson Agonistes* are the work of a blind man. They were dictated, chiefly to Milton's three daughters, who had also to read to their father an enormous number of books in a variety of languages which they did not know. The youngest, Deborah, was the only one who did not heartily dislike the task, and they all had, as may be imagined, none too happy a life. After fourteen years of retirement, Milton died, in 1674, and was buried in St. Giles', Cripplegate.

Paradise Lost is built out of Milton's disadvantages. Even his twenty years as a Commonwealth politician helped him, for they gave him the scenes in which Satan and his fellows argue and debate in Hell. His blindness also helped him. *Paradise Lost* breaks the boundaries of the earth and sky we see, and ranges in the boundless spaces of Heaven and Chaos and Hell. The story of *Paradise Lost*, which is that of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, need not concern us. The main interest of its twelve books is centred in Satan, the fallen angel and the tempter. Satan has Milton's own pride. Outcast though he is, he is almost a noble figure, and our sympathies are with him, as it is clear that Milton's were, throughout his fall from Heaven, his misery in Hell, and his adventures on Earth, when he comes to tempt Adam and Eve to eat the forbidden fruit.

There are several reasons for Satan's hold upon our interest, of which the chief is that he was about the only character with whom Milton had a free hand. The characters of the Messiah and God the Father would naturally overawe a believer. He would be conscious all the time of the awful responsibility of putting words into their mouths which might be unsuitable or irreverent. With the enemy of mankind, however, Milton was at no such disadvantage. Adam, and Eve, "our general Mother," are hardly characters at all. They are generalities, abstractions. They speak ceremonially for mankind. But Satan could be the mouthpiece of doubt, rebellion, and intellectual pride. His meditations are among Milton's finest passages. He is gazing at the sun just before he reaches Eden.

O thou, that, with surpassing glory crowned,
Lookest from thy sole dominion like the god
Of this new world; at whose sight all the stars
Hide their diminished heads; to thee I call,
But with no friendly voice, and add thy name,
O sun! to tell thee how I hate thy beams,
That bring to my remembrance from what state
I fell, how glorious once above thy sphere;
Till pride and worse ambition threw me down,
Warring in heaven against heaven's matchless King . . .

Satan had led a rebellion in Heaven, hoping to overthrow God Himself and seize His throne. Milton describes how God sent out the loyal angels to fight Satan's army:

So spake the Sovereign Voice, and clouds began
To darken all the hill, and smoke to roll
In dusky wreaths, reluctant flames, the sign
Of wrath awaked; nor with less dread the loud

Ethereal trumpet from on high 'gan[1] *blow;*
At which command the powers militant
That stood for heaven, in mighty quadrate joined
Of union irresistible, moved on
In silence their bright legions, to the sound
Of instrumental harmony, that breathed
Heroic ardour to adventurous deeds,
Under their god-like leaders, in the cause
Of God and his Messiah. On they move
Indissolubly firm; nor obvious hill,
Nor straitening vale, nor wood, nor stream, divides
Their perfect ranks; for high above the ground
Their march was, and the passive air upbore
Their nimble tread. As when the total kind[2]
Of birds, in orderly array on wing,
Came summoned over Eden to receive
Their names of thee; so over many a tract
Of heaven they marched, and many a province wide,
Tenfold of this terrene:[3] *at last,*
Far in the horizon to the north appeared
From skirt to skirt a fiery region, stretched
In battailous aspect, and nearer view
Bristle with upright beams innumerable
Of rigid spears, and helmets thronged, and shields
Various, with boastful argument portrayed,
The banded powers of Satan hasting on
With furious expedition; for they weened[4]
That self-same day, by fight, or by surprise,
To win the mount of God, and on his throne
To set the envier of his state, the proud
Aspirer; but their thoughts proved fond and vain
In the mid-way: though strange to us it seemed
At first, that angel should with angel war,
And in fierce hosting meet, who wont to meet

[1] Began to. [2] The whole race. [3] Territory. [4] Thought.

So oft in festivals of joy and love
Unanimous, as sons of one great Sire,
Hymning the Eternal Father. But the shout
Of battle now began, and rushing sound
Of onset ended soon each milder thought.
High in the midst, exalted as a god,
The apostate[1] *in his sun-bright chariot sat,*
Idol of majesty divine, inclosed
With flaming cherubim, and golden shields;
Then lighted from his gorgeous throne, for now
'Twixt host and host but narrow space was left,
A dreadful interval, and front to front
Presented stood in terrible array
Of hideous length: before the cloudy van,
On the rough edge of battle ere it joined,
Satan, with vast and haughty strides advanced,
Came towering, armed in adamant and gold. . . .

There was a great and terrible battle, and Satan himself was attacked by Abdiel, who first told him exactly what he thought of him:

So saying, a noble stroke he lifted high,
Which hung not, but so swift with tempest fell
On the proud crest of Satan, that no sight,
Nor motion of swift thought, less could his shield,
Such ruin intercept: ten paces huge
He back recoiled; the tenth on bended knee
His massy spear upstaid; as if on earth
Winds under ground, or waters, forcing way
Sidelong had pushed a mountain from his seat,
Half-sunk with all his pines. Amazement seized
The rebel thrones, but greater rage, to see
Thus foiled their mightiest; ours joy filled, and shout,
Presage of victory, and fierce desire

[1] **Satan.**

Of battle: whereat Michael bid sound
The archangel trumpet; through the vast of heaven
It sounded, and the faithful armies rung
Hosanna to the Highest: nor stood at gaze
The adverse legions, nor less hideous joined
The horrid shock. Now storming fury rose,
And clamour, such as heard in heaven till now
Was never; arms on armour clashing brayed
Horrible discord, and the madding wheels
Of brazen chariots raged; dire was the noise
Of conflict; over head the dismal hiss
Of fiery darts in flaming volleys flew,
And flying vaulted either host with fire.
So under fiery cope together rushed
Both battles main, with ruinous assault
And inextinguishable rage. All heaven
Resounded; and had earth been then, all earth
Had to her centre shook.

Another of Milton's disadvantages proved greatly to the advantage of *Paradise Lost*; this was his lack of any sense of humour. He simply never thought that there could be anything ludicrous about his descriptions of Adam and Eve and the Immortals; and, because he never thought of it, there scarcely ever is. He can even carry through a description of Satan and his troops inventing gunpowder, hurriedly making guns, and firing them defiantly at the angels. The angels were temporarily upset by this: but not for long:

Rage prompted them at length, and found them arms
Against such hellish mischief fit to oppose.
Forthwith (behold the excellence, the power
Which God hath in his mighty angels placed!)
Their arms away they threw, and to the hills
(For earth hath this variety from heaven,

Of pleasure situate in hill and dale),
Light as the lightning glimpse they ran, they flew,
From their foundations loosening to and fro,
They plucked the seated hills, with all their load,
Rocks, waters, woods, and by the shaggy tops
Uplifting bore them in their hands: amaze,
Be sure, and terror, seized the rebel host,
When coming towards them so dread they saw
The bottom of the mountains upward turned;
Till on those cursèd engines' triple row
They saw them whelmed, and all their confidence
Under the weight of mountains buried deep;
Themselves invaded next, and on their heads
Main promontories flung, which in the air
Came shadowing, and oppressed whole legions armed;
Their armour helped their harm, crushed in and bruised
Into their substance pent, which wrought them pain
Implacable, and many a dolorous groan;
Long struggling underneath, ere they could wind
Out of such prison, though spirits of purest light,
Purest at first, now gross by sinning grown.
The rest, in imitation, to like arms
Betook them, and the neighbouring hills uptore:
So hills amid the air encountered hills,
Hurled to and fro with jaculation[1] *dire;*
That underground they fought in dismal shade;
Infernal noise! war seemed a civil game
To this uproar; horrid confusion heaped
Upon confusion rose.

2

At last the Messiah Himself came to lead His forces to victory:

[1] Throwing.

Attended with ten thousand thousand saints,
He onward came; far off his coming shone;
And twenty thousand (I their number heard)
Chariots of God, half on each hand, were seen.
He on the wings of cherub rode sublime
On the crystalline sky; in sapphire throned,
Illustrous far and wide; but by his own
First seen: them unexpected joy surprised
When the great ensign of the Messiah blazed
Aloft by angels borne, his sign of heaven. . . .
Full soon
Among them he arrived; in his right hand
Grasping ten thousand thunders, which he sent
Before him, such as in their souls infixed
Plagues: they, astonished, all resistance lost,
All courage; down their idol weapons dropt;
O'er shields, and helms, and helmèd heads he rode
Of thrones and mighty seraphim prostrate,
That wished the mountains now might be again
Thrown on them, as a shelter from his ire.
Nor less on either side tempestuous fell
His arrows, from the fourfold-visaged four
Distinct with eyes, and from the living wheels
Distinct alike with multitude of eyes;
One spirit in them ruled; and every eye
Glared lightning, and shot forth pernicious fire
Among the accursed, that withered all their strength,
And of their wonted vigour left them drained,
Exhausted, spiritless, afflicted, fallen.
Yet half his strength he put not forth, but checked
His thunder in mid volley; for he meant
Not to destroy, but root them out of heaven:
The overthrown he raised, and as a herd
Of goats or timorous flock together thronged,
Drove them before him thunderstruck, pursued

With terrors and with furies, to the bounds
And crystal wall of heaven; which, opening wide,
Rolled inward, and a spacious gap disclosed
Into a wasteful deep; the monstrous sight
Struck them with horror backward, but far worse
Urged them behind: headlong themselves they threw
Down from the verge of heaven; eternal wrath
Burnt after them to the bottomless pit.

As Satan had been turned out of Heaven, so, by his machinations, Adam and Eve were turned out of Eden. The end of *Paradise Lost* is like the end of all Milton's poems; after great force and resounding vigour, they end with the absolute quietness of assured strength.

To their fixed station, all in bright array,
The cherubim descended; on the ground
Gliding meteorous, as evening mist
Risen from a river o'er the marish[1] *glides,*
And gathers ground fast at the labourer's heel
Homeward returning. High in front advanced,
The brandished sword of God before them blazed,
Fierce as a comet; which with torrid heat,
And vapour as the Libyan air adust,
Began to parch that temperate clime; whereat
In either hand the hastening angel caught
Our lingering parents, and to the eastern gate
Led them direct, and down the cliff as fast
To the subjected plain; then disappeared.
They, looking back, all the eastern side beheld
Of Paradise, so late their happy seat,
Waved over by that flaming brand; the gate
With dreadful faces thronged, and fiery arms.
Some natural tears they dropt, but wiped them soon;

[1] Marsh.

The world was all before them, where to choose
Their place of rest, and Providence their guide:
They, hand in hand, with wandering steps and slow,
Through Eden took their solitary way.

Milton's last poem, *Samson Agonistes*, moves in this same way from strife to serenity. The story is that of the captive Samson among the Philistines, and it is told in the form of a Greek tragedy.[1] Samson and Satan are Milton's two finest characters; and it is noticeable that they both have something of their creator in them. Both are strong-willed and proud, and both fall by their pride, and Samson in addition is blind.

O dark, dark, dark, amid the blaze of noon,
Irrecoverably dark, total eclipse
Without all hope of day!
O first-created beam, and thou great Word,
"Let there be light, and light was over all;"
Why am I thus bereaved thy prime decree?
The sun to me is dark
And silent as the moon,
When she deserts the night,
Hid in her vacant interlunar cave.
Since light so necessary is to life,
And almost life itself, if it be true
That light is in the soul,
She all in every part; why was this sight
To such a tender ball as the eye confined,
So obvious and so easy to be quenched?
And not, as feeling, through all parts diffused,
That she might look at will through every pore?
Then had I not been thus exiled from light,

[1] That is to say, the events do not take place upon the stage, but are described by a messenger, and a chorus comments upon all that passes. For the rules of the Greek drama, see p. 163.

As in the land of darkness, yet in light,
To live a life half dead, a living death,
And buried. . . .

When Samson has pulled down the pillars of the temple and overwhelmed the Philistines, his friends mourn him amid the tumult; but his father, Manoa, rebukes them:

Come, come; no time for lamentations now,
Nor much more cause; Samson hath quit himself
Like Samson, and heroically hath finished
A life heroic, on his enemies
Fully revenged. . . .

And the final chorus is quiet and resigned, reflecting in its last words the stillness and serenity of Milton's mind when his task was over.

All is best, though we oft doubt
What the unsearchable dispose[1]
Of highest wisdom brings about,
And ever best found in the close.
Oft he seems to hide his face,
But unexpectedly returns,
And to his faithful champion hath in place
Bore witness gloriously; whence Gaza[2] *mourns*
And all that band them to resist
His uncontrollable intent;
His servants he, with new acquist
Of true experience from this great event,
With peace and consolation hath dismist,
And calm of mind, all passion spent.

[1] Disposition, plan. [2] The place where Samson was imprisoned.

CHAPTER XIV

THE CAVALIER POETS

1

CHARLES II's cavaliers, like Elizabeth's courtiers, were poets more often than not. Often, no doubt, they were bad poets; but the best of them have left a small number of poems, mostly love-songs, whose polish and charm have scarcely been equalled.

The chief of the Cavalier poets was not a cavalier at all, but a Devonshire parson. Robert Herrick heartily disliked the village of Dean Prior, of which he was vicar from 1629 till 1648. This was his farewell to *Deanbourn, a rude River in Devon, by which sometimes he lived.*

> Dean-bourn, *farewell; I never look to see*
> Dean, *or thy warty incivility.*
> *Thy rocky bottom, that doth tear thy streams*
> *And makes them frantic, ev'n to all extremes;*
> *To my content, I never should behold,*
> *Were thy streams silver, or thy rocks all gold.*
> *Rocky thou art; and rocky we discover*
> *Thy men; and rocky are thy ways all over.*
> *O men, O manners; Now, and ever known*
> *To be* A Rocky Generation*!*
> *A people currish; churlish as the seas;*
> *And rude (almost) as rudest Savages.*
> *With whom I did, and may re-sojourn when*
> *Rocks turn to Rivers, Rivers turn to Men.*

When he forgot that he was exiled from London and the Court, Herrick took a great delight in his country life. The collection of some three thousand poems which he

named *Hesperides* is full of the flowers and games and pleasures of his village.

I sing of brooks, of blossoms, birds, and bowers;
Of April, May, of June, and July-flowers.
I sing of May-poles, hock-carts, wassails, wakes,
Of bridegrooms, brides, and of their bridal cakes.

Herrick was a curious mixture; a devout parson, when he remembered: a contented bachelor: a writer of delicate and cavalier-like love-lyrics to numbers of imaginary young women with classical names.

Here is the Vicar and lover of flowers:—

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

This is his *Grace for a Child.*

Here a little child I stand,
Heaving up my either hand;
Cold as Paddocks[1] *though they be,*
Here I lift them up to Thee,
For a Benison to fall
On our meat, and on us all. Amen.

It is the courtier who speaks in the *Night Piece to Julia:*—

[1] Toads.

Her eyes the Glow-worm lend thee,
The shooting stars attend thee
And the Elves also,
Whose little eyes glow,
Like the sparks of fire, befriend thee.

No Will-o'-th'-Wisp *mis-light thee;*
Nor Snake, or Slow-worm bite thee:
But on, on thy way
Not making a stay,
Since Ghost there's none to affright thee

Let not the dark thee cumber;
What though the Moon does slumber?
The Stars of the night
Will lend thee their light,
Like Tapers clear without number.

Then Julia *let me woo thee,*
Thus, thus to come unto me:
And when I shall meet
Thy silv'ry feet,
My soul I'll pour into thee.

Herrick turned hundreds of compliments; comparing his ladies' lips to cherries was for him a very mild flight of fancy.

Cherry-Ripe, Ripe, Ripe, I cry,
Full and fair ones; come and buy:
If so be, you ask me where
They do grow? I answer, There
Where my Julia's *lips do smile;*
There's the Land, or Cherry-Isle:
Whose Plantations fully show
All the year, where Cherries grow.

Sometimes the compliment was left-handed:

Sweet, be not proud of those two eyes,
Which Star-like sparkle in their skies:
Nor be you proud, that you can see
All hearts your captives; yours, yet free:
Be you not proud of that rich hair,
Which wantons with the Love-sick air:
When as that Ruby, *which you wear,*
Sunk from the tip of your soft ear,
Will last to be a precious Stone,
When all your world of Beauty's gone.

In this he was in line with the poets who were writing in London while he wrote in Devon. The courtly love-poet was concerned, not to love his lady, but to praise her as gracefully as possible. To do this, he must first suppose her perfect: and Herrick himself, in *No loathsomeness in Love*, described with great good-humour how little the original often came up to the copy.

What I fancy, I approve,
No Dislike there is in love:
Be my Mistress short or tall,
And distorted therewithal:
Be she likewise one of those,
That an Acre *hath of Nose:*
Be her forehead, and her eyes
Full of incongruities:
Be her cheeks so shallow too,
As to show her Tongue *wag through:*
Be her lips ill hung, or set,
And her grinders black as jet;
Hath she thin hair, hath she none,
She's to me a Paragon.

Herrick was proud to call himself one of the "sons of Ben"—one of the professed followers of Ben Jonson, who brought these new, courtly lyrics into fashion. Herrick had met Ben Jonson, when he was a young man, at the famous Mermaid Tavern and elsewhere.

Ah Ben!
Say how, or when
Shall we thy Guests
Meet at those Lyric *feasts,*
Made at the Sun,
The Dog, *the triple* Tun?
Where we such clusters[1] *had,*
As made us nobly wild, not mad;
And yet each Verse of thine
Out-did the meat, out-did the frolic wine.

He had a great admiration for his master.

When I a Verse shall make,
Know I have prayed thee,
For old Religion's *sake,*
Saint Ben *to aid me.*

Make the way smooth for me,
When I, thy Herrick,
Honouring thee, on my knee
Offer my Lyric.

Candles I'll give to thee,
And a new Altar;
And thou Saint Ben, *shalt be*
Writ in my Psalter.

[1] Clusters of grapes, i.e. wine.

Another poet, born in Devonshire, was also numbered among the "Sons of Ben"—so much so, that until recently his master was given the credit for his best epitaph. This was William Browne of Tavistock, born about 1590. Unlike Herrick, Browne spent little of his time in Devon: but it left its mark upon his work. His best known poem, *Britannia's Pastorals*, while for the most part it dealt with the country in the manner of the court, chronicling

> *Thenot, Piers, Wilkin, Duddy, Hobbinhall,*
> *Alexis, Silvan, Teddy of the glen,*
> *Rowley, and Perigot here by the fen . . .*

broke every now and then into descriptions of country scenes, written as only a countryman could write them.

Browne's chief importance in the history of English literature is, perhaps, that he pleased and influenced Keats: but he holds his modest place in the temple of fame by the one superb epitaph, mentioned above, upon the Countess of Pembroke:—

> *Underneath this sable hearse*
> *Lies the subject of all verse,*
> *Sidney's sister, Pembroke's mother.*
> *Death, ere thou hast slain another,*
> *Fair and learned and good as she,*
> *Time shall throw a dart at thee!*

Another and homelier epitaph puns gently on its subject's name:—

> *Here lieth in sooth*
> *Honest John Tooth,*
> *Whom in a day*
> *Death drew away.*

2

No other Cavalier poet has left as many good verses as Herrick. Most of them are remembered for one, or perhaps two, really good poems: and there is no need to remember more. Sir Henry Wotton, for example, the friend of Milton and of Isaac Walton, is known for the poem *On his mistress the Queen of Bohemia:*—

You meaner beauties of the night,
That poorly satisfy our eyes
More by your number than your light;
You common people of the skies;
What are you when the moon shall rise?

You curious chanters of the wood,
That warble forth Dame Nature's lays,
Thinking your passions understood
By your weak accents; what's your praise,
When Philomel her voice shall raise?

You violets that first appear,
By your pure purple mantles known
Like the proud virgins of the year,
As if the spring were all your own;
What are you when the rose is blown?

So, when my mistress shall be seen
In form and beauty of her mind,
By virtue first, then choice, a Queen,
Tell me if she were not designed
The eclipse and glory of her kind?

Two other lines of Wotton's must be quoted: the epitaph *Upon the Death of Sir Albertus Morton's Wife.*

He first deceased; she for a little tried
To live without him, liked it not, and died.

The earlier Cavaliers were content to praise their mistresses and declare themselves their humble servants. With Sir John Suckling, however, there came a change. He was a busy, popular, and fortunate young courtier, with no time for unnecessary sentiment, and his poems were charming, but impudent. He made a joke of love, to the great benefit of poetry, which was becoming more and more serious.

Why so pale and wan, fond lover?
Prithee, why so pale?
Will, when looking well can't move her,
Looking ill prevail?
Prithee, why so pale?

Why so dull and mute, young sinner?
Prithee, why so mute?
Will, when speaking well can't win her,
Saying nothing do't?
Prithee, why so mute?

Quit, quit, for shame, this will not move:
This cannot take her.
If of herself she will not love,
Nothing can make her:
The devil take her!

Even his praise is impudent:—

Out upon it, I have loved
Three whole days together;
And am like to love three more,
If it prove fair weather.

Time shalt moult away his wings,
Ere he shall discover
In the whole wide world again
Such a constant lover.

But the spite on't[1] *is, no praise*
Is due at all to me:
Love with me had made no stays,
Had it any been but she.

Had it any been but she,
And that very face,
There had been at least ere this
A dozen dozen in her place.

Of the many other Cavalier poets, we still remember Carew, Lovelace, Lord Rochester, and the Earl of Dorset. The Earl of Dorset is famous for one poem, a *Song written at Sea*, in 1665, on the night before a naval victory over the Dutch. It is too good not to be quoted in full.

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.

For though the Muses should prove kind,
And fill our empty brain,
Yet if rough Neptune rouse the wind
To wave the azure main,
Our paper, pen, and ink, and we,
Roll up and down our ships at sea.

[1] Of it.

Then if we write not by each post,
Think not we are unkind,
Nor yet conclude our ships are lost
By Dutchman, or by wind,
Our tears we'll send a speedier way;
The tide shall waft them twice a day.

The King with wonder and surprise
Will swear the seas grow bold,
Because the tides will higher rise,
Then e'er they did of old;
But let him know it is our tears
Bring floods of grief to Whitehall-stairs.

Should foggy Opdam[1] *chance to know*
Our sad and dismal story,
The Dutch would scorn so weak a foe,
And quit their fort at Goree,
For what resistance can they find
From men who've left their hearts behind?

Let wind and weather do its worst,
Be you to us but kind,
Let Dutchmen vapour, Spaniards curse,
No sorrow we shall find;
'Tis then no matter how things go,
Or who's our friend, or who's our foe.

To pass our tedious hours away,
We throw a merry main,[2]
Or else at serious ombre[3] *play,*
But why should we in vain

[1] A Dutch admiral. When Pepys the diarist was with Lord Sandwich on the *Swiftsure* in 1660, he had to entertain Admiral Opdam, "who spoke Latin well, but not French nor English . . . he brought my Lord a tierce of wine and a barrel of butter as a present. . . ." [2] Call made before throwing dice. [3] A card game.

Each other's ruin thus pursue?
We were undone when we left you!

But now our fears tempestuous grow
And cast our hopes away,
Whilst you, regardless of our woe,
Sit careless at a play,—
Perhaps permit some happier man
To kiss your hand or flirt your fan.

When any mournful tune you hear,
That dies in every note,
As if it sighed with each man's care,
For being so remote,
Think then how often love we've made
To you, when all those tunes were played.

In justice you can not refuse
To think of our distress,
When we for hopes of honour lose
Our certain happiness;
All those designs are but to prove
Ourselves more worthy of your love.

And now we've told you all our loves,
And likewise all our fears,
In hopes this declaration moves
Some pity from your tears:
Let's hear of no inconstancy,
We have too much of that at sea.

Andrew Marvell combined courtly poetry with two other kinds which were fashionable at the time: religious poetry, and the complicated, brilliant, intellectual poetry which Dr. Johnson labelled "metaphysical" and which

no one wrote better than John Donne. Marvell's pleasantest poem, however, though "metaphysical," is simple and direct in its best verses. It is called *The Garden:*—

What wondrous life is this I lead!
Ripe apples drop about my head;
The luscious clusters of a vine
Upon my mouth do crush their wine;
The nectarine, and curious peach,
Into my hands themselves do reach;
Stumbling on melons, as I pass,
Ensnared with flowers, I fall on grass.

Meanwhile the mind, from pleasure less,
Withdraws into its happiness;—
The mind, that ocean where each kind
Does straight its own resemblance find;
Yet it creates, transcending these,
Far other worlds, and other seas,
Annihilating all that's made
To a green thought in a green shade.

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 does glide:
There, like a bird, it sits and sings,
Then wets and claps its silver wings,
And, till prepared for longer flight,
Waves in its plumes the various light. . . .

How well the skilful gardener drew
Of flowers, and herbs, this dial new,
Where, from above, the milder sun
Does through a fragrant zodiac run,

And, as it works, the industrious bee
Computes its time as well as we!
How could such sweet and wholesome hours
Be reckoned, but with herbs and flowers?

Among the religious poets, George Herbert and Henry Vaughan stand out. Herbert was a country parson, quiet, fervently religious, and utterly unlike the pleasure-loving Herrick. Vaughan was a disciple of Herbert's, a thoughtful poet with flashes of a rare mysticism. One of his simpler poems shows both the eagerness of his religious hopes, and the delicacy and precision of expression in which he resembled his Cavalier contemporaries.

My soul, there is a country
Far beyond the stars,
Where stands a wingèd sentry,
All skilful in the wars.
There above noise and danger
Sweet Peace sits crowned with smiles,
And One born in a manger
Commands the beauteous files.[1]
He is thy gracious Friend,
And O my soul, awake!
Did in pure love descend
To die here for thy sake.
If thou canst get but thither,
There grows the flower of peace,
The rose that cannot wither,
Thy fortress, and thy ease.
Leave then thy foolish ranges,
For none can thee secure,
But One who never changes—
Thy God, thy Life, thy Cure.

[1] Ranks.

CHAPTER XV

PROSE OF THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

1

IF FORTY Sepulchral Urns were dug up in a Norfolk field to-day, learned societies would hurry from town to inspect them. They would write about the Romans, or whoever might be buried in them, in treatises that would be certainly scientific, and almost certainly dull. When in 1667 forty or fifty such urns were found, they were written about by a Norwich doctor, Sir Thomas Browne, a lovable man who was fascinated by any opportunity for philosophical speculation on unusual discoveries. His *Urn Burial* may not be science, but it is certainly literature.

"Now since these dead bones have already outlasted the living ones of *Methuselah*, and in a yard under ground, and thin walls of clay, out-worn all the strong and specious buildings above it; and quietly rested under the drums and tramplings of three conquests; what Prince can promise such diuturnity[1] unto his Reliques,[2] or might not gladly say,

Sic ego componi versus in ossa velim.[3]

Time which antiquates Antiquities, and hath an art to make dust of all things, hath yet spared these *minor* Monuments."

He wonders whose ashes these were: but he does not put the matter as simply as that.

[1] Power of lasting. [2] Remains. [3] Thus I, once I am turned to bone, would wish to be buried.

"What Song the *Syrens*[1] sang, or what name Achilles assumed when he hid himself among women, though puzzling Questions, are not beyond all conjecture. What time the persons of these Ossuaries[2] entered the famous Nations of the Dead, and slept with Princes and Counsellors, might admit a wide solution. But who were the proprietaries of these bones, or what bodies these ashes made up, were a question above Antiquarism. Not to be resolved by man, nor easily perhaps by spirits, except we consult the Provincial Guardians, or tutelary Observators. Had they made as good provision for their names, as they have done for their Reliques, they had not so grossly erred in the art of perpetuation. But to subsist in bones, and be but Pyramidally extant, is a fallacy in duration.[3] Vain ashes, which in the oblivion of names, persons, times, and sexes, have found unto themselves a fruitless continuation, and only arise unto late posterity, as Emblems of mortal vanities; Antidotes against pride, vain-glory, and madding vices . . ."

There is no doubt, he says, that "To be nameless in worthy deeds exceeds an infamous history. . . .

"But the iniquity of oblivion blindly scattereth her poppy, and deals with the memory of men without distinction to merit of perpetuity. . . . Who knows whether the best of men be known? or whether there be not more remarkable persons forgot, than any that stand remembered in the known account of time? Without the favour of the everlasting register, the first man had been as unknown as the last, and *Methuselah's* long life had been his only Chronicle. . . .

[1] Nymphs whose sweet songs lured sailors to destruction. [2] Receptacles for the bones of the dead. [3] The wrong sort of lasting.

"In vain do individuals hope for Immortality, or any patent from oblivion, in preservations below the Moon."

Browne would not have written this ornate, impressive prose if the Authorised Version of the Bible had not appeared when he was a boy. The prose-writers of James I's reign owed to the Authorised Version this new power of philosophical writing: and, one and all, they made the most of it. It blended with the influence of the classical writers, particularly that of Cicero, to introduce new cadences into English prose. Here is the end of Sir Walter Raleigh's History of the World.

"O eloquent, just, and mighty death! whom none could advise, thou hast persuaded; what none could advise, thou hast persuaded: what none hath dared, thou hast done; and whom all the world hath flattered, thou only hast cast out of the world and despised; thou hast drawn together all the far-stretched greatness, all the pride, cruelty, and ambition of man, and covered it all over with these two narrow words, *hic jacet!*"[1]

Milton wrote in this new prose, and many preachers not only wrote it but spoke it from their pulpit. Dr. Donne, famous also as a poet, drew huge crowds to St. Paul's when he preached there, and could move them all, from King James downwards, by his impassioned and vehement eloquence. His last sermon, *Death's Duel*, was preached in 1630, when he himself was dying. He dragged his way to the pulpit, dressed in the shroud in which he was to be buried, and spoke in a failing voice, but with unfailing determination, of Death, "the most inglorious and contemptible vilification, the most deadly and peremptory nullification, of man that

[1] Here (he) lies.

we can consider." Peter Sterry, chaplain to Oliver Cromwell, preached to the House of Commons a sermon of astonishing beauty, of which they can hardly have understood a word.

There was, of course, less ornate prose, more suitable for everyday use. One writer, Richard Burton, hovers between the grand style and a style resembling nothing so much as the index to a book. He has all the material to write the harmonious prose of *Urn Burial*, but lacks the energy to put it together. His life-work, *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, sounds dull enough, from its title: actually, it is one of the best cures for the melancholy it diagnoses. These are his views on the rich and prosperous man. They are from the section on *Poverty and Want, Causes of Melancholy.*

"All honour, offices, applause, grand titles, and turgent[1] epithets are put upon him, all men's eyes are upon him, God bless his good worship, his honour; every man speaks well of him, every man presents him, seeks and sues to him for his love, favour, and protection, to serve him, belong unto him. . . . He may sail as he will himself, and temper his estate, at his pleasure, jovial days, splendour and magnificence, sweet music, dainty fare, the good things, and fat of the land, fine clothes, rich attires, soft beds, down pillows are at his command, all the world labours for him, thousands of artificers are his slaves to drudge for him, run, ride, and post for him: Divines, lawyers, physicians, philosophers, scholars are his, wholly devote to his service. Every man seeks his acquaintance, his kindred, to match with him, though he be an oaf, a ninny, a monster, a goosecap, he is an excellent match for my son, my daughter, my niece, etc. Let him go whither

[1] Swelling, high-sounding.

he will, trumpets sound, bells ring, etc., all happiness attends him, every man is willing to entertain him. . . . What preparation is made for his entertainment! fish and fowl, spices and perfumes, all that sea and land affords. What cooking, masking, mirth to exhilarate his person! What dish will your good worship eat of? . . . What sport will your honour have? Hawking, hunting, fishing, fowling, bulls, bears, cards, dice, cocks, players, tumblers, fiddlers, jesters, etc., they are all at your good worship's command. Fair houses, gardens, orchards, terraces, galleries, cabinets, pleasant walks, delightsome places, they are at hand. . . . Though he be a silly soft fellow, and scarce have commonsense, yet if he be born to fortunes (as I have said), he must have honour and office in his course."

Having diagnosed melancholy, which indeed includes every known disease of mind and body, he proceeds to cure it. Here is *Music a Remedy*:—

"Many and sundry are the means which philosophers and physicians have prescribed to exhilarate a sorrowful heart, to divert those fixed and intent cares and meditations, which in this malady so much offend; but in my judgement none so present, none so powerful, none so apposite as a cup of strong drink, mirth, music, and merry company.

"*Musica est mentis medicina mœstæ*,[1] a roaring-meg against melancholy, to rear and revive the languishing soul, affecting not only the ears, but the very arteries, the vital and animal spirits, it erects the mind, and makes it nimble. Labouring men that sing to their work, can tell as much, and so can soldiers when they go to fight, whom terror of death cannot so much affright as the sound of trumpets, drum, fife, and such like music

[1] Music is the cure for an unhappy mind.

animates. It makes a child quiet, the nurse's song; and many times the sound of a trumpet on a sudden, bells ringing, a carman's whistle, a boy singing some ballad tune early in the street, alters, revives, recreates a restless patient that cannot sleep in the night, etc. In a word, it is so powerful a thing that it ravisheth the soul, the queen of the senses, by sweet pleasure (which is a happy cure), and corporal tunes pacify our incorporeal soul, and carries it beyond itself, helps, elevates, extends it.

"But to leave all declamatory speeches in praise of divine music, I will confine myself to my proper subject: besides that excellent power it hath to expel many other diseases, it is a sovereign remedy against despair and melancholy, and will drive away the devil himself."

This is another cure, with one of his index-like lists of "delectable recreations":—

"But the most pleasant of all outward pastimes is . . . to make a petty progress, a merry journey now and then with some good companions, to visit friends, see cities, castles, towns,

"*To see the pleasant fields, the crystal fountains,*
And take the gentle air amongst the mountains.

"To walk amongst orchards, gardens, bowers, mounts, and arbours, artificial wildernesses, green thickets, arches, groves, lawns, rivulets, fountains, and such like pleasant places . . . brooks, pools, fishponds, between wood and water, in a fair meadow by a river side, to disport in some pleasant plain, park, run up a steep hill sometimes, or sit in a shady seat, must needs be a delectable recreation."

Study is an excellent cure for melancholy. It is not considered suitable for women, however:—

"Now for women, instead of laborious studies, they have curious needle-works, cut-works, spinning, bone-lace, and many petty devices of their own making, to adorn their houses, cushions, carpets, chairs, stools, confections, conserves, distillations, etc., which they show to strangers.

"*Which to her guests she shows, with all her pelf,*[1]
Thus far my maids, but this I did myself.

"This they have to busy themselves about, household offices, etc., neat gardens, full of exotic, versicolour,[2] diversely varied, sweet-smelling flowers, and plants in all kinds, which they are most ambitious to get, curious to preserve and keep, proud to possess, and much many times brag of."

2

With Izaak Walton's *Compleat Angler* we come to a more friendly and simple way of writing. The *Compleat Angler* is one of the most companionable books ever written. Its professed purpose is to teach fishermen how to catch fish; but numbers of people who have never held a fishing-rod read it for its happy conversations and its vivid appreciation of the English countryside.

"No life, my honest Scholar," says Walton to the friend whom he is teaching, "no life so happy and pleasant, as the life of a well-governed Angler; for when the Lawyer is swallowed up with business, and the Statesman is preventing or contriving plots, then we sit on cowslip-banks, hear the birds sing, and possess ourselves in as much quietness as these silent silver streams,

[1] Wealth. [2] Many-coloured.

which we now see glide so quietly by us. Indeed, my good Scholar, we may say of Angling, as Dr. Boteler said of Strawberries; 'Doubtless God could have made a better berry, but doubtless God never did': and so, if I might be judge, 'God never did make a more calm, quiet, innocent recreation, than Angling.' " This is the sort of day they used to spend. Walton (called *Piscator*, i.e. Fisherman) is again talking to his Scholar, who because his recreation used to be Hunting, is called *Venator*.

"And now you shall see me try my skill to catch a Trout, and at my next walking, either this evening, or to-morrow morning, I will give you direction how you yourself shall fish for him.

"VENATOR: Trust me, Master, I see now it is a harder matter to catch a Trout than a Chub; for I have put on patience, and followed you these two hours, and not seen a fish stir, neither at your minnow nor your worm.

"PISCATOR: Well, Scholar, you must endure worse luck sometime or you will never make a good Angler. But what say you now? there is a Trout now, and a good one too, if I can but hold him, and two or three turns more will tire him: Now you see he lies still, and the sleight is to land him: reach me that landing-net: so, Sir, now he is mine own, what say you now? is not this worth all my labour and my patience?

"VENATOR: On my word, Master, this is a gallant Trout, what shall we do with him?

"PISCATOR: Marry, e'en eat him to supper; we'll go to my Hostess, from whence we came; she told me, as I was going out of door, that my brother Peter, a good Angler and a cheerful companion, had sent word he would lodge there to-night, and bring a friend with him. My Hostess has two beds, and I know, you and I may have the best: we'll rejoice with my brother Peter and his friend, tell tales, or sing ballads, or make a catch,

or find some harmless sport to content us, and pass away a little time without offence to God or man.

"VENATOR: A match, good Master, let's go to that house, for the linen looks white, and smells of lavender and I long to lie in a pair of sheets that smell so: let's be going, good Master, for I am hungry again with fishing.

"PISCATOR: Nay, stay a little, good Scholar, I caught my last Trout with a worm, now I will put on a Minnow and try a quarter of an hour about yonder trees for another, and so walk towards our lodging. Look you, Scholar, thereabout we shall have a bite presently, or not at all: have with you Sir! o' my word I have hold of him. Oh, it is a great logger-headed Chub; come, hang him upon that willow twig, and let's be going. But turn out of the way a little, good Scholar, towards yonder high honeysuckle hedge; there we'll sit and sing whilst this shower falls so gently upon the teeming earth, and gives yet a sweeter smell to the lovely flowers that adorn these verdant meadows.

"Look, under that broad beech-tree, I sat down, when I was last this way a-fishing, and the birds in the adjoining grove seemed to have a friendly contention with an echo, whose dead voice seemed to live in a hollow tree, near to the brow of that primrose-hill; there I sat viewing the silver streams glide silently towards their centre, the tempestuous sea; yet sometimes opposed by rugged roots, and pebble-stones, which broke their waves, and turned them into foam: and sometimes I beguiled time by viewing the harmless lambs, some leaping securely in the cool shade, whilst others sported themselves in the cheerful sun; and saw others craving comfort from the swollen udders of their bleating dams. As I thus sat, these and other sights had so fully possessed my soul with content, that I thought as the Poet has happily expressed it:

"I was for that time lifted above earth;
And possess'd joys not promised in my birth.

"As I left this place, and entered into the next field, a second pleasure entertained me; 'twas a handsome Milkmaid that had not yet attained so much age and wisdom as to load her mind with any fears of many things that will never be, as too many men too often do; but she cast away all care, and sung like a nightingale: her voice was good, and the ditty fitted for it; 'twas that smooth song, which was made by Kit Marlowe,[1] now at least fifty years ago: and the milkmaid's mother sung an answer to it, which was made by Sir Walter Raleigh in his younger days.

"They were old-fashioned poetry, but choicely good, I think much better than the strong lines that are now in fashion in this critical age. Look yonder! on my word, yonder they both be a-milking again. I will give her the Chub, and persuade them to sing those two songs to us."

The Milkmaid sings so well that *Venator* says, "I'll bestow Sir Thomas Overbury's Milkmaid's wish upon her, 'That she may die in the Spring, and being dead, may have good store of flowers thick round about her winding sheet.' " Overbury's *Milkmaid* was one of those brief portraits of imaginary people which were in fashion at that time, and which were known as Characters. Here is the Character of *The Slothful*, by Joseph Hall, who was a Bishop:—

"Summer is out of his favour for nothing but long days, that make no haste to their even. He loves still to have the sun witness of his rising; and lies long, more for loathness to dress him than will to sleep:

[1] Christopher Marlowe. See Chapter VII.

and after some stretching and yawning calls for dinner unwashed; which having digested with a sleep in his chair, he walks forth to the bench in the market-place, and looks for companions: whomsoever he meets, he stays with idle questions and lingering discourse: how the days are lengthened; how kindly the weather is; how false the clock; how forward the spring; and ends ever with, 'What shall we do?' . . . He had rather freeze than fetch wood; and chooses rather to steal than work; to beg, than take pains to steal; and in many things, to want, than beg. He is so loath to leave his neighbour's fire, that he is fain to walk home in the dark; and if he be not looked to, wears out the night in the chimney corner; or if not that, lies down in his clothes to save two labours. He eats and prays himself asleep; and dreams of no other torment but work."

3

The Pilgrim's Progress, which appeared in 1675, contains characters who are far more alive than any drawn by the professed 'Character-Writers,' although they too have allegorical names such as Hopeful, Obstinate, Giant Despair, and Mr. Valiant-for-Truth. John Bunyan, its author, was a Bedfordshire tinker. He was imprisoned for preaching in defiance of the law, and *The Pilgrim's Progress* was actually written in Bedford Gaol. It is an allegory of man's progress through this world to the Celestial City, and it draws its characters, with amazing vividness, from the men and women Bunyan must himself have met at fairs and in market-places and on his preaching journeys.

Christian, who had in him much of Bunyan himself, set out from his native town, the City of Destruction, to find Immortal Life.

"So I saw in my dream, that the Man began to run; Now he had not run far from his own door, but his Wife and Children perceiving it, began to cry after him to return: but the Man put his fingers in his Ears, and ran on crying, Life, Life, Eternal Life: so he looked not behind him, but fled towards the middle of the Plain.

"The Neighbours also came out to see him run, and as he ran, some mocked, others threatened; and some cried after him to return: Now among those that did so, there were two that were resolved to fetch him back by force: The name of the one was *Obstinate*, and the name of the other *Pliable*. Now by this time the Man was got a good distance from them; But however they were resolved to pursue him; which they did, and in little time they over-took him. Then said the Man, Neighbours, Wherefore are you come? They said, To persuade you to go back with us; but he said, That can by no means be: You dwell, said he, in the City of *Destruction* (the place also where I was born,) I see it to be so; and dying there, sooner or later, you will sink lower than the Grave, into a place that burns with Fire and Brimstone; Be content good Neighbours, and go along with me.

"What! said Obstinate, and leave our friends, and our comforts behind us!

"Yes, said Christian, (for that was his name) because that all is not worthy to be compared with a little of that that I am seeking to enjoy, and if you will go along with me, you shall fare as I myself; for there where I go, is enough, and to spare; Come away, and prove my words.

"OBSTINATE: What are the things you seek, since you leave all the World to find them?

"CHRISTIAN: I seek an Inheritance, incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away: and it is laid up in Heaven and fast there, to be bestowed at the time appointed, on them that diligently seek it.

"OBSTINATE: Tush, said Obstinate, away with your Book; will you go back with us, or not?"

Christian was not to be persuaded, and went on his way through the Slough of Despond, up Hill Difficulty, and through many terrible dangers. One of the worst was his meeting with Apollyon in the Valley of Humiliation.

"But now in this Valley of Humiliation poor Christian was hard put to it, for he had gone but a little way before he espied a foul Fiend coming over the field to meet him; his name is *Apollyon*. Then did Christian begin to be afraid, and to cast in his mind whether to go back, or to stand his ground. But he considered again, that he had no Armour for his back, and therefore thought that to turn the back to him, might give him greater advantage with ease to pierce him with his Darts; therefore he resolved to venture, and stand his ground. For thought he, had I no more in mine eye, than the saving of my life, 'twould be the best way to stand.

"So he went on, and *Apollyon* met him; now the Monster was hideous to behold, he was clothed with scales like a Fish (and they are his pride), he had Wings like a Dragon, and out of his belly came Fire and Smoke, and his mouth was as the mouth of a Lion. When he was coming up to *Christian*, he beheld him with a disdainful countenance, and thus began to question with him.

"APOLLYON: Whence come you and whither are you bound?

"CHRISTIAN: I come from the City of Destruction, which is the place of all evil, and am going to the City of Zion.

"APOLLYON: By this I perceive thou art one of my Subjects, for all that Country is mine; and I am the

Prince and God of it. How is it then that thou hast ran away from thy King? Were it not that I hope thou mayest do me more service, I would strike thee now at one blow to the ground."

Apollyon tried to browbeat Christian, but he was resolute in his determination to serve only God, the King of Princes.

"Then Apollyon broke out into a grievous rage, saying I am an Enemy to this Prince: I hate his Person, his Laws, and People: I am come out on purpose to withstand thee.

"CHRISTIAN: Apollyon, beware what you do, for I am in the King's High-way, the way of Holiness, therefore take heed to your self.

"Then Apollyon strodled quite over the whole breadth of the way, and said, I am void of fear in this matter, prepare thyself to die, for I swear thou shalt go no further, here I will spill thy soul; and with that, he threw a flaming Dart at his breast, but Christian had a Shield in his hand, with which he caught it, and so prevented the danger of that. Then did Christian draw, for he saw 'twas time to bestir him; and Apollyon as fast made at him, throwing Darts as thick as Hail; by the which, notwithstanding all that Christian could do to avoid it, Apollyon wounded him in his head, his hand and foot; this made Christian give a little back: Apollyon therefore followed his work amain, and Christian again took courage, and resisted as manfully as he could. This sore Combat lasted for above half a day, even till Christian was almost quite spent. For you must know that Christian, by reason of his wounds, must needs grow weaker and weaker.

"Then Apollyon espying his opportunity, began to

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

One of Christian's companions, Faithful, was put to death in Vanity Fair. Hopeful, however, joined him later on, and was with him until the very end, when, crossing the River, they came at last to the Heavenly City, and "all the Bells in the City Rang for joy." It was Hopeful who had fallen with Christian into the hands of Giant Despair.

"Now there was not far from the place where they lay, a Castle called *Doubting Castle*, the owner whereof was Giant Despair, and it was in his grounds they now were sleeping: wherefore he getting up in the morning early, and walking up and down in his Fields caught Christian and Hopeful asleep in his grounds. Then with a grim and surly voice he bid them awake, and asked them whence they were, and what they did in his grounds? They told him, they were Pilgrims, and that they had lost their way. Then said the Giant, You have this night trespassed

on me, by trampling in, and lying on my grounds, and therefore you must go along with me. So they were forced to go, because he was stronger than they."

It is a far cry from the simplicity and directness of Bunyan to the intricate rhythms of *Urn Burial*: yet both owe their inspiration to the English Bible.

CHAPTER XVI

DRYDEN AND BUTLER

1

DRYDEN was a great all-rounder. He was poet, dramatist, satirist, political pamphleteer, translator, and critic. He was the leading man of letters of his age, and the age knew it, and looked up to him. He first won a name for himself in 1667, when he was thirty-six, with *Annus Mirabilis*, a long poem describing the events of the "wonderful year" 1666: the Fire, the Plague, and the war with the Dutch. This pleased and flattered his countrymen, and from then until his death in 1700, Dryden was the acknowledged head of English letters. Milton was his only possible rival, and Milton after the Restoration lived in complete seclusion. Seclusion would not have suited Dryden, for he throve by contact with his fellow-writers. Coffee-houses were the popular meeting-places of the day, having superseded the Elizabethan taverns; and Dryden was the king of Will's, the most famous Coffee-house, spending long hours there talking things over with his contemporaries and with the young men who respected him. Pope, who was a boy when Dryden was an old man, insisted on being taken to see him at Will's when he was only eleven years old, and remembered the occasion all his life.

The habit of talking things over was typical of the new age. The period of literary history which may be said to have ended with the execution of Charles I was a period of tremendous energy and fertility. The dramatists and other writers of the reigns of Elizabeth, James I, and Charles I had no lack of ideas, and a vast choice of new subjects. Inspired by the stimulus of the new learn-

ing, and urged on in most cases by the dire need to gain a livelihood, they worked copiously and fast. All was fish that came to their net. As a whole, they were too busy doing things to spend much time wondering how things ought to be done.

The age which succeeded them was different. To use a garden metaphor, an era of rich and rapid growth was succeeded by an era of selection, cultivation, and careful planting. The creative energy of the Renaissance was spent. Men turned to criticism. They had now leisure to think how things ought to be done, and they set about searching for principles and rules to govern their writing and that of the future.

Dryden, as Dr. Johnson says, was the father of English criticism. He was the first man to express the new, common-sense views on literary matters which came into fashion at the Restoration; and because he not only said what everyone else thought, but had original and sensible ideas of his own, he was heard with respect. We have no record of the coffee-house conversations, but there is no doubt that the new principles were there talked over and tried out.

The principles, and the habit of talking about them, came from France. Charles II had spent much of his exile at the French court, and his return to England brought French fashions in literature as in everything else. There were great writers in France at that time, and England was as much influenced by their views as, at the Renaissance, she had been by those of the Italians. When Dryden and his friends upheld good taste against luxuriance, reason against over-much enthusiasm, and common sense above everything, they were speaking as France had taught them.

Dryden's poetry shows how thoroughly he had mastered the new ideals. It is, in a way quite new to

English Literature, the poetry of civilisation. It is clear, forcible, and witty, and carefully avoids any real enthusiasm. It is written for polite society. Even its metre, the heroic couplet, soon became the metre of polite society. These rhymed couplets, with five beats in each line, were generally voted the only tolerable way for a gentleman to express himself in verse; and it is typical of an age which believed in hard-and-fast rules that they should believe one metre suitable for all kinds of poetry, and for all poets.

Fortunately, the heroic couplet suited Dryden. He was at his best as a satirist, and the heroic couplet, with its force, its precision, and the sting of its rhymes, is an admirable weapon for satire. Here, for an illustration, is Dryden's portrait of the Duke of Buckingham, from his satire *Absalom and Achitophel*:—

A man so various that he seemed to be
Not one, but all mankind's epitome:[1]
Stiff in opinions, always in the wrong,
Was everything by starts and nothing long;
But in the course of one revolving moon
Was chemist, fiddler, statesman, and buffoon;
Then all for women, painting, rhyming, drinking,
Besides ten thousand freaks that died in thinking.[2]
Blest madman, who could every hour employ
With something new to wish or to enjoy!
Railing and praising were his usual themes,
And both, to show his judgement, in extremes:
So over violent or over civil
That every man with him was God or Devil.
In squandering wealth was his peculiar art;
Nothing went unrewarded but desert.[3]
Beggared by fools whom still he found too late,
He had his jest, and they had his estate.

[1] Representative: i.e. he seemed to contain all the characteristics of mankind. [2] Died as soon as he thought of them. [3] Merit.

He laughed himself from Court; then sought relief
By forming parties, but could ne'er be chief:
For in spite of him, the weight of business fell
On Absalom and wise Achitophel;
Thus wicked but in will, of means bereft,
He left not faction, but of that was left.

Absalom in this poem stood for the Duke of Monmouth who led a rising against Charles II; and Achitophel was Lord Shaftesbury, his evil counsellor. Satire such as Dryden's was a valuable political weapon. With the publication of this poem in 1681, Dryden became more then a mere man of letters. He became a political power, helpful to his party and extremely dangerous to his enemies. Political satire, as he understood it, hit clean and hard. This is his portrait of "Achitophel":—

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

2

These "portraits" were perhaps Dryden's finest achievement. They were the old "Characters" put into verse, and made both personal and pointed. Dryden was justly proud of them. "How easy it is," he said once, "to call rogue and villain, and that wittily! But how hard to make a man appear a fool, a blockhead, or a knave, without using any of those opprobrious terms. . . . This is the mystery of that noble trade, which yet no master can teach to his apprentice." He was referring to his own "Zimri," quoted above: and we cannot deny that he was justified.

Dryden was, as we should expect, well supplied with theories about satire. One was that it should not be spiteful. He looked upon it as a means to correct men's errors. It should be inspired, not by personal rage, but by impersonal contempt. He generally lived up to this theory, but once or twice he was human enough to vent his own personal spite. He had a grudge against a poet named Shadwell. This is how poor Shadwell features in *Absalom and Achitophel*:—

> *Now stop your noses, readers, all and some,*
> *For here's a tun of midnight work to come,*
> *Og from a treason-tavern rolling home*
> *Round as a globe, and liquored every chink,*
> *Goodly and great he sails behind his link.*[1]
> *With all this bulk there's nothing lost in Og,*
> *For every inch that is not fool is rogue. . . .*

There is much more in the same strain. Dryden never had a good word for Shadwell, who, fat and fond of drink as he was, yet had his merits. It must have been a bitter blow to Dryden when his fat *bête noire* succeeded him, in

[1] Boy with a torch.

1689, as poet laureate. Not content with the above portrait, Dryden later gave Shadwell a whole satire to himself. It is called *Mac Flecknoe; or A Satire on the True Blue Protestant Poet, T. S.*, and it describes, with lively malice, how a dull poet named Flecknoe sought for a poet bad enough to succeed him on the throne of Dulness:

All human things are subject to decay
And when Fate summons, monarchs must obey.
This Flecknoe found, who, like Augustus, young
Was called to empire and had governed long,
In prose and verse was owned without dispute
Through all the realms of Nonsense absolute.
This aged prince, now flourishing in peace
And blest with issue of a large increase,
Worn out with business, did at length debate
To settle the succession of the state;
And pondering which of all his sons was fit
To reign and wage immortal war with wit,
Cried, " 'Tis resolved, for Nature pleads that he
"Should only rule who most resembles me.
"Shadwell alone my perfect image bears,
"Mature in dulness from his tender years;
"Shadwell alone of all my sons is he
"Who stands confirmed in full stupidity.
"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.
"Besides, his goodly fabric fills the eye
"And seems designed for thoughtless majesty,
"Thoughtless as monarch oaks that shade the plain
"And, spread in solemn state, supinely reign. . . ."

Dryden goes on with this for some two hundred lines, hugely enjoying himself. At last Flecknoe stops speaking, and leaves his kingdom: but, unlike most departing souls, he goes down instead of up.

Sinking he left his drugget robe behind,
Borne upwards by a subterranean wind.
The mantle fell to the young prophet's part
With double portion of his father's art.

This malicious outburst is exceptional in Dryden. When we come to read Pope's satires, on the other hand, we shall find them full of witty and cruel personal invective.

Dryden had a genius for seizing opportunities. *Absalom and Achitophel* was not the only one of his poems to come out at precisely the right minute. Although he wrote to order, for an occasion, he more than rose to his occasions. His plays, which need not concern us, were written to suit the Court. People wanted something extravagant and fantastic, an escape from the eternal "common sense" of the period. In Dryden's "heroic" tragedies, in which the impossible is piled on the impossible and one wild heroism on another, they certainly got it.

Dryden's career is too long and too intricate to be described in detail. He changed his politics, and he changed his religion, leaving poems to record his faith at each different stage. He wrote both heroic tragedy and the new Comedy of Manners, and he has left numbers of prologues and epilogues to the plays of his day, which, topical as they were, retain something of their sparkle to-day. He was poet laureate. He wrote in a new prose, clear, simple, and straightforward, which was shortly afterwards to revolutionise English prose style. If we are to remember him by any single picture, it will be as the elderly king of Will's coffee-house, as Pope saw

him, sitting in undisputed sovereignty, laying down the laws which have had such an influence upon English thought and writing.

3

Dryden, involved in political and religious controversy though he was, was primarily the satirist of the Tory party. A contemporary of his, Samuel Butler, was a satirist with a broader target. He was the son of a country farmer, and brought to his writing all the blunt directness and vigour of the countryman, allied to an extraordinary degree of skill in the contriving of the eight-syllable, hard-hitting couplets in which he wrote. His work was almost all inspired by dislike; not, as Dryden's was, by contempt or party politics. His main dislike, which was of Puritans and Puritanism, should have won him favour at the court of Charles II, but it actually brought him no profit there. He was of a bitter temper, and had no great talent for making friends. The last years of his life were spent in London, where he lived little known and in poverty. He died in 1680.

Butler's chief work is *Hudibras*, a long, mock-heroic attack upon the Roundheads. His hero sets out, like Don Quixote, to do battle with an unbelieving world. Every detail of his attributes, person, and accoutrement is described with venomous care.

For his Religion, it was fit
To match his learning and his wit;
'Twas Presbyterian true blue;
For he was of that stubborn crew
Of errant saints, whom all men grant
To be the true Church Militant;
Such as do build their faith upon
The holy text of pike and gun;

Decide all controversies by
Infallible artillery;
And prove their doctrine orthodox
By apostolic blows, and knocks;
Call fire, and sword, and desolation,
A godly thorough Reformation,
Which always must be carried on,
And still be doing, never done;
As if Religion were intended
For nothing else but to be mended.
A sect, whose chief devotion lies
In odd perverse antipathies;
In falling out with that or this,
And finding somewhat still amiss;
More peevish, cross, and splenetic,
Than dog distract, or monkey sick.
That with more care keep holy-day
The wrong, than others the right way;
Compound for sins they are inclined to,
By damning those they have no mind to;
Still so perverse and opposite,
As if they worshipped God for spite.

Hudibras' physical habits were strange:—

His breeches was of rugged woollen,
And had been at the siege of Bullen;[1]
To old King Harry[2] *so well known,*
Some writers held they were his own.
Though they were lined with many a piece
Of ammunition bread and cheese,
And fat black-puddings, proper food
For warriors that delight in blood:

[1] Boulogne. [2] Henry VIII.

For, as we said, he always chose
To carry victual in his hose,
That often tempted rats and mice
The ammunition to surprise. . . .

In th' holsters, at his saddle-bow,
Two aged pistols he did stow,
Among the surplus of such meat
As in his hose he could not get.
These would inveigle rats with th' scent,
To forage when the cocks were bent;
And sometimes catch 'em with a snap,
As cleverly as th' ablest trap.
They were upon hard duty still,
And ev'ry night stood sentinel,
To guard the magazine i' th' hose,
From two-legged and from four-legged foes. .
Thus clad and fortified, Sir Knight
From peaceful home, set forth to fight.
But first with nimble active force,
He got on th' outside of his horse:
For having but one stirrup tied
T' his saddle on the further side,
It was so short, h' had much ado
To reach it with his desperate toe.
But after many strains and heaves,
He got up to the saddle-eaves,
From whence he vaulted into th' seat,
With so much vigour, strength, and heat,
That he had almost tumbled over
With his own weight; but did recover,
By laying hold on tail and mane,
Which oft he used instead of rein.

Butler seems to have disliked Puritans even more fiercely than did Ben Jonson, though he uses a different method of expressing his dislike. Butler's portrait of Hudibras (who had an original in real life) is a "Character," in the technical sense. He was a good writer of prose Characters, and succeeded even better in verse. *Hudibras* is more knock-about satire than *Absalom and Achitophel*; but the character of Hudibras, like Dryden's Achitophel and Zimri, has out-lived the original with whom it dealt so unkindly, and taken its place in the Rogues' Gallery of permanent satiric portraits.

CHAPTER XVII

TWO DIARISTS

1

TWO OF the most interesting diaries we know were kept, in the busiest years of the seventeenth century, by two men who lived in London. John Evelyn and Samuel Pepys[1] knew each other. They met at court, and Evelyn records that there dined with him one day "Mr. Surveyor Dr. Christopher Wren, and Mr. Pepys, Clerk of the Acts,[2] two extraordinary ingenious and knowing persons." Unknown to each other, Evelyn and Pepys both kept diaries; and in these diaries the great events, the gossip, and the public and private affairs of their day are recorded as they appeared to two totally different men. Evelyn wrote soberly and carefully, intending his diary for publication. Pepys wrote entirely for his own pleasure; he did not have to be careful, for he did not mean anyone else to read what he wrote. In fact, he was at some pains to make sure that anyone into whose hands it might by accident fall should not be able to read the more intimate entries, for he used foreign words and a cipher. A new waistcoat was as interesting to him as the doings of King Charles II, and he put down, in the most engaging confusion, details of a tedious, unreasonable sermon or a venison pasty, of the plague and of his wife's new dress—which he admired, but did not like paying for—of the new shelves in his study, or a battle with the Dutch. Evelyn's diary covers sixty-six years, while Pepys only wrote for nine: but there is no question which of their diaries is, and will always be, the more popular. Like all

[1] Pronounced "Peeps." [2] Of the Navy Office.

diarists who wrote for an audience, Evelyn was self-conscious. We feel that he had to stop and think what to leave out, even though what he did put in was well-told and interesting. Pepys, with no audience to consider, was absolutely un-selfconscious. He was always honest, whether "mightily pleased" or "nearly fuddled" and repenting with a bad headache; and his Diary, which has become a classic in spite of him, is the record of a very lovable man.

When Evelyn and Pepys record the same thing, they give us pictures which reveal by their differences the different temperaments of the writers. Here is Evelyn's account of the coronation of Charles II in 1661.

"The next day, being St. George's, he went by water to Westminster Abbey. When his Majesty was entered, the Dean and Prebendaries brought all the regalia, and delivered them to several Noblemen to bear before the King, who met them at the west door of the Church, singing an anthem, to the Choir. Then came the Peers in their robes, and coronets in their hands, till his Majesty was placed in a throne elevated before the altar. Then the Bishop of London (the Archbishop of Canterbury being sick) went to every side of the throne to present the King to the People, asking if they would have him for their King and do him homage; at this they shouted four times *God save King Charles the Second!* Then an anthem was sung. Then his majesty attended by three Bishops went up to the altar, and he offered a pall and a pound of gold. Afterwards he sat down in another chair during the sermon, which was preached by Dr. Morley, then Bishop of Worcester. After sermon the King took his oath before the altar to maintain the Religion, Magna Charta, and Laws of the Land. The hymn Ven. S. Sp.[1] followed and

[1] *Veni sanctus spiritus:* Come, Holy Ghost.

then the Litany by two Bishops. Then the Archbishop of Canterbury, present but much indisposed and weak, said *Lift up your Hearts*; at which the King rose up and put off his robes and upper garments, and was in a waistcoat so opened in divers places that the Archbishop might commodiously anoint him, first in the palms of his hands, when a anthem was sung and a prayer read; then his breast and twixt the shoulders, bending of both arms, and lastly on the crown of the head, with apposite hymns and prayers at each anointing; this done, the Dean closed and buttoned up the waistcoat. Then was a coif put on, and the cobbium, syndon, or dalmatic, and over this a supertunic of cloth of gold, with buskins and sandals of the same, spurs, and the sword, a prayer being first said over it by the Archbishop on the altar before 'twas girt on by the Lord Chamberlain. Then the armill, mantle, &c. Then the Archbishop placed the crown imperial on the altar, prayed over it, and set it on his Majesty's head, at which all the Peers put on their coronets. Anthems and rare music, with lutes, viols, trumpets, organs, and voices, were then heard, and the Archbishop put a ring on his Majesty's finger. The King next offered his sword on the altar, which being redeemed was drawn and borne before him. Then the Archbishop delivered him the sceptre with the globe. Then the King kneeling, the Archbishop pronounced the blessing. The King then ascending again his Royal Throne, whilst *Te Deum* was singing all the Peers did their homage, by every one touching his crown. The Archbishop and rest of the Bishops first kissing the King; who received the holy sacrament, and so disrobed, yet with the crown imperial on his head, and accompanied with all the Nobility in the former order, he went on foot upon blue cloth, which was spread and reached from the West door of the Abbey to Westminster

stairs, when he took water in a triumphal barge to Whitehall, where was extraordinary feasting."

Evelyn might or might not have been at that ceremony. His details are full, but quite impersonal. Pepys leave us in no doubt that he was there.

"About four I rose and got to the Abbey, where I followed Sir J. Denham, the surveyor, with some company he was leading in. And with much ado, by the favour of Mr. Cooper, his man, did get up into a great scaffold across the North end of the Abbey, where with a great deal of patience I sat from past four till eleven before the King come in. And a great pleasure it was to see the Abbey raised in the middle, all covered with red, and a throne (that is, a chair) and footstool on the top of it; and all the officers of all kinds, so much as the very fiddlers, in red vests. At last comes in the Dean and Prebendaries of Westminster, with the Bishops (many of them in cloth of gold copes), and after them the Nobility, all in their Parliament robes, which was a most magnificent sight. Then the Duke, and the King with a sceptre (carried by my Lord Sandwich) and sword and wand before him, and the crown too. The King in his robes, bareheaded, which was very fine. And after all had placed themselves, there was a sermon and the service; and then in the Choir at the high altar, the King passed through all the ceremonies of the Coronation, which to my great grief I and most in the Abbey could not see. The crown being put upon his head, a great shout begun, and he comes forth to the throne, and there passed through more ceremonies; as taking the oath, and having things read to him by the Bishop; and his lords (who put on their caps as soon as the King put on his crown) and bishops come, and kneeled before him. And

three times the King at Arms went to the three open places on the scaffold, and proclaimed, that if any one could show any reason why Charles Stuart should not be King of England, that now he should come and speak. And a General Pardon also was read by the Lord Chancellor, and medals flung down by my Lord Cornwallis, of silver, but I could not come by any. But so great a noise that I could make but little of the music; and indeed, it was lost to every body. I went out a little while before the King had done all his ceremonies, and went round the Abbey to Westminster Hall, all the way within rails, and 10,000 people with the ground covered with blue cloth; and scaffolds all the way. Into the Hall I got, where it was very fine with hangings and scaffolds one upon another full of brave ladies; and my wife in one little one, on the right hand. Here I stayed walking up and down, and at last upon one of the side stalls I stood and saw the King come in with all the persons (but the soldiers) that were yesterday in the cavalcade; and a most pleasant sight it was to see them in their several robes. And the King come in with his crown on, and his sceptre in his hand, under a canopy borne up by six silver staves, carried by Barons of the Cinque Ports, and little bells at every end. And after a long time, he got up to the farther end, and all set themselves down at their several tables; and that was also a brave sight: and the King's first course carried up by the Knights of the Bath. And many fine ceremonies there was of the Heralds leading up people before him, and bowing; and my Lord of Albemarle's going to the kitchen and eating a bit of the first dish that was to go to the King's table. But, above all, was these three Lords, Northumberland, and Suffolk, and the Duke of Ormond, coming before the courses on horseback, and staying so all dinner-time, and at last

bringing up (Dymock) the King's Champion, all in armour on horseback, with his spear and target carried before him. And a Herald proclaims "That if any dare deny Charles Stuart to be lawful King of England, here was a Champion that would fight with him"; and with these words, the Champion flings down his gauntlet, and all this he do three times in his going up towards the King's table. To which, when he is come, the King drinks to him, and then sends him the cup, which is of gold, and he drinks it off, and then rides back again with the cup in his hand. I went from table to table to see the Bishops and all others at their dinner, and was infinitely pleased with it. And at the Lords' table, I met with William Howe, and he spoke to my Lord for me, and he did give him four rabbits and a pullet, and so Mr. Creed and I got Mr. Minshell to give us some bread, and so we at a stall eat it, as every body else did what they could get. I took a great deal of pleasure to go up and down, and look upon the ladies, and to hear the music of all sorts, but above all, the twenty-four violins."

2

Evelyn was often at Court, and was much liked by the King.

"Being called into his Majesty's closet when Mr. Cooper, the rare limner, was crayoning of the King's face and head, to make the stamps by for the new milled money now contriving, I had the honour to hold the candle whilst it was doing, he choosing the night and candle-light for the better finding out the shadows. During this his Majesty discoursed with me on several things relating to painting and graving."

He did not enjoy Court life, although he had so much of it. One day, with unusual frankness, he wrote,

"I came home to be private a little, not at all affecting the life and the hurry of the Court." It was Evelyn who "discovered" Grinling Gibbon the carver and introduced him to the King. This is one of his best stories, very possibly because it shows Evelyn himself in such a kindly light.

"This day I first acquainted his Majesty with that incomparable young man Gibbon, whom I had lately met with in an obscure place by mere accident as I was walking near a poor solitary thatched house, in a field in our parish, near Sayes Court. I found him shut in; but looking in at the window I perceived him carving that large cartoon or crucifix of Tintoret, a copy of which I had myself brought from Venice, where the original painting remains. I asked if I might enter; he opened the door civilly to me, and I saw him about such a work as for the curiosity of handling, drawing, and studious exactness, I never had before seen in all my travels. I questioned him why he worked in such an obscure and lonesome place; he told me it was that he might apply himself to his profession without interruption, and wondered not a little how I had found him out. I asked if he was unwilling to be made known to some great man, for that I believed it might turn to his profit; he answered he was yet but a beginner, but would not be sorry to sell off that piece; on demanding the price, he said 100*l.* In good earnest the very frame was worth the money, there being nothing in nature so tender and delicate as the flowers and festoons about it, and yet the work was very strong; in the piece were more than 100 figures of men, &c. I found he was likewise musical, and very civil, sober, and discreet in his discourse. There was only an old woman in the house. So desiring leave to visit him sometimes, I went away.

"Of this young artist, together with my manner of finding him out, I acquainted the King, and begged that he would give me leave to bring him and his work to White-hall, for that I would adventure my reputation with his Majesty that he had never seen anything approach it, and that he would be exceedingly pleased and employ him. The King said he would himself go see him. This was the first notice his Majesty ever had of Mr. Gibbon. . . .

"I caused Mr. Gibbon to bring to White-hall his excellent piece of carving, where being come I advertised his Majesty, who asked me where it was; I told him in Sir Richard Browne's (my father-in-law) chamber, and that if it pleased his Majesty to appoint whither it should be brought, being large and though of wood heavy, I would take care for it; 'No,' says the King, 'show me the way, I'll go to Sir Richard's chamber,' which he immediately did, walking along the entries after me, as far as the ewrie, till he came up into the room where I also lay. No sooner was he entered and cast his eye on the work, but he was astonished at the curiosity of it, and having considered it a long time and discoursed with Mr. Gibbon, whom I brought to kiss his hand, he commanded it should be immediately carried to the Queen's side to show her. It was carried up into her bed chamber, where she and the King looked on and admired it again; the King being called away left us with the Queen, believing she would have bought it, being a crucifix; but when his Majesty was gone, a French peddling woman, one Madame de Boord, who used to bring petticoats and fans, and baubles out of France to the Ladies, began to find fault with several things in the work, which she understood no more than an ass or a monkey, so as in a kind of indignation, I caused the person who brought it to carry it back to the chamber, finding the Queen so much

governed by an ignorant French woman, and this incomparable artist had his labour only for his pains, which not a little displeased me, and he was fain to send it down to his cottage again; he not long after sold it for 80*l* though well worth 100*l* without the frame, to Sir George Viner."

Both Evelyn and Pepys were in town in the great Fire of 1666 and the plague of the year before. Their accounts of the Fire give only too vivid an idea of its terror. This is Evelyn's:—

"This fatal night about ten, began that deplorable fire near Fish Street in London.

"I had public prayers at home. The fire continuing after dinner I took coach with my wife and son and went to the Bank side in Southwark, where we beheld the dismal spectacle, the whole City in dreadful flames near the water side; all the houses from the Bridge, all Thames street, and upwards towards Cheapside, down to the Three Cranes, were now consumed; and so returned exceeding astonished what would become of the rest.

"The fire having continued all this night (if I may call that night which was light as day for ten miles round about, after a dreadful manner) when conspiring with a fierce Eastern wind in a very dry season; I went on foot to the same place, and saw the whole South part of the City burning from Cheapside to the Thames, and all along Cornhill (for it likewise kindled back against the wind as well as forward), Tower Street, Fenchurch Street, Gracious Street, and so along to Bainard's Castle, and was now taking hold of St. Paul's Church, to which the scaffolds contributed exceedingly. The conflagration was so universal, and the people so astonished, that from the beginning, I know not by what despondency or fate, they hardly stirred to quench it, so that there was nothing heard or seen but crying out and lamentation, running

about like distracted creatures, without at all attempting to save even their goods; such a strange consternation there was upon them, so as it burned both in breadth and length, the Churches, Public Halls, Exchange, Hospitals, Monuments, and ornaments, leaping after a prodigious manner from house to house and street to street, at great distances one from the other; for the heat with a long set of fair and warm weather had even ignited the air and prepared the materials to conceive the fire, which devoured after an incredible manner houses, furniture, and everything. Here we saw the Thames covered with goods floating, all the barges and boats laden with what some had time and courage to save, as, on the other, the carts, &c. carrying out to the fields, which for many miles were strewed with movables of all sorts, and tents erecting to shelter both people and what goods they could get away. Oh the miserable and calamitous spectacle! such as haply the world had not seen the like since the foundation of it, nor be outdone till the universal conflagration of it. All the sky was a fiery aspect, like the top of a burning oven, and the light seen above forty miles round about for many nights. God grant mine eyes may never behold the like, who now saw above ten thousand houses all in one flame; the noise and crackling and thunder of the impetuous flames, the shrieking of women and children, the hurry of people, the fall of Towers, Houses and Churches, was like an hideous storm, and the air all about so hot and inflamed that at the last one was not able to approach it, so that they were forced to stand still and let the flames burn on, which they did for near two miles in length and one in breadth. The clouds also of smoke were dismal and reached upon computation near fifty-six miles in length . . . London was, but is no more! Thus I returned home. . . .

"At my return I was infinitely concerned to find that

goodly Church St. Paul's now a sad ruin, and that beautiful portico (for structure comparable to any in Europe, as not long before repaired by the late King) now rent in pieces, flakes of vast stone split asunder, and nothing remaining entire but the inscription in the architecture, showing by whom it was built, which had not one letter of it defaced. It was astonishing to see what immense stones the heat had in a manner calcined, so that all the ornaments, columns, friezes, capitals, and projectures of massy Portland stone flew off, even to the very roof, where a sheet of lead covering a great space (no less than six acres by measure) was totally melted; the ruins of the vaulted roof falling broke into St. Faith's, which being filled with the magazines of books belonging to the Stationers, and carried thither for safety, they were all consumed, burning for a week following. It was also observable that the lead over the altar at the East end was untouched, and among the divers monuments, the body of one Bishop remained entire. Thus lay in ashes that most venerable Church, one of the most ancient pieces of early piety in the Christian world, besides near a hundred more."

3

Pepys introduces the Fire casually, as it was first brought to his notice by one of the maids.

"Some of our maids sitting up late last night to get things ready against our feast to-day, Jane called us up about three in the morning, to tell us of a great fire they saw in the City. So I rose, and slipped on my night-gown, and went to her window; and thought it to be on the back-side of Mark Lane at the farthest; but being unused to such fires as followed, I thought it far enough off; and

so went to bed again, and to sleep. About seven rose again to dress myself, and there looked out at the window, and saw the fire not so much as it was, and further off. So to my closet to set things to rights, after yesterday's cleaning."

When he sees how serious it is, he goes out, with his heart "full of trouble" to think what may have happened to his friends.

"By and by Jane comes and tells me that she hears that above 300 houses have been burned down to-night by the fire we saw, and that it is now burning down all Fish Street, by London Bridge. So I made myself ready presently, and walked to the Tower; and there got up upon one of the high places, Sir J. Robinson's little son going up with me; and there I did see the houses at that end of the bridge all on fire, and an infinite great fire on this and the other side the end of the bridge; which, among other people, did trouble me for poor little Mitchell and our Sarah on the bridge. So down with my heart full of trouble, to the Lieutenant of the Tower, who tells me that it begun this morning in the King's baker's house in Pudding-lane, and that it hath burned down St. Magnus's Church and most part of Fish Street already. So I down to the water-side, and there got a boat, and through bridge, and there saw a lamentable fire. Poor Mitchell's house, as far as the Old Swan, already burned that way, and the fire running further, that, in a very little time, it got as far as the Steele-yard, while I was there. Every body endeavouring to remove their goods, and flinging into the river, or bringing them into lighters that lay off; poor people staying in their houses as long as till the very fire touched them, and then running into boats, or clambering from one pair of stairs, by the waterside, to another. And, among other things, the

poor pigeons, I perceive, were loath to leave their houses, but hovered about the windows and balconies, till they burned their wings, and fell down. Having stayed, and in an hour's time seen the fire rage every way; and nobody, to my sight, endeavouring to quench it, but to remove their goods, and leave all to the fire; and, having seen it get as far as the Steele-yard, and the wind mighty high, and driving it into the City; and everything, after so long a drought, proving combustible, even the very stones of churches; and, among other things, the poor steeple by which pretty Mrs. —— lives, and whereof my old schoolfellow Elborough is parson, taken fire in the very top, and there burned till it fell down; I to White Hall, with a gentleman with me, who desired to go off from the Tower, to see the fire, in my boat, and there up to the King's Closet in the Chapel, where people come about me, and I did give them an account dismayed them all, and word was carried in to the King. So I was called for, and did tell the King and Duke of York what I saw; and that, unless his Majesty did command houses to be pulled down, nothing could stop the fire. They seemed much troubled, and the King commanded me to go to my Lord Mayor from him, and command him to spare no houses, but to pull down before the fire every way. The Duke of York bid me tell him, that if he would have any more soldiers, he shall; and so did my Lord Arlington afterwards, as a great secret. Here meeting with Captain Cooke, I in his coach, which he lent me, and Creed with me to Paul's; and there walked along Watling Street, as well as I could, every creature coming away loaden with goods to save, and, here and there, sick people carried away in beds. Extraordinary good goods carried in carts and on backs. At last met my Lord Mayor in Canning Street, like a man spent, with a handkercher about his neck. To the King's message, he cried,

like a fainting woman, 'Lord! what can I do? I am spent: people will not obey me. I have been pulling down houses; but the fire overtakes us faster than we can do it.' That he needed no more soldiers; and that, for himself, he must go and refresh himself, having been up all night. So he left me, and I him, and walked home; seeing people all almost distracted, and no manner of means used to quench the fire. The houses, too, so very thick thereabouts, and full of matter for burning, as pitch and tar, in Thames Street; and warehouses of oil, and wines, and brandy, and other things. Here I saw Mr. Isaac Goublon, the handsome man, prettily dressed and dirty at his door at Dowgate, receiving some of his brother's things, whose houses were on fire; and, as he says, have been removed twice already; and he doubts, as it soon proved, that they must be, in a little time, removed from his house also, which was a sad consideration. And to see the churches all filling with goods by people who themselves should have been quietly there at this time. By this time, it was about twelve o'clock; and so home, and there find my guests, who were Mr. Wood and his wife Barbara Shelden, and also Mr. Moone: she mighty fine, and her husband, for aught I see, a likely man. But Mr. Moone's design and mine, which was to look over my closet, and please him with the sight thereof, which he hath long desired, was wholly disappointed; for we were in great trouble and disturbance at this fire, not knowing what to think of it. However, we had an extraordinary good dinner, and as merry as at this time we could be. While at dinner, Mrs. Batelier came to enquire after Mr. Woolf and Stanes, who, it seems, are related to them, whose houses in Fish Street are all burned, and they in a sad condition. She would not stay in the fright. Soon as dined, I and Moone away, and walked through the City, the streets full of nothing but people: and horses and

carts loaden with goods, ready to run over one another, and removing goods from one burned house to another. They now removing out of Canning Street, which received goods in the morning, into Lombard Street, and further; and, among others, I now saw my little goldsmith Stokes, receiving some friend's goods, whose house itself was burned the day after. We parted at Paul's; he home, and I to Paul's Wharf, where I had appointed a boat to attend me, and took in Mr. Carcasse and his brother, whom I met in the street, and carried them below and above bridge too. And again to see the fire, which was now got further, both below and above, and no likelihood of stopping it. Met with the King and Duke of York in their barge, and with them to Queenhithe, and there called Sir Richard Browne to them. Their order was only to pull down houses apace, and so below bridge at the water-side; but little was or could be done, the fire coming upon them so fast. Good hopes there was of stopping it, at the Three Cranes above, and at Buttulph's Wharf below bridge, if care be used; but the wind carries it into the City, so as we know not, by the water-side, what it do there . . ."

Both Evelyn and Pepys, fortunately for us, were fond of any spectacle. In happier times they both went to the theatre frequently, though Evelyn leaves only brief comments. "I saw Hamlet Prince of Denmark played, but now the old plays begin to disgust this refined age, since his Majesty's being so long abroad." Was Evelyn really disgusted, or did he enjoy the "old play" of *Hamlet* and feel ashamed to say so? Pepys is very downright about his feelings, and he has eyes for the audience as well as the stage. He had been to see *Othello*, "which was very well done. Burt acted the Moor; by the same token, a very pretty lady that sat by me cried out to see

Desdemona smothered." Another day he went to see *Twelfth Night* and thought very little of it. "To the Duke's house, and there saw *Twelfth Night* acted well, though it be but a silly play, and not relating at all to the name or day. Home, and found all well, only myself somewhat vexed at my wife's neglect in leaving of her scarf, waistcoat, and night-dressings in the coach to-day, that brought us from Westminster; though, I confess, she did give them to me to look after."

There were less pleasant spectacles than play-acting to be seen in those days, and neither of the diarists, cultured men though they were, hesitated to watch a torture or an execution and to write about it with some gusto afterwards. Evelyn describes a horrible scene at which he was present in Paris, sandwiching the description between a visit to a convent and the account of a Ball. He went to see a man tortured, and stood a good deal before it became too much for him. Pepys deals briefly with this sort of thing:—

"I went out to Charing Cross, to see Major-General Harrison hanged, drawn, and quartered; which was done there, he looking as cheerful as any man could do in that condition."

Pepys' comments are irresistible. He was a shrewd observer with a sense of humour, and his remarks on his acquaintances are often more telling and picturesque than those of many professional writers. We are apt to forget his business in our delight with his domestic details: but he was excellent at his job, took a great interest in it, and was respected by everyone. This is how Evelyn wrote of him:—

"This day died Mr. Sam. Pepys, a very worthy, industrious and curious person, none in England exceeding him in knowledge of the Navy, in which he had

passed through all the most considerable offices, Clerk of the Acts and Secretary of the Admiralty, all which he performed with great integrity. . . . He was universally beloved, hospitable, generous, learned in many things, skilled in music, a very great cherisher of learned men of whom he had the conversation."

Mere selections from Pepys' diary cannot do him justice, though it is tempting to make them. Here, for example, is one Sunday's entry.

"Infinite of business, my heart and head full. Met with Purser Washington, with whom and a lady, a friend of his, I dined at the Bell Tavern in King Street, but the rogue had no more manners than to invite me, and to let me pay my club. This morning come home my fine camlet cloak, with gold buttons, and a silk suit, which cost me much money, and I pray God to make me able to pay for it."

Pepys' clothes, Pepys' wife, and Pepys' food have delighted the world as much as they delighted him.

"Dined with my wife upon a most excellent dish of tripes of my own directing, covered with mustard, as I have heretofore see them done at my Lord Crewe's, of which I made a very great meal, and sent for a glass of wine for myself."

"Put on my new scallop, which is very fine. After supper, making up my monthly account to myself. I find myself, by my expense in bands and clothes this month, abated a little of my last, and that I am worth £679 still; for which God be praised."

"Talking with my wife, in whom I never had greater content, blessed be God! than now—she continuing with the same care and thrift and innocence, so long

as I keep her from occasions of being otherwise, as ever she was in her life, and keeps the house as well."

"Thus ends the year," Pepys concludes, "with great mirth to me and my wife." Most years ended well for him, we are glad to remember. It is particularly unfair to make extracts from Pepys' diary, because half the pleasure of reading him is to follow his changes of mood. In the course of a few days he is "very merry," "very angry" about some underdone mutton, very much worried about the King's behaviour, or contentedly sitting in his office "practising arithmetique." There we may well leave him; but, once we have really made his acquaintance, Samuel Pepys, that "ingenious and knowing person," is a friend we will not willingly lose.

CHAPTER XVIII

POPE AND THE AGE OF REASON

1

POPE SUCCEEDED to Dryden's honours. He had trained for the position from his boyhood, and he was not disappointed. English society and English literary taste had developed since Dryden's day exactly as might have been expected: they were still more reasonable, still more correct, and still more determined to be well-bred. Pope exactly suited such a society and such a taste, and his suitability for leadership was immediately recognised. He stepped easily into fame before he was thirty, keeping his position, in spite of misdeeds which seem to us unpardonable, until his death in 1744.

In 1715 Pope published the first volume of his translation of Homer, and it at once became a "best-seller." As he was only twenty-seven, this was no mean achievement, for he had many obstacles which might well have hindered him. He could by this time write heroic couplets, fluently, after the manner of Dryden, and with more neatness and polish than his master. He had had plenty of practice, beginning under his father, who sternly told young Alexander, "these are not good rhymes," and made him go on until they were. Pope's chief obstacle was ill-health. Throughout his life he was ill more often than well. His body was deformed, he had comtinual pain and headaches, and nothing but sheer will-power could have given him the time and energy to work as much as he did. Another drawback was that he was a Roman Catholic. This would not matter nowadays, but it mattered so much then that Pope was excluded

from politics, from going to any public school, and even, on one occasion, from coming within ten miles of London. The result of his ill-health was, not unnaturally, to make him self-engrossed, while his deformity made him abnormally sensitive to any kind of rudeness; and the result of his religious persecution came out later in various shifty and underhand ways of getting what he was afraid that he might not get openly. Pope cannot be called lovable. He was often spiteful, and his life is largely a record of petty quarrels; yet, when all is said, we cannot help admiring him for what he became in spite of himself.

In 1718 Pope moved to Twickenham, where he lived for the rest of his life in a villa on the banks of the Thames. He loved his house and garden, and took particular delight in a grotto which he had had made.

"I there found a spring of the clearest water, which falls in a perpetual rill, that echoes through the cavern day and night. From the river Thames, you can see through my arch up a walk of the wilderness, to a kind of open temple, wholly composed of shells in the rustic manner, and from the distance under the temple you look through a sloping arcade of trees, and see the sails on the river passing suddenly and vanishing . . .

"There are connected to this grotto, by a narrower passage, two porches: one towards the river, of smooth stones full of light, and open: the other towards the garden, shadowed with trees, rough with shells, flints, and iron ore. The bottom is painted with simple pebble, as is also the adjoining walk up to the wilderness to the temple, in the natural taste, agreeing not ill with the little dripping murmur, and the aquatic idea of the whole place."[1]

[1] From a letter.

At Twickenham Pope was within easy reach of London, and could be visited by all his literary friends. Some, it appears, came too often.

What walls can guard me, or what shades can hide?
They pierce my thickets, through my grot they glide;
By land, by water, they renew the charge;
They stop the chariot and they board the barge:
No place is sacred, not the church is free,
E'en Sunday shines no Sabbath-day to me.

The chief of Pope's literary friends was Dean Swift, and this was a friendship which brought out the best, and the worst, in him. Swift was right to say that "Poor Pope would grieve a month" when he died. Pope loved Swift, and wished he could have helped him in his illness. He once suggested that Swift should come and live with him.

"I could keep you, for I am rich, that is, I have more than I want. I can afford room for yourself and two servants; I have indeed room enough, nothing but myself at home . . . yet this house is enlarged, and the gardens extend and flourish, as knowing nothing of the guests I have lost. I have more fruit trees and kitchen gardens than you have any thought of: nay, I have good melons and pineapples of my own growth. . . . For God's sake, why should not you . . . e'en give all you have to the poor of Ireland (for whom you have already done everything else), so quit the place, and live and die with me?"

Swift did not accept this generous offer, and he was wise. They were too much unlike to live happily together, and loved each other best when they were apart. Swift stayed at Twickenham once, but the visit was not a success. He was already suffering from the giddiness and deafness which were to bring about his death; and Pope, meaning to be kind, fussed over him, and kept

the house full of visitors when Swift only longed for quietness. Swift has left some verses describing the visit:

Pope has the talent well to speak,
But not to reach the ear;
His loudest voice is low and weak,
The dean too deaf to hear.

Awhile they on each other look,
Then different studies choose;
The dean sits plodding o'er a book,
Pope walks and courts the muse.

When his friend died, Pope grieved for far longer than a month, yet, while the Dean was ill, he was engaged on an astonishingly mean intrigue to get hold of, and have published, the letters they had written to each other. The whole business is typical of Pope at his worst.

He wished their correspondence published, thinking it would do him credit: but he wished it to appear that the whole business was done against his will. Other letters of Pope's had been brought out in a similar roundabout fashion, Pope leaving the letters where a bookseller could "steal" them, and appearing properly horrified when he saw them in print. He wrote to Swift, who was now old and failing, and suggested that any letters he had would be safer in England, in Pope's keeping. Swift replied that they would be safer still if he burnt them—which was not at all what Pope wanted!

At last, by a stratagem, Pope got the packet of letters from Swift. He had the whole lot printed secretly, and anonymously sent to Swift in Ireland, with a warning that, as they were certain to be published in any case, Swift had better give his permission. Poor Swift believed this, and gave it; and Pope was in the position he wanted, able to be surprised and horrified when the volume

reached him. He played his part well; complained to his friends of Swift's behaviour, kindly excused him a little because of his ill-health, and had the crowning audacity to moralise over the sin of the defenceless man whom he had tricked.

2

After this, we may turn to the pleasanter side of Pope. His most brilliant poem, the *Rape of the Lock*, appeared before the Twickenham days. It was written for a special occasion. Young Lord Petre had seriously offended a Miss Arabella Fermor by cutting off a lock of her hair, and the quarrel had grown into a family matter. A friend of Pope's suggested that he should make peace between them by a poem treating the affair as a joke. The result was the mock-heroic *Rape of the Lock*. Pope describes, with Homeric pomp and majesty, how the fair Belinda set off one morning for a sail on the Thames, and how the Baron saw and coveted her shining ringlets.

Not with more glories in th' ethereal plain,
The sun first rises o'er the purpled main,
Than, issuing forth, the rival of his beams
Launch'd on the bosom of the silver Thames.
Fair nymphs, and well-drest youths around her shone,
But every eye was fix'd on her alone.
On her white breast a sparkling cross she wore,
Which Jews might kiss and infidels adore.
Her lively looks a sprightly mind disclose,
Quick as her eyes, and as unfix'd as those:
Favours to none, to all she smiles extends;
Oft she rejects, but never once offends.
Bright as the sun, her eyes the gazers strike,
And, like the sun, they shine on all alike.

Yet graceful ease, and sweetness void of pride,
Might hide her faults, if Belles had faults to hide:
If to her share some female errors fall,
Look on her face, and you'll forget 'em all.
This nymph, to the destruction of mankind,
Nourish'd two locks which graceful hung behind
In equal curls, and well conspired to deck
With shining ringlets the smooth iv'ry neck.
Love in these labyrinths his slave detains,
And mighty hearts are held in slender chains.
With hairy springes[1] *we the birds betray,*
Slight lines of hair surprise the finny prey,
Fair tresses man's imperial race insnare,
And beauty draws us with a single hair.

Th' advent'rous Baron the bright locks admir'd:
He saw, he wish'd, and to the prize aspir'd.
Resolv'd to win, he meditates the way,
By force to ravish, or by fraud betray:
For when success a lover's toil attends,
Few ask, if fraud or force attain'd his ends.

For this, ere Phoebus rose, he had implored
Propitious heav'n, and ev'ry pow'r ador'd,
But chiefly Love—to Love an Altar built,
Of twelve vast French romances, neatly gilt.
There lay three garters, half a pair of gloves,
And all the trophies of his former loves;
With tender billets-doux[2] *he lights the pyre,*
And breathes three amorous sighs to raise the fire.
Then prostrate falls, and begs with ardent eyes
Soon to obtain, and long possess the prize:
The Powers gave ear, and granted half his prayer,
The rest the winds dispers'd in empty air.

But now secure the painted vessel glides,
The sun-beams trembling on the floating tides:

[1] Traps, snares. [2] Love letters.

While melting music steals upon the sky,
And soften'd sounds along the waters die;
Smooth flow the waves, the Zephyrs gently play,
Belinda smil'd, and all the world was gay.

The climax came that same afternoon, while the party was drinking coffee at Hampton Court.

Close by those meads, for ever crown'd with flowers,
Where Thames with pride surveys his rising towers,
There stands a structure of majestic frame,
Which from the neighbouring Hampton takes its name.
Here Britain's statesmen oft the fall foredoom
Of foreign tyrants, and of nymphs at home;
Here thou, great Anna[1] *whom three realms obey,*
Dost sometimes counsel take—and sometimes tea.
Hither the heroes and the nymphs resort,
To taste awhile the pleasures of the court;
In various talk th' instructive hours they past,
Who gave the ball, or paid the visit last;
One speaks the glory of the British Queen,
And one describes a charming Indian screen;
A third interprets motions, looks, and eyes;
At ev'ry word a reputation dies.
Snuff, or the fan, supply each pause of chat,
With singing, laughing, ogling, and all that.

Belinda plays cards with the Baron, and Pope describes the game as if it were a heroïc battle.

Behold, four Kings in majesty rever'd,
With hoary whiskers and a forky beard;
And four fair Queens whose hands sustain a flower,
Th' expressive emblem of their softer power;

[1] Queen Anne.

Four knaves in garb succinct, a trusty band,
Caps on their heads, and halberts in their hand;
And particolour'd troops, a shining train,
Draw forth to combat on the velvet plain.
The skilful nymph reviews her force with care:
Let Spades be trumps! she said, and trumps they were.

Belinda wins, and rejoices with most un-sportsmanlike cries.

An Ace of Hearts steps forth: the King unseen
Lurk'd in her hand, and mourn'd his captive Queen:
He springs to vengeance with an eager pace,
And falls like thunder on the prostrate ace.
The nymph exulting fills with shouts the sky;
The walls, the woods, and long canals reply.

But there is trouble coming. Pope warns her, and proceeds to describe the Rape of the Lock with the happiest contrast of epic manner and everyday matter. The airy band of spirits who cool Belinda's coffee and try to protect her locks are Pope's version of the ghosts and spirits who crowned all the best epics.

Oh thoughtless mortals! ever blind to fate,
Too soon dejected, and too soon elate.
Sudden, these honours shall be snatch'd away,
And curs'd for ever this victorious day.
For lo! the board with cups and spoons is crowned,
The berries crackle, and the mill turns round;
On shining altars of Japan they raise
The silver lamp; the fiery spirits blaze:
From silver spouts the grateful liquors glide,
While China's earth receives the smoking tide:[1]

[1] They pour the coffee out of the silver pots into the china cups.

At once they gratify their scent and taste,
And frequent cups prolong the rich repast.
Straight hover round the fair her airy band;
Some, as she sipp'd, the fuming liquor fann'd,
Some o'er her lap their careful plumes display'd,
Trembling, and conscious of the rich brocade.
Coffee, (which makes the politician wise,
And see thro' all things with his half-shut eyes)
Sent up in vapours to the Baron's brain
New strategems, the radiant lock to gain.
Ah cease, rash youth! desist ere 'tis too late,
Fear the just gods, and think of Scylla's fate!
Chang'd to a bird, and sent to flit in air,
She dearly pays for Nisus' injur'd hair!
But when to mischief mortals bend their will,
How soon they find fit instruments of ill!
Just then, Clarissa drew with tempting grace
A two-edg'd weapon from her shining case:
So ladies in romance assist their knight,
Present the spear, and arm him for the fight.
He takes the gift with rev'rence, and extends
The little engine on his finger's ends;
This just behind Belinda's neck he spread,
As o'er the fragrant steams she bends her head.
Swift to the lock a thousand sprites repair,
A thousand wings, by turns, blow back the hair;
And thrice they twitch'd the diamond in her ear;
Thrice she look'd back, and thrice the foe drew near.
Just in that instant, anxious Ariel sought
The close recesses of the virgin's thought;
As on the nosegay in her breast reclin'd,
He watch'd th' ideas rising in her mind,
Sudden he view'd, in spite of all her art,
An earthly lover lurking at her heart.

Amaz'd, confus'd, he found his pow'r expir'd,
Resign'd to fate, and with a sigh retir'd,
The peer now spreads the glitt'ring forfex[1] *wide,*
T' inclose the lock; now joins it, to divide.
Ev'n then, before the fatal engine clos'd,
A wretched sylph too fondly interpos'd;
Fate urg'd the shears, and cut the sylph in twain,
(But airy substance soon unites again)
The meeting points the sacred hair dissever
From the fair head, for ever, and for ever!
Then flash'd the living lightning from her eyes,
And screams of horror rend th' affrighted skies.
Not louder shrieks to pitying heaven are cast,
When husbands, or when lapdogs, breathe their last;
Or when rich China vessels fall'n from high,
In glitt'ring dust and painted fragments lie!
Let wreaths of triumph now my temples twine,
(The victor cried) the glorious prize is mine!
While fish in streams, or birds delight in air,
Or in a coach and six the British fair,
As long as Atalantis shall be read,
Or the small pillow grace the lady's bed,
While visits shall be paid on solemn days,
When num'rous wax-lights in bright order blaze,
While nymphs take treats, or assignations give,
So long my honour, name, and praise shall live!
What time would spare, from steel receives its date,
And monuments, like men, submit to fate!

The Baron was right in prophesying immortality for his great deed. The *Rape of the Lock* was a brilliant joke, and everybody, from Pope's day to ours, has enjoyed it—not excepting the rather foolish couple whom it satirised.

[1] Scissors.

3

Pope's natural bent in satire was for something far less kindly than the *Rape of the Lock*. In the *Dunciad*, which appeared in 1728, he is supposed to be the champion of Wit against the ranks of Dulness; what actually happens is that he lashes out in bitter fury against all the writers whom he does not like. It is closely modelled on Dryden's *Mac Flecknoe*:—

Oh (cried the goddess) for some pedant reign!
Some gentle James,[1] *to bless the land again;*
To stick the doctor's chair into the throne,
Give law to words, or war with words alone,
Senates and courts with Greek and Latin rule,
And turn the council to a grammar school!
For sure, if dulness sees a grateful day,
'Tis in the shade of arbitrary sway.
O! if my sons may learn one earthly thing,
Teach but that one, sufficient for a king;
That which my priests, and mine alone, maintain,
Which, as it dies, or lives, we fall, or reign:
May you, my Cam, and Isis,[2] *preach it long!*
"The right divine of kings to govern wrong."
Prompt at the call, around the goddess roll
Broad hats, and hoods, and caps, a sable shoal:
Thick and more thick the black blockade extends,
A hundred head of Aristotle's friends.

Among the dunces Pope puts Bentley, a really good scholar against whom he happened to have a grudge:

As many quit the streams that murm'ring fall
To lull the sons of Margaret and Clare-hall,
Where Bentley late tempestuous wont to sport
In troubled waters, but now sleeps in port.

[1] James 1, "the wisest fool in Christendom." [2] Rivers at Cambridge and Oxford.

Before them march'd that awful aristarch;
Plow'd was his front with many a deep remark:
His hat, which never veil'd to human pride,
Walker with reverence took, and laid aside.
Low bow'd the rest: he, kingly, did but nod;
So upright Quakers please both man and God.
Mistress! dismiss that rabble from your throne:
Avaunt—is Aristarchus[1] *yet unknown?*
Thy mighty Scholiast, whose unwearied pains
Made Horace dull, and humbled Milton's strains,[2]
Turn what they will to verse, there toil is vain,
Critics like me shall make it prose again.

Severe as this is, it is nothing to Pope's treatment of the lesser lights of the day. Dulness herself is present at some games held in honour of the new ruler (an enemy of Pope, of course, as Shadwell had been of Dryden). She descends

To where Fleet Ditch with disemboguing streams
Rolls the large tribute of dead dogs to Thames,
The king of dykes than whom no sluice of mud
With deeper sable blots the silver flood.—
Here strip, my children, here at once leap in;
Here prove who best can dash through thick and thin,
And who the most in love of dirt excel.

Pope himself shows no dislike of dirt, and flings it with wholehearted thoroughness as he puts the athletes through their paces. The *Dunciad*, as may be imagined, roused a storm of protest from its victims. All who were not included, however, saw its excellence.

Judged on the *Dunciad*, Pope's "correctness" and common sense seem far to seek. The man of a hundred petty hatreds hardly sounds like the leader of the

[1] Referring to himself. [2] Bentley had boldly undertaken to "improve" *Paradise Lost*.

Augustan age of English poetry, as it proudly calls itself.[1] Yet Pope had the qualities for that leadership. His *Essay on Criticism*, his *Essay on Man*, and his method of translating Homer are typical of the spirit of the Augustans. The *Essay on Criticism* is a string of commonplaces, mostly borrowed from French writers which extol correctness as the great literary virtue. The *Essay on Man* contains well-bred commonplaces on philosophy, about which Pope knew practically nothing. Both these poems, and the Homer, are written in polished, regular heroic couplets. The Augustans were convinced that their poetry, like their religion, their politics, and all their ideas, was best when it conformed to an absolutely hard-and-fast set of rules. Pope conformed admirably. Even his satire—excluding the *Dunciad*—pointed out only the kind of faults to which a self-respecting age did not mind admitting.

It must not be thought, however, that Pope was incapable of deep feeling, or that the heroic couplet was unsuited to express it. Here is part of his *Elegy to the Memory of an Unfortunate Lady.*

What can atone (oh ever-injur'd shade!)
Thy fate unpitied, and thy rites unpaid?
No friend's complaint, no kind domestic tear
Pleas'd thy pale ghost, or grac'd thy mournful bier.
By foreign hands thy dying eyes were clos'd,
By foreign hands thy decent limbs compos'd,
By foreign hands thy humble grave adorn'd,
By strangers honour'd and by strangers mourn'd!
What tho' no friends in sable weeds appear,
Grieve for an hour, perhaps, then mourn a year,
And bear about the mockery of woe
To midnight dances, and the public show?

[1] Comparing itself with the great Augustan Age of Rome, when Vergil was alive, and Latin literature reached its highest level.

What tho' no weeping loves thy ashes grace,
Nor polish'd marble emulate thy face,[1]
What tho' no sacred earth allow thee room,
Nor hallow'd dirge be mutter'd o'er thy tomb;
Yet shall thy grave with rising flowers be drest,
And the green turf lie lightly on thy breast:
There shall the morn her earliest tears bestow,
There the first roses of the year shall blow;
While angels with their silver wings o'ershade
The ground now sacred by thy relics made.

This has feeling as well as polish. Like all Pope's poetry, it is aimed at a polite and cultivated audience. Poets and authors had become important as a class, and the society in which they moved took a critical interest in their work. It is easy to see why Pope is a better Augustan than Swift. Swift scorned and shattered the trim conventions of the age; Pope, smaller, more petty, less clear-sighted, accepted the Augustans at their own valuation, and was in return accepted as their spokesman.

[1] i.e. there is no marble statue over your grave.

CHAPTER XIX

ADDISON, STEELE, AND DEFOE

1

THE *Spectator*, the daily paper which Addison founded in 1711, was exactly what the Age of Reason wanted. The men who gathered at the coffee-houses each day were only too willing to talk over the affairs of the day, politics, new fashions, and new books; but they were extremely glad to have a daily paper which would tell them what to say. The *Spectator*, served up daily at three thousand breakfast tables, told men and women what was happening and what to think about it. Addison's influence was incalculable. He wrote with a serious, gentle humour, ridiculing anything he thought wrong, and giving his readers philosophy rather than politics. His paper bore little resemblance to our modern newspapers. It consisted each day of a single essay, and these essays were of such high quality that they have lasted to the present time. Dr. Johnson said decisively, "whoever wishes to attain an English style, familiar but not coarse, and elegant but not ostentatious, must give his days and nights to the volumes of Addison."

A friend of Addison's, Richard Steele, also had a hand in the *Spectator*. Steele was an Irishman, born in Dublin in 1672, the same year as Addison. He had been in the army, and knocked about a good deal; and before the *Spectator* he had for two years run a paper of his own called the *Tatler*. Steele was partly responsible for one of the most lovable characters in English literature—the old bachelor knight, Sir Roger de Coverley.

Addison began Sir Roger's history, making him a

member of the "club" which helped the imaginary Mr. Spectator to do his work. The first number of the *Spectator*, which appeared on Thursday, March 1, 1711, contained Mr. Spectator's account of himself, and it gives a good idea of how Addison collected material for his essays, and of the kind of people who read them.

"There is no place of general resort wherein I do not often make my appearance; sometimes I am seen thrusting my head into a round of politicians at Will's, and listening with great attention to the narratives that are made in those little circular audiences. Sometimes I smoke a pipe at Child's, and, while I seem attentive to nothing but the Post-Man, overhear the conversation of every table in the room. I appear on Sunday nights at St. James's coffee-house, and sometimes join the little committee of politics in the inner room, as one who comes there to hear and improve. My face is likewise very well known at the Grecian, the Cocoa-tree, and in the theatres both of Drury Lane and the Hay-Market. I have been taken for a merchant upon the Exchange for above these ten years, and sometimes pass for a Jew in the assembly of stock-jobbers at Jonathan's. In short, wherever I see a cluster of people, I always mix with them, though I never open my lips but in my own club."

The second number introduces Sir Roger.

"The first of our society is a gentleman of Worcestershire, of ancient descent, a baronet, his name Sir Roger de Coverley. His great-grandfather was inventor of that famous country-dance which is called after him. All who know that shire are very well acquainted with the parts and merits of Sir Roger. He is a gentleman that

is very singular in his behaviour, but his singularities proceed from his good sense, and are contradictions to the manners of the world, only as he thinks the world is in the wrong. . . . When he is in town he lives in Soho Square: it is said, he keeps himself a bachelor by reason he was crossed in love by a perverse beautiful widow of the next county to him. Before this disappointment, Sir Roger was what you call a fine gentleman, had often supped with my Lord Rochester and Sir George Etherege,[1] fought a duel upon his first coming to town, and kicked Bully Dawson in a public coffee-house for calling him youngster. But being ill-used by the above-mentioned widow, he was very serious for a year and a half; and though his temper being naturally jovial, he at last got over it, he grew careless of himself and never dressed afterwards; he continues to wear a coat and doublet of the same cut that were in fashion at the time of his repulse, which, in his merry humours, he tells us, has been in and out twelve times since he first wore it. He is now in his fifty-sixth year, cheerful, gay, and hearty, keeps a good house in both town and country; a great lover of mankind; but there is such a mirthful cast in his behaviour, that he is rather beloved than esteemed. His tenants grow rich, his servants look satisfied, all the young women profess love to him, and the young men are glad of his company: when he comes into a house he calls the servants by their names, and talks all the way upstairs to a visit."

Sir Roger became a great favourite, and several numbers were given up entirely to describing his adventures. One day he was taken to the theatre, to see a play called *The Distressed Mother.*

[1] Well known men-about-town of Restoration days. Rochester was a poet (see p. 204) and Etherege a playwright.

"My friend Sir Roger de Coverley, when we last met together at the club, told me, that he had a great mind to see the new tragedy with me, assuring me at the same time, that he had not been at a play these twenty years. . . . He then proceeded to enquire of me who this Distressed Mother was; and upon hearing that she was Hector's widow,[1] he told me, that her husband was a brave man, and that when he was a school-boy he had read his life at the end of the dictionary."

He was slightly nervous of being out late, for there were bands of ruffians about at night, and the streets were none too safe.

" 'However (says the knight), if Captain Sentry will make one with us to-morrow night, and if you will both of you call on me about four o'clock, that we may be at the house before it is full, I will have my own coach in readiness to attend to you, for John tells me he has got the fore-wheels mended.'

"The captain, who did not fail to meet me there at the appointed hour, bid Sir Roger fear nothing, for that he had put on the same sword which he had made use of at the battle of Steenkirk. Sir Roger's servants, and among the rest my old friend the butler, had, I found, provided themselves with good oaken plants, to attend their master upon this occasion. When we had placed him in his coach with myself at his left hand, the captain before him, and his butler at the head of his footmen in the rear, we convoyed him in safety to the play-house; where, after having marched up the entry in good order, the captain and I went in with him, and seated him betwixt us in the pit. As soon as the house was full and

[1] Andromache, widow of the Trojan leader Hector, was sent to Pyrrhus, one of the Greek heroes, after the Greeks had taken Troy.

the candles lighted, my old friend stood up and looked about him with that pleasure, which a mind seasoned with humanity naturally feels in itself, at the sight of a multitude of people who seem pleased with one another, and partake of the same common entertainment. I could not but fancy to myself, as the old man stood up in the middle of the pit, that he made a very proper centre to a tragic audience. Upon the entering of Pyrrhus, the knight told me, that he did not believe the King of France himself had a better strut. I was, indeed, very attentive to my old friend's remarks, because I looked upon them as a piece of natural criticism, and was well pleased to hear him at the conclusion of almost every scene, telling me that he could not imagine how the play would end. One while he appeared much concerned about Andromache; and a little while after as much for Hermione:[1] and was extremely puzzled to think what would become of Pyrrhus.

"When Sir Roger saw Andromache's obstinate refusal to her lover's importunities, he whispered me in the ear, that he was sure she would never have him;[2] to which he added, with a more than ordinary vehemence, you cannot imagine, sir, what it is to have to do with a widow. Upon Pyrrhus his threatening afterwards to leave her, the knight shook his head, and muttered to himself, 'Ay, do if you can.' This part dwelt so much upon my friend's imagination, that at the close of the third act, as I was thinking of something else, he whispered in my ear, 'These widows, sir, are the most perverse creatures in the world. But pray (says he), you that are a critic, is this play according to your dramatic rules, as you call them? Should your people in tragedy always talk to be understood? Why, there is not a single sentence in this play that I do not know the meaning of.'

[1] Wife of Pyrrhus. [2] i.e. Pyrrhus.

"The fourth act very luckily begun before I had time to give the old gentleman an answer; 'Well (says the knight, sitting down with great satisfaction), I suppose we are now to see Hector's ghost. . . .' Upon Hermione's going off with a menace to Pyrrhus, the audience gave a loud clap; to which Sir Roger added, 'On my word, a notable young baggage!' . . .

"As they were afterwards applauding Pyrrhus, Sir Roger put in a second time, 'And let me tell you (says he), though he speaks but little, I like the old fellow in whiskers as well as any of them.' . . . The knight was wonderfully attentive to the account which Orestes[1] gives to Pyrrhus his death, and at the conclusion of it, told me it was such a bloody piece of work, that he was glad it was not done upon the stage. Seeing afterwards Orestes in his raving fit, he grew more than ordinary serious, and took occasion to moralise (in his way) upon an evil conscience, adding, that 'Orestes, in his madness, looked as if he saw something.'

"As we were the first that came into the house, so we were the last that went out of it; being resolved to have a clear passage for our old friend, whom we did not care to venture among the justling of the crowd. Sir Roger went out fully satisfied with his entertainment, and we guarded him to his lodgings in the same manner that we brought him to the playhouse; being highly pleased, for my own part, not only with the performance of the excellent piece which had been presented, but with the satisfaction which it had given to the good old man."

2

At last Sir Roger died, and was missed by everybody. Addison gives, in one of the *Spectator* papers, a letter from Sir Roger's butler describing his master's death.

[1] Orestes, another Greek, was responsible for Pyrrhus' death.

" 'HONOURED SIR,

'Knowing that you was my old master's good friend, I could not forbear sending you the melancholy news of his death, which has afflicted the whole country, as well as his poor servants who loved him, I may say, better than we did our lives. I am afraid he caught his death the last country sessions, where he would go to see justice done to a poor widow woman, and her fatherless children that had been wronged by a neighbouring gentleman; for, you know, my good master was always the poor man's friend. Upon his coming home, the first complaint he made was, that he had lost his roast-beef stomach, not being able to touch a sirloin, which was served up according to custom: and you know he used to take great delight in it. From that time forward he grew worse and worse, but still kept a good heart to the last. Indeed we were once in great hopes of his recovery, upon a kind message that was sent him from the widow lady whom he had made love to the forty last years of his life; but this only proved a lightning before his death. He has bequeathed to this lady as a token of his love, a great pearl necklace, and a couple of silver bracelets set with jewels, which belonged to my good old lady his mother: he has bequeathed the fine white gelding, that he used to ride a-hunting upon, to his chaplain, because he thought he would be kind to him, and has left you all his books. He has, moreover, bequeathed to the chaplain a very pretty tenement with good lands about it. It being a very cold day when he made his will, he left for mourning to every man in the parish a great frieze coat and to every woman a black riding-hood. It was a most moving sight to see him take leave of his poor servants, commending us all for our fidelity, whilst we were not able to speak a word for weeping. As we most of us are grown

grey-headed in our dear master's service, he has left us pensions and legacies which we may live very comfortably upon the remaining part of our days. . . . Captain Sentry, my master's nephew, has taken possession of the hall-house, and the whole estate. When my old master saw him, a little before his death, he shook him by the hand, and wished him joy of the estate which was falling to him, desiring him only to make a good use of it, and to pay the several legacies, and the gifts of charity, which he told him he had left as quit-rents upon the estate. The captain truly seems a courteous man, though he says but little. He makes much of those whom my master loved, and shows great kindness to the old house-dog, that you know my poor master was so fond of. It would have gone to your heart to have heard the moans the dumb creature made on the day of my master's death. He has never joyed himself since; no more has any of us. It was the melancholiest day for the poor people that ever happened in Worcestershire. This being all from,

'Honoured sir, your most sorrowful servant,

'EDWARD BISCUIT.' "

Sir Roger, it is easy to see, is drawn on the model of the earlier Characters. These, which had begun as impersonal portraits, came in the hands of Dryden and Butler to be drawn from living originals; and under Addison and Steele they turned in the direction of the novel. Sir Roger is an imaginary character, but he is far from impersonal. He is alive and goes about his affairs; a very little more elaboration would make him the central figure in a novel.

The *Spectator* contained much beside the Coverley papers. Addison was an adept at a quiet satire which was none the less effective for being gentle. He could correct absurd new fashions as well as morals, and he was

the first writer to address women as much as men. Here is a letter, purporting to be from the founder of "an Academy for the training up of young women in the Exercise of the Fan, according to the most fashionable airs and motions that are now practised at court." As Addison says, it sufficiently explains its own intentions.

"The ladies who carry fans under me are drawn up twice a day in my great hall, where they are instructed in the use of their arms, and exercised by the following words of command:

Handle your Fans,
Unfurl your Fans,
Discharge your Fans,
Ground your Fans,
Recover your Fans,
Flutter your Fans. . . .

"Upon my giving the word to Discharge their Fans, they give one general crack, that may be heard at a considerable distance when the wind sits fair. This is one of the most difficult parts of the exercise; but I have several ladies with me, who at their first entrance could not give a pop loud enough to be heard at the further end of the room, who can now Discharge a Fan in such a manner, that it shall make a report like a pocket-pistol. I have likewise taken care (in order to hinder young women from letting off their fans in wrong places or unsuitable occasions) to show upon what subject the crack of a fan may come in properly. I have likewise invented a fan, with which a girl of sixteen, by the help of a little wind which is enclosed about one of the largest sticks, can make as loud a crack as a woman of fifty with an ordinary fan.

"When the fans are thus discharged, the word of

command in course is to Ground their Fans. This teaches a lady to quit her fan gracefully when she throws it aside, in order to take up a pack of cards, adjust a curl of hair, replace a fallen pin, or apply herself to any other matter of importance. This part of the exercise, as it only consists in tossing a fan with an air upon a long table (which stands by for that purpose) may be learnt in two days' time as well as in a twelve-month.

"When my female regiment is thus disarmed, I generally let them walk about the room for some time; when on a sudden (like ladies that look upon their watches after a long visit) they all of them hasten to their arms, catch them up in a hurry, and place themselves in their proper stations upon my calling out Recover your Fans. This part of the exercise is not difficult, provided a woman applies her thoughts to it.

"The Fluttering of the Fan is the last, and, indeed, the masterpiece of the whole exercise; but if a lady does not misspend her time, she may make herself mistress of it in three months. I generally lay aside the dog-days and the hot time of the summer for the teaching of this part of the exercise; for as soon as ever I pronounce Flutter your Fans, the place is filled with so many zephyrs and gentle breezes as are very refreshing in that season of the year, though they might be dangerous to ladies of a tender constitution in any other."

Light as this is, it doubtless did its work among the affected ladies of fashion. In more serious mood, it was Addison's ambition to have it said that he had "brought Philosophy out of closets and libraries, schools and colleges, to dwell in clubs and assemblies, at tea-tables and coffee-houses." It is no more than the writer of the *Spectator* papers may justly claim.

3

Addison and Steele chiefly addressed the leisured, cultured society of drawing-room and coffee-house. A contemporary of theirs, also a journalist, made his appeal to a larger public. Daniel Defoe ranked merchants above scholars, and the merchants and ordinary, sober business men appreciated his common sense, and returned the compliment by reading him. Defoe wrote anything he thought would find a public. He was a man of amazing energy and versatility, producing pamphlets, satires, stories, journals, as they were wanted, and judging public taste with the acuteness of the born journalist. Seven years before the *Spectator* began, Defoe was running a weekly paper of his own, called *A Review of the Affairs of France and of all Europe, as influenced by that Nation.* It was a success, for Defoe knew his politics. Indeed, much of his life was spent in petty intrigues and shady political odd jobs. Moreover, he knew that all the public wanted was facts—or what looked like facts!

To this conviction we owe *Robinson Crusoe*, which appeared in 1719. It is the most amazing collection of "facts" that ever made fiction. There was a true foundation to Defoe's story, in the adventures of a castaway sailor named Andrew Selkirk; but to this foundation Defoe added innumerable details of his own, all of them sounding much too matter-of-fact to be anything but true.

The details of Crusoe's first day on the island remind us of the details of Gulliver's arrival in Lilliput. Like Swift, Defoe leaves nothing out of his account.

"I now began to consider, that I might yet get a great many things out of the ship, which would be useful to me, and particularly some of the rigging and

sails, and such other things as might come to land; and I resolved to make another voyage on board the vessel if possible. And as I knew that the first storm that blew must necessarily break her all in pieces, I resolved to set all other things apart till I got everything out of the ship that I could get. Then I called a council, that is to say, in my thoughts, whether I should take back the raft, but this appeared impracticable; so I resolved to go as before, when the tide was down; and I did so, only that I stripped before I went from my hut, having nothing on but a chequered shirt and a pair of linen drawers, and a pair of pumps on my feet.

"I got on board the ship as before, and prepared a second raft, and having had experience of the first, I neither made this so unwieldy, nor loaded it so hard; but yet I brought away several things very useful to me; as, first, in the carpenter's stores I found two or three bags full of nails and spikes, a great screwjack, a dozen or two of hatchets, and above all, that most useful thing called a grindstone. All these I secured, together with several things belonging to the gunner, particularly two or three iron crows, and two barrels of musket bullets, seven muskets, and another fowling-piece, with some small quantity of powder more; a large bag full of small-shot, and a great roll of sheet lead; but this last was so heavy, I could not hoist it up to get it over the ship's side. Besides these things, I took all the men's clothes that I could find, and a spare fore-top sail, a hammock, and some bedding; and with this I loaded my second raft, and brought them all safe on shore, to my very great comfort.

"I was under some apprehension during my absence from the land that at least my provisions might be devoured on shore; but when I came back, I found no sign of any visitor, only sat a creature like a wild cat upon one of the chests, which, when I came towards

it, ran away a little distance, and then stood still. She sat very composed and unconcerned, and looked full in my face, as if she had a mind to be acquainted with me. I presented my gun at her; but as she did not understand it, she was perfectly unconcerned at it, nor did she offer to stir away; upon which I tossed her a bit of biscuit, though, by the way, I was not very free of it, for my store was not great. However, I spared her a bit, I say, and she went to it, smelled of it, and ate it, and looked (as pleased) for more; but I thanked her, and could spare no more, so she marched off."

It is Crusoe's superb matter-of-factness that has endeared him to all right-minded English readers; and, as with Gulliver, it is this that makes his adventures so good a fairy-tale. Here is the imperturbable Crusoe preparing himself a house:

"I consulted several things in my situation, which I found would be proper for me. First, health and fresh water, I just now mentioned. Secondly, shelter from the heat of the sun. Thirdly, security from ravenous creatures, whether men or beasts. Fourthly, a view to the sea, that if God sent any ship in sight I might not lose any advantage for my deliverance, of which I was not willing to banish all my expectation yet.

"In search of a place proper for this, I found a little plain on the side of a rising hill, whose front towards this little plain was steep as a house-side, so that nothing could come down upon me from the top; on the side of this rock there was a hollow place, worn a little way in, like the entrance or door of a cave; but there was not really any cave, or way into the rock at all.

"On the flat of the green, just before this hollow place, I resolved to pitch my tent. This plain was not above an hundred yards broad, and about twice as long,

and lay like a green before my door, and at the end of it descended irregularly every way down into the low grounds by the seaside. It was on the N.N.W. side of the hill, so that I was sheltered from the heat every day, till it came to a W. and by S. sun, or thereabouts, which in those countries is near the setting.

"Before I set up my tent, I drew a half circle before the hollow place, which took in about ten yards in its semi-diameter from the rock, and twenty yards in its diameter from its beginning and ending. In this half-circle I pitched two rows of strong stakes, driving them into the ground till they stood very firm like piles, the biggest end being out of the ground about five feet and a half, and sharpened on the top. The two rows did not stand above six inches from one another.

"Then I took the pieces of cable which I had cut in the ship, and laid them in rows one upon another, within the circle, between these two rows of stakes, up to the top, placing other stakes in the inside leaning against them, about two feet and a half high, like a spur to a post; and this fence was so strong, that neither man or beast could get into it, or over it. This cost me a great deal of time and labour, especially to cut the piles in the woods, bring them to the place, and drive them into the earth.

"The entrance into this place I made to be not by a door, but by a short ladder to go over the top; which ladder, when I was in, I lifted over after me, and so I was completely fenced in and fortified, as I thought, from all the world, and consequently slept secure in the night, which otherwise I could not have done; though as it appeared afterward, there was no need of all this caution from the enemies that I apprehended danger from.

"Into this fence or fortress, with infinite labour, I carried all my riches, all my provisions, ammunition and stores, of which you have the account above; and I made

me a large tent, which, to preserve me from the rains that in one part of the year are very violent there, I made double, viz., one smaller tent within, and one larger tent above it, and covered the uppermost with a large tarpaulin, which I had saved among the sails. And now I lay no more for a while in the bed which I had brought on shore, but in a hammock, which was indeed a very good one, and belonged to the mate of the ship.

"Into this tent I brought all my provisions, and everything that would spoil by the wet; and having thus enclosed all my goods, I made up the entrance, which, till now, I had left open, and so passed and repassed, as I said, by a short ladder.

"When I had done this, I began to work my way into the rock; and bringing all the earth and stones that I dug down out through my tent, I laid them up within my fence in the nature of a terrace, so that it raised the ground within about a foot and a half; and thus I made me a cave just behind my tent, which served me like a cellar to my house."

Crusoe lives alone for twenty-five years, and is then joined by the savage, Man Friday, who becomes his devoted servant. When Crusoe is rescued and begins to mix with other men again, he becomes less interesting. It is as a castaway, resourceful, methodical, and doing all the things we feel we should do in such a situation, that he holds our interest and affection.

4

Robinson Crusoe, though an excellent story, is not a novel as we understand the term. There is only one character in it who really matters—Crusoe himself, the teller of the tale. Defoe told several other stories in the same way, as if they were written by their chief character;

and his *Journal of the Plague Year*, though not a story, is narrated as if by an eyewitness. The Plague was in 1665, and Defoe wrote about it in 1722, but we might easily believe he had been present at the scenes he describes.

"Much about the same time I walked out into fields towards Bow; for I had a great mind to see how things were managed in the river and among the ships; and as I had some concern in shipping, I had a notion that it had been one of the best ways of securing one's self from the infection to have retired into a ship: and musing how to satisfy my curiosity in that point, I turned away over the fields from Bow to Bromley, and down to Blackwall to the stairs, which are there for landing or taking water.

"Here I saw a poor man walking on the bank, or sea-wall, as they call it, by himself. I walked a while also about, seeing the houses all shut up; at last I fell into some talk, at a distance, with this poor man; first I asked him how people did thereabouts. 'Alas, sir!' says he, 'almost all desolate; all dead or sick. Here are very few families in this part, or in that village,' pointing at Poplar, 'where half of them are not dead already, and the rest sick.' Then he pointed to one house. 'There they are all dead,' said he, 'and the house stands open; nobody dares go into it. A poor thief,' says he, 'ventured in to steal something, but he paid dear for the theft, for he was carried to the churchyard too last night.' Then he pointed to several other houses. 'There,' says he, 'they are all dead, the man and his wife, and five children.' 'There,' says he, 'they are shut up; you see a watchman at the door;' and so of other houses. 'Why,' says I, 'what do you here all alone?' 'Why,' says he, 'I am a poor, desolate man; it has pleased God I am not yet visited,[1] though my family is, and one of my children

[1] i.e. by the plague.

dead.' 'How do you mean, then,' said I, 'that you are not visited?' 'Why,' says he, 'that's my house,' pointing to a very little, low-boarded house, 'and there my poor wife and two children live,' said he, 'if they may be said to live, for my wife and one of the children are visited, but I do not come at them.' And with that word I saw the tears run very plentifully down his face; and so they did down mine too, I assure you.

" 'But,' said I, 'why do you not come at them? How can you abandon your own flesh and blood?' 'Oh, sir,' says he, 'the Lord forbid! I do not abandon them; I work for them as much as I am able; and, blessed be the Lord, I keep them from want.' . . . 'Well,' says I, 'honest man, that is a great mercy as things go now with the poor. But how do you live, then, and how are you kept from the dreadful calamity that is now upon us all?' 'Why, sir,' says he, 'the boat serves me for a house. I work in it in the day, and I sleep in it in the night; and what I get I lay down upon that stone,' says he, showing me a broad stone on the other side of the street, a good way from his house; 'and then,' says he, 'I halloo, and call to them till I make them hear; and they come and fetch it.'

" 'Well, friend,' says I, 'but how can you get any money as a waterman? Does anybody go by water these times?' 'Yes sir,' says he, 'in the way I am employed there does. Do you see there,' says he, 'five ships lie at anchor,' pointing down the river a good way below the town, 'and do you see,' says he, 'eight or ten ships lie at the chain there, and at anchor yonder,' pointing above the town. 'All those ships have families on board, of their merchants and owners, and such-like, who have locked themselves up and live on board, close shut in, for fear of the infection; and I tend on them to fetch things for them, carry letters, and do what is absolutely necessary,

that they may not be obliged to come on shore; and every night I fasten my boat on board one of the ship's boats, and there I sleep by myself, and, blessed be God, I am preserved hitherto. . . . I seldom come on shore here, and I came now only to call to my wife and hear how my little family do, and give them a little money, which I received last night.'

" 'Poor man!' said I; 'and how much hast thou gotten for them?'

" 'I have gotten four shillings,' said he, 'which is a great sum, as things go now with poor men; but they have given me a bag of bread too, and a salt fish and some flesh; so all helps out.'

" 'Well,' said I, 'and have you given it them yet?'

" 'No,' said he, 'but I have called, and my wife has answered that she cannot come out yet, but in half-an-hour she hopes to come, and I am waiting for her. Poor woman!' says he, 'she is brought sadly down. She has a swelling, and it is broke, and I hope she will recover; but I fear the child will die, but it is the Lord——'

"Here he stopped, and wept very much.

" 'Well, honest friend,' said I, 'thou hast a sure Comforter, if thou hast brought thyself to be resigned to the will of God; He is dealing with us all in judgement.'

" 'Oh, sir!' says he, 'it is infinite mercy if any of us are spared, and who am I to repine!' "

Defoe wrote as straightforwardly as he spoke. In his style, as in the more polished work of Addison and Steele, we can see how the Age of Reason had simplified English prose. The ornate periods of Sir Thomas Browne had had their day. They gave place, as the spirit of the age altered, to a style no less capable of feeling, but clear, sensible, and workaday.

CHAPTER XX

DEAN SWIFT

1

JONATHAN SWIFT, the Dean of St. Patrick's Cathedral, Dublin, fell victim to a joke as ironic as any he played in life or in his writings. Retiring to Dublin in a rage when all prospect of the preferment he coveted was gone, he came to be the idol of the people he had at first despised. Writing one of the most savage and bitter satires that was ever intended to lash the world, he so far failed in his object that the world, removing from the satire one or two obviously offensive passages, has given it to children as a fairy tale.

Swift was born in Dublin in 1667. He was sent to school at Kilkenny, and went from there to Trinity College, Dublin, where he more than once got into trouble before taking his degree. His first position was as secretary to Sir William Temple, the famous diplomatist, at Moor Park, near Farnham, in Surrey. This position, with one or two intervals, he held for some time. Sir William had a fine library, and Swift's first satire, *The Battle of the Books*, was written during his stay. In 1694 Swift took Holy Orders. At Sir William Temple's house he met Esther Johnson, who drew out from him, as no other human being quite succeeded in doing, the tenderness which made one side of his restless and suspicious nature. *The Journal to Stella*, which he was often writing side by side with bitter attacks on this and that in politics, shows him in a very different light from that of his satires.

Swift came to London in 1707, where he was made much of by Steele, and began to write in the *Tatler*.

There was at the time a so-called prophet named Partridge, who occasionally issued predictions in print. Swift replied under the name of Isaac Bickerstaff, by prophesying the death of Partridge, and presently announced the fulfilment of his prophecy. It was in vain for the indignant Partridge to protest that he was still alive: the whole town joined in the joke, and Swift adopted the name of Bickerstaff for his contributions to the *Tatler*.

After a while, however, the savagery of his temper came out too strongly. The *Examiner*, a magazine founded to support the Tory ministry of 1710, was much more to his taste—though his conduct of it was far less bitter, and far more statesmanlike, than might have been expected. As a reward for his services, he was made Dean of St. Patrick's Cathedral, in Dublin; but he expected English preferment; and when Queen Anne died, and the Tory ministry fell, he retired to Dublin disappointed and embittered, "to die," as he savagely put it, "like a poisoned rat in a hole."

"You are to understand," he wrote to his friend Pope, "that I live in the corner of a vast unfurnished house; my family consists of a steward, a groom, a helper in the stable, a foot-man, and an old maid, who are all on board wages, and when I do not dine abroad, or make an entertainment (which last is very rare) I eat a meat-pie, and drink half a pint of wine: my amusements are defending my small dominions against the archbishop, and endeavouring to reduce my rebellious choir."

In Dublin he found much to engage the restless fury of his mind. The mass of the people were poor, ignorant, and half starved, and the country was badly misgoverned. Soon came the opportunity for a protest which endeared Swift to the Irish for ever. He had

already published one pamphlet, *Arachne and Pallas*, so bitter that its printer was prosecuted: but a bigger chance now offered. A man named Wood had been given a patent to supply Ireland with copper halfpennies. There was nothing wrong with the halfpennies, though Swift chose to believe so, but the whole transaction, and the disposal of the huge profits, was shady in the extreme. Swift threw himself into the fray, and his *Drapier Letters* attacked the project, root and branch, with such ferocity that the English government was obliged to give way and to drop the patent. This victory, secured by means almost as unscrupulous as the project it defeated, made the Irish look upon Swift as their champion and deliverer. Later, when the country was being ravaged by famine, and nothing was being done to help it, Swift came forward with the fierce irony of his *Modest Proposal* to reduce the population and feed the hungry by killing and eating the children. Such popularity did he attain, and so great was the faith of the people in him, that once, when a crowd had gathered outside his house to see an eclipse, he dispersed them by coming out and telling them that the eclipse had been postponed by his orders.

Swift's greatest work is his satire *Gulliver's Travels*, which was begun in Dublin soon after the affair of Wood's halfpennies. Gulliver, a shipwrecked sailor, is cast among the Lilliputians, a tiny people whose politics, so surprisingly like the politics of England at the time, are made to seem ridiculously insignificant, and that not only by the fact that they belonged to creatures a few inches high. When Gulliver visits the Brobdingnagians, a race of giants, Swift secures the same effect by making the giant King laugh to hear that so tiny a creature has political passions. These are the two voyages which, minus a few passages, have been made over to children as a fairy tale. There were subsequent voyages which

have not. The voyage to Laputa was an attack upon the scientists and the philosophers: hardly a wise attack, as the eighteenth century was chiefly remarkable for its achievements in philosophy and science. In the last voyage to the country where horses rule, and a degraded race of men, the Yahoos, are in subjection to them, Swift's hatred of his fellow creatures finds full vent.

In the last years of his life. Swift began to lose the powers of his mind. He had early mused upon what would happen at his death:—

From Dublin soon to London spread,
'Tis told at court "the Dean is dead."
And Lady Suffolk, in the spleen,
Runs laughing up to tell the queen.
The queen, so gracious, mild, and good,
Cries "Is he gone? 'tis time he should.
He's dead, you say; then let him rot:
I'm glad the medals were forgot.
I promised him, I own; but when?
I only was the princess then;
But now, as consort of the King
You know, 'tis quite another thing."

The ladies lament him, but not too much. They

Receive the news in doleful dumps.
The Dean is dead (pray what is trumps?)

His friends are sorry, each after his fashion.

Here shift the scene, to represent
How those I love my death lament.
Poor Pope would grieve a month,[1] *and Gay*[2]
A week, and Arbuthnot a day.

[1] See p. 260. [2] Author of *The Beggar's Opera.*

St John himself will scarce forbear
To bite his pen and drop a tear.
The rest will give a shrug and cry,
"I'm sorry—but we all must die!"

Actually his friends were mourning for him some time before he died. His brain gradually clouded, and, in his few clear moments, he ridiculed the care taken to keep him alive.

Behold a proof of Irish sense!
Here Irish wit is seen!
When nothing's left that's worth defence
They build a magazine.

He wrote the following letter to his friend Mrs. Whiteway in one of his clearer moments.

"I have been very miserable all night, and to-day extremely deaf and full of pain. I am so stupid and confounded that I cannot express the mortification I am under both in body and mind. All I can say is that I am not in torture; but I daily and hourly expect it. Pray let me know how your health is, and your family. I hardly understand one word I write. I am sure my days will be very few: few and miserable they must be:

"I am, for those few days, yours entirely

"JON SWIFT."

"If I do not blunder, it is Saturday, July 26, 1740."

He died in 1745.

2

Swift's first work, *The Battle of the Books*, was written, as we have said, while he was still with Sir William Temple. It took up the argument of the Classics against

the Moderns. Swift represents the Classics by the Bee, which flies from flower to flower culling all the sweetness that each has to offer, and the Moderns by the Spider, spinning everything out of his own insides. Here is an account of their first meeting:

"Things were at this crisis when a material accident fell out. For upon the highest corner of a large window there dwelt a certain spider, swollen up to the first magnitude by the destruction of infinite numbers of flies, whose spoils lay scattered before the gates of his palace, like human bones before the cave of some giant. The avenues to his castle were guarded with turnpikes and palisadoes, all after the modern way of fortification. After you had passed several courts you came to the centre, wherein you might behold the constable himself in his own lodgings, which had windows fronting to each avenue, and posts to sally out upon all occasions of prey or defence. In this mansion he had for some time dwelt in peace and plenty, without danger to his person by swallows from above, or to his palace by brooms from below: when it was the pleasure of fortune to conduct thither a wandering bee, to whose curiosity a broken pane in the glass had discovered itself, and in he went; where, expatiating[1] a while, he at last happened to alight upon one of the outward walls of the spider's citadel; which, yielding to the unequal weight, sunk down to the very foundation. Thrice he endeavoured to force his passage, and thrice the centre shook. The spider within, feeling the terrible convulsion, supposed at first that nature was approaching to her final dissolution; or else that Beelzebub,[2] with all his legions, was come to revenge the death of many thousands of his subjects whom his enemy had slain and devoured. However, he at length valiantly resolved to issue forth and meet his fate.

[1] Wandering. [2] Here, the God of flies.

Meanwhile the bee had acquitted himself of his toils, and, posted securely at some distance, was employed in cleansing his wings, and disengaging them from the ragged remnants of the cobweb. By this time the spider was adventured out, when, beholding the chasms, the ruins, and dilapidations of his fortress, he was very near at his wit's end; he stormed and swore like a madman, and swelled till he was ready to burst. At length, casting his eye upon the bee, and wisely gathering causes from events, (for they knew each other by sight,) A plague split you, said he; is it you, with a vengeance, that have made this litter here? could not you look before you, and be d——d? do you think I have nothing else to do, in the devil's name, but to mend and repair after you?—Good words, friend, said the bee, having now pruned himself, and being disposed to droll: I'll give you my hand and word to come near your kennel no more; I was never in such a confounded pickle since I was born.—Sirrah, replied the spider, if it were not for breaking an old custom in our family, never to stir abroad against an enemy, I should come and teach you better manners.—I pray have patience, said the bee, or you'll spend your substance, and, for aught I see, you may stand in need of it all toward the repair of your house.—Rogue, rogue, replied the spider, yet methinks you should have more respect to a person whom all the world allows to be so much your better.—By my troth, said the bee, the comparison will amount to a very good jest; and you will do me a favour to let me know the reasons that all the world is pleased to use in so hopeful a dispute. At this the spider, having swelled himself into the size and posture of a disputant, began his argument in the true spirit of controversy, with resolution to be heartily scurrilous and angry, to urge on his own reasons, without the least regard to the answers or objections of his opposite; and

fully predetermined in his mind against all conviction.

"Not to disparage myself, said he, by the comparison with such a rascal, what art thou but a vagabond without house or home, without stock or inheritance? born to no possession of your own, but a pair of wings and a drone-pipe. Your livelihood is a universal plunder upon nature; a freebooter over fields and gardens; and, for the sake of stealing, will rob a nettle as easily as a violet. Whereas I am a domestic animal, furnished with a native stock within myself. This large castle (to show my improvements in the mathematics) is all built with my own hands, and the material extracted altogether out of my own person.

"I am glad, answered the bee, to hear you grant at least that I am come honestly by my wings and my voice; for then, it seems, I am obliged to Heaven alone for my flights and my music; and Providence would never have bestowed on me two such gifts, without designing them for the noblest ends. I visit indeed all the flowers and blossoms of the field and garden; but whatever I collect thence enriches myself, without the least injury to their beauty, their smell, or their taste. Now, for you and your skill in architecture and other mathematics, I have little to say: in that building of yours there might, for aught I know, have been labour and method enough; but, by woeful experience for us both, it is plain the materials are naught; and I hope you will henceforth take warning, and consider duration and matter, as well as method and art. You boast indeed of being obliged to no other creature, but of drawing and spinning out all from yourself; that is to say, if we may judge of the liquor in the vessel by what issues out, you possess a good plentiful store of dirt and poison in your breast; and, though I would by no means lessen or disparage your genuine stock of either, yet I doubt you are somewhat obliged,

for an increase of both, to a little foreign assistance. Your inherent portion of dirt does not fail of acquisitions, by sweepings exhaled from below; and one insect furnishes you with a share of poison to destroy another. So that, in short, the question comes all to this: whether is the nobler being of the two, that which, by a lazy contemplation of four inches round, by an overweening pride, feeding and engendering on itself, turns all into venom, producing nothing at all but flybane and a cobweb; or that which, by a universal range, with a long search, much study, true judgment, and distinction of things, brings home honey and wax."

When Swift was in Ireland in 1699, as chaplain and secretary to Lord Berkeley, he was bored to death by being compelled to read each evening to Lady Berkeley from a pious work entitled *Boyle's Meditations*. One night he substituted the following parody, which completely deceived the good lady:

Meditation on a Broomstick.

"The singlestick, which you now behold ingloriously lying in that neglected corner, I once knew in a flourishing state in a forest: it was full of sap, full of leaves, and full of boughs: but now, in vain does the busy art of man pretend to vie with nature, by tieing that withered bundle of twigs to its sapless trunk; it is now, at best, but the reverse of what it was, a tree turned upside down, the branches on the earth and the root in the air; it is now handled by every dirty wench, condemned to do her drudgery, and, by a capricious kind of fate, destined to make other things clean and be nasty itself; at length, worn to the stumps in the service of the maids, it is either thrown out of doors, or condemned to the last use of

kindling a fire. When I beheld this, I sighed, and said within myself, SURELY MAN IS A BROOMSTICK! Nature sent him into the world strong and lusty, in a thriving condition, wearing his own hair on his head, the proper branches of this reasoning vegetable, until the axe of intemperance has lopped off his green boughs, and left him a withered trunk: he then flies to art, and puts on a periwig, valuing himself upon an unnatural bundle of hairs (all covered with powder), that never grew on his head; but now, should this our broomstick pretend to enter the scene, proud of those birchen spoils it never bore, and all covered with dust, though the sweepings of the finest lady's chamber, we should be apt to ridicule and despise its vanity. Partial judges that we are of our own excellences and other men's defaults!

"But a broomstick, perhaps you will say, is an emblem of a tree standing on its head: and pray what is man but a topsyturvy creature, his animal faculties perpetually mounted on his rational, his head where his heels should be, grovelling on the earth! And yet, with all his faults, he sets up to be a universal reformer and corrector of abuses, a remover of grievances, rakes into every slut's corner of nature, bringing hidden corruption to the light, and raises a mighty dust where there was none before; sharing deeply all the while in the very same pollutions he pretends to sweep away: his last days are spent in slavery to women, and generally the least deserving; till, worn out to the stumps, like his brother besom, he is either kicked out of doors, or made use of to kindle flames for others to warm themselves by."

3

Swift's masterpiece, *Gulliver's Travels*, was indirectly the outcome of his friendship with Pope. When he was in

London, he and Pope, with a few other friends, had founded what was known as the Scriblerus Club, with the object of ridiculing all stupidity that masqueraded as learning. (Dr. Martin Scriblerus was an imaginary and singularly foolish pedant.) To the Scriblerus Club we owe not only *Gulliver's Travels*, but the *Dunciad*. In 1725, Swift writes thus to Pope about *Gulliver*.

". . . My travels . . . intended for the Press when the world shall deserve them, or rather when a printer shall be found brave enough to venture his ears. . . . The chief end I propose to myself in all my labours, is to vex the world, rather than divert it; and if I could compass that design without hurting my own person or fortune, I would be the most indefatigable writer you have ever known."

Everyone knows the story of Gulliver's arrival among the people of Lilliput: how, falling asleep exhausted after the wreck, he awoke to find himself a prisoner, tied to the ground by innumerable tiny ropes. After a while, upon humble promise to behave himself, he was given a measure of liberty. The following is the inventory, or list, of his possessions made by the Lilliputian commissioners:—

"*Imprimis*,[1] in the right coat-pocket of the great man-mountain (for so I interpret the words *quinbus flestrin*), after the strictest search, we found only one great piece of coarse cloth, large enough to be a footcloth for your majesty's chief room of state.[2] In the left pocket we saw a huge silver chest, with a cover of the same metal, which we the searchers were not able to lift. We desired it should be opened, and one of us stepping

[1] First of all. [2] His handkerchief.

into it found himself up to the mid-leg in a sort of dust, some part whereof, flying up to our faces, set us both a-sneezing for several times together.[1] In his right waistcoat-pocket we found a prodigious bundle of white thin substances, folded one over another, about the bigness of three men, tied with a strong cable, and marked with black figures, which we humbly conceive to be writings, every letter almost half as large as the palm of our hands.[2] In the left there was a sort of engine, from the back of which were extended twenty long poles, resembling the palisadoes before your majesty's court, wherewith we conjecture the man-mountain combs his head; for we did not always trouble him with questions, because we found it a great difficulty to make him understand us. In the large pocket, on the right side of his middle cover (so I translate the word *ranfulo*, by which they meant my breeches), we saw a hollow pillar of iron, about the length of a man, fastened to a strong piece of timber larger than the pillar; and upon one side of the pillar were huge pieces of iron sticking out, cut into strange figures, which we know not what to make of.[3] In the left pocket another engine of the same kind. In the smaller pocket, on the right side, were several round flat pieces of white and red metal, of different bulk; some of the white, which seemed to be silver, were so large and heavy that my comrade and I could hardly lift them.[4] In the left pocket were two black pillars irregularly shaped; we could not, without difficulty, reach the top of them as we stood at the bottom of his pocket. One of them was covered, and seemed all of a piece; but at the upper end of the other there appeared a white round substance, about twice the bigness of our heads. Within each of these was enclosed a prodigious plate of steel; which, by our orders, we obliged him to show us,

[1] They were in his snuff-box. [2] A diary. [3] A pistol. [4] Money.

because we apprehended they might be dangerous engines. He took them out of their cases, and told us that, in his own country, his practise was to shave his beard with one of these, and cut his meat with the other. There were two pockets which we could not enter; these he called his fobs; they were two large slits cut into the top of his middle cover, but squeezed close by the pressure of his belly. Out of his right fob hung a great silver chain, with a wonderful kind of engine at the bottom. We directed him to draw out whatever was at the end of that chain, which appeared to be a globe, half silver, and half of some transparent metal; for, on the transparent side, we saw certain strange figures circularly drawn, and thought we could touch them, till we found our fingers stopped by that lucid substance. He put this engine to our ears, which made an incessant noise, like that of a water-mill; and we conjecture it is either some unknown animal, or the god he worships; but we are more inclined to the latter opinion, because he assured us (if we understood him right, for he expressed himself very imperfectly) that he seldom did anything without consulting it. He called it his oracle, and said it pointed out the time for every action of his life. From the left fob he took out a net, almost large enough for a fisherman, but contrived to open and shut like a purse, and served him for the same use; we found therein several massy pieces of yellow metal, which, if they be real gold, must be of immense value.

"Having thus, in obedience to your majesty's commands, diligently searched all his pockets, we observed a girdle about his waist, made of the hide of some prodigious animal, from which, on the left side, hung a sword of the length of five men; and on the right, a bag or pouch divided into two cells, each capable of holding three of your majesty's subjects. In one of these cells

were several globes, or balls, of a most ponderous metal, about the bigness of our heads, and required a strong hand to lift them;[1] the other cell contained a heap of certain black grains, but of no great bulk or weight, for we could hold above fifty of them in the palms of our hands.[2]

"This is an exact inventory of what we found about the body of the man-mountain, who used us with great civility, and due respect to your majesty's commission. Signed and sealed on the fourth day of the eighty-ninth moon of your majesty's auspicious reign."

We have room for one more quotation from the Travels, an adventure with the Brobdingnagians:—

"Scared and confounded as I was, I could not forbear going on with these reflections, when one of the reapers, approaching within ten yards of the ridge where I lay, made me apprehend that with the next step I should be squashed to death under his foot, or cut in two with his reaping-hook. And therefore, when he was again about to move, I screamed as loud as fear could make me: whereupon the huge creature trod short, and, looking round about for some time, at last espied me as I lay on the ground. He considered a while, with the caution of one who endeavours to lay hold on a small dangerous animal in such a manner that it shall not be able either to scratch or to bite him, as I myself have sometimes done with a weasel in England. At length he ventured to take me behind, by the middle, between his fore-finger and thumb, and brought me within three yards of his eyes, that he might behold my shape more perfectly. guessed his meaning, and my good fortune gave me so much presence of mind, that I resolved not to struggle in

[1] Bullets. [2] Gunpowder.

the least as he held me in the air above sixty feet from the ground, (although he grievously pinched my sides,) for fear I should slip through his fingers. All I ventured was to raise mine eyes towards the sun, and place my hands together in a supplicating posture, and to speak some words in an humble, melancholy tone, suitable to the condition I then was in: for I apprehended every moment that he would dash me against the ground, as we usually do any little hateful animal which we have a mind to destroy. But my good star would have it that he appeared pleased with my voice and gestures, and began to look upon me as a curiosity, much wondering to hear me pronounce articulate words, although he could not understand them. In the mean time I was not able to forbear groaning and shedding tears, and turning my head towards my sides; letting him know, as well as I could, how cruelly I was hurt by the pressure of his thumb and finger. He seemed to apprehend my meaning; for lifting up the lappet of his coat, he put me gently into it, and immediately ran along with me to his master, who was a substantial farmer, and the same person I had first seen in the field.

"The farmer, having (as I suppose by their talk) received such an account of me as his servant could give him, took a piece of a small straw, about the size of a walking staff, and therewith lifted up the lappets of my coat; which it seems he thought to be some kind of covering that nature had given me. He blew my hairs aside to take a better view of my face. He called his hinds about him, and asked them (as I afterwards learned) whether they had ever seen in the fields any little creature that resembled me. He then placed me softly on the ground upon all fours, but I got immediately up, and walked slowly backwards and forwards, to let those people see I had no intent to run away. They all sat down in a circle

about me, the better to observe my motions. I pulled off my hat, and made a low bow towards the farmer. I fell on my knees, and lifted up my hands and eyes, and spoke several words as loud as I could. I took a purse of gold out of my pocket, and humbly presented it to him. He received it on the palm of his hand, then applied it close to his eye to see what it was, and afterwards turned it several times with the point of a pin, which he took out of his sleeve, but could make nothing of it. Whereupon I made a sign that he should place his hand on the ground. I then took the purse, and, opening it, poured all the gold into his palm. There were six Spanish pieces of four pistoles each, besides twenty or thirty smaller coins. I saw him wet the tip of his little finger upon his tongue, and take up one of my largest pieces, and then another; but he seemed to be wholly ignorant what they were. He made me a sign to put them again into my purse, and the purse again into my pocket, which, after offering it to him several times, I thought it best to do.

"The farmer by this time was convinced I must be a rational creature. He spoke often to me, but the sound of his voice pierced my ears like that of a water-mill, yet his words were articulate enough. I answered as loud as I could in several languages, and he often laid his ear within two yards of me; but all in vain, for we were wholly unintelligible to each other. He then sent his servants to their work, and, taking his handkerchief out of his pocket, he doubled and spread it on his left hand, which he placed flat on the ground with the palm upward, making me a sign to step into it; as I could easily do, for it was not above a foot in thickness. I thought it my part to obey; and, for fear of falling, laid myself at full length upon the handkerchief, with the remainder of which he lapped me up to the head for farther security,

and in this manner carried me home to his house. There he called his wife, and showed me to her; but she screamed and ran back, as women in England do at the sight of a spider or a toad. However, when she had awhile seen my behaviour, and how well I observed the signs her husband made, she was soon reconciled, and by degrees grew extremely tender of me."

Swift chose his own epitaph. He lies "ubi saeva indignatio ulterius cor lacerare nequit" (where fierce indignation can tear the heart no longer).

His was a fierce and a generous indignation, even if the springs of it seem to lie in the disappointment of his own ambitions. For the poor Irish he did great things, and it is no accident that has fixed him in history and in the public mind as the Dean of St. Patrick's.

It is pleasant to wind up with something which shows him in a happy light, two or three short passages from his *Journal to Stella*:—

"I dined in the city to-day, and went from hence early to town, and visited the Duke of Ormond, and Mr. Secretary. They say, my lord treasurer has a dead warrant in his pocket, they mean, a list of those who are to be turned out of employment, and we every day now expect those changes. I past by the treasury to-day and saw vast crowds waiting to give lord treasurer petitions as he passes by. He is now at the top of power and favour: he keeps no levées yet. I am cruel thirsty this hot weather. I am just this minute going to swim. I take Patrick down with me to hold my nightgown, shirt and slippers, and borrow a napkin of my landlady for a cap. So farewell till I come up; but there's no danger, don't be frighted—I have been swimming this half hour and more; and when I was coming out I dived, to make my head and all through wet, like a cold bath; but as I

dived, the napkin fell off and is lost, and I have that to pay for. O faith, the great stones were so sharp, I could hardly set my feet on them as I came out. It was pure and warm. I got to bed, and will now go sleep. . . .

"Nothing makes me so excessively peevish as hot weather. Lady Berkeley after dinner clapt my hat on another lady's head, and she in roguery put it upon the rails. I minded them not; but in two minutes they called me to the window, and lady Carteret shewed me my hat out of her window five doors off, where I was forced to walk to it, and pay her and old lady Weymouth a visit, with some more beldames. Then I went and drank coffee, and made one or two puns with lord Pembroke, and designed to go to lord treasurer; but it was too late, and besides I was half broiled, and broiled without butter, for I never sweat after dinner, if I drink any wine. Then I sat an hour with lady Betty Butler at tea, and every thing made me hotter and drier. Then I walkt home, and was here by ten, so miserably hot, that I was in as perfect a passion as ever I was in my life at the greatest affront or provocation. Then I sat an hour, till I was quite dry and cool enough to go swim; which I did, but with so much vexation, that I think I have given it over: for I was every moment disturbed by boats, rot them; and that puppy Patrick, standing ashore, would let them come within a yard or two, and then call sneakingly to them. The only comfort I proposed here in hot weather is gone; for there is no jesting with those boats after 'tis dark: I had none last night. I dived to dip my head, and held my cap on with both my hands, for fear of losing it. . . ."

The unfortunate Patrick made other mistakes:—

"I dined yesterday with lord treasurer, who would needs take me along with him to Windsor, although I refused him several times, having no linen, &c. I

had just time to desire lord Forbes to call at my lodging, and order my man to send my things to-day to Windsor by his servant. I lay last night at the secretary's lodgings at Windsor, and borrowed one of his shirts to go to court in. The queen is very well. I dined with Mr. Masham; and not hearing any thing of my things, I got lord Winchelsea to bring me to town. Here I found that Patrick had broke open the closet to get my linen and nightgown, and sent them to Windsor, and there they are; and he not thinking I would return so soon, is gone upon his rambles: so here I am left destitute, and forced to borrow a nightgown of my landlady, and have not a rag to put on to-morrow: faith, it gives me the spleen. . . ."

And here is a glimpse of Good Queen Anne:—

"There was a drawing-room to-day at Court; but so few company, that the queen sent for us into her bed-chamber, where we made our bows, and stood about twenty of us round the room, while she looked at us round with her fan in her mouth, and once a minute said about three words to some that were nearest her, and then she was told dinner was ready, and went out. . . ."

CHAPTER XXI

DR. JOHNSON

1

SAMUEL JOHNSON, one of the most downright and lovable characters who has ever lived, was born at Lichfield in 1709. His father was a bookseller. From his earliest days he had to struggle against adversity. Attacked by scrofula, the disease known as "King's Evil," he nearly lost his sight. "King's Evil" got its name from the popular belief that the touch of a king's hand could cure it. Johnson's parents took him all the way to London, but Queen Anne's touch did him no good, and to the end of his life he had trouble with his sight and hearing. Luckily, a strong constitution helped him to surmount this difficulty and many more. He went to school, first at Lichfield, under the violent Hunter, and later at Stourbridge: but the real foundations of his enormous learning were laid in the two years he subsequently spent at home, reading everything in his father's shop upon which he could lay his hands.

In 1728 his father managed with help from a friend to send him up to Pembroke College, Oxford. There he made a name for himself by his wit and strength of character, but his money gave out, and he left in 1731 without a degree, ill clothed and hungry. He was for a while assistant master in a school, tried his hand at writing, and then, at the lowest ebb of his fortunes, married an ugly widow twice his age, to whom he remained devoted for as long as she lived.

The queer pair set up a school at Lichfield, but, as they had only three pupils, they gave it up and came to London. One of the pupils, David Garrick, who was to

become the most famous of English actors, used to convulse his friends with imitations of the loving couple. Johnson's chances of success at this time must have seemed poor indeed: yet he lived to be the most famous and honoured writer of his time, the subject of the best biography in the English language, a talker whose reputation has gone round the world and is to-day as high as ever, and the object of more affection than any other figure in our literature.

When they came to London, the plight of the Johnsons for a while was desperate. Hunger, and the treat of an occasional good meal, laid the foundations of the gluttony and uncouthness for which Johnson soon became celebrated. His table manners became frankly bad, and remained so. He ate hastily and greedily,[1] till the veins stood out on his forehead: he puffed and grunted and blew. When a man is starving, he does not worry much about good manners. In the same way, the man who has perforce to wear a dirty shirt may soon cease to be particular, even when he has several; and before we judge Johnson, who later on frankly admitted that he was no great lover of clean linen, we must bear in mind the sufferings from which these and other of his eccentricities began. All his life, he was subject to fits of melancholy and depression. "Man is not born for happiness," he wrote, in his life of the poet Collins. When we imagine what his sufferings must have been at this time (when he had not only himself to think about), the wonder is, not that he became the great Dr. Johnson, but that he existed at all.

Johnson had brought with him to town the manuscript of a tragedy, *Irene*, but no theatre would accept it. His first regular job came when he was engaged by the

[1] To the end of his days Johnson enjoyed his food. "There is no private house (said he) in which people can enjoy themselves so much, as at a capital tavern."

publisher of the *Gentleman's Magazine* to write articles. Most of his work for this paper consisted of disguised accounts of the debates in Parliament. The accounts had to be disguised, for at the time direct reporting was forbidden. The year after his arrival he published a poem, *London*, which attracted attention, and won the praise of Pope. From time to time, though he still lived from hand to mouth, his reputation grew. In 1744 he published a life of his unfortunate friend Richard Savage, the poet, and three years later a federation of publishers offered him a sum of over £1,500 to compile a *Dictionary of the English Language*.

Johnson engaged upon his task in high hope, dedicating the prospectus to Lord Chesterfield, a famous patron of the arts. Chesterfield however took scant notice until, years later, the Dictionary was almost ready for publication. Then, presumably ashamed of his neglect, he wrote a couple of articles in the magazine, *The World*, glowingly recommending Johnson and his work. Upon seeing these, Johnson wrote him a letter which remained a classic.

"To the Right Honourable the Earl of Chesterfield.
February 7, 1755.

"My Lord,

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

"When, upon some slight encouragement, I first visited your Lordship, I was overpowered, like the rest of mankind, by the enchantment of your address, and could not forbear to wish that I might boast myself *Le*

vainqueur du vainqueur de la terre;[1]—that I might obtain that regard for which I saw the world contending; but I found my attendance so little encouraged, that neither pride nor modesty would suffer me to continue it. When I had once addressed your Lordship in public, I had exhausted all the art of pleasing which a retired and uncourtly scholar can possess. I had done all that I could; and no man is well pleased to have his all neglected, be it ever so little.

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

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

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

"Having carried on my work thus far with so little obligation to any favourer of learning, I shall not be disappointed though I should conclude it, if less be

[1] The conqueror of the conqueror of the world.

possible, with less; for I have been long wakened from that dream of hope, on which I once boasted myself with so much exultation,

"My Lord,
"Your Lordship's most humble
"Most obedient servant,
"Sam Johnson."

In defence of Chesterfield it must be recognised that Johnson, with his queer manners and his poor clothes, was not a desirable visitor to a fashionable house; but his reproof is a just one. Chesterfield's neglect shows him lacking in manhood and good sense. He might have found a dozen ways to help the struggling young writer, and nothing but folly could have blinded him to Johnson's character. It looks as if his neglect was due to common snobbery, a mean and stupid fault, however understandable.

Johnson, fortunately, had by now no need to bother about him. He had been doing other things in the meantime. Garrick, his old pupil, had put on *Irene*, but it was a failure. It was to *The Rambler*, a magazine of his own which appeared twice a week for just two years, that he owed his first real fame, which the *Dictionary* consolidated. These busy years brought him a great sorrow. Mrs. Johnson did not live to see the completion of the great work, and her death plunged Johnson deeper into his characteristic fits of depression. He had all his life been afraid of death, and henceforward feared it increasingly, until it drew near him, when he seemed to lose all fear.

Even after the appearance of the *Dictionary*, however, Johnson often found himself in want of money. He began another magazine, *The Idler*, which had a considerable success, and received subscriptions for an edition of Shakespeare, which he did not finish till years later, after

success had practically tempted him into dishonesty. He wrote also a novel, *Rasselas*, which was very successful then, and is interesting to-day. Then, in 1762, he received a pension of £300 a year from the Crown, and was never afterwards in want.

2

A year later, Johnson met the young man to whom so large a measure of his fame is due. A Scotsman named James Boswell had long wished to meet the great Dr. Johnson, and on May 16th, 1763, his wish was fulfilled. Like many people who are too anxious to please, Boswell did not do very well on this first occasion. Feeling himself at a disadvantage anyhow, since Dr. Johnson did not like Scotland, he rushed into conversation too eagerly, and was snubbed for his pains.

" 'What do you think of Garrick?' asked Johnson, of Davis the bookseller. 'He has refused me an order for the play for Miss Williams, because he knows the house will be full, and an order would be worth three shillings.'

"Eager to take any opening to get into conversation with him, I ventured to say 'O, Sir, I cannot think Mr. Garrick would grudge such a trifle to you.' 'Sir, (said he, with a stern look,) I have known David Garrick longer than you have done: and I know no right you have to talk to me on the subject.' "

Boswell recovered from the snub, and called upon Johnson just over a week later, meeting with a friendly reception.

"Some gentlemen, whom I do not recollect, were sitting with him; and when they went away, I also rose; but he said to me, 'Nay, don't go.'—'Sir, (said I,) I am afraid that I intrude upon you. It is benevolent

to allow me to sit and hear you.' He seemed pleased with this compliment, which I sincerely paid him, and answered 'Sir, I am obliged to any man who visits me.' "

A subsequent meeting emboldened Boswell to remind Johnson of the snub he had given him.

" 'Poh, poh! (said he, with a complacent smile,) never mind these things. Come to me as often as you can. I shall be glad to see you.' "

Boswell took him at his word, and we may be glad it was so, for to these visits we owe the best of English biographies. Boswell was silly, vain, and a chatterbox, but he knew a great man when he saw one, and he was capable of winning and keeping the friendship of his betters. To have won Johnson's affection was much: to have been liked and tolerated by the circle of brilliant men about Johnson was even more. It is true that Johnson loved anyone who was kind to him. "He was a vicious man," he said of Harry Hervey, "but very kind to me. If you call a dog HERVEY, I shall love him." But there was real good in "Bozzy," and our hearts warm to him as we read his simple confessions, his petty stratagems, his mortifications, and his triumphs. In any case, we should have to like him for his devotion to Johnson and the accurate record which he kept of all the great man's sayings and doings. "Give me your hand," cried Johnson to him, in the course of one of their earliest conversations, "I have taken a liking to you:" and we soon find ourselves echoing the great man's opinion.

Boswell took down a typical piece of robust common-sense on the day of his first visit.

" 'The morality of an action depends on the motive from which we act. If I fling half a crown to a beggar

with the intention to break his head, and he picks it up and buys victuals with it, the physical effect is good; but, with respect to me, the action is very wrong.' "

Soon the pair were on the best of terms, and Johnson could round upon Boswell as sharply as he pleased without being taken too seriously. As Boswell would laboriously ask him all manner of questions, some of them exceedingly silly, this was just as well. Very often Johnson turned them aside.

" 'If, Sir, you were shut up in a castle, and a newborn child with you, what would you do?' Johnson: 'Why, Sir, I should not much like my company.' "

Later, Boswell was so unfortunate as to raise the one subject Johnson feared—death.

"To my question, whether we might not fortify our minds for the approach of death, he answered, in a passion, 'No, sir, let it alone. It matters not how a man dies, but how he lives. The act of dying is not of importance, it lasts so short a time.' He added (with an earnest look,) 'A man knows it must be so, and submits. It will do him no good to whine.'

"I attempted to continue the conversation. He was so provoked, that he said: 'Give us no more of this;' and was thrown into such a state of agitation, that he expressed himself in a way that alarmed and distressed me; shewed an impatience that I should leave him, and when I was going away, called to me sternly, 'Don't let us meet to-morrow.'

"I went home exceedingly uneasy. All the harsh observations which I had ever heard made upon his character, crowded into my mind; and I seemed to myself like the man who had put his head into the lion's

mouth a great many times with perfect safety, but at last had it bit off."

These sudden descents into gloom and anger were counterbalanced by an enormous liveliness, and often by merriment which to the onlookers seemed out of all proportion to its cause. One night, when he had been in pain, and far from cheerful, he became mysteriously amused about something which to the rest of the company did not seem funny at all.

"He now laughed immoderately, without any reason that we could perceive, at our friend's making his will.... Johnson could not stop his merriment, but continued it all the way till he got without the Templegate. He then burst into such a fit of laughter, that he appeared to be almost in a convulsion; and, in order to support himself, laid hold of one of the posts at the side of the foot pavement, and sent forth peals so loud, that in the silence of the night his voice seemed to resound from Temple-bar to Fleet-ditch.

"This most ludicrous exhibition of the awful, melancholy, and venerable Johnson, happened well to counteract the feelings of sadness which I used to experience when parting with him for a considerable time. I accompanied him to his door, where he gave me his blessing."

Upon other occasions, however, there was no mystery as to the source of his merriment: and he could amuse himself with the best. Once, at least, he confessed to having been made laugh against his will—by Foote, the actor and mimic.

"Johnson: 'The first time I was in company with Foote was at Fitzherbert's. Having no good opinion of the fellow, I was resolved not to be pleased; and it is very difficult to please a man against his will. I went on eating

my dinner pretty sullenly, affecting not to mind him. But the dog was so very comical, that I was obliged to lay down my knife and fork, throw myself back upon my chair, and fairly laugh it out. No Sir, he was irresistible.' "

A hilarious party knocked him up one night at a preposterous hour. He came to the door with a poker in his hand. "What, is it you, you dogs?" he cried. "I'll have a frisk with you." It was good frisk, too, for Garrick was twitting him with it a few days later. "I heard of your frolic t'other night. You'll be in the Chronicle." Johnson was impatient, and declared that Garrick dare not do anything of the kind, for his wife would not let him.

3

One of Boswell's most successful strategems concerned the bringing about of a meeting between Johnson and the notorious John Wilkes.[1] We must allow him to tell the story in his own words.

"Notwithstanding the high veneration which I entertained for Dr. Johnson, I was sensible that he was sometimes a little actuated by the spirit of contradiction, and by means of that I hoped I should gain my point. I was persuaded that if I had come upon him with a direct proposal, 'Sir, will you dine in company with Jack Wilkes?' he would have flown into a passion, and would probably have answered, 'Dine with Jack Wilkes, Sir! I'd as soon dine with Jack Ketch.'[2] I therefore, while we were sitting quietly by ourselves at his house in an evening, took occasion to open my plan thus:—'Mr. Dilly, Sir, sends his respectful compliments to you, and would be happy if you would do him the honour to dine

[1] Wilkes was responsible for a paper, the *North Briton*, which was so outspoken in its criticism of the Government that he was tried for libel.
[2] The hangman.

with him on Wednesday next along with me, as I must soon go to Scotland.' Johnson: 'Sir, I am obliged to Mr. Dilly, I will wait upon him——' Boswell: 'Provided, Sir, I suppose, that the company which he is to have, is agreeable to you.' Johnson: 'What do you mean, Sir? What do you take me for? Do you think I am so ignorant of the world, as to imagine that I am to prescribe to a gentleman what company he is to have at his table?' Boswell: 'I beg your pardon, Sir, for wishing to prevent you from meeting people whom you might not like. Perhaps he may have some of what he calls his patriotic friends with him.' Johnson: 'Well, Sir, and what then? What care *I* for his *patriotic friends*? Poh!' Boswell: 'I should not be surprised to find Jack Wilkes there.' Johnson: 'And if Jack Wilkes *should* be there, what is that to *me*, Sir? My dear friend, let us have no more of this. I am sorry to be angry with you; but really it is treating me strangely to talk to me as if I could not meet any company whatever, occasionally.' Boswell: 'Pray, forgive me, Sir; I meant well. But you shall meet whoever comes, for me.' Thus I secured him, and told Dilly that he would find him very well pleased to be one of his guests on the day appointed."

On the appointed day, though with some difficulty, for the Doctor had forgotten, Boswell got him there.

"When we entered Mr. Dilly's drawing-room, he found himself in the midst of a company he did not know. I kept myself snug and silent, watching how he would conduct himself. I observed him whispering to Mr. Dilly, 'Who is that gentleman, Sir?'—'Mr. Arthur Lee.' Johnson: 'Too, too, too,' (under his breath,) which was one of his habitual mutterings. Mr. Arthur Lee could not but be very obnoxious to Johnson, for he was not only a *patriot*

but an *American*. He was afterwards minister from the United States at the Court of Madrid. 'And who is the gentleman in lace?' 'Mr. Wilkes, sir.' This information confounded him still more; he had some difficulty to restrain himself, and taking up a book, sat down upon a window-seat and read, or at least kept his eye upon it intently for some time, till he composed himself. His feelings, I dare say, were awkward enough. But he no doubt recollected his having rated me for supposing that he could be at all disconcerted by any company, and he, therefore, resolutely set himself to behave quite as an easy man of the world, who could adapt himself at once to the disposition and manners of those whom he might chance to meet.

"The cheering sound of 'Dinner is upon the table,' dissolved the reverie, and we *all* sat down without any symptom of ill humour . . . Mr. Wilkes placed himself next to Dr. Johnson, and behaved to him with so much attention and politeness, that he gained upon him insensibly. No man eat more heartily than Johnson, or loved better what was nice and delicate. Mr. Wilkes was very assiduous in helping him to some fine veal. 'Pray give me leave, Sir;—It is better here—A little of the brown—Some fat, Sir—A little of the stuffing—Some gravy—Let me have the pleasure of giving you some butter—Allow me to recommend a squeeze of this orange;—or the lemon, perhaps, may have more zest.'—'Sir, Sir, I am obliged to you, Sir,' cried Johnson, bowing, and turning his head to him with a look for some time of 'surly virtue,' but, in a short while, of complacency."

These tactics, with other attentions, were successful. Soon all were talking with the greatest friendliness.

"Johnson: (To Mr. Wilkes) 'You must know, Sir, I lately took my friend Boswell, and shewed him genuine

civilised life in an English provincial town. I turned him loose at Litchfield, my native city, that he might see for once real civility: for you know he lives among savages in Scotland, and among rakes in London.' Wilkes: 'Except when he is with grave, sober, decent people, like you and me.' Johnson: (smiling) 'And we ashamed of him.' " Boswell's triumph was complete. "I attended Dr. Johnson home," he observes, "and had the satisfaction to hear him tell Mrs. Williams how much he had been pleased with Mr. Wilkes' company."

4

By 1773 Boswell was so far established in Johnson's affections as to prevail upon him to visit Scotland with him, and make a tour of the Hebrides. Both travellers recorded the journey, and it must be confessed that Boswell's is the more interesting account of the two. Four years later, Johnson was engaged by the booksellers to write the one work of his which is still widely read—his *Lives of the English Poets*. It is a work which shows his strength and his weakness. Dr. Johnson had no real feeling for poetry *as a thing in itself*. For him, it was a part of the ordinary world, and therefore subject to ordinary beliefs and prejudices. He would not have understood the claim that the world of poetry is a world apart. Thus his judgment of poetry is all of a piece with his judgment of life, and the same common sense asserts itself, sometimes with excellent results, and sometimes with results which are far from excellent. It is wrong to say, absolutely, as many critics have done, that he had no feeling for poetry at all. To say this is to ignore any good things he said about it, and any pleasure he took in it. The point was simply that he did not realise that, like music, it is a world of its own, and cannot be judged by outside standards. He may have been further hindered in

his appreciation by the lack of a musical ear. Many fine poets have no ear for music, so that there is no rule on the subject: but with Johnson the sense of a line came always a long way before the sound.

Dr. Johnson was a Tory. Toryism is less a political than a social creed. Its rock-bottom principle is an acceptance of the state of life unto which, in the language of the Catechism, it has pleased God to call us. It does not necessarily imply that one state of life is better than another. Some are born rich, some are born poor. This belief accorded perfectly with Johnson's state of mind, and was the foundation upon which his enormous common sense worked. It made him a confirmed supporter of the Established Church, and led him, among other things, to justify the exclusion of Nonconformists from the universities. "The cow is a very good animal in the field" he observed, in support of his argument, "but we turn her out of a garden." It has been said that Johnson was the ordinary man raised to the highest degree: and, while this statement a little flatters the ordinary man, there is some sense in it. Johnson's sense is certainly the basis of the ordinary man's affection for him. Mr. Raymond Postgate, in the introduction to his excellent abridged edition of Boswell's *Life of Johnson*, puts the matter very happily.

"There is yet another cause for Johnson's popularity. . . . The ordinary man, especially the ordinary man of the middle-class whose verdict has great weight in conferring immortality, knows or suspects that he cannot write plays like Shakespeare, speak like Mr. Lloyd George, or compose like Beethoven. But he sees in Johnson the figure of the man he might be and hopes he is. He sees himself too striking the table with his fists, and crushing opposition with a remark beginning 'No, Sir!' Perhaps in fact he finds it difficult to carry the sentence any further,

perhaps his son and daughter are not awed into silence, perhaps his intervention is even drowned in the conversation. But always in his mind is a radiant figure of himself the admired centre of the room, humiliating cranks and silencing radicals by his jovial wit and hard commonsense."

Johnson carried, then, to his judgment of poetry, his ordinary everyday-world prejudices and beliefs. It was those which made him unfair to Milton, for instance, and to Gray. For Gray he had very little use of any kind. His political opinions prevented him from being fair to Milton, with whom he picks several particular quarrels, the most famous concerning *Lycidas*. In his censure of this poem he really lets himself go. He cannot get over the fact that, though an elegy for a dead friend, it is full of classical allusions. "It is not to be considered as the effusion of real passion (i.e. grief); for passion runs not after remote opinions and obscure allusions. . . . Where there is leisure for fiction there is little grief." He makes fun of the shepherds, shakes his head severely over the mixing of heathen and Christian deities—"With these trifling fictions are mingled the most awful and sacred truths, such as ought never to be polluted with such irreverent combinations" —and calls the form of the poem "easy, vulgar, and therefore disgusting." His belief that poetry was a matter of propriety led him to condemn Dryden for introducing nautical terms into a description of the sea fight in *Annus Mirabilis*. (This queer belief, often held to-day, has done poetry much harm). He takes Gray to task for asking Father Thames, in his *Ode on a Distant Prospect of Eton College*, to tell him who drives the hoop and tosses the ball. "Father Thames has no better means of knowing than himself."

Yet, for all its divers faults, how good the book is! Johnson wrote a noble, double-chinned prose, full of Latin words, sounding and vigorous. It needs to be read aloud, with a long breath and in a deep voice. And how refreshing is the very common sense that occasionally marks the blemishes! Listen to this, about Milton's school:[1]—

"It is told that in the art of education he performed wonders; and a formidable list is given of the authors, Greek and Latin, that were read in Aldersgate-street by youth between ten and fifteen or sixteen years of age. Those who tell or receive these stories should consider, that nobody can be taught faster than he can learn. The speed of the horseman must be limited by the power of the horse. Every man that has ever undertaken to instruct others can tell what slow advances he has been able to make, and how much patience it requires to recall vagrant inattention, to stimulate sluggish indifference, and to rectify absurd misapprehension."

What a happy description of the schoolmaster's task.

As soon as he had enough money for his needs, Dr. Johnson looked around for people to whom he could show his charity. For his household, let us turn once more to Mr. Postgate:—

"In Johnson's own house, a dark and small building off Fleet Street, was quartered the strangest assembly of the ugly, old, blind or diseased who were in receipt of his bounty, and rewarded it by continual quarrelling and complaining. At the head of the household was an elderly, blind and peevish lady named Williams. There was also another poor and old woman, Mrs. Desmoulins, and her daughter, and another destitute female, Polly Carmichael, whom her benefactor described briefly as 'a

[1] See p. 184.

stupid slut.' 'I had some hopes of her at first,' he told Mrs. Thrale, 'but when I talked to her closely and tightly, I could make nothing of her; she was wiggle-waggle, and I could never persuade her to be categorical.'[1] On the male side there were Levett, an old and incompetent quack doctor, and Frank, a negro servant.'

This ménage was in full swing when Boswell first met the Doctor. Nor is Boswell our only source of knowledge. There is also Fanny Burney, from whose Diary and Letters we get a vivid picture of how he appeared to a young woman who admired him, and for whom he felt a benevolent affection. Thanks to these two, but in far greater degree to Boswell, we know Johnson more intimately than we know most of our contemporaries; and we know also the host of great men by whom he was surrounded. Burke, Goldsmith, Reynolds, Garrick appear often in these pages, with a host of lesser people, including his dear friends the Thrales, whose friendship and goodness meant so much to him.

He died in December, 1784, meeting death when it drew near with calmness and courage. Here is Boswell's account of his end:—

"Johnson, with that native fortitude, which amidst all his bodily distress and mental sufferings, never forsook him, asked Dr. Brocklesby, as a man in whom he had confidence, to tell him plainly whether he could recover. 'Give me (said he) a direct answer.' The Doctor, having first asked him if he could bear the whole truth, which way soever it might lead, and being answered that he could, declared that, in his opinion, he could not recover without a miracle. 'Then, (said Johnson,) I will take no more physic, not even my opiates:[2] for I have prayed that I may render up my soul to God unclouded.' In that

[1] Definite. [2] Drugs to deaden pain.

resolution he persevered, and, at the same time, used only the weakest kinds of sustenance. Being pressed by Mr. Windham to take somewhat more generous nourishment, lest too low a diet should have the very effect which he dreaded, by debilitating his mind, he said, 'I will take anything but inebriating sustenance.'

"Having made his will on the 8th and 9th of December, and settled all his worldly affairs, he languished till Monday, the 13th of that month, when he expired about seven o'clock in the evening, with so little apparent pain that his attendants hardly perceived when his dissolution took place.

"Of his last moments, my brother, Thomas David, has furnished me with the following particulars:

" 'The Doctor, from the time that he was certain his death was near, appeared to be perfectly resigned, was seldom or never fretful or out of temper, and often said to his faithful servant, who gave me this account, "Attend, Francis, to the salvation of your soul, which is the object of greatest importance:" he also explained to him passages in the scripture, and seemed to have pleasure in talking upon religious subjects.

" 'On Monday, the 13th of December, the day on which he died, a Miss Morris, daughter to a particular friend of his called, and said to Francis, that she begged to be permitted to see the doctor, that she might earnestly request him to give her his blessing. Francis went into his room, followed by the young lady, and delivered the message. The Doctor turned himself in the bed, and said, "God bless you, my dear!" These were the last words he spoke. His difficulty of breathing increased till about seven o'clock in the evening, when Mr. Barber and Mrs. Desmoulins, who were sitting in the room, observing that the noise he made in breathing had ceased, went to the bed, and found he was dead.' "

LIFE IN ENGLISH LITERATURE

Part III

LIFE IN ENGLISH LITERATURE

An Introduction

L. A. G. STRONG AND MONICA REDLICH

PART III

Goldsmith to Browning



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CHAPTER XXII

GOLDSMITH AND FIELDING

1

OLIVER GOLDSMITH was nineteen years younger than a very good friend of his, Dr. Johnson. Unlike Johnson, he was a brilliant writer but a bad talker. It is remembered of him that he "wrote like an angel, and talked like poor Poll,"[1] and Boswell, who once remarked, "For my part, I like very well to hear honest Goldsmith talk away carelessly," received the reply, "Why, yes Sir; but he should not like to hear himself."

Goldsmith, a lovable man for all his vanity, was brought up in Ireland. He was born in 1728 at Pallas, County Longford, where his father was a poor parson. He had a haphazard education, owing to his own hastiness and improvidence, and went from Trinity College, Dublin, to Edinburgh, and from there to Leyden in Holland, trying to settle to the profession of medicine. It is said that when in Leyden he spent every penny he had left to buy some flowers for a rich uncle. After that he set out on a walking tour of the Continent "with a guinea in his pocket, one shirt to his back, and a flute in his hand." The flute was his stock-in-trade, for his playing earned him many a night's hospitality in France and in Italy. In 1756 Goldsmith came home, and began to earn a precarious livelihood as a writer. He wrote poems, essays, history, plays, and a novel, and might have been rich; but he was still careless and generous with his money, supporting other people with no thought for himself. He died in 1774. He was one

[1] i.e. a parrot.

of the original members of Johnson's Club, which was founded in 1764. Good talker or no, he was popular with them all—except perhaps with Boswell, who was inclined to be jealous; and once at least, Boswell tells, he managed to score off the Doctor.

"Goldsmith, however, was often very fortunate in his witty contests, even when he entered the lists with Johnson himself. Sir Joshua Reynolds was in company with them one day, when Goldsmith said, that he thought he could write a good fable, mentioned the simplicity which that kind of composition requires, and observed, that in most fables the animals introduced seldom talk in character. 'For instance, (said he), the fable of the little fishes, who saw birds fly over their heads, and envying them, petitioned Jupiter to be changed into birds. The skill (continued he,) consists in making them talk like little fishes.' While he indulged himself in this fanciful reverie, he observed Johnson shaking his sides, and laughing. Upon which he smartly proceeded, 'Why Dr. Johnson, this is not so easy as you seem to think; for if you were to make little fishes talk they would talk like WHALES.' "

Many writers have tried their hands at all kinds of work, but few have succeeded in as many kinds as Goldsmith did. His fame is fourfold; for his poems, *The Traveller* and *The Deserted Village*: for his essays, *The Citizen of the World*: for a novel, *The Vicar of Wakefield*: and for a play, *She Stoops to Conquer*. As Johnson justly said, "There was nothing he touched that he did not adorn."

It is to Johnson that we owe the publication of *The Vicar of Wakefield*. This is the story as Johnson tells it in Boswell's *Life*:—

"I received one morning a message from poor Goldsmith that he was in great distress, and as it was not in his power to come to me, begging that I would come to him as soon as possible. I sent him a guinea, and promised him to come directly. I accordingly went as soon as I was drest, and found that his landlady had arrested him for his rent, at which he was in a violent passion. I perceived that he had already changed my guinea, and had got a bottle of Madeira and a glass before him. I put the cork into the bottle, desired he would be calm, and began to talk to him of the means by which he might be extricated. He then told me that he had a novel ready for the press, which he produced. I looked into it and saw its merit; told the landlady I should soon return, and having gone to a bookseller,[1] sold it for sixty pounds. I brought Goldsmith the money, and he discharged his rent, not without rating his landlady for having used him so ill."

In return for this, it is pleasant to quote a tribute of Goldsmith's to Dr. Johnson. Goldsmith wrote essays not unlike those of Addison, and one of them, *A Reverie*, describes his fancy of the Fame Machine, a small carriage standing in the yard of a large inn "in which there were an infinite number of waggons and stage coaches, attended by fellows who either invited the company to take their places, or were busied in packing their baggage. Each vehicle had its inscription, showing the place of its destination. On one I could read, *The pleasure stage-coach*: on another, *The waggon of industry*; on a third, *The vanity whim*: and on a fourth, *The landau of riches*. . . .

"I instantly made up to the coachman, whom I found

[1] In Goldsmith's time the functions of publisher and bookseller were combined.

to be an affable and seemingly good-natured fellow. He informed me, that he had but a few days ago returned from the Temple of Fame, to which he had been carrying Addison, Swift, Pope, Steele, Congreve,[1] and Colley Cibber.[2] That they made but indifferent company by the way, and that he once or twice was going to empty his berlin of the whole cargo; however, says he, I got them all safe home, with no other damage than a black eye, which Colley gave Mr. Pope, and am now returned for another coachful. 'If that be all, friend,' said I, 'and if you are in want of company, I'll make one with all my heart. Open the door, I hope the machine rides easy.' 'Oh, for that, Sir, extremely easy.' But still keeping the door shut, and measuring me with his eye, 'Pray, Sir, have you no luggage? You seem to be a good-natured sort of a gentleman; but I don't find you have got any luggage, and I never permit any to travel with me but such as have something valuable to pay for coach-hire.' Examining my pockets, I own, I was not a little disconcerted at this unexpected rebuff; but considering that I carried a number of the *Bee*[3] under my arm, I was resolved to open it in his eyes, and dazzle him with the splendour of the page. He read the title and contents, however, without any emotion, and assured me he had never heard of it before. 'In short, friend,' said he, now losing all his former respect, 'you must not come in: I expect better passengers, but as you seem a harmless creature, perhaps, if there be room left, I may let you ride a while for charity.' "

Several people applied in vain for seats, but at last there came someone more worthy.

[1] Author of the excellent comedy, *The Way of the World.* [2] Poet laureate: a scurrilous, witty character, and author of several plays. [3] A magazine.

"This was a very grave personage, whom at some distance I took for one of the most reserved and even disagreeable figures I had seen; but as he approached, his appearance improved, and when I could distinguish him thoroughly, I perceived that in spite of the severity of his brow, he had one of the most good-natured countenances that could be imagined. Upon coming to open the stage-door, he lifted a parcel of folios into the seat before him, but our inquisitorial coachman at once shoved them out again. 'What! not take in my Dictionary?' exclaimed the other in a rage. 'Be patient, Sir,' replied the coachman, 'I have drove a coach, man and boy, these two thousand years; but I do not remember to have carried above one dictionary during the whole time. That little book which I perceive peeping from one of your pockets, may I presume to ask what it contains?' 'A mere trifle,' replied the author; 'it is called *The Rambler*.'[1] '*The Rambler*!' says the coachman, 'I beg, Sir, you'll take your place; I have heard our ladies in the court of Apollo frequently mention it with rapture.' "

2

Goldsmith's essays, like Addison's and Steele's, poked fun at the people who were to read them. Goldsmith, however, made use of a new device for his friendly satire. He wrote imaginary letters from a Chinese philosopher supposed to be staying in England, and thus ridiculed our national habits as they might appear to an outsider. This is how he deals with a visit to the theatre.

"The English are as fond of seeing plays acted as the Chinese; but there is a vast difference in the manner of conducting them. We play our pieces in the open air, the

[1] See p. 820.

English theirs under cover; we act by daylight, they by the blaze of torches. One of our plays continues eight or ten days successively; an English piece seldom takes up above four hours in the representation.

"My companion in black, with whom I am now beginning to contract an intimacy, introduced me a few nights ago to the play-house, where we placed ourselves conveniently at the foot of the stage. . . . Upon the whole, the lights, the music, the ladies in their gayest dresses, the men with cheerfulness and expectation in their looks, all conspired to make a most agreeable picture, and to fill a heart that sympathises at human happiness with inexpressible serenity.

"The expected time for the play to begin at last arrived; the curtain was drawn, and the actors came on. A woman, who personated a queen, came in courtesying to the audience, who clapped their hands upon her appearance. Clapping of hands is, it seems, the manner of applauding in England; the manner is absurd, but every country you know has its peculiar absurdities. I was equally surprised, however, at the submission[1] of the actress, who should have considered herself as a queen, as at the little discernment of the audience who gave her such marks of applause before she attempted to deserve them. Preliminaries between her and the audience being thus adjusted, the dialogue was supported between her and a most hopeful youth, who acted the part of her confidant.—They both appeared in extreme distress, for it seems the queen had lost a child some fifteen years before, and still keeps its dear resemblance next to her heart, while her kind companion bore a part in her sorrows. . . .

"The third act now began with an actor who came to inform us that he was the villain of the play, and

[1] Humility.

intended to show strange things before all was over. He was joined by another, who seemed as much disposed for mischief as he; their intrigues continued through this whole division.—If that be a villain, said I, he must be a very stupid one to tell his secrets without being asked; such soliloquies of late are never admitted in China.

"The noise of clapping interrupted me once more; a child of six years old was learning to dance on the stage, which gave the ladies and mandarins infinite satisfaction. I am sorry, said I, to see the pretty creature so early learning so bad a trade; dancing being, I presume, as contemptible here as in China. Quite the reverse, interrupted my companion; dancing is a very reputable and genteel employment here; men have a greater chance for encouragement from the merit of their heels than their heads. One who jumps up and flourishes his toes three times before he comes to the ground, may have three hundred a year; he who flourishes them four times, gets four hundred; but he who arrives at five is inestimable, and may demand what salary he thinks proper."

It will be remembered that Sir Roger de Coverley also visited the theatre, and in a far less critical spirit; but Addison was concerned less with the absurdities of the play than with the pleasure Sir Roger took in it. Goldsmith also created characters in his essays, and described their adventures with kindly humour. His most famous creation is Beau Tibbs, the shabby-genteel pretender. Goldsmith describes how he and a friend were strolling one evening in a public walk, looking at the people, when they saw that they were being followed.

"Our pursuer soon came up, and joined us with all the familiarity of an old acquaintance. My dear Drybone,

cries he, shaking my friend's hand, where have you been hiding this half a century? Positively I had fancied you were gone to cultivate matrimony and your estate in the country. During the reply, I had an opportunity of surveying the appearance of our new companion: his hat was pinched up with peculiar smartness; his looks were pale, thin, and sharp; round his neck he wore a broad black riband, and in his bosom a buckle studded with glass; his coat was trimmed with tarnished twist; he wore by his side a sword with a black hilt; and his stockings of silk, though newly washed, were grown yellow by long service. I was so much engaged with the peculiarity of his dress, that I attended only to the latter part of my friend's reply, in which he complimented Mr. Tibbs on the taste of his clothes, and the bloom in his countenance. Pshaw, pshaw, Will, cried the figure, no more of that, if you love me: you know I hate flattery, on my soul I do; and yet, to be sure, an intimacy with the great will improve one's appearance, and a course of venison will fatten; and yet, faith, I despise the great as much as you do: but there are a great many honest fellows among them; and we must not quarrel with one half, because the other wants weeding. If they were all such as my Lord Muddler, one of the most good-natured creatures that ever squeezed a lemon, I should myself be among the number of their admirers. I was yesterday to dine at the Duchess of Piccadilly's. My lord was there. Ned, says he to me, Ned, says he, I'll hold gold to silver, I can tell where you were poaching last night.

"Ah, Tibbs, thou art a happy fellow, cried my companion, with looks of infinite pity; I hope your fortune is as much improved as your understanding in such company? Improved, replied the other; you shall know,—but let it go no farther,—a great secret—five hundred a year to begin with.—My lord's word of honour for it—

his lordship took me down in his own chariot yesterday, and we had a tête-à-tête dinner in the country, where we talked of nothing else. I fancy you forget, Sir, cried I, you told us but this moment of your dining yesterday in town. Did I say so? replied he coolly; to be sure if I said so, it was so—dined in town: egad, now I do remember, I did dine in town: but I dined in the country too; for you must know, my boys, I eat two dinners. By the bye, I am grown as nice as the devil in my eating. I'll tell you a pleasant affair about that: We were a select party of us to dine at Lady Grogram's, an affected piece, but let it go no farther; a secret: well, there happened to be no assafoetida in the sauce to a turkey, upon which, says I, I'll hold a thousand guineas, and say, done first, that—but dear Drybone, you are an honest creature, lend me half-a-crown for a minute or two, or so, just till—but hearkee, ask me for it the next time we meet, or it may be twenty to one but I forget to pay you."

3

Goldsmith's comedy, *She Stoops to Conquer*, contains at least one character who has become famous. This is Tony Lumpkin, the heroine's boorish step-brother, who is happiest in inns and stables. His mother spoils him as if he were a delicate child. Indeed, she is at pains to conceal his real age from him. She is discussing him one day with her husband:—

MRS. HARDCASTLE: . . . he's not come to years of discretion yet.

HARDCASTLE: Nor ever will, I dare answer for him. Ay you have taught him finely.

MRS. HARDCASTLE: No matter. Tony Lumpkin has a good fortune. My son is not to live by his learning.

I don't think a boy wants much learning to spend fifteen hundred a year.

HARDCASTLE: Learning, quotha! a mere composition of tricks and mischief.

MRS. HARDCASTLE: Humour, my dear; nothing but humour. Come, Mr. Hardcastle, you must allow the boy a little humour.

HARDCASTLE: I'd sooner allow him a horse-pond. If burning the footman's shoes, frightening the maids, and worrying the kittens be humour, he has it. It was but yesterday he fastened my wig to the back of my chair, and when I went to make a bow, I popped my bald head in Mrs. Frizzle's face.

MRS. HARDCASTLE: Am I to blame? The poor boy was always too sickly to do any good. A school would be his death. When he comes to be a little stronger, who knows what a year or two's Latin may do for him?

HARDCASTLE: Latin for him! A cat and fiddle. No, no; the alehouse and the stable are the only schools he'll ever go to.

MRS. HARDCASTLE: Well, we must not snub the poor boy now, for I believe we shan't have him long among us. Anybody that looks in his face may see he's consumptive.

HARDCASTLE: Ay, if growing too fat be one of the symptoms.

MRS. HARDCASTLE: He coughs sometimes.

HARDCASTLE: Yes, when his liquor goes the wrong way.

MRS. HARDCASTLE: I'm actually afraid of his lungs.

HARDCASTLE: And truly so am I; for he sometimes whoops like a speaking-trumpet—(TONY, *hallooing behind the scenes.*)—Oh, there he goes—a very consumptive figure, truly.

Enter TONY, *crossing the stage.*

MRS. HARDCASTLE: Tony, where are you going, my charmer? Won't you give papa and me a little of your company, lovey?

TONY: I'm in haste, mother; I cannot stay.

MRS. HARDCASTLE: You shan't venture out this raw evening, my dear; you look most shockingly.

TONY: I can't stay, I tell you. The Three Pidgeons expects me down every moment. There's some fun going forward.

HARDCASTLE: Ay; the alehouse; the old place; I thought so.

MRS. HARDCASTLE: A low, paltry set of fellows.

TONY: Not so low neither. There's Dick Muggins the exciseman, Jack Slang, the horse doctor, little Aminadab that grinds the music box, and Tom Twist that spins the pewter platter.

MRS. HARDCASTLE: Pray, my dear, disappoint them for one night at least.

TONY: As for disappointing them, I should not so much mind; but I can't abide to disappoint myself.

MRS. HARDCASTLE (*detaining him*): You shan't go.

TONY: I will, I tell you.

MRS. HARDCASTLE: I say you shan't.

TONY: We'll see which is the strongest, you or I.

(*Exit, hauling her out.*)

Goldsmith drew largely on his own experiences for his writings. *The Traveller* records many things that he saw on his walking and flute-playing tour of the Continent. *The Deserted Village* owes much to his memories of childhood. He is lamenting "Sweet Auburn! loveliest village of the plain," spoiled and deserted by the spread of wealth and of industry.

Sweet was the sound, when oft, at evening's close,
Up yonder hill the village murmur rose.
There, as I passed with careless steps and slow,
The mingling notes came softened from below;
The swain responsive as the milk-maid sung,
The sober herd that lowed to meet their young;
The noisy geese that gabbled o'er the pool,
The playful children just let loose from school,
The watch-dog's voice that bayed the whispering wind,
And the loud laugh that spoke the vacant mind,
These all in sweet confusion sought the shade,
And filled each pause the nightingale had made.
But now the sounds of population fail,
No cheerful murmurs fluctuate in the gale,
No busy steps the grass-grown foot-way tread,
But all the blooming flush of life is fled.

There is no doubt that he knew the old schoolmaster:

Beside yon straggling fence that skirts the way
With blossoming furze unprofitably gay,
There in his noisy mansion, skilled to rule,
The village master taught his little school.
A man severe he was, and stern to view,
I knew him well, and every truant knew:
Well had the boding tremblers learned to trace
The day's disasters in his morning face;
Full well they laughed with counterfeited glee
At all his jokes, for many a joke had he;
Full well the busy whisper circling round,
Conveyed the dismal tidings when he frowned.
Yet he was kind, or if severe in aught,
The love he bore to learning was in fault.
The village all declared how much he knew,
'Twas certain he could write, and cipher too;

Lands he could measure, terms and tides presage,
And e'en the story ran that he could gauge.
In arguing too, the parson owned his skill,
For e'en though vanquished, he could argue still;
While words of learned length, and thund'ring sound,
Amazed the gazing rustics ranged around—
And still they gazed, and still the wonder grew,
That one small head could carry all he knew.

4

Goldsmith's one novel, the *Vicar of Wakefield*, is still, and deservedly, popular. The plot is quite absurd: the Vicar, Dr. Primrose, and his wife and family of six children, are plunged into every kind of misery, and equally improbably plunged into complete happiness and prosperity in the last few pages. It is for the good and humorous Vicar himself that we turn to Goldsmith's novel, and for the scenes of family life.

The Primroses were simple people, and were continually being taken in by their more worldly-wise acquaintances. They decided to sell their colt and buy a better horse, and Mrs. Primrose wished to send the second boy, Moses, to carry out the transaction at a neighbouring fair.

"As I had some opinion of my son's prudence, I was willing enough to entrust him with this commission; and the next morning I perceived his sisters mighty busy in fitting out Moses for the fair; trimming his hair, brushing his buckles, and cocking his hat with pins. The business of the toilet being over, we had at last the satisfaction of seeing him mounted upon the colt, with a deal box before him to bring home groceries in. He had on a coat made of that cloth they call thunder and lightning,

which, though grown too short, was much too good to be thrown away. His waistcoat was of a gosling green, and his sisters had tied his hair with a broad black riband. We all followed him several paces from the door, bawling after him Good luck! good luck! till we could see him no longer."

The day passed, and Moses did not return. The Vicar began to wonder what was keeping him so long.

" 'Never mind our son,' cried my wife; 'depend upon it, he knows what he is about. I'll warrant we'll never see him sell his hen on a rainy day. I have seen him buy such bargains as would amaze one. I'll tell you a good story about that, that will make you split your sides with laughing. But as I live, yonder comes Moses, without a horse, and the box at his back.'

"As she spoke, Moses came slowly on foot, and sweating under the deal box, which he had strapped round his shoulders like a pedlar. 'Welcome, welcome, Moses; well, my boy, what have you brought us from the fair?' 'I have brought you myself,' cried Moses, with a sly look, and resting the box on the dresser. 'Ay, Moses,' cried my wife, 'that we know, but where is the horse?' 'I have sold him,' cried Moses, 'for three pounds five shillings and two-pence.' 'Well done, my good boy,' returned she, 'I knew you would touch them off. Between ourselves, three pounds five shillings and two-pence is no bad day's work. Come, let us have it then.' 'I have brought back no money,' cried Moses again, 'I have laid it all out in a bargain, and here it is,' pulling out a bundle from his breast: 'here they are: a gross of green spectacles, with silver rims and shagreen cases.' 'A gross of green spectacles!' repeated my wife, in a faint voice. 'And you have parted with the colt, and brought us back nothing but a

gross of green paltry spectacles!' 'Dear mother,' cried the boy, 'why won't you listen to reason? I had them a dead bargain, or I should not have bought them. The silver rims alone will sell for double the money.' 'A fig for the silver rims!' cried my wife in a passion: 'I dare swear they won't sell for above half the money at the rate of broken silver, five shillings an ounce.' 'You need be under no uneasiness,' cried I, 'about selling the rims: for they are not worth sixpence, for I perceive they are only copper varnished over.' 'What,' cried my wife, 'not silver, the rims not silver!' 'No,' cried I, 'no more silver than your saucepan.' 'And so,' returned she, 'we have parted with a colt, and have only got a gross of green spectacles with copper rims and shagreen cases. A murrain take such trumpery!' "

5

The novel had just begun to come into fashion when Goldsmith wrote, though his simple-minded story went its own way without much reference to what was or was not fashionable. It had four great novels at least for its contemporaries: Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*: an enormously long sentimental story about a girl called *Clarissa*, written by a fat bookseller whose name was Samuel Richardson: Smollett's tale of the wandering young scamp *Roderick Random*: and Fielding's *Tom Jones*. Tom Jones was the adopted son of a West Country squire: an impetuous, good-hearted boy who was always getting into scrapes. For one of these he was turned out of his home, and he had innumerable adventures, on the high road and in London, before he was returned to prosperity and his beloved Sophia. The story cannot be told in extracts; but here is Tom Jones at the theatre with his barber-servant Partridge:—

"In the first row, then, of the first gallery did Mr. Jones, Mrs. Miller, her youngest daughter, and Partridge, take their places. Partridge immediately declared it was the finest place he had ever been in. When the first music was played, he said, 'It was a wonder how so many fiddlers could play at one time, without putting one another out.' While the fellow was lighting the upper candles, he cried out to Mrs. Miller, 'Look, look, madam, the very picture of the man in the end of the common-prayer book, before the gunpowder-treason service.' Nor could he help observing, with a sigh, when all the candles were lighted, 'That here were candles enough burnt in one night to keep an honest poor family for a whole twelvemonth.'

"As soon as the play, which was *Hamlet, Prince of Denmark*, began, Partridge was all attention, nor did he break silence till the entrance of the Ghost; upon which he asked Jones, 'What man that was in the strange dress; something,' said he, 'like what I have seen in a picture. Sure it is not armour, is it?' Jones answered, 'That is the Ghost.' To which Partridge replied with a smile, 'Persuade me to that, sir, if you can. Though I can't say I ever actually saw a ghost in my life, yet I am certain I should know one, if I saw him, better than that comes to. No, no, sir, ghosts don't appear in such dresses as that, neither.' In this mistake, which caused much laughter in the neighbourhood of Partridge, he was suffered to continue, till the scene between the Ghost and Hamlet, when Partridge gave that credit to Mr. Garrick[1] which he had denied to Jones, and fell into so violent a trembling, that his knees knocked against each other. Jones asked him what was the matter, and whether he was afraid of the warrior upon the stage? 'O la! sir,' said he, 'I perceive now it is what you told me. I am not afraid of any thing,

[1] See p. 316.

for I know it is but a play. And if it was really a ghost, it could do one no harm at such a distance, and in so much company; and yet if I was frightened, I am not the only person.'

" 'Why, who,' cried Jones, 'dost thou take to be such a coward here besides thyself?'

" 'Nay, you may call me coward if you will; but if that little man there upon the stage is not frightened, I never saw any man frightened in my life. . . .'

"When the scene was over, Jones said, 'Why, Partridge, you exceed my expectations. You enjoy the play more than I conceived possible.'

" 'Nay, sir,' answered Partridge, 'if you are not afraid of the devil, I can't help it; but to be sure it is natural to be surprised at such things, though I know there is nothing in them: not that it was the Ghost that surprised me neither, for I should have known that to have been only a man in a strange dress; but when I saw the little man so frightened himself, it was that which took hold of me.'

" 'And dost thou imagine then, Partridge,' cries Jones, 'that he was really frightened?' . . .

" 'Well, well,' cries Partridge, 'I know it is only a play; and besides, if there was anything in all this, Madam Miller would not laugh so: for as to you, sir, you would not be afraid, I believe, if the devil was here in person. . . .'

"Little more worth remembering occurred during the play; at the end of which Jones asked him, which of the players he had liked best?

"To this he answered, with some appearance of indignation at the question, 'The King, without doubt.'

" 'Indeed, Mr. Partridge,' says Mrs. Miller, 'you are not of the same opinion as the town; for they are all

agreed that Hamlet is acted by the best player who ever was on the stage.'

" 'He the best player!' cries Partridge, with a contemptuous sneer, 'why, I could act as well as he myself. I am sure if I had seen a ghost, I should have looked in the very same manner, and done just as he did. And then, to be sure, in that scene, as you call it, between him and his mother, where you told me he acted so fine, why, Lord help me, any man, that is any good man, that had had such a mother, would have done exactly the same. I know you are only joking with me; but indeed, madam, though I was never at a play in London, yet I have seen acting before in the country; and the King for my money; he speaks all his words distinctly, half as loud again as the other. Anybody may see he is an actor.' "

It is interesting to remember Sir Roger de Coverley at the theatre, and Goldsmith's Chinese philosopher—both, like poor Partridge, seeing as something new a spectacle which we should take for granted. The Age of Reason prided itself on a common sense view of its own life: and it is common sense, humour, and a really good plot that have made *Tom Jones* popular ever since it first came out. Goldsmith was not remarkable for common sense: we connect him with the unworldly Dr. Primrose, and remember that he gave away even the food on his breakfast-table. He *was* remarkable, however, for his unfailing humour, for the absolute ease of his writing, and for the lovable nature which has left its mark on everything he wrote.

CHAPTER XXIII

STERNE

1

THE REVEREND LAURENCE STERNE, author of the two maddest books that have ever become classics, was born at Clonmel, in Ireland, in 1713. He did not begin to write until he had reached the age of forty-seven, and his mind had set firmly into its unusual mould. His father was an army officer, and, during his early years, Sterne had homes in many places. He was educated at the Grammar School at Halifax, and later at Cambridge. There he met a character who probably had a considerable influence upon him, one John Stevenson, a man of wit who did himself exceedingly well, and whose opinions of life and conduct were, to say the least, unorthodox. Soon afterwards Sterne took Holy Orders, and proceeded to a living in Yorkshire. He married five years later, but the marriage was not a success—partly because of the interest he took in a number of other ladies.

The first two volumes of *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gent.* caused an immediate stir. Locally the resemblance of one of the characters, Dr. Slop, to a certain well-known character, excited a good deal of indignation; and in London everyone was eager to see this most unusual new author. Nothing like this book had ever appeared before. It opens long before the birth of its hero, and every detail which minutely concerns his arrival into the world is set down, with any number of wilful digressions, fits, and starts, long before he has reached the stage of having a life, let alone an opinion. Even when he is established in the world he is of far less importance than the people around

him, a collection of characters who have gone straight to the hearts of readers and stayed there ever since. Dr. Johnson, commenting upon the fact that the book had (naturally enough) dropped out of favour after a period of intense popularity, remarked that it was too odd: and that nothing odd would do. Odd or not, it has outlasted the Doctor's work. There must be ten readers of Sterne for every one of Johnson. There was method in his madness, and a book that at first sight appears to be a scrap book huddled together at random turns out to be very subtly balanced and constructed. In any case, Sterne's humour, his sense of character, and his instinct for the value of human goodness, would have kept most of his chapters alive, however shapeless the work might be from which they were taken.

Tristram Shandy was not completed till 1767, and the following year appeared *A Sentimental Journey Through France and Italy*. The use of the word "sentimental" needs some explanation. Hitherto, "sentiment" had meant simply "opinion" (the Latin *sententia*). Sterne used the word to mean the new sensibility, or sensitiveness, which the French writer Jean Jacques Rousseau had done much to make popular.

"In the meantime," he writes in a letter, "we will philosophise and sentimentalise—the last word is a bright insertion of the moment, which was written for your's and Dr. Johnson's service—and you shall sit in my study and take a peep into the world as into a showbox and amuse yourself as I present the pictures to your imagination. Thus will I teach you to love its follies, to pity its errors and detest its injustice—and I will introduce you among the rest to some tender-hearted damsel on whose cheeks some bitter affliction has placed a tear, and having heard her story you

shall take a white handkerchief from your pocket and wipe the moisture from her eyes and your own."

Uncle Toby, in *Tristram Shandy*, in his celebrated dealings with the fly which had annoyed him, is an instance of the new sensibility:—

"Go—says he, one day at dinner, to an over-grown one which buzzed about his nose, and tormented him cruelly all dinner-time,—and which after infinite attempts, he had caught at last, as it flew by him;—I'll not hurt thee, says my uncle Toby, rising from his chair, and going across the room, with the fly in his hand,—I'll not hurt a hair of thy head:—Go, says he, lifting up the sash, and opening his hand as he spoke, to let it escape; go, poor devil, get thee gone, why should I hurt thee?—This world surely is wide enough to hold both thee and me."

Sterne's *Sentimental Journey*, then, was the journey of a man of feeling, consciously alive and susceptible to the various emotions that might be roused in him by his travels; and the book is a record of actual experiences. Soon after its appearance, Sterne died, leaving nothing for his widow and daughter, to provide for whom the public raised a subscription.

No estimate of Sterne can convey half as much to us as can extracts from his work. Tristram Shandy's arrival in the world is shortly expected, and Obadiah the servant is sent off post-haste to fetch Doctor Slop.

"Imagine to yourself a little squat, uncourtly figure of a Dr. Slop, of about four feet and a half perpendicular height, with a breadth of back, and a sesquipedality[1] of belly, which might have done honour to a serjeant in the horse-guards.

[1] Huge size: from the Latin *sesquipedalis*, a foot and a half long.

"Such were the outlines of Dr. Slop's figure, which,—if you have read Hogarth's[1] analysis of beauty, and if you have not, I wish you would;—you must know may as certainly be caricatured, and conveyed to the mind by three strokes as three hundred.

"Imagine such a one,—for such, I say, were the outlines of Dr. Slop's figure, coming slowly along, foot by foot, waddling thro' the dirt upon the vertebrae of a little diminutive pony, of a pretty colour—but of strength,—alack!—scarce able to have made an amble of it, under such a fardel,[2] had the roads been in an ambling condition.—They were not.—Imagine to yourself, Obadiah mounted upon a strong monster of a coach-horse, pricked into a full gallop, and making all practicable speed the adverse way.

"Pray, Sir, let me interest you a moment in this description.

"Had Dr. Slop beheld Obadiah a mile off, posting in a narrow lane directly towards him, at that monstrous rate,—splashing and plunging like a devil thro' thick and thin, as he approached, would not such a phenomenon, with such a vortex of mud and water moving along with it, round its axis,—have been a subject of juster apprehension to Dr. Slop in his situation, than the worst of Whiston's comets? To say nothing of the Nucleus; that is, Obadiah and the coach-horse. In my idea, the vortex alone of 'em was enough to have involved and carried, if not the doctor, at least the doctor's pony, quite away with it. What then do you think must the terror and hydrophobia[3] of Dr. Slop have been, when you read (which you are just going to do) that he was advancing thus warily along towards Shandy Hall, and had approached to within sixty yards of it, and within

[1] The famous painter and caricaturist. [2] Load. [3] Literally, fear of water.

five yards of a sudden turn, made by an acute angle of the garden-wall,—and in the dirtiest part of a dirty lane,—when Obadiah and his coach-horse turned the corner, rapid, furious,—pop,—full upon him!—Nothing, I think, in nature, can be supposed more terrible than such a rencounter,—so imprompt! so ill prepared to stand the shock of it as Dr. Slop was.

"What could Dr. Slop do?—he crossed himself ✠ Pugh!—but the doctor, Sir, was a Papist.—No matter; he had better have kept hold of the pummel.—He had so;—nay, as it happened, he had better have done nothing at all; for in crossing himself he let go his whip,—and in attempting to save his whip betwixt his knee and his saddle's skirt, as it slipped, he lost his stirrup, in losing which he lost his seat;—and in the multitude of all these losses (which, by the bye, shews what little advantage there is in crossing) the unfortunate doctor lost his presence of mind. So that without waiting for Obadiah's onset, he left his pony to its destiny, tumbling off it diagonally, something in the style and manner of a pack of wool, and without any other consequence from the fall, save that of being left (as it would have been) with the broadest part of him sunk about twelve inches deep in the mire.

"Obadiah pulled off his cap twice to Dr. Slop; once as he was falling,—and then again when he saw him seated.—Ill-timed complaisance;—had not the fellow better have stopped his horse, and got off and helped him?—Sir, he did all that his situation would allow; but the Momentum of the coach-horse was so great, that Obadiah could not do it all at once; he rode in a circle three times round Dr. Slop, before he could fully accomplish it any how; and at the last, when he did stop his beast, 'twas done with such an explosion of mud, that Obadiah had better been a league off. In

short never was a Dr. Slop so beluted,[1] and so transubstantiated, since that affair came into fashion."

Uncle Toby, a retired warrior, and his faithful servant, Corporal Trim, have an overmastering hobby. They have made a large model of the siege of Namur, upon which Uncle Toby spends the best part of his time in moving and manœuvring.

"My uncle Toby had a little neat country-house of his own, in the village where my father's estate lay at Shandy, which had been left him by an old uncle, with a small estate of about one hundred pounds a-year. Behind this house, and contiguous[2] to it, was a kitchen-garden of about half an acre; and at the bottom of the garden, and cut off from it by a tall yew hedge, was a bowling-green, containing just about as much ground as Corporal Trim wished for;—so that as Trim uttered the words, 'A rood and a half of ground to do what they would with,'—this identical bowling-green instantly presented itself, and became curiously painted all at once, upon the retina of my uncle Toby's fancy;—which was the physical cause of making him change colour, or at least of heightening his blush, to that immoderate degree I spoke of.

"Never did lover post down to a beloved mistress with more heat and expectation, than my uncle Toby did, to enjoy this self-same thing in private;—I say, in private;—for it was sheltered from the house, as I told you, by a tall yew hedge, and was covered on the other three sides, from mortal sight, by rough holly and thick-set flowering shrubs:—so that the idea of not being seen, did not a little contribute to the idea of pleasure preconceived in my uncle Toby's mind.—Vain thought!

[1] Muddified: Latin, *luteum*, mud. [2] Adjoining.

however thick it was planted about,—or private soever it might seem,—to think, dear uncle Toby, of enjoying a thing which took up a whole rood and a half of ground,—and not have it known!

"How my uncle Toby and Corporal Trim managed this matter,—with the history of their campaigns, which were no way barren of events,—may make no uninteresting under-plot in the epitasis[1] and working up of this drama.—At present the scene must drop,—and change for the parlour fire-side."

2

One day uncle Toby hears that there is an army officer named Le Fever staying in the village, who has been taken very ill. He sends Corporal Trim down to the inn to find out about him.

"I despaired at first, said the corporal, of being able to bring back any intelligence to your honour, about the licutenant and his son; for when I asked where his servant was, from whom I made myself sure of knowing every thing which was proper to be asked,—That's a right distinction, Trim, said my uncle Toby—I was answered, an' please your honour, that he had no servant with him;—that he had come to the inn with hired horses, which, upon finding himself unable to proceed (to join, I suppose, the regiment), he had dismissed the morning after he came.—If I get better, my dear, said he, as he gave his purse to his son to pay the man,—we can hire horses from hence.—But alas! the poor gentleman will never get from hence, said the landlady to me,—for I heard the death-watch all night long;—and when he dies, the youth, his son, will certainly die with him; for he is broken-hearted already.

[1] Arrangement.

"I was hearing this account, continued the corporal, when the youth came into the kitchen, to order the thin toast the landlord spoke of;—but I will do it for my father myself, said the youth.—Pray let me save you the trouble, young gentleman, said I, taking up a fork for the purpose, and offering him my chair to sit down upon by the fire, whilst I did it.—I believe, Sir, said he, very modestly, I can please him best myself.—I am sure, said I, his honour will not like the toast the worse for being toasted by an old soldier.—The youth took hold of my hand, and instantly burst into tears.—Poor youth, said my uncle Toby,—he has been bred up from an infant in the army, and the name of a soldier, Trim, sounded in his ears like the name of a friend;—I wish I had him here.

"—I never, in the longest march, said the corporal, had so great a mind to my dinner, as I had to cry with him for company:—What could be the matter with me an' please your honour? Nothing in the world, Trim, said my uncle Toby, blowing his nose,—but that thou art a good-natured fellow.

"When I gave him the toast, continued the corporal, I thought it was proper to tell him I was Captain Shandy's servant, and that your honour (though a stranger) was extremely concerned for his father;—and that if there was any thing in your house or cellar—(and thou might'st have added my purse, too, said my uncle Toby)—he was heartily welcome to it;—He made a very low bow (which was meant to your honour), but no answer—for his heart was full—so he went up stairs with the toast;—I warrant you, my dear, said I, as I opened the kitchen-door, your father will be well again."

Presently Le Fever sends for the corporal to come up to his room:

"When I went up, continued the corporal, into the lieutenant's room, which I did not do till the expiration of the ten minutes,—he was lying in his bed with his head raised upon his hand, with his elbow upon the pillow, and a clean white cambric handkerchief beside it:—The youth was just stooping down to take up the cushion, upon which I supposed he had been kneeling,—the book was laid upon the bed, and, as he rose, in taking up the cushion with one hand, he reached out his other to take it away at the same time.—Let it remain there, my dear, said the lieutenant.

"He did not offer to speak to me, till I had walked up close to his bed:—If you are Captain Shandy's servant, said he, you must present my thanks to your master, with my little boy's thanks along with them, for his courtesy to me;—if he was of Leven's—said the lieutenant.—I told him your honour was—Then, said he, I served three campaigns with him in Flanders, and remember him,—but 'tis most likely, as I had not the honour of any acquaintance with him, that he knows nothing of me.—You will tell him, however, that the person his good-nature has laid under obligation to him, is one Le Fever, a lieutenant in Angus's—but he knows me not,—said he, a second time, musing;—possibly he may my story—added he—pray tell the captain, I was the ensign at Breda, whose wife was most unfortunately killed with a musket-shot, as she lay in my arms in my tent.—I remember the story, an't please your honour, said I, very well.—Do you so? said he, wiping his eyes with his handkerchief,—then well may I.—In saying this, he drew a little ring out of his bosom, which seemed tied with a black riband about his neck, and kissed it twice—Here, Billy, said he,—the boy flew across the room to the bed-side—and falling down upon his knee, took the ring in his hand, and kissed it too,—then

kissed his father, and sat down upon the bed and wept.

"I wish, said my uncle Toby, with a deep sigh,—I wish, Trim, I was asleep.

"Your honour, replied the corporal, is too much concerned;—shall I pour your honour out a glass of sack to your pipe?—Do, Trim, said my uncle Toby.

"I remember, said my uncle Toby, sighing again, the story of the ensign and his wife, with a circumstance his modesty omitted;—and particularly well that he, as well as she, upon some account or other (I forget what) was universally pitied by the whole regiment;—but finish the story thou art upon:—'Tis finished already, said the corporal,—for I could stay no longer,—so wished his honour a good night; young Le Fever rose from off the bed, and saw me to the bottom of the stairs; and as we went down together, told me they had come from Ireland, and were on their route to join the regiment in Flanders.—But alas! said the corporal,—the lieutenant's last day's march is over.—Then what is to become of his poor boy? cried my uncle Toby."

Later on, uncle Toby has something more to say on the subject:

"Thou hast left this matter short, said my uncle Toby to the corporal, as he was putting him to bed,—and I will tell thee in what, Trim.—In the first place, when thou madest an offer of my services to Le Fever,—as sickness and travelling are both expensive, and thou knowest he was but a poor lieutenant, with a son to subsist as well as himself out of his pay,—that thou didst not make an offer to him of my purse; because, had he stood in need, thou knowest, Trim, he had been as welcome to it as myself.—Your honour knows, said the

corporal, I had no orders;—True, quoth my uncle Toby, —thou didst very right, Trim, as a soldier,—but certainly very wrong as a man.

"In the second place, for which, indeed, thou hast the same excuse, continued my uncle Toby,—when thou offeredst him whatever was in my house,—thou shouldst have offered him my house too:—A sick brother officer should have the best quarters, Trim, and if we had him with us,—we could tend and look to him:—Thou are an excellent nurse thyself, Trim,—and what with thy care of him, and the old woman's, and his boy's, and mine together, we might recruit him again at once, and set him upon his legs.—

"—In a fortnight or three weeks, added my uncle Toby, smiling,—he might march.—He will never march, an' please your honour, in this world, said the corporal: —He will march, said my uncle Toby, rising up from the side of the bed, with one shoe off:—An' please your honour, said the corporal, he will never march, but to his grave;—He shall march, cried my uncle Toby, marching upon the foot which had a shoe on, though without advancing an inch,—he shall march to his regiment.— He cannot stand it, said the corporal;—He shall be supported, said my uncle Toby;—He'll drop at last, said the corporal, and what will become of his boy?—He shall not drop, said my uncle Toby, firmly.—A-well-o'-day,—do what we can for him, said Trim, maintaining his point,— the poor soul will die:—He shall not die, by G——, cried my uncle Toby.

"—The Accusing Spirit, which flew up to heaven's chancery with the oath, blushed as he gave it in;—and the Recording Angel, as he wrote it down, dropped a tear upon the word, and blotted it out for ever.

"My uncle Toby went to his bureau,—put his purse into his breeches pocket, and having ordered the corporal

to go early in the morning for a physician,—he went to bed, and fell asleep.

"The sun looked bright the morning after, to every eye in the village but Le Fever's and his afflicted son's; the hand of death pressed heavy upon his eyelids,—and hardly could the wheel at the cistern[1] turn round its circle,—when my uncle Toby, who had rose up an hour before his wonted time, entered the lieutenant's room, and without preface or apology, sat himself down upon the chair by the bed-side, and, independently of all modes and customs, opened the curtain in the manner an old friend and brother officer would have done it, and asked him how he did,—how he had rested in the night,—what was his complaint,—where was his pain,—and what he could do to help him:—and without giving him time to answer any one of the enquiries, went on, and told him of the little plan which he had been concerting with the corporal the night before for him.—

"You shall go home directly, Le Fever, said my uncle Toby, to my house,—and we'll send for a doctor to see what's the matter,—and we'll have an apothecary,—and the corporal shall be your nurse;—and I'll be your servant, Le Fever.

"There was a frankness in my uncle Toby,—not the effect of familiarity,—but the cause of it,—which let you at once into his soul, and shewed you the goodness of his nature; to this, there was something in his looks, and voice, and manner, superadded, which eternally beckoned to the unfortunate to come and take shelter under him; so that before my uncle Toby had half finished the kind offers he was making to the father, had the son insensibly pressed up close to his knees, and had taken hold of the breast of his coat, and was pulling it towards him.—The blood and spirits of Le Fever, which

[1] See p. 62.

were waxing cold and slow within him, and were retreating to their last citadel, the heart—rallied back,—the film forsook his eyes for a moment,—he looked up wishfully in my uncle Toby's face,—then cast a look upon his boy,—and that ligament, fine as it was,—was never broken.—

"Nature instantly ebbed again,—the film returned to its place,—the pulse fluttered—stopped—went on—throbbed—stopped—shall I go on?—No."

Sterne founded no school of writing. The eccentricities of his style were too much for any would-be imitator. Several of the chapters in *Tristram Shandy* are only a line or so in length: in one place he had a blank marbled page bound into the middle of the story: in another he takes up several pages with a terrific and highly detailed Latin curse. He remains, as Dr. Johnson called him, "odd," but with an oddity which attracts and interests readers as much to-day as when he began to write.

CHAPTER XXIV

SHERIDAN

1

Richard Brinsley Sheridan, like Goldsmith, was a writer of comedy, a brilliant, easy-going, unpractical man, and an Irishman. Unlike Goldsmith, however, he was an excellent talker, he had a vast circle of friends, from the Prince of Wales downwards, and was a man of the world, a Member of Parliament, and the manager of one of London's two great theatres. His father, also a theatrical manager, lived in Dublin, and Sheridan was born there in 1751. He came to London in 1775, having in the meantime been at Harrow, where he was lazy and very popular, and having eloped with a beautiful young singer, called Elizabeth Linley.

His first play, *The Rivals*, was produced at Covent Garden in 1775. In the following year he took over Drury Lane Theatre from David Garrick, and there, in 1777, he produced his most famous comedy, *The School for Scandal*. Two years later came *The Critic*, a burlesque of fashionable highflown tragedy.

The earlier part of Sheridan's life was successful and exciting. He entertained everybody, and went to all the great houses of the day. His plays were the talk of the town, and he achieved fame as a speaker in the House of Commons, where, at the trial of the Indian lawgiver, Warren Hastings, "For five hours and a half Mr. Sheridan commanded the universal interest and admiration of the house . . . by an oration of almost unexampled excellence." His later life, however, was a very different story. Largely owing to his own imprudence, he fell heavily into debt. He was a bad business

man, continually forgetting to keep appointments or answer letters, and letters containing bills, or even cheques, were as often as not left unopened. In 1809 came his crowning misfortune: Drury Lane Theatre was burnt down. Sheridan was in the House of Commons when the blaze began, and a sympathetic Member suggested that the House should be adjourned. Sheridan, however, was a brave man. "Whatever may be the extent of the calamity," he answered, "I hope it will not interfere with the public business of the country." Some time afterwards he lost even his seat in Parliament, and the prestige which that afforded. Heavily in debt, and neglected by all his former friends, he died in 1816.

There are no "Rivals" in Sheridan's play of that name —or rather, they are one and the same man. The romantically minded Lydia Languish loves the half-pay officer, Ensign Beverley, and will on no account marry the rich young heir to a baronetcy, Captain Absolute: and the Captain-Ensign finds great difficulty in playing both parts. His father begins the complications, by refusing to tell him the name of the lady he wishes him to marry. (It is, of course, Lydia.)

Father and son meet in Bath, the fashionable resort of the day, where Lydia is also staying with her aunt, Mrs. Malaprop.

ABSOLUTE: Now for a parental lecture. I hope he has heard nothing of the business that has brought me here. I wish the gout had held him fast in Devonshire, with all my soul!

Enter SIR ANTHONY

Sir, I am delighted to see you here; and looking so well! Your sudden arrival at Bath made me apprehensive for your health.

SIR ANTHONY: Very apprehensive, I dare say, Jack. What, you are recruiting here, hey?

ABSOLUTE: Yes, sir, I am on duty.

SIR ANTHONY: Well, Jack, I am glad to see you, though I did not expect it, for I was going to write to you on a little matter of business. Jack, I have been considering that I grow old and infirm and shall probably not trouble you long.

ABSOLUTE: Pardon me, sir, I never saw you look more strong and hearty; and I pray frequently that you may continue so.

SIR ANTHONY: I hope your prayers may be heard, with all my heart. Well then, Jack, I have been considering that I am so strong and hearty, I may continue to plague you a long time. Now, Jack, I am sensible that the income of your commission, and what I have hitherto allowed you, is but a small pittance for a lad of your spirit. You shall be master of a large estate in a few weeks.

ABSOLUTE: Let my future, sir, speak my gratitude; I cannot express the sense I have of your munificence. Yet, sir, I presume you would not wish me to quit the army?

SIR ANTHONY: Oh, that shall be as your wife chooses.

ABSOLUTE: My wife, sir!

SIR ANTHONY: Why, what difference does that make? If you have the estate, you must take it with the live stock on it, as it stands.

ABSOLUTE: If my happiness is to be the price, I must beg leave to decline the proposition. Pray, sir, who is the lady?

SIR ANTHONY: What's that to you, sir? Come, give me your promise to love and to marry her directly.

ABSOLUTE: Sir, sir, this is not very reasonable, to summon my affections for a lady I know nothing of!

SIR ANTHONY: I am sure, sir, 'tis more unreasonable in you to object to a lady you know nothing of.

ABSOLUTE: Then, sir, I must tell you plainly, that my inclinations are fixed on another—my heart is engaged to an angel.

SIR ANTHONY: Then pray let it send an excuse. It is very sorry, but business prevents its waiting on her.

ABSOLUTE: But my vows are pledged to her.

SIR ANTHONY: Let her foreclose,[1] Jack, let her foreclose: they are not worth redeeming: besides, you have the angel's vows in exchange, I suppose: so there can be no loss there.

ABSOLUTE: What, sir, promise to link myself to some mass of ugliness! to——

SIR ANTHONY: Zounds sirrah! thy lady shall be as ugly as I choose: she shall have a hump on each shoulder: she shall be as crooked as the Crescent, her one eye shall roll like the bull's in Cox's Museum:[2] she shall have a skin like a mummy—she shall be all this, sirrah! yet I will make you ogle her all day, and sit up all night to write sonnets on her beauty.

ABSOLUTE: This is reason and moderation indeed!

SIR ANTHONY: None of your sneering, puppy! No grinning, jackanapes!

ABSOLUTE: Indeed, sir, I never was in a worse humour for mirth in all my life.

SIR ANTHONY: There, you sneer again! Don't provoke me—but you rely upon the mildness of my temper—you do, you dog! You play upon the meekness of my disposition! Yet take care—the patience of a saint may be overcome at last!—but mark! I give you six hours and a half to consider of this: If you then agree, without any condition, to do everything on earth that I choose,

[1] i.e. Let her take the vows—and do what she can with them.
[2] A London museum full of mechanical curiosities.

why—I may in time forgive you. If not, I'll disinherit you, I'll unget you! and I'll never call you Jack again.

Absolute goes, in his own person, to call upon the lady he is supposed never to have seen—and to whom, as Ensign Beverley, he is engaged. Mrs. Malaprop, with a letter in her hand, greets him when he arrives.

MRS. MALAPROP: Your being Sir Anthony's son, Captain, would itself be sufficient, but from the ingenuity of your appearance, I am convinced you deserve the character here given of you.

ABSOLUTE: Permit me to say, madam, that as I never yet have had the pleasure of seeing Miss Languish, my principle inducement in this affair at present is the honour of being allied to Mrs. Malaprop, of whose intellectual accomplishments, elegant manners, and unaffected learning, no tongue is silent.

MRS. MALAPROP: Sir, you do me infinite honour! I beg, Captain, you'll be seated. (*They sit. Aside*) He is the very pineapple of politeness. (*Aloud*) You are not ignorant, Captain, that this giddy girl has somehow contrived to fix her affections on a beggarly, strolling, eavesdropping Ensign whom none of us have ever seen, and nobody knows anything of?

ABSOLUTE: Oh, I have heard the silly affair before. I'm not at all prejudiced against her on *that* account.

MRS. MALAPROP: You are very good and very considerate, Captain. I am sure I have done everything in my power since I exploded the affair. I thought she had persisted from corresponding with him: but, behold, this very day I have intercepted another letter from the fellow: I believe I have it in my pocket.

ABSOLUTE (*aside*): My last note! Oh, the little traitress Lucy.

MRS. MALAPROP: There, perhaps you may know the writing. (*Gives him the letter*)

ABSOLUTE: I think I must have seen the hand before—yes, I certainly must have seen this hand before——

MRS. MALAPROP: Nay, but read it, Captain.

ABSOLUTE (*reads*): "My soul's idol, my adored Lydia!" Very tender indeed!

MRS. MALAPROP: Tender! aye and profane too, o' my conscience!

ABSOLUTE: "I am exceedingly alarmed at the intelligence you send me, the more so as my new rival——"

MRS. MALAPROP: That's you, sir.

ABSOLUTE: "Has universally the character of being an accomplished gentleman and a man of honour."—Well, that's handsome enough.

MRS. MALAPROP: Oh, the fellow has some design in writing so.

ABSOLUTE: That he had, I'll answer for him, ma'am.

MRS. MALAPROP: But go on, sir—you'll see presently.

ABSOLUTE: "As for the old weather-beaten she-dragon that guards you."—Who can he mean by that?

MRS. MALAPROP: Me, sir! *me*—he means *me*! There—what do you think now?—but go on a little further.

ABSOLUTE: Impudent scoundrel! "I have a scheme to see you shortly with the old harridan's consent, and even to make her a go-between in our interview." Was ever such assurance!

MRS. MALAPROP: Did you ever hear anything like it? He'll elude my vigilance, will he? Yes, yes ha! ha! he's very likely to enter these doors! We'll try who can plot best!

ABSOLUTE: So we will, ma'am, so we will. Ha! ha! ha! a conceited puppy, ha! ha! ha! But pray, could I not see the lady for a few minutes now? I should like to try her temper a little.

MRS. MALAPROP: Well, I don't know. I doubt she is not

prepared for a visit of this kind. There is a decorum in these matters.

ABSOLUTE: O Lord! she won't mind *me*—only tell her Beverley——

MRS. MALAPROP: Sir!

ABSOLUTE: Oh, I was going to propose that you should tell her, by way of a jest, that it was Beverley who was below—she'd come down fast enough then. Ha! ha! ha!

MRS. MALAPROP: 'Twould be a trick she well deserves, besides you know the fellow tells her he'll get my consent to see her. Ha! ha! Let him, if he can, I say again. Lydia, come down here. (*Calling*) The little hussy won't hear. Well, I'll go at once and tell her who it is—she shall know that Captain Absolute is come to wait on her. And I'll make her behave as becomes a young woman. For the present, Captain, your servant. Ah! you're not done laughing yet, I see. "Elude my vigilance!" Yes, yes: ha! ha! ha!

2

The School for Scandal deals with the same kind of people as *The Rivals*, though it is set in London instead of in Bath. It was a great success when Sheridan first produced it, and has remained so to this day, for it is friendly as well as satirical, and witty as well as sentimental. Charles Surface, who is supposed to be the villain of the piece, ends up with all the honours, in spite of his brother Joseph's underhand tricks. Charles is an extravagant, careless man, and has to sell all his possessions to raise money. At last nothing remains but his family pictures. He offers these to a Mr. Premium, happily unconscious that the "little broker" is really his rich uncle in disguise. Charles, his uncle Sir Oliver, Careless, and a Jew called Moses, come into the Picture Room together.

CHARLES SURFACE: Walk in, gentlemen, pray walk in;—here they are, the family of the Surfaces, up to the Conquest.

SIR OLIVER: And, in my opinion, a goodly collection.

CHARLES SURFACE: Ay, ay, these are done in the true spirit of portrait-painting; no *volontière grace* or expression. Not like the works of your modern Raphaels, who give you the strongest resemblance, yet contrive to make your portrait independent of you; so that you may sink the original and not hurt the picture. No, no; the merit of these is the inveterate likeness—all stiff and awkward as the originals, and like nothing in human nature besides.

SIR OLIVER: Ah! we shall never see such figures of men again.

CHARLES SURFACE: I hope not. Well, you see, Master Premium, what a domestic character I am; here I sit of an evening surrounded by my family. But come, get to your pulpit, Mr. Auctioneer; here's an old gouty chair of my grandfather's will answer the purpose.

CARELESS: Ay, ay, this will do. Come, begin—A-going, a-going, a-going!

CHARLES SURFACE: Bravo, Careless! Well, here's my great-uncle, Sir Richard Raveline, a marvellous good general in his day, I assure you. He served in all the Duke of Marlborough's wars, and got that cut over his eye at the battle of Malplaquet. What say you, Mr. Premium? Look at him—there's a hero! not cut out of his feathers, as your modern clipped captains are, but enveloped in wig and regimentals, as a general should be. What do you bid?

SIR OLIVER (*aside to* MOSES): Bid him speak.

MOSES: Mr. Premium would have you speak.

CHARLES SURFACE: Why, then, he shall have him for ten pounds, and I'm sure that's not dear for a staff-officer.

SIR OLIVER (*aside*): Heaven deliver me! his famous uncle Richard for ten pounds!—(*Aloud*) Very well, sir, I take him for that.

CHARLES SURFACE: Careless, knock down my uncle Richard.—Here, now, is a maiden sister of his, my great-aunt Deborah, done by Kneller, in his best manner, and esteemed a very formidable likeness. There she is, you see, a shepherdess feeding her flock. You shall have her for five pounds ten—the sheep are worth the money.

SIR OLIVER: Ah! poor Deborah! a woman who set such a value on herself!—(*Aloud*) Five pounds ten—she's mine.

CHARLES SURFACE: Knock down my aunt Deborah! This now is a grandfather of my mother's, a learned judge, well-known on the western circuit.—What do you rate him at, Moses?

MOSES: Four guineas.

CHARLES SURFACE: Four guineas! Gad's life, you don't bid me the price of his wig.—Mr. Premium, you have more respect for the woolsack; do let us knock his lordship down at fifteen.

SIR OLIVER: By all means.

CARELESS: Gone!

CHARLES SURFACE: Here's a jolly fellow—I don't know what relation, but he was mayor of Norwich: take him at eight pounds.

SIR OLIVER: No, no; six will do for the mayor.

CHARLES SURFACE: Come, make it guineas, and I'll throw you the two aldermen there into the bargain.

SIR OLIVER: They're mine.

CHARLES SURFACE: Careless, knock down the mayor and aldermen. But plague on't! we shall be all day retailing in this manner; do let us deal wholesale: what say you, little Premium? Give me three hundred pounds for the rest of the family in the lump.

CARELESS: Ay, ay, that will be the best way.

SIR OLIVER: Well, well, any thing to accommodate you; they are mine. But there is one portrait which you have always passed over.

CARELESS: What, that ill-looking little fellow over the settee?

SIR OLIVER: Yes, sir, I mean that: though I don't think him so ill-looking a little fellow, by any means.

CHARLES SURFACE: What, that? Oh; that's my uncle Oliver! 'twas done before he went to India.

SIR OLIVER: But I suppose uncle Oliver goes with the rest of the lumber?

CHARLES SURFACE: No, hang it! I'll not part with poor Noll. The old fellow has been very good to me, and, egad, I'll keep his picture while I've a room to put it in.

SIR OLIVER (*aside*): The rogue's my nephew after all! —(*Aloud*) But, sir, I have somehow taken a fancy to that picture.

CHARLES SURFACE: I'm sorry for't, for you certainly will not have it. Oons, haven't you got enough of them?

SIR OLIVER (*aside*): I forgive him every thing!—(*Aloud*) But, sir, when I take a whim in my head, I don't value money. I'll give you as much for that as for all the rest.

CHARLES SURFACE: Don't tease me, master broker; I tell you I'll not part with it, and there's an end of it.

SIR OLIVER (*aside*): How like his father the dog is!—(*Aloud*) Well, well, I have done.—(*Aside*) I did not perceive it before, but I think I never saw such a striking resemblance.—(*Aloud*) Here is a draught for your sum.

CHARLES SURFACE: Why, 'tis for eight hundred pounds!

SIR OLIVER: You will not let Sir Oliver go?

CHARLES SURFACE: Zounds! no! I tell you, once more.

SIR OLIVER: Then never mind the difference, we'll balance that another time. But give me your hand on

the bargain; you are an honest fellow, Charles—I beg your pardon, sir, for being so free.—Come, Moses.

(*Exit with* MOSES.)

CHARLES SURFACE: So! this was an odd old fellow, indeed. Let me see, two-thirds of these five hundred and thirty odd pounds are mine by right. 'Fore Heaven! I find one's ancestors are more valuable relations than I took them for!—Ladies and gentlemen, your most obedient and very grateful servant.

3

A third play of Sheridan's, *The Critic*, deals with another kind of world—the theatre world. Sheridan, as manager of Drury Lane, had every opportunity to observe the peculiarities of playwrights and actors, and the utter absurdity of some of the tragedies which were then popular. *The Critic* is the result of these observations. It was written under strange conditions. Sheridan was incorrigibly slack about his writing, and two days before *The Critic* was to appear, it was still without a last act. Everyone in the theatre was in despair. Sheridan's father-in-law, however, had a brilliant idea. He got Sheridan into a little room, where writing materials, two bottles of wine, and some anchovy sandwiches were prepared. Sheridan suspected nothing: suddenly he found himself locked into the room, and heard a voice through the keyhole saying he was to stay there until he had finished the play. Nothing daunted, he did so.

Puff, the hero of *The Critic*, has written a tragedy, telling how Don Ferolo Whiskerandos, who is a prisoner at Tilbury Fort in the reign of Elizabeth, loves the Governor's daughter Tilburina. He takes his friends Dangle and Sneer to see a rehearsal of *The Spanish Armada*.

UNDER PROMPTER: Sir, the scene is set, and everything is ready to begin, if you please.

PUFF: Egad, then we'll lose no time.

UNDER PROMPTER: Though I believe, sir, you will find it very short, for all the performers have profited by the kind permission you granted them.

PUFF: Hey! what?

UNDER PROMPTER: You know, sir, you gave them leave to cut out or omit whatever they found heavy or unnecessary to the plot, and I must own they have taken very liberal advantage of your indulgence.

PUFF: Well, well. They are in general very good judges, and I know I am luxuriant. Now, Mr. Hopkins, as soon as you please.

UNDER PROMPTER (*to the* ORCHESTRA): Gentlemen, will you play a few bars of something, just to——

PUFF: Ay, that's right; for as we have the scenes and dresses, egad, we'll go to't as if it was the first night's performance—but you need not mind stopping between the acts. (*Exit* UNDER PROMPTER. ORCHESTRA *play—then the bell rings.*) So! stand clear, gentlemen. Now, you know, there will be a cry of "Down! down! —Hats off!—Silence!" Then up curtain, and let us see what our painters have done for us. (*Curtain rises.*)

"SCENE II

"Tilbury Fort

"*Two* SENTINELS *discovered asleep*"

DANGLE: Tilbury Fort!—very fine indeed!

PUFF: Now, what do you think I open with?

SNEER: Faith, I can't guess——

PUFF: A clock. Hark! (*Clock strikes.*) I open with a clock striking, to beget an awful attention in the audience.

It also marks the time, which is four o'clock in the morning, and saves a description of the rising sun, and a great deal about gilding the eastern hemisphere.

DANGLE: But, pray, are the sentinels to be asleep?

PUFF: Fast as watchmen.

SNEER: Isn't that odd, though, at such an alarming crisis?

PUFF: To be sure it is—but smaller things must give way to a striking scene at the opening; that's a rule. And the case is, that two great men are coming to this very spot to begin the piece. Now, it is not to be supposed they would open their lips if these fellows were watching them; so, egad, I must either have sent them off their posts or set them asleep.

SNEER: Oh, that accounts for it. But tell us, who are these coming?

PUFF: These are they—Sir Walter Raleigh and Sir Christopher Hatton. You'll know Sir Christopher by his turning out his toes—famous, you know, for his dancing. I like to preserve all the little traits of character. Now attend.

Enter SIR WALTER RALEIGH *and* SIR CHRISTOPHER HATTON.

SIR CHRISTOPHER: True, gallant Raleigh!——

DANGLE: What, they had been talking before?

PUFF: Oh, yes; all the way as they came along. (*To the* ACTORS) I beg your pardon, gentlemen, but these are particular friends of mine, whose remarks may be of great service to us. (*To* SNEER *and* DANGLE) Don't mind interrupting them whenever anything strikes you.

SIR CHRISTOPHER: True, gallant Raleigh!

But oh, thou champion of thy country's fame,

There is a question which I yet must ask:
A question which I never ask'd before—
What mean these mighty armaments?
This general muster? and this throng of chiefs?

SNEER: Pray, Mr. Puff, how came Sir Christopher Hatton never to ask that question before?

PUFF: What, before the play began? How the plague could he?

DANGLE: That's true, i' faith!

Puff is enjoying his play.

PUFF: But now for my principal character. Here he comes —Lord Burleigh in person! Pray, gentlemen, step this way—softly—I only hope the Lord High Treasurer is perfect—if he is but perfect!

Enter LORD BURLEIGH, *goes slowly to a chair, and sits.*

SNEER: Mr. Puff!

PUFF: Hush! Vastly well, sir, vastly well!—a most interesting gravity!

DANGLE: What, isn't he to speak at all?

PUFF: Egad, I thought you'd ask me that! Yes, it is a very likely thing—that a minister in his situation, with the whole affairs of the nation on his head, should have time to talk! But hush! or you'll put him out.

SNEER: Put him out! how the plague can that be, if he's not going to say anything?

PUFF: That's the reason! Why, his part is to think: and how the plague do you imagine he can think if you keep talking?

DANGLE: That's very true, upon my word!

LORD BURLEIGH *comes forward, shakes his head, and exit.*

SNEER: He is very perfect indeed! Now pray, what did he mean by that?

PUFF: You don't take it?

SNEER: No, I don't, upon my soul.

PUFF: Why, by that shake of the head, he gave you to understand that even though they had more justice in their cause, and wisdom in their measures—yet, if there was not a greater spirit shown on the part of the people, the country would at last fall a sacrifice to the hostile ambition of the Spanish monarchy.

SNEER: The devil! did he mean all that by shaking his head? . . .

PUFF: Now enter Tilburina!

SNEER: Egad, the business comes on quick here.

PUFF: Yes, sir—now she comes in stark mad in white satin.

SNEER: Why in white satin?

PUFF: O Lord! sir—when a heroine goes mad, she always goes into white satin. Don't she, Dangle?

DANGLE: Always—it's a rule.

PUFF: Yes—here it is. (*Looking at the book.*) "Enter Tilburina stark mad in white satin, and her confidante stark mad in white linen."

Enter TILBURINA *and* CONFIDANTE, *mad, according to custom.*

SNEER: But, what the deuce! is the confidante to be mad too?

PUFF: To be sure she is: the confidante is always to do whatever her mistress does; weep when she weeps, smile when she smiles, go mad when she goes mad. Now, madam confidante—but keep your madness in the background, if you please.

TILBURINA: The wind whistles—the moon rises—see,
They have kill'd my squirrel in his cage!
Is this a grasshopper? Ha! no; it is my
Whiskerados—you shall not keep him—
I know you have him in your pocket—
An oyster may be cross'd in love! Who says
A whale's a bird? Ha! did you call, my love?
He's here! he's there! He's everywhere!
Ah me! he's nowhere! (*Exit.*)

"There," says Puff, in high good humour, "do you ever desire to see anybody madder than that?"

"Never, while I live!" replies Sneer.

Sheridan stands out in the history of the English theatre as a writer of pure comedy. His fame rests upon two plays, which are continually performed to-day, and have been favourites almost from the date of their first appearance. The plots are complicated, yet perfectly clear. The dialogue is polished to the last degree, yet absolutely natural. Each play is full of humorous situations, all quite simply contrived, and many of the characters have become proverbial. In fact, *The Rivals* and *The School for Scandal* are almost perfect comedies. No playwright has so high a reputation on the strength of so small an output as the happy-go-lucky and good-natured Sheridan.

CHAPTER XXV

GRAY AND COLLINS

1

GRAY AND COLLINS are usually considered together in histories and literature, yet they were men of very different character. They were not even acquaintances, and did not know that their poetry had anything in common. We are apt to think of them together because of a quality in their work which appeals immediately to our own age. There is something "modern," something which does not sound like Eighteenth Century thought, in Gray's *Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard* and in Collins' *Ode to Evening.* Gray was born in 1716, Collins in 1721. They knew and respected the ideals of Pope and Dr. Johnson, but they could not help letting their work vary from the existing standards of "reason" and common sense. Like all good poets, Augustans or otherwise, they wrote of what they sincerely felt: and it so happens that, in such matters as their love of country sights and sounds rather than of town topics, they were nearer to their successors, Wordsworth and Coleridge, and nearer to us to-day.

Gray was a scholar, and liked a quiet life, with good books, good music, and a good garden. He had all these at Cambridge, which was his home from his undergraduate days until he died in 1771. He was said to be "perhaps the most learned man in Europe," and in 1757 was offered, and refused, the office of poet laureate. He had many friends, and his correspondence with them reveals him as a gay and delightful man. He made most of his friends at Eton. Among them was Horace Walpole, the famous letter-writer and man about town. Walpole took him on a tour of France and Italy in

1739. They quarrelled and separated, but later became friends again. Walpole took all the blame for their quarrel. "He loved me and I did not think he did," he said. Gray had been "too serious a companion." He liked antiques and learned sight-seeing, "whilst I was for perpetual balls and plays—the fault was mine."

Gray was a keen antiquary, as the notes of his travels show: but he had eyes for other things than ruins. Here is a letter which he wrote to his mother in 1739, from Turin.

"I am this night arrived here, and have just set down to rest me after eight days' tiresome journey. For the three first we had the same road we before passed through to go to Geneva; the fourth we turned out of it, and for that day and the next travelled rather among than upon the Alps; the way commonly running through a deep valley by the side of the river Arc, which works itself a passage, with great difficulty and a mighty noise, among vast quantities of rocks that have rolled down from the mountain tops. The winter was so far advanced as in great measure to spoil the beauty of the prospect; however, there was still somewhat fine remaining amidst the savageness and horror of the place. The sixth we began to go up several of these mountains; and as we were passing one, met with an odd accident enough. Mr. Walpole had a little fat black spaniel, that he was very fond of, which he sometimes used to set down, and let it run by the chaise side. We were at that time in a very rough road, not two yards broad at most; on one side was a great wood of pines, and on the other a vast precipice; it was noon-day, and the sun shone bright, when all of a sudden, from the wood-side (which was as steep upwards, as the other part was downwards) out rushed a great wolf, came close to the head of the horses, seized the dog by the throat, and rushed up the hill again with him in his mouth. This was

done in less than a quarter of a minute; we all saw it, and yet the servants had not time to draw their pistols, or do anything to save the dog. If he had not been there, and the creature had thought fit to lay hold of one of the horses, chaise, and we, and all must inevitably have tumbled over fifty fathoms perpendicular, down the precipice. The seventh we came to Lanebourg, the last town in Savoy; it lies at the foot of the famous mount Cenis, which is so situated as to allow no room for any way but over the very top of it. Here the chaise was forced to be pulled to pieces, and the baggage and that to be carried by mules. We ourselves were wrapped up in our furs, and seated upon a sort of matted chair without legs, which is carried upon poles in the manner of a bier, and so begun to ascend by the help of eight men. It was six miles to the top, where a plain opens itself about as many more in breadth, covered perpetually with very deep snow, and in the midst of that a great lake of unfathomable depth, from whence a river takes its rise, and tumbles over monstrous rocks quite down the other side of the mountain. The descent is six miles more, but infinitely more steep than the going up; and here the men perfectly fly down with you, stepping from stone to stone with incredible swiftness in places where none but they could go three paces without falling. The immensity of the precipices, the roaring of the river and torrents that run into it, the huge crags covered with ice and snow, and the clouds below you and about you, are objects it is impossible to conceive without seeing them; and though we had heard of many strange descriptions of the scene, none of them at all came up to it."

Gray's *Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard* appeared in 1750. It was immediately popular, and has been so

ever since, for its subject is such as must appeal to everybody, and its landscape one that all English people love.

The curfew tolls the knell of parting day,
The lowing herd winds slowly o'er the lea,
The ploughman homeward plods his weary way,
And leaves the world to darkness and to me.

Now fades the glimmering landscape on the sight,
And all the air a solemn stillness holds,
Save where the beetle wheels his droning flight,
And drowsy tinklings lull the distant folds:

Save that from yonder ivy-mantled tow'r,
The moping owl does to the moon complain
Of such as, wand'ring near her secret bow'r,
Molest her ancient solitary reign.

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

The breezy call of incense-breathing morn,
The swallow twitt'ring from the straw-built shed,
The cock's shrill clarion, or the echoing horn,
No more shall rouse them from their lowly bed.

For them no more the blazing hearth shall burn,
Or busy housewife ply her evening care:
No children run to lisp their sire's return,
Or climb his knees the envied kiss to share.

Oft did the harvest to their sickle yield,
Their furrow oft the stubborn glebe has broke:
How jocund did they drive their team afield!
How bow'd the woods beneath their sturdy stroke!

Let not ambition mock their useful toil,
Their homely joys, and destiny obscure;
Nor grandeur hear with a disdainful smile
The short and simple annals of the poor.

The boast of heraldry, the pomp of pow'r
And all that beauty, all that wealth e'er gave,
Awaits alike th' inevitable hour:
The paths of glory lead but to the grave.

Nor you, ye proud, impute to these the fault,
If memory o'er their tomb no trophies raise,
Where through the long-drawn aisle and fretted vault
The pealing anthem swells the note of praise.

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

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

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

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

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

Th' applause of list'ning senates to command,
The threats of gain and ruin to despise,
To scatter plenty o'er a smiling land,
And read their history in a nation's eyes,

Their lot forbad: nor circumscrib'd alone
Their growing virtues, but their crimes confined;
Forbad to wade thro' slaughter to a throne,
And shut the gates of mercy on mankind;

The struggling pangs of conscious truth to hide,
To quench the blushes of ingenuous shame,
Or heap the shrine of Luxury and Pride
With incense kindled at the Muse's flame.

Far from the madding crowd's ignoble strife,
Their sober wishes never learn'd to stray;
Along the cool sequester'd vale of life
They kept the noiseless tenour of their way.

Yet even these bones from insult to protect
Some frail memorial still erected nigh,
With uncouth rhymes and shapeless sculpture deck'd,
Implores the passing tribute of a sigh.

Their name, their years, spelt by th' unletter'd Muse,
The place of fame and elegy supply:
And many a holy text around she strews,
That teach the rustic moralist to die.

For who, to dumb Forgetfulness a prey,
This pleasing anxious being e'er resign'd,
Left the warm precincts of the cheerful day,
Nor cast one longing ling'ring look behind? . . .

2

In this one poem, Gray's appeal was universal. Some of its lines have almost become proverbs. It is told that General Wolfe, sailing down to Quebec, repeated the *Elegy* to his brother officers, and said he would rather have written that than take the city. Except in the *Elegy*, Gray wrote for a small audience. Most of his other works are Odes, a difficult form which he mastered with great success. Here are stanzas from *The Bard*:

I. 1

"*Ruin seize thee, ruthless King!*
Confusion on thy banners wait;
Tho' fann'd by conquest's crimson wing,
They mock the air with idle state.
Helm, nor hauberk's twisted mail,
Nor e'en thy virtues, Tyrant, shall avail
To save thy secret soul from nightly fears,
From Cambria's curse, from Cambria's tears!"
Such were the sounds that o'er the crested pride
Of the first Edward scatter'd wild dismay,
As down the steep of Snowdon's shaggy side
He wound with toilsome march his long array.
Stout Glo'ster stood aghast in speechless trance:
"*To arms!*" *cried Mortimer, and couch'd his*
quiv'ring lance.

I. 2

On a rock, whose haughty brow
Frowns o'er cold Conway's foaming flood,
Robed in the sable garb of woe,
With haggard eyes the poet stood;
(Loose his beard, and hoary hair
Stream'd, like a meteor, to the troubled air)
And with a master's hand, and prophet's fire,
Struck the deep sorrows of his lyre.
"Hark, how each giant-oak, and desert cave,
Sighs to the torrent's awful voice beneath!
O'er thee, oh King! their hundred arms they wave,
Revenge on thee in hoarser murmurs breathe;
Vocal no more, since Cambria's fatal day,
To high-born Hoel's[1] *harp, or soft Llewellyn's lay.*

I. 3

"Cold is Cadwallo's tongue,
That hush'd the stormy main:
Brave Urien sleeps upon his craggy bed:
Mountains, ye mourn in vain
Modred, whose magic song
Made huge Plinlimmon bow his cloud-topt head.
On dreary Arvon's[2] *shore they lie,*
Smear'd with gore, and ghastly pale:
Far, far aloof th' affrighted ravens sail;
The famish'd eagle screams, and passes by.
Dear lost companions of my tuneful art,
Dear as the light that visits these sad eyes,
Dear as the ruddy drops that warm my heart,
Ye died amidst your dying country's cries—
No more I weep. They do not sleep.

[1] All these are the Bard's "dear lost companions." [2] Carnarvon.

On yonder cliffs, a grisly band,
I see them sit, they linger yet,
Avengers of their native land:
With me in dreadful harmony they join,
And weave with bloody hands the tissue of thy line."

II. 1

"*Weave the warp, and weave the woof,*
The winding-sheet of Edward's race.
Give ample room, and verge enough
The characters of hell to trace.
Mark the year, and mark the night,
When Severn shall re-echo with affright
The shrieks of death, thro' Berkeley's roof that ring,
Shrieks of an agonising king![1]
She-wolf of France,[2] *with unrelenting fangs,*
That tear'st the bowels of thy mangled mate,
From thee be born, who o'er thy country hangs
The scourge of heav'n.[3] *What terrors round him wait!*
Amazement in his van, with Flight combin'd,
And Sorrow's faded form, and Solitude behind. . . ."

3

Seeing the fascination past history had for Gray, we are reminded of Horace Walpole, who loved "Gothic" barbarities and architecture, who wrote a tale full of horrors called *The Castle of Otranto*, and who lived himself in an imitation castle called Strawberry Hill, near Pope's old home at Twickenham. The death of Walpole's cat brought yet another kind of poem from Gray—the mock-serious *Ode on the Death of a Favourite Cat Drowned in a Tub of Gold Fishes.*

[1] **Edward II.** See Marlowe's play, pp. 93-99. [2] **Isabella of France, Edward II's Queen.** [3] **Edward III.**

'Twas on a lofty vase's side,
Where China's gayest art had dy'd
The azure flowers that blow;
Demurest of the tabby kind,
The pensive Selima reclin'd,
Gaz'd on the lake below.

Her conscious tail her joy declar'd;
The fair round face, the snowy beard,
The velvet of her paws,
Her coat, that with the tortoise vies,
Her ears of jet, and emerald eyes,
She saw; and purr'd applause.

Still had she gaz'd; but 'midst the tide
Two angel forms were seen to glide,
The Genii of the stream:
Their scaly armour's Tyrian hue
Through richest purple to the view
Betray'd a golden gleam.

The hapless nymph with wonder saw:
A whisker first, and then a claw,
With many an ardent wish,
She stretch'd, in vain, to reach the prize.
What female heart can gold despise?
What Cat's averse to fish?

Presumptuous maid! with looks intent
Again she stretch'd, again she bent,
Nor knew the gulf between.
(Malignant Fate sat by, and smil'd.)
The slipp'ry verge her feet beguil'd,
She tumbled headlong in.

Eight times emerging from the flood
She mew'd to every wat'ry God,
Some speedy aid to send.
No Dolphin came, no Nereid stirr'd:
Nor cruel Tom, nor Susan heard.
A fav'rite has no friend!

From hence, ye beauties, undeceiv'd,
Know, one false step is ne'er retriev'd,
And be with caution bold.
Not all that tempts your wand'ring eyes
And heedless hearts is lawful prize,
Nor all that glisters, gold.

In this poem Gray might well be laughing at himself, making fun of his own manner of writing odes. The "hapless nymph," "malignant Fate," and the "wat'ry God," might have appeared in earnest in one of his serious poems. Gray, after all, lived in an age which thought it good to refer to fish as "the finny drove" (and which once even called a cold bath a "gelid cistern"), and he took this poetic diction for granted, as part of his poetic equipment. It is very obvious in the *Ode on a Distant Prospect of Eton College*—the poem with the address to Father Thames which so roused Dr. Johnson's wrath. Here are two verses.

Say, father Thames, for thou hast seen
Full many a sprightly race
Disporting on thy margent green,
The paths of pleasure trace;
Who foremost now delight to cleave,
With pliant arm, thy glassy wave?
The captive linnet which enthral?
What idle progeny succeed
To chase the rolling circle's speed,
Or urge the flying ball? . . .

Alas! regardless of their doom
The little victims play;
No sense have they of ills to come,
Nor care beyond to-day:
Yet see, how all around 'em wait
The ministers of human fate,
And black Misfortune's baleful train!
Ah, show them where in ambush stand,
To seize their prey, the murth'rous band!
Ah, tell them, they are men! . . .

Our last glimpse of Gray is an anecdote sometimes quoted among his poems. It shows him as we like to remember him.

"One fine morning in the spring, Mr. Nicholls was walking in the neighbourhood of Cambridge with Mr. Gray, who feeling the influence of the season and cheered with the melody of birds on every bough, turned round to his friend, and expressed himself extempore in these beautiful lines:

There pipes the wood-lark, and the song-thrush there
Scatters his loose notes in the waste of air."

4

William Collins' life was short, and none too happy. He was born in 1721, and died, of insanity following upon deep melancholia, in 1759. "Such was the fate of Collins, with whom I once delighted to converse, and whom I yet remember with tenderness," wrote Dr. Johnson, who loved him as a man though he had little use for him as a poet. Collins was born at Chichester. He went to Winchester and Oxford, and afterwards led a hand-to-mouth existence in London. His friend Gilbert White said that

when he first came up, he "commenced a man of the town, spending his time in all the dissipation of Ranelagh, Vauxhall, and the playhouses; and was romantic enough to suppose that his superior abilities would draw the attention of the great world, by means of whom he was to make his fortune. . . . He was passionately fond of music; good-natured and affable; warm in his friendships, visionary in his pursuits; and, as long as I knew him, very temperate in his eating and drinking. He was of a moderate stature, of a light and clear complexion, with grey eyes, so very weak at times as hardly to bear a candle in the room; and often raising within him apprehensions of blindness." It is not as a man of the town, however, that we remember Collins. It is, more than anything, for his *Ode to Evening*.

If aught of oaten stop, or pastoral song,
May hope, O pensive Eve, to soothe thine ear,
Like thy own solemn springs,
Thy springs and dying gales;

O Nymph reserved, while now the bright-haired Sun
Sits in yon western tent, whose cloudy skirts,
With brede ethereal wove,
O'er hang his wavy bed:

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

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

Whose numbers, stealing through thy darkening vale,
May, not unseemly, with its stillness suit,
As, musing slow, I hail
Thy genial loved return.

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

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

Then let me rove some wild and heathy scene;
Or find some ruin, 'midst its dreary dells,
Whose walls more awful nod
By thy religious gleams.

Or if chill blustering winds, or driving rain
Prevent my willing feet, be mine the hut
That from the mountain's side
Views wilds and swelling floods,

And hamlets brown, and dim-discovered spires;
And hears their simple bell, and marks o'er all
Thy dewy fingers draw
The gradual dusky veil.

While Spring shall pour the showers, as oft he wont,
And bathe thy breathing tresses, meekest Eve!
While Summer loves to sport
Beneath thy lingering light;

While sallow Autumn fills thy lap with leaves;
Or Winter, yelling through the troublous air,
Affrights thy shrinking train,
And rudely rends thy robes;

So long, regardful of thy quiet rule,
Shall Fancy, Friendship, Science, smiling Peace,
Thy gentlest influence own,
And love thy favourite name.

It is almost surprising to realise that this poem is unrhymed. It is one of a handful of English lyrics which succeed perfectly without rhyme. Another is Tennyson's *Tears, Idle Tears.* One other short poem, written in 1746 after the battle of Fontenoy, shows in how delicate and individual a manner Collins managed the formal lament.

How sleep the brave, who sink to rest,
By all their country's wishes blest!
When Spring, with dewy fingers cold,
Returns to deck their hallowed mould,
She there shall dress a sweeter sod
Than Fancy's feet have ever trod.

By fairy hands their knell is rung;
By forms unseen their dirge is sung;
There Honour comes, a pilgrim gray,
To bless the turf that wraps the clay;
And Freedom shall a while repair
To dwell a weeping hermit there!

Gray and Collins both wrote few poems, almost all of which were of high quality. They have been much argued about, as coming at the end of the Augustan tradition of poetry and heralding the Romantic Revival: but, scholastic questions apart, their poetry lives because it is, in Gray's own words, "pure, perspicuous, and musical."

CHAPTER XXVI

BLAKE

1

MOST PEOPLE have, at some time or other, come across the following poem, usually at a concert, or in a school chapel, where it is sung as a hymn.

And did those feet in ancient time
Walk upon England's mountains green?
And was the holy Lamb of God
On England's pleasant pastures seen?

And did the Countenance Divine
Shine forth upon our clouded hills?
And was Jerusalem builded here
Among these dark Satanic Mills?

Bring me my bow of burning gold:
Bring me my Arrows of desire:
Bring me my Spear: O clouds unfold!
Bring me my Chariot of fire.

I will not cease from Mental Fight,
Nor shall my Sword sleep in my hand
Till we have built Jerusalem
In England's green and pleasant Land.

It is possible to join in the singing, and to be much excited by it, without knowing very clearly what Blake meant by his bow of burning gold, or by the Jerusalem which he so ardently desired to raise. All poets in a sense are mystics, in that they tend to measure life by different rules, and to judge its values by emotion

rather than by the more material standards in common use.

To me the meanest flower that blows can give
Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears,

wrote Wordsworth: and poets in general are distinguished for their power of seeing much in little. Blake begins his *Auguries of Innocence* with the lines:

To see a World in a Grain of Sand
And a Heaven in a Wild Flower,
Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand
And Eternity in an hour.

For him, the objects we see around us had a double existence: first as themselves, and then as the clues, or symbols, to a further reality. There was more in them than met the ordinary eye. As it has been well put, genius sees what other people only look at. The poet, looking at some everyday object, suddenly sees it as part of the vast pattern of the universe—and, for an instant of time, has a fleeting vision of the pattern. Tennyson put the same thought less positively:

Flower in the crannied wall,
I pluck you out of the crannies,
I hold you here, root and all, in my hand,
Little flower—but if I could understand
What you are root and all, and all in all,
I should know what God and man is.

This, the perception that goes to make a poet, was with Blake developed to such an extent, and so made into a system, that he often speaks in riddles, and it is exceedingly difficult to get at his meaning. But Blake had a stronger hold than this upon the further reality. He was a true visionary, for whom the other world was as real and

as convincing as this. When he rose from his brother's deathbed, he had no need to mourn, for he had seen his brother's soul fly up to God clapping its hands for joy. This faculty of direct vision, and his unquestioning faith in it, led his poetry often into strange places where we cannot follow: but his practical interest in the world around him, and his instant response to cruelty or injustice, make him at times the simplest of poets.

A Robin Redbreast in a cage
Puts all Heaven in a rage. . . .
Each outcry of the hunted Hare
A fibre from the Brain does tear.

There was always something childlike about Blake, and he loved children. "The Chimney Sweeper," from *Songs of Innocence*, is inspired by indignation at their unjust treatment,[1] yet Blake writes with a child's happiness, and, like his Angel, mixes familiarly with the holiday-making sweeps' boys.

When my mother died I was very young,
And my father sold me while yet my tongue
Could scarcely cry " 'weep! 'weep! 'weep!"
So your chimneys I sweep, and in soot I sleep.

There's little Tom Dacre, who cried when his head
That curl'd like a lamb's back, was shav'd: so I said
"Hush, Tom! never mind it, for when your head's bare
You know that the soot cannot spoil your white hair."

And so he was quiet, and that very night,
As Tom was a-sleeping, he had such a sight!
That thousands of sweepers, Dick, Joe, Ned, and Jack,
Were all of them lock'd up in coffins of black.

[1] These wretched children had to climb up inside the chimneys to clear out the soot.

And by came an Angel who had a bright key,
And he open'd the coffins and set them all free;
Then down a green plain leaping, laughing, they run,
And wash in the river, and shine in the Sun.

Then naked and white, all their bags left behind,
They rise upon clouds and sport in the wind;
And the Angel told Tom, if he'd be a good boy,
He'd have God for his father, and never want joy.

And so Tom awoke; and we rose in the dark,
And got with our bags and our brushes to work.
Tho' the morning was cold, Tom was happy and warm;
So if all do their duty they need not fear harm.

The *Songs of Innocence* appeared in 1789, in books designed and printed by Blake himself. The designs included pictures for the poems, and these pictures, as always with Blake, are an essential part of the whole poem. He was as much painter as poet. Often the picture came first and the poem was written to illustrate it.[1] There is a great contrast between the *Songs of Innocence* and the *Songs of Experience* of seven years later. In the earlier poems, Blake entered into childhood as no other poet has ever done; in the later ones, he pointed the contrast between innocent happiness and experience of the sorrow of life. Each collection contained a poem called "Holy Thursday." This was the one in *Songs of Innocence*:

'Twas on a Holy Thursday, their innocent faces clean,
The children walking two and two, in red and blue and green,
Grey-headed beadles walk'd before, with wands as white as snow,
Till into the high dome of Paul's they like Thames' waters flow.

[1] There is an excellent collection of Blake's pictures in the Tate Gallery.

O what a multitude they seem'd, these flowers of London town!
Seated in companies they sit with radiance all their own.
The hum of multitudes was there, but multitudes of lambs,
Thousands of little boys and girls raising their innocent hands.

Now like a mighty wind they raise to heaven the voice of song,
Or like harmonious thunderings the seats of Heaven among.
Beneath them sit the aged men, wise guardians of the poor;
Then cherish pity, lest you drive an angel from your door.

This was the very different poem in *Songs of Experience*:

Is this a holy thing to see
In a rich and fruitful land,
Babes reduc'd to misery,
Fed with cold and usurous hand?

Is that trembling cry a song?
Can it be a song of joy?
And so many children poor?
It is a land of poverty!

And their land does never shine,
And their fields are bleak and bare,
And their ways are fill'd with thorns:
It is eternal winter there.

For where-e'er the sun does shine,
And where-e'er the rain does fall,
Babe can never hunger there,
Nor poverty the mind appal.

2

Blake was born in London in 1757. He was apprenticed to an engraver, and ultimately took up the trade himself, although much of his time was filled with poetry and painting. It is said that he refused to be apprenticed to the man his father first suggested. "He is going to be hanged," he objected: and sure enough the man *was* hanged.

Blake was poor and neglected all his life, but he kept himself always busy, and had an intense capacity for happiness. One of his many friends said of him, "He was at the same time most sublime in his expressions, with the simplicity and gentleness of a child, though never wanting in energy when it was called for." Life could not be dull or ordinary for Blake. Ordinary things hardly mattered to him, for he had a more important reality of his own.

"I assert for My Self," he said, "that I do not behold the outward Creation and that to me it is hindrance and not Action; it is as the dirt upon my feet, No part of Me. 'What,' it will be Question'd, 'When the Sun rises, do you not see a round disk of fire somewhat like a Guinea?' O no, no, I see an Innumerable company of the Heavenly host crying, 'Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord God Almighty.' I question not my Corporeal of Vegetative Eye any more than I would Question a Window concerning a Sight. I look thro' it and not with it."

So, when through a friend's kindness Blake and his wife went to live in a cottage at Felpham, this was how he wrote to announce their safe arrival:

"Felpham is a sweet place for Study, because it is more Spiritual than London. Heaven opens here on all

sides her golden Gates; her windows are not obstructed by vapours; voices of Celestial inhabitants are more distinctly heard, and their forms more distinctly seen; and my Cottage is also a Shadow of their houses."

He went on to describe their journey down, passing perfectly naturally from talk of books and boxes to the eternal matters which were his other reality.

"Our Journey was very pleasant; and tho' we had a great deal of luggage, No Grumbling; All was Cheerfulness and Good Humour on the Road, and yet we could not arrive at our Cottage before half-past Eleven at night, owing to the necessary shifting of our Luggage from one Chaise to another; for we had Seven Different Chaises, and as many different drivers. We set out between Six and Seven in the Morning of Thursday, with Sixteen heavy boxes and portfolios full of prints. And Now Begins a New life, because another covering of Earth is shaken off. I am more famed in Heaven for my works than I could well conceive. In my Brain are studies and Chambers filled with books and pictures of old, which I wrote and painted in ages of eternity before my mortal life; and those works are the delight and Study of Archangels. Why, then, should I be anxious about the riches or fame of mortality? The Lord our father will do for us and with us according to his divine will for our Good."

Blake died at his home in the Strand in 1827. He had regretfully returned from "Felpham Cottage, of Cottages the prettiest," saying "that I can alone carry on my visionary studies in London unannoy'd, and that I may converse with my friends in Eternity, See Visions, Dream Dreams and prophesy and speak Parables

unobserv'd and at liberty from the Doubts of other Mortals."

The visions that Blake saw had for him a most detailed reality, and his vivid pictures make an instant impression on our imagination.

Tiger! Tiger! burning bright
In the forests of the night,
What immortal hand or eye
Could frame thy fearful symmetry?

In what distant deeps or skies
Burnt the fire of thine eyes?
On what wings dare he aspire?
What the hand dare seize the fire?

And what shoulder, and what art,
Could twist the sinews of thy heart?
And when thy heart began to beat,
What dread hand? and what dread feet?

What the hammer? what the chain?
In what furnace was thy brain?
What the anvil? what dread grasp
Dare its deadly terrors clasp?

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

Tiger! Tiger! burning bright
In the forests of the night,
What immortal hand or eye,
Dare frame thy fearful symmetry?

This poem is important in the light it sheds upon Blake's poetry, and, indeed, upon all poetry. Reading it, we realise that the thought of poetry is swifter than ordinary thought, that it misses out a number of the logical stops that come between that which provokes a thought and its conclusion; leaping straight to the conclusion. Poetic reality is unlike the everyday reality of house and street. Look at the first lines of this poem. The tiger does not burn. If it were in the forests of the night (whatever that means), they would presumably be dark, and you could not see it at all: and so on and so forth. But these facts do not matter to Blake's description. In a single flash, he has seen the tiger, what it is, what it means, what it looks like: in a few sure touches he has found the magical words—literally magical, for they call up his vision to our eyes.

The every day world existed for Blake as an undistinguished part of his Eternity. Spirits walked about in his garden at Felpham, and the vast countermarches of his prophetic books took place impartially in Heaven, Hell, and London.

From Golgonooza,[1] *the spiritual Four-fold London eternal,*
In immense labours and sorrows, ever building, ever falling,
Thro' Albion's four Forests which overspread all the Earth
From London Stone to Blackheath east: to Hounslow west:
To Finchley north: to Norwood south: and the weights
Of Enitharmon's Loom play lulling cadences on the winds of Albion.
From Caithness in the north to Lizard-point and Dover in the south.

[1] We are not attempting to explain the symbolism of these names. They belonged to Blake's unknown world. Los, for example, was Sol, the Sun and giver of life, and he was also Time.

Loud sounds the Hammer of Los and loud his Bellows is heard
Before London to Hampstead's breadths and Highgate's heights, to
Stratford and old Bow and across to the Gardens of Kensington
On Tyburn's Brook: loud groans Thames beneath the iron Forge
Of Rintrah and Palamabron, of Thoetorm and Bromion, to forge the instruments
Of Harvest, the Plow and Harrow to pass over the Nations.

Those lines represent the difficult side of Blake's work. The precise meaning eludes us, and even the words are strange. Blake's songs were far simpler in *words*, but even they could be anything but simple in meaning.

How sweet I roam'd from field to field,
And tasted all the summer's pride
Till I the prince of love beheld,
Who in the sunny beams did glide!

He shew'd me lilies for my hair,
And blushing roses for my brow;
He led me through his gardens fair,
Where all his golden pleasures grow.

With sweet May dews my wings were wet,
And Phœbus fir'd my vocal rage;
He caught me in his silken net,
And shut me in his golden cage.

He loves to sit and hear me sing,
Then, laughing, sports and plays with me;
Then stretches out my golden wing,
And mocks my loss of liberty.

As in *The Tiger*, we are left with an intensely vivid impression, though we should find difficulty in explaining it. Here is a last poem which, like all the best of Blake, convinces us inwardly even if we cannot explain its meaning in words.

Never seek to tell thy love
Love that never told can be;
For the gentle wind does move
Silently, invisibly.

I told my love, I told my love,
I told her all my heart,
Trembling, cold, in ghastly fears—
Ah, she did depart.

Soon as she was gone from me
A traveller came by
Silently, invisibly—
He took her with a sigh.

CHAPTER XXVII

LAMB AND HAZLITT

1

WHEN WE have read the *Essays of Elia*, we know Charles Lamb. He is the most self-revealing of all English essayists, and the most lovable, whimsical, and comical, whether in his writings or in his life. All readers of Elia are his friends: but he had innumerable friends in his own lifetime, among them the poets Wordsworth and Coleridge, and the essayist and critic William Hazlitt.

Scarcely a word need be added to their own accounts of themselves. With Lamb and Hazlitt, the essay, which had begun in impersonal *Spectator* papers, became a personal matter. Lamb's letters to Wordsworth and Coleridge: Hazlitt's description of Wordsworth and Coleridge: Hazlitt's account of Lamb's Thursday evening parties: above all Lamb's accounts of his own tastes and friendships and doings: with these before us, we cannot wish to re-tell what has already been told in the best possible way.

Here is Hazlitt on Lamb's conversation at his Thursday parties. It is from his essay *On the Conversation of Authors*.

"There was Lamb himself, the most delightful, the most provoking, the most witty and sensible of men. He always made the best pun, and the best remark in the course of the evening. His serious conversation, like his serious writing, is his best. No one ever stammered out such fine piquant, deep, eloquent things in half a dozen half-sentences as he does. His jests scald like tears: and he probes a question with a play upon words. What a

keen, laughing, hare-brained vein of home-felt truth! What choice venom! How often did we cut into the haunch of letters, while we discussed the haunch of mutton on the table! How we skimmed the cream of criticism! How we got into the heart of controversy! How we picked out the marrow of authors. 'And, in our flowing cups many a good name and true was freshly remembered.' Recollect (most sage and critical reader) that in all this I was but a guest! Need I go over the names? They were but the old everlasting set—Milton and Shakespeare, Pope and Dryden, Steele and Addison, Swift and Gay, Fielding, Smollett, Sterne, Richardson, Hogarth's prints, Claude's landscapes, the Cartoons at Hampton Court, and all those things that, having once been, must ever be."

Lamb was a Londoner born and bred. He was born in the Temple, in 1775, and educated at Christ's Hospital, and he died at Enfield in 1834. When he grew up he worked first with the South Sea Company, and then at East India House. He was over forty when the first Elia essays appeared, and retired from work shortly afterwards.

This is Hazlitt's description of Elia:

"Mr. Lamb has succeeded, not by conforming to the *Spirit of the Age*, but in opposition to it. He does not march boldly along with the crowd, but steals off the pavement to pick his way in the contrary direction. He prefers *bye-ways* to *highways*. When the full tide of human life pours along to some festive show, to some pageant of a day, Elia would stand on one side to look over an old book-stall, or stroll down some deserted pathway in search of a pensive description over a tottering doorway, or some quaint device in architecture, illustrative of embryo art and ancient manners. Mr. Lamb has the very

soul of an antiquarian, as this implies a reflecting humanity; the film of the past hovers forever before him. He is shy, sensitive, the reverse of everything coarse, vulgar, obtrusive, and *common-place*."

It is time to quote something by Elia himself. Here are some of his *Recollections of Christ's Hospital.*

"The time would fail me if I were to attempt to enumerate all those circumstances, some pleasant, some attended with some pain, which, seen through the mist of distance, come sweetly softened to the memory. But I must crave leave to remember our transcending superiority in those invigorating sports, leap-frog, and basting the bear; our delightful excursions in the summer holidays to the New River, near Newington, where, like otters, we would live the long day in the water, never caring for dressing ourselves when we had once stripped; our savoury meals afterwards, when we came home almost famished with staying out all day without our dinners; our visits at other times to the Tower, where, by ancient privilege, we had free access to all the curiosities; our solemn processions through the City at Easter, with the Lord Mayor's largess of buns, wine, and a shilling, with the festive questions and civil pleasantries of the dispensing Alderman, which were more to us than all the rest of the banquet; our stately suppings in public, where the well-lighted hall, and the confluence of well-dressed company who came to see us, made the whole look more like a concert or assembly, than a scene of a plain bread and cheese collation. . . . Let me have leave to remember our hymns and anthems, and well-toned organ; the doleful tune of the burial anthem chanted in the solemn cloisters, upon the seldom-occurring funeral of some school-fellow; the festivities at Christmas, when the

richest of us would club our stock to have a gaudy day, sitting round the fire, replenished to the height with logs, and the penniless, and he that could contribute nothing, partook in all the mirth, and in some of the substantialities of the feasting; the carol sung by night at that time of the year, which when a young boy, I have so often lain awake to hear from seven (the hour of going to bed) till ten, when it was sung by the older boys and monitors, and have listened to it, in their rude chanting, till I have been transported in fancy to the fields of Bethlehem, and the song which was sung at that season by angels' voices to the shepherds."

Essayists seem to have a strong taste for the theatre. We have seen Addison there, with Sir Roger, and Goldsmith with his Chinese philosopher. Here is Lamb —still a child (he was only six when he first went to a play) and wanting no better company than his own thoughts and pleasure. His first play was at Drury Lane Theatre, made famous by Garrick and Sheridan.

"The afternoon had been wet, and the condition of our going (the elder folks and myself) was, that the rain should cease. With what a beating heart did I watch from the window the puddles, from the stillness of which I was taught to prognosticate the desired cessation! I seem to remember the last spurt, and the glee with which I ran to announce it.

"We went with orders, which my godfather F. had sent us. He kept the oil shop (now Davies's) at the corner of Featherstone-building in Holborn. F. was a tall grave person, lofty in speech, and had pretensions above his rank. He associated in those days with John Palmer, the comedian, whose gait and bearing he seemed to copy; if John (which is quite as likely) did not rather borrow

somewhat of his manner from my godfather. He was also known to, and visited by, Sheridan. It was to his house in Holborn that young Brinsley brought his wife on her elopement with him from a boarding-school at Bath—the beautiful Maria Linley.[1] My parents were present (over a quadrille table) when he arrived in the evening with his harmonious charge. From either of these connexions it may be inferred that my godfather could command an order for the then Drury-lane theatre at pleasure—and, indeed, a pretty liberal issue of those cheap billets, in Brinsley's autograph, I have heard him say was the sole remuneration which he had received for many years' nightly illumination of the orchestra and various avenues of that theatre—and he was content it should be so. The honour of Sheridan's familiarity or supposed familiarity—was better to my godfather than money. . . .

"In those days were pit orders. Beshrew the uncomfortable manager who abolished them!—with one of these we went. I remember the waiting at the door—not that which is left—but between that and an inner door in shelter—O when shall I be such an expectant again!—with the cry of nonpareils, an indispensable play-house accompaniment in those days. As near as I can recollect, the fashionable pronunciation of the theatrical fruit-eresses then was, 'Chase some oranges, chase some numparels, chase a bill of the play';—chase *pro* chuse. But when we got in, and I beheld the green curtain that veiled a heaven to my imagination, which was soon to be disclosed—the breathless anticipations I endured! . . . The boxes at that time, full of well-dressed women of quality, projected over the pit; and the pilasters reaching down were adorned with a glistering substance (I know not what) under glass (as it seemed), resembling—a

[1] A mistake for Elizabeth Linley. See p. 337.

homely fancy—but I judged it to be sugar-candy—yet, to my raised imagination, divested of its homelier qualities, it appeared a glorified candy!—The orchestra lights at length arose, those 'fair Auroras!' Once the bell sounded. It was to ring out yet once again—and, incapable of the anticipation, I reposed my shut eyes in a sort of resignation upon the maternal lap. It rang the second time. The curtain drew up—I was not past six years old—and the play was Artaxerxes!

"I had dabbled a little in the Universal History—the ancient part of it—and here was the court of Persia. It was being admitted to a sight of the past. I took no proper interest in the action going on, for I understood not its import—but I heard the word Darius, and I was in the midst of Daniel. All feeling was absorbed in vision. Gorgeous vests, gardens, palaces, princesses, passed before me. I knew not players. I was in Persepolis for the time; and the burning idol of their devotion almost converted me into a worshipper. I was awe-struck, and believed those significations to be more than elemental fires. It was all enchantment and a dream. No such pleasure has since visited me but in dreams."

2

Lamb the Londoner sticks up for his tastes in answer to a letter from his friend Wordsworth.

"I ought before this to have replied to your very kind invitation into Cumberland. With you and your sister I could gang any where; but I am afraid whether I shall ever be able to afford so desperate a journey. Separate from the pleasure of your company, I don't now care if I never see a mountain in my life. I have passed all my days in London until I have formed as many and intense

local attachments, as any of you mountaineers can have done with dead nature. The lighted shops of the Strand and Fleet-street, the innumerable trades, tradesmen, and customers, coaches, waggons, playhouses; all the bustle and wickedness round about Covent Garden; the watchmen, drunken scenes, rattles;—life awake, if you awake, at all hours of the night; the impossibility of being dull in Fleet-street; the crowds, the very dirt and mud, the sun shining upon houses and pavements, the print-shops, the old bookstalls, parsons cheapening books, coffee-houses, steams of soups from kitchens, the pantomimes —London itself a pantomime and a masquerade—all these things work themselves into my mind, and feed me without a power of satiating me. The wonder of these sights impels me into night-walks about her crowded streets, and I often shed tears in the motley Strand from fulness of joy at so much life. . . . The rooms where I was born, the furniture which has been before my eyes all my life, a book-case which has followed me about like a faithful dog (only exceeding him in knowledge), wherever I have moved,—old chairs, old tables, streets, squares, where I have sunned myself, my old school,—these are my mistresses—have I not enough, without your mountains? I do not envy you. I should pity you, did I not know that the mind will make friends of any thing. Your sun, and moon, and skies, and hills, and lakes, affect me no more, or scarcely come to me in more venerable characters, than as a gilded room with tapestry and tapers, where I might live with handsome visible objects. I consider the clouds above me but as a roof beautifully painted, but unable to satisfy the mind; and at last, like the pictures of the apartment of a connoisseur, unable to afford him any longer a pleasure. So fading upon me, from disuse, have been the beauties of Nature, as they have been confinedly called; so ever

fresh, and green, and warm are all the inventions of men and assemblies of men in this great city."

Lamb had a great genius for happiness. His life would seem to most people far from happy, yet he was always contented and cheerful. He never married, but gave up all his life to his sister Mary, who lived under the continual threat of insanity, and who had to leave him at times and go into an asylum until her attacks of madness passed. In one of these terrible attacks, she had stabbed her own mother. Lamb, overwhelmed with sorrow, yet managed to love her and look after her. He wrote to Coleridge:

"My dearest Friend,

"White, or some of my friends, or the public papers, by this time may have informed you of the terrible calamities that have fallen on our family. I will only give you the outlines:—My poor dear, dearest sister, in a fit of insanity, has been the death of her own mother, I was at hand only time enough to snatch the knife out of her grasp. She is at present in a madhouse, from whence I fear she must be moved to an hospital. God has preserved to me my senses,—I eat, and drink, and sleep, and have my judgment, I believe, very sound. My poor father was slightly wounded, and I am left to take care of him and my aunt. Mr. Norris of the Blue-coat School, has been very very kind to us, and we have no other friend; but, thank God, I am very calm and composed, and able to do the best that remains to do. Write as religious a letter as possible, but no mention of what is gone and done with. With me 'the former things are passed away,' and I have something more to do than to feel.

"God Almighty have us all in His keeping.

"C. Lamb."

Charles and Mary lived happily together, in spite of everything, and when Mary was well she was a delightful companion. Lamb describes their life in his essay in praise of *Old China.* His "cousin" Bridget (who is Mary) is lamenting the good old times "when we were not quite so rich."

"Do you remember the brown suit, which you made to hang upon you, till all your friends cried shame upon you, it grew so threadbare—and all because of that folio Beaumont and Fletcher, which you dragged home late at night from Barker's in Covent-garden? Do you remember how we eyed it for weeks before we could make up our minds to the purchase, and had not come to a determination till it was near ten o'clock of the Saturday night, when you set off from Islington, fearing you should be too late—and when the old bookseller with some grumbling opened his shop, and by the twinkling taper (for he was setting bed-wards) lighted out the relic from his dusty treasures—and when you lugged it home, wishing it were twice as cumbersome—and when you presented it to me—and when we were exploring the perfectness of it (*collating* you called it)—and while I was repairing some of the loose leaves with paste, which your impatience would not suffer to be left till day-break—was there no pleasure in being a poor man? or can those neat black clothes which you wear now, and are so careful to keep brushed, since we have become rich and finical, give you half the honest vanity, with which you flaunted it about in that over-worn suit—your old corbeau—for four or five weeks longer than you should have done, to pacify your conscience for the mighty sum of fifteen—or sixteen shillings was it?—a great affair we thought it then—which you had lavished on the old folio. Now you can afford to buy any book that pleases you, but I do not see

that you ever bring me home any nice old purchases now."

It is tempting to go on and on quoting Elia. Every page of the essays has something which it seems impossible to leave out. There is the famous *Disscrtation upon Roast Pig*, which describes how a Chinese swineherd, when his house was burnt down, ate the burnt pigs by mistake, and discovered the art of roasting, and how everybody bought pigs and burnt down their houses, in order to be provided with this new delicacy. That, however, is a long story. Here, for a last extract, are *Mrs. Battle's Opinions on Whist.*

" 'A clear fire, a clean hearth, and the rigour of the game.' This was the celebrated *wish* of old Sarah Battle (now with God) who, next to her devotions, loved a good game at whist. She was none of your lukewarm gamesters, your half-and-half players, who have no objection to take a hand, if you want to make up a rubber; who affirm that they have no pleasure in winning; that they like to win one game, and lose another; that they can while away an hour very agreeably at a card-table, but are indifferent whether they play or no; and will desire an adversary, who has slipt a wrong card, to take it up and play another. These insufferable triflers are the curse of a table. One of these flies will spoil a whole pot. Of such it may be said, that they do not play at cards, but only play at playing at them.

"Sarah Battle was none of that breed. She detested them, as I do, from her heart and soul; and would not, save upon a striking emergency, willingly seat herself at the same table with them. She loved a thorough-paced partner, a determined enemy. She took, and gave, no concessions. She hated favours. She never made a revoke,

nor ever passed it over in her adversary without exacting the utmost forfeiture. She fought a good fight: cut and thrust. She held not her good sword (her cards) 'like a dancer.' She sate bolt upright; and neither showed you her cards, nor desired to see yours. All people have their blind side—their superstitions; and I have heard her declare, under the rose, that Hearts was her favourite suit.

"I never in my life—and I knew Sarah Battle many of the best years of it—saw her take out her snuff-box when it was her turn to play; or snuff a candle in the middle of a game; or ring for a servant, till it was fairly over. She never introduced, or connived at, miscellaneous conversation during its process. As she emphatically observed, cards were cards: and if I ever saw unmingled distaste in her fine last-century countenance, it was at the airs of a young gentleman of a literary turn, who had been with difficulty persuaded to take a hand; and who, in his excess of candour, declared, that he thought there was no harm in unbending the mind now and then, after serious studies, in recreations of that kind! She could not bear to have her noble occupation, to which she wound up her faculties, considered in that light. It was her business, her duty, the thing she came into the world to do,—and she did it. She unbent her mind afterwards—over a book."

3

William Hazlitt, who was born in 1775, had none of Lamb's geniality. He was a difficult and quarrelsome man, though a few friends kept on good terms with him. Among these, as we could expect, was Lamb himself, who wrote of their friendship ". . . it is my boast that I was able for so many years to have preserved it entire; and I think I shall go to my grave without finding, or expecting to find, such a companion."

Hazlitt was a solitary man: how solitary, we can see from his essay *On Going A Journey.*

"One of the pleasantest things in the world is going a journey; but I like to go by myself. I can enjoy society in a room; but out of doors, nature is company enough for me. I am never less alone than when alone.

The fields his study, nature was his book.

"I cannot see the wit of walking and talking at the same time. When I am in the country I wish to vegetate like the country. I am not for criticizing hedgerows and black cattle. I go out of town in order to forget the town and all that is in it. There are those who for this purpose go to watering-places, and carry the metropolis with them. I like more elbow-room and fewer encumbrances. I like solitude, when I give myself up to it, for the sake of solitude; nor do I ask for

a friend in my retreat,
Whom I may whisper, solitude is sweet.

The soul of a journey is liberty, perfect liberty, to think, feel, do, just as one pleases. We go a journey chiefly to be free of all impediments and of all inconveniences; to leave ourselves behind, much more to get rid of others. It is because I want a little breathing-space to muse on indifferent matters, where Contemplation

May plume her feathers and let grow her wings,
That in the various bustle of resort
Were all too ruffled, and sometimes impair'd,

that I absent myself from the town for a while, without feeling at a loss the moment I am left by myself. Instead of a friend in a postchaise or in a Tilbury, to exchange good things with, and vary the same stale topics over

again, for once let me have a truce with impertinence. Give me the clear blue sky over my head, and the green turf beneath my feet, a winding road before me, and a three hours' march to dinner—and then to thinking! It is hard if I cannot start some game on these lone heaths. I laugh, I run, I leap, I sing for joy. From the point of yonder rolling cloud I plunge into my past being, and revel there, as the sunburnt Indian plunges headlong into the wave that wafts him to his native shore. Then long-forgotten things, like 'sunken wrack and sumless treasuries,' burst upon my eager sight, and I begin to feel, think, and be myself again."

Hazlitt wrote admirable criticism as well as descriptive essays. In this he was like Lamb, who knew and loved the Elizabethan dramatists, and to whose eager research we owe it that many of them are still known to-day. Hazlitt's *Characters of Shakespeare's Plays* have still to be beaten. Here are his views on our old friend Falstaff.

"This is perhaps the most substantial comic character that ever was invented. Sir John carries a most portly presence in his mind's eye; and in him, not to speak it profanely, 'We behold the fulness of the spirit of wit and humour bodily.' We are as well acquainted with his person as his mind, and his jokes come upon us with double force and relish from the quantity of flesh through which they make their way, as he shakes his fat sides with laughter, or 'lards the lean earth as he walks along.' . . . He would not be in character, if he were not so fat as he is; for there is the greatest keeping in the boundless luxury of his imagination and the pampered self-indulgence of his physical appetites. He manures and nourishes his mind with jests, as he does his body with sack and sugar. . . . His imagination keeps up the ball

after his senses have done with it. He seems to have even a greater enjoyment of the freedom from restraint of good cheer, of his ease, of his vanity, in the ideal exaggerated description which he gives of them, than in fact. He never fails to enrich his discourse with allusions to eating and drinking, but we never see him at table. He carries his own larder about with him, and he is himself 'a tun of man.' . . . Again, such is his deliberate exaggeration of his own vices, that it does not seem quite certain whether the account of his hostess's bill, found in his pocket, with such an out-of-the-way charge for capons and sack with only one halfpenny-worth of bread, was not put there by himself as a trick to humour the jest upon his favourite propensities, and as a conscious caricature of himself. He is represented as a liar, a braggart, a coward, a glutton, etc., and yet we are not offended but delighted with him; for he is all these as much to amuse others as to gratify himself. He openly assumes all these characters to shew the humorous part of them. The unrestrained indulgence of his own ease, appetites, and convenience, has neither malice nor hypocrisy in it. In a word, he is an actor in himself almost as much as upon the stage, and we no more object to the character of Falstaff in a moral point of view than we should think of bringing an excellent comedian, who should represent him to the life, before one of the police officers."

When Hazlitt is in genial mood, he can tell a story with the best. One of his essays is on *John Cavanagh, the Fives Player.*

"It is not likely that any one will now see the game of fives played in its perfection for many years to come—for Cavanagh is dead, and has not left his peer behind him. . . . Cavanagh was an Irishman by birth, and

a house-painter by profession. He had once laid aside his working-dress, and walked up, in his smartest clothes, to the Rosemary Branch to have an afternoon's pleasure. A person accosted him, and asked him if he would have a game. So they agreed to play for half a crown a game and a bottle of cider. The first game began—it was seven, eight, ten, thirteen, fourteen, all. Cavanagh won it. The next was the same. They played on, and each game was hardly contested. 'There,' says the unconscious fives-player, 'there was a stroke that Cavanagh could not take: I never played better in my life, and yet I can't win a game. I don't know how it is!' However, they played on, Cavanagh winning every game, and the bystanders drinking the cider and laughing all the time. In the twelfth game, when Cavanagh was only four, and the stranger thirteen, a person came in and said, 'What! are you here, Cavanagh?' The words were no sooner pronounced than the astonished player let the ball drop from his hand, and saying 'What! have I been breaking my heart all this time to beat Cavanagh?' refused to make another effort. 'And yet, I give you my word,' said Cavanagh, telling the story with some triumph, 'I played all the while with my clenched fist.' He used frequently to play matches at Copenhagen House for wagers and dinners. The wall against which they play is the same that supports the kitchen-chimney, and when the wall resounded louder than usual, the cooks exclaimed, 'Those are the Irishman's balls,' and the joints trembled on the spit!"

The essays of Lamb and Hazlitt are full of the events and people of their day, yet they do not "date." Fives may have given place to cricket, and Mrs. Battle's whist to contract bridge: but Lamb's personality, and Hazlitt's, which have made the essays live, live on still in their writings.

CHAPTER XXVIII

WORDSWORTH AND COLERIDGE: THE ROMANTIC REVIVAL

1

MANY PEOPLE analyse and argue about the poetry of Wordsworth and Coleridge so much that they forget to enjoy it. It is true that those two poets were the leaders of what we call the Romantic Revival. They were full of theories themselves, and infected many other people: but we can, if we are willing, forget the theories and approach their poetry as simply as anyone else's.

The best introduction to their work is to meet the poets themselves, as they appeared to their friends Lamb and Hazlitt. Hazlitt first met Coleridge in 1798. He was tremendously impressed by the poet's genius—and by his genius for talking—and was delighted to be asked to stay with Coleridge in Somerset. It was there that he met Wordsworth.

"The next day Wordsworth arrived from Bristol at Coleridge's cottage. I think I see him now. He answered in some degree to his friend's description of him, but was more gaunt and Don Quixote-like. He was quaintly dressed (according to the *costume* of that unconstrained period) in a brown fustian jacket and striped pantaloons. There was something of a roll, a lounge in his gait, not unlike his own *Peter Bell*. There was a severe, worn pressure of thought about his temples, a fire in his eye (as if he saw something in objects more than the outward appearance), an intense, high, narrow forehead, a Roman nose, cheeks furrowed by strong purpose and feeling, and a convulsive inclination to

laughter about the mouth, a good deal at variance with the solemn, stately expression of the rest of his face. He sat down and talked very naturally and freely, with a mixture of clear, gushing accents in his voice, a deep guttural intonation, and a strong tincture of the northern *burr*, like the crust on wine. . . . Wordsworth, looking out of the low, latticed window, said 'How beautifully the sun sets on that yellow bank!' I thought within myself, 'With what eyes these poets see nature!' and ever after, when I saw the sunset stream upon the objects facing it, conceived I had made a discovery, or thanked Mr. Wordsworth for having made one for me!"

It is for this that other people "thank Mr. Wordsworth." A love of nature inspired all his best work. Lamb noticed this quality in him: we remember the letter to Wordsworth, contrasting London with "your sun, and moon, and skies, and hills, and lakes." Lamb has left a description of Coleridge which shows at once what he and Wordsworth had in common. Coleridge was living in the Lake District by this time, and Charles and Mary Lamb went to visit him.

"He received us with all the hospitality in the world, and gave up his time to show us all the wonders of the country. He dwells upon a small hill by the side of Keswick, in a comfortable house, quite enveloped on all sides by a net of mountains: great floundering bears and monsters they seem'd, all couchant and asleep. We got in in the evening, travelling in a post chaise from Penrith, in the midst of a gorgeous sunshine, which transmuted all the mountains into colours, purple, &c. &c. We thought we had got into fairy land. But that went off (and it never came again; while we stayed we had no more fine sunsets); and

we entered Coleridge's comfortable study just in the dusk, when the mountains were all dark with clouds upon their heads. Such an impression I never received from objects of sight before, nor do I suppose that I can ever again. Glorious creatures, fine old fellows, Skiddaw, &c. I never shall forget ye, how ye lay about that night, like an intrenchment; gone to bed, as it seemed for the night, but promising that ye were to be seen in the morning. Coleridge had got a blazing fire in his study, which is a large, antique, ill-shaped room, with an old fashioned organ, never play'd upon, big enough for a church, shelves of scattered folios, an Eolian harp, and an old sofa, half bed, &c. And all looking out upon the fading view of Skiddaw, and his broad-breasted brethren: what a night! Here we staid three full weeks, in which time I visited Wordsworth's cottage, where we stayed a day or two with the Clarksons (good people, and most hospitable, at whose house we tarried one day and night), and saw Lloyd. The Wordsworths were gone to Calais. They have since been in London, and past much time with us: he is now gone into Yorkshire to be married. . . . We have clambered up to the top of Skiddaw, and I have waded up the bed of Lodore. In fine, I have satisfied myself, that there is such a thing as that which tourists call *romantic*, which I very much suspected before: they make such a spluttering about it, and toss their splendid epithets around them, till they give as dim a light as at four o'clock next morning the lamps do after an illumination."

It is not only tourists who use the word "romantic." The word has come to be a label for Wordsworth and Coleridge, and to stand for their revolt against the "classical" standards of the Age of Reason. The Romantic Revival was a small Renaissance of the mind, which took

place at the very end of the eighteenth century. It was in part the inevitable reaction against the rules and formality of poetry in the age of Pope: a reaction which we have seen beginning in Gray and Collins and Blake. But it was not only a question of verse. Inspired by the French Revolution of 1789, which seemed to stand for perfect freedom, poets found new ideas of Art, of Nature, of Philosophy, and of their relation to mankind. The past was studied, and the future provided for: and poetry became the battlefield of new ideas.

Wordsworth and Coleridge entered the lists in 1798, with a small volume of poems called *Lyrical Ballads*. These were written while they were together in Somerset. The two friends brought out the best in each other, and during the few years which they spent together each produced his finest work. Coleridge wrote *The Ancient Mariner*, *Christabel*, and *Kubla Khan*; Wordsworth wrote many short poems, and began his great work, the *Prelude, or Growth of a Poet's Mind*.

In the *Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth was to provide poems of simple and rustic life, and Coleridge those which dealt with the supernatural. The great innovation was to be in the language. For the "poetic diction" of the eighteenth century, they were determined to substitute "a selection of the language really used by men." This was Wordsworth's manifesto:

"The principal object which I proposed to myself in these Poems was to choose incidents and situations from common life and to relate or describe them throughout, as far as was possible, in a selection of the language really used by men; and, at the same time, to throw over them a certain colouring of imagination, whereby ordinary things should be presented to the mind in an unusual way."

Here is one of Wordsworth's contributions.

Up! up! my Friend, and quit your books;
Or surely you'll grow double:
Up! up! my Friend, and clear your looks;
Why all this toil and trouble?

The sun, above the mountain's head,
A freshening lustre mellow
Through all the long green fields has spread,
His first sweet evening yellow.

Books! 'tis dull and endless strife:
Come, hear the woodland linnet,
How sweet his music! on my life,
There's more of wisdom in it. . . .

Coleridge, on the other hand, was to make extraordinary things interesting by "supposing them real." As he says in *Biographia Literaria*,

"It was agreed that my endeavours should be directed to persons and characters supernatural, or at least romantic; yet so as to transfer from our inward nature a human interest and a semblance of truth sufficient to procure for these shadows of imagination that willing suspension of disbelief for the moment which constitutes poetic faith."

2

Coleridge's *Ancient Mariner* has outlived everything in the *Lyrical Ballads* except Wordsworth's *Lines written above Tintern Abbey*. There was never a stranger story told with such apparent simplicity.

It is an ancient Mariner,
And he stoppeth one of three.
"By thy long grey beard and glittering eye,
Now wherefore stopp'st thou me?

"The Bridegroom's doors are open'd wide,
And I am next of kin;
The guests are met, the feast is set:
May'st hear the merry din."

He holds him with his skinny hand,
"There was a ship," quoth he.
"Hold off! unhand me, grey-beard loon!"
Eftsoons his hand dropt he.

He holds him with his glittering eye—
The Wedding-Guest stood still,
And listens like a three years' child:
The Mariner hath his will.

The Wedding-Guest sat on a stone:
He cannot choose but hear;
And thus spake on that ancient man,
The bright-eyed Mariner.

"The ship was cheer'd, the harbour clear'd,
Merrily did we drop
Below the kirk, below the hill,
Below the light-house top.

The sun came up upon the left.
Out of the sea came he!
And he shone bright, and on the right
Went down into the sea.

Higher and higher every day,
Till over the mast at noon——"
The Wedding-Guest here beat his breast,
For he heard the loud bassoon.

The bride hath paced into the hall,
Red as a rose is she;
Nodding their heads before her goes
The merry minstrelsy.

The Wedding-Guest he beat his breast,
Yet he cannot choose but hear;
And thus spake on that ancient man,
The bright-eyed Mariner.

"And now the storm-blast came, and he
Was tyrannous and strong:
He struck with his o'ertaking wings,
And chased us south along.

With sloping masts and dipping prow,
As who pursued with yell and blow
Still treads the shadow of his foe,
And forward bends his head,
The ship drove fast, loud roar'd the blast,
And southward aye we fled.

And now there came both mist and snow,
And it grew wondrous cold:
And ice, mast-high, came floating by,
As green as emerald.

And through the drifts the snowy clifts
Did send a dismal sheen:
Nor shapes of men nor beasts we ken—
The ice was all between.

The ice was here, the ice was there,
The ice was all around:
It crack'd and growl'd, and roar'd and howl'd,
Like noises in a swound!

At length did cross an Albatross:
Thorough the fog it came;
As it had been a Christian soul,
We hail'd it in God's name.

It ate the food it ne'er had eat,
And round and round it flew.
The ice did split with a thunder-fit;
The helmsman steer'd us through!

And a good south wind sprung up behind;
The Albatross did follow
And every day, for food or play,
Came to the mariners' hollo!

In mist or cloud, on mast or shroud,
It perch'd for vespers nine;
Whiles all the night, through fog-smoke white,
Glimmered the white moon-shine."

"God save thee, ancient Mariner!
From the fiends that plague thee thus!—
Why look'st thou so?"—"With my cross-bow
I shot the Albatross!"

The Albatross was the bird of good luck, and his shipmates reproached the Mariner for killing it. Sure enough, their luck now deserted them.

The fair breeze blew, the white foam flew,
The furrow stream'd off free;
We were the first that ever burst
Into that silent sea.

Down dropt the breeze, the sails dropt down,
'Twas sad as sad could be;
And we did speak only to break
The silence of the sea!

All in a hot and copper sky,
The bloody Sun, at noon,
Right up above the mast did stand,
No bigger than the Moon.

Day after day, day after day,
We stuck, nor breath nor motion;
As idle as a painted ship
Upon a painted ocean.

Water, water, every where,
And all the boards did shrink;
Water, water, every where,
Nor any drop to drink.

The very deep did rot: O Christ!
That ever this should be!
Yea, slimy things did crawl with legs
Upon the slimy sea.

About, about, in reel and rout
The death-fires danced at night;
The water, like a witch's oils,
Burnt green and blue and white.

And some in dreams assured were
Of the spirit that plagued us so:
Nine fathom deep he had followed us
From the land of mist and snow.

And every tongue, through utter drouth,
Was wither'd at the root;
We could not speak, no more than if
We had been choked with soot.

Ah! well a-day! what evil looks
Had I from old and young!
Instead of the Cross, the Albatross
About my neck was hung.

The drought grew worse and worse, and all his two hundred shipmates died.

"*I fear thee, ancient Mariner!*
I fear thy skinny hand!
And thou art long, and lank, and brown,
As is the ribb'd sea-sand.

I fear thee and thy glittering eye,
And thy skinny hand, so brown."—
"*Fear not, fear not, thou Wedding-Guest!*
This body dropt not down.

Alone, alone, all all alone,
Alone on a wide wide sea!
And never a saint took pity on
My soul in agony.

The many men, so beautiful!
And they all dead did lie:
And a thousand thousand slimy things
Lived on; and so did I.

I look'd upon the rotting sea,
And drew my eyes away;
I look'd upon the rotting deck,
And there the dead men lay.

I look'd to Heaven, and tried to pray;
But or ever a prayer had gusht,
A wicked whisper came, and made
My heart as dry as dust.

I closed my lids, and kept them close,
For the balls like pulses beat;
For the sky and the sea, and the sea and the sky
Lay like a load on my weary eye,
And the dead were at my feet.

The cold sweat melted from their limbs,
Nor rot nor reek did they;
The look with which they look'd on me
Had never pass'd away.

An orphan's curse would drag to Hell
A spirit from on high;
But oh! more horrible than that
Is the curse in a dead man's eye!
Seven days, seven nights, I saw that curse,
And yet I could not die.

The moving Moon went up the sky,
And nowhere did abide:
Softly she was going up,
And a star or two beside—
Her beams bemock'd the sultry main,
Like April hoar-frost spread;
But where the ship's huge shadow lay,
The charmed water burnt alway
A still and awful red.

Beyond the shadow of the ship,
I watched the water-snakes:
They moved in tracks of shining white,
And when they rear'd, the elfish light
Fell off in hoary flakes.

Within the shadow of the ship
I watched their rich attire:
Blue, glossy green, and velvet black,
They coil'd and swam; and every track
Was a flash of golden fire.

O happy living things! no tongue
Their beauty might declare:
A spring of love gush'd from my heart,
And I bless'd them unaware!
Sure my kind saint took pity on me,
And I bless'd them unaware!

The selfsame moment I could pray;
And from my neck so free
The Albatross fell off, and sank
Like lead into the sea.

Once love had come back to him, the Mariner's fortunes began to mend.

O sleep! it is a gentle thing,
Beloved from pole to pole!
To Mary Queen the praise be given!
She sent the gentle sleep from Heaven,
That slid into my soul.

The silly buckets on the deck,
That had so long remain'd,
I dreamt that they were fill'd with dew;
And when I awoke, it rain'd.

At last supernatural forces began to drive his ship homewards.

But soon there breathed a wind on me
Nor sound nor motion made:
Its path was not upon the sea,
In ripple or in shade.

It raised my hair, it fann'd my cheek
Like a meadow-gale of spring—
It mingled strangely with my fears,
And it felt like a welcoming.

Swiftly, swiftly flew the ship,
Yet she sail'd softly too:
Sweetly sweetly blew the breeze—
On me alone it blew.

Oh! dream of joy! is this indeed
The light-house top I see?
Is this the hill? Is this the kirk?
Is this mine own countree?

We drifted o'er the harbour-bar,
And I with sobs did pray—
"O let me be awake, my God!
Or let me sleep alway."

The harbour-bar was clear as glass,
So smoothly it was strewn!
And on the bay the moonlight lay,
And the shadow of the moon.

The rock shone bright, the kirk no less,
That stands above the rock:
The moonlight steeped in silentness
The steady weathercock.

The Mariner was home, and the Pilot, the Pilot's boy, and the Hermit, received him. He was under a curse, however, for the rest of his life, and at intervals a "woeful agony" forced him to travel from land to land, finding a hearer for his tale.

3

Kubla Khan came to Coleridge in a dream. He had been ill, in the summer of 1797, and slept for three hours in his chair. On waking he found that he remembered two or three hundred lines of the poem he had been dreaming. He began to write them down. A "person on business from Porlock" interrupted him; and when Coleridge was left alone again, he found that the rest of his precious vision had escaped him.

Here are the first and last stanzas that he preserved. Not even Coleridge himself could explain them!

In Xanadu did Kubla Khan
A stately pleasure-dome decree:
Where Alph, the sacred river, ran
Through caverns measureless to man
Down to a sunless sea.

So twice five miles of fertile ground
With walls and towers were girdled round:
And there were gardens bright with sinuous rills
Where blossomed many an incense-bearing tree;
And here were forests ancient as the hills,
Enfolding sunny spots of greenery. . . .
The shadow of the dome of pleasure
Floated midway on the waves;
Where was heard the mingled measure
From the fountain and the caves.
It was a miracle of rare device,
A sunny pleasure-dome with caves of ice!
A damsel with a dulcimer
In a vision once I saw:
It was an Abyssinian maid
And on her dulcimer she played,
Singing of Mount Abora.
Could I revive within me
Her symphony and song,
To such deep delight 'twould win me,
That with music loud and long,
I would build that dome in air,
That sunny dome! those caves of ice!
And all who heard should see them there,
And all should cry, Beware! Beware!
His flashing eyes, his floating hair!
Weave a circle round him thrice,
And close your eyes with holy dread,
For he on honey-dew hath fed,
And drunk the milk of Paradise.

Wordsworth's approach to supernatural things was very different from his friend's wild and eerie imaginings. It was largely personal. He took himself and his poetry very seriously indeed. He liked to see himself

On Man, on Nature, and on Human Life
Musing in solitude.

In this he was aided and abetted by Coleridge, and by his sister Dorothy. Dorothy was the good angel of Wordsworth's life, and did far more than keep house for him. Here is a poem in which Wordsworth has forgotten some of his theories and is enjoying a beautiful sight.

I wandered lonely as a cloud
That floats on high o'er vales and hills,
When all at once I saw a crowd,
A host, of golden daffodils;
Beside the lake, beneath the trees,
Fluttering and dancing in the breeze.

Continuous as the stars that shine
And twinkle on the milky way,
They stretched in never-ending line
Along the margin of a bay:
Ten thousand saw I at a glance,
Tossing their heads in sprightly dance.

The waves beside them danced; but they
Out-did the sparkling waves in glee:
A poet could not but be gay,
In such a jocund company:
I gazed—and gazed—but little thought
What wealth the show to me had brought:

For oft, when on my couch I lie
In vacant or in pensive mood,
They flash upon that inward eye
Which is the bliss of solitude;
And then my heart with pleasure fills,
And dances with the daffodils.

"Poetry," said Wordsworth, "is emotion recollected in tranquillity." The emotion he recollects here was first of all not his own, but his sister's. Here is a passage from her Journal:

"I never saw daffodils so beautiful. They grew among the mossy stones about and above them; some rested their heads upon these stones, as on a pillow, for weariness; and the rest tossed and reeled and danced, and seemed as if they verily laughed with the wind, that blew upon them over the lake; they looked so gay, ever glancing, ever changing."

Wordsworth was right when he said "She gave me eyes, she gave me ears." It was thanks to her influence and that of Coleridge that he ever wrote great poetry; and Coleridge also owed her much. From a chance remark of hers, about the last red leaf on a tree, grew this verse of the mysterious and unfinished *Christabel.*

The night is chill; the forest bare;
Is it the wind that moaneth bleak?
There is not wind enough in the air
To move away the ringlet curl
From the lovely lady's cheek—
There is not wind enough to twirl
The one red leaf, the last of its clan,
That dances as often as dance it can,
Hanging so light, and hanging so high,
On the topmost twig that looks up at the sky.

Dorothy also gave Wordsworth the material for one of his finest sonnets, that composed on Westminster Bridge.

Earth has not anything to show more fair:
Dull would he be of soul who could pass by
A sight so touching in its majesty:
This city now doth, like a garment, wear
The beauty of the morning; silent, bare,
Ships, towers, domes, theatres, and temples lie
Open unto the fields, and to the sky;
All bright and glittering in the smokeless air.
Never did sun more beautifully steep
In his first splendour, valley, rock, or hill;
Ne'er saw I, never felt, a calm so deep!
The river glideth at his own sweet will;
Dear God! the very houses seem asleep;
And all that mighty heart is lying still.

One more sonnet of Wordsworth's must be quoted —perhaps the best of them all.

The world is too much with us: late and soon,
Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers:
Little we see in Nature that is ours;
We have given our hearts away, a sordid boon!
This Sea that bares her bosom to the moon:
The winds that will be howling at all hours,
And are up-gathered now like sleeping flowers;
For this, for every thing, we are out of tune;
It moves us not.—Great God! I'd rather be
A pagan suckled in a creed outworn:
So might I, standing on this pleasant lea,
Have glimpses that would make me less forlorn:
Have sight of Proteus rising from the sea;
Or hear old Triton blow his wreathed horn.

Wordsworth and Coleridge were known to their contemporaries as the Lake Poets. Wordsworth, who was born in the Lake District in 1770, returned there from Somerset and lived there until his death in 1850, and its scenery had an incalculable effect upon him. Coleridge also lived there for a time, but the end of his life was clouded by melancholy. He began to take drugs, and spent his last years with a doctor in Highgate, where he died in 1834. Neither poet lived up to the promise of his youth. Wordsworth became more and more conventional and dull: Coleridge, that man of strange genius, had no strength of will to overcome his weaknesses. They had done their work, however; and the two years during which they wrote their best under each other's influence have left us some of the greatest poems in our literature.

CHAPTER XXIX

BYRON

1

GEORGE GORDON NOEL, Lord Byron, was born in London in 1788. He was an only child, and his mother alternately spoiled and ill-treated him. He was handsome, quick at learning, and affectionate, and inherited from his mother a violent temper. It is told that when he was grown up she once threw the fire-irons at him, and mother and son went separately to warn the chemist not to supply the other with poison. Byron was lame, and was exceedingly sensitive about it. He was a keen athlete in spite of his bad foot, and especially enjoyed the sports where it did not matter, riding, and swimming.

In 1798 he succeeded to the title of Lord Byron: a dignity of which he was unfailingly proud. He went to Harrow in 1801, and after hating it for some time, settled down and became popular. There, as everywhere, he was proud to be different from other people. He used often to make his way, with a book under his arm, to sit on the gravestone in Harrow churchyard which is still known as "Byron's tomb." He genuinely enjoyed being alone there, reading and thinking: but he also enjoyed being seen there by other people and reverentially left to himself.

He went from Harrow to Cambridge, where he lived very extravagantly. It was the fashion to drink and gamble. Byron, to be in the fashion, drank and gambled too. Tiring of Cambridge for a time, he moved to London, where, as he had then no friends in town, he spent most of his time with two *maîtres d'armes* called Jackson and Angelo, who to his great satisfaction reduced his weight

for him. "Gentleman Jackson" was a boxer: champion of England, a huge man with a terrific punch. Byron grew very fond of "my old friend and corporal pastor and master," as he called him, and carried him off to Cambridge when he moved back there.

In 1812 Byron "woke one morning and found himself famous." The publication of the first two Cantos of *Childe*[1] *Harold* took London by storm. The poem reached seven editions in four weeks; and for two or three years Byron was enormously popular and fêted by everyone. Childe Harold was an account of the two years' travel from which he had just returned. It is coloured by Byron's own personality—or that which he liked to think was his own; by melancholy and dissatisfaction, mixed with the cynicism which he displayed whenever he could.

Childe Harold bask'd him in the noontide sun,
Disporting there like any other fly;
Nor deem'd before his little day was done
One blast might chill him into misery.
But long ere scarce a third of his pass'd by,
Worse than adversity the Childe befell;
He felt the fulness of satiety:
Then loathed he in his native land to dwell,
Which seemed to him more lone than Eremite's sad cell.
For he through Sin's long labyrinth had run,
Nor made atonement when he did amiss,
Had sigh'd to many though he loved but one,
And that loved one, alas! could ne'er be his.
Ah, happy she! to 'scape from him whose kiss
Had been pollution unto aught so chaste;
Who soon had left her charms for vulgar bliss,
And spoil'd her goodly lands to gild his waste,
Nor calm domestic peace had ever deign'd to taste.

[1] Knight.

And now Childe Harold was sore sick at heart,
And from his fellow bacchanals would flee;
'Tis sad at times the sullen tear would start,
But Pride congeal'd the drop within his ee:
Apart he stalk'd in joyless reverie,
And from his native land resolved to go,
And visit scorching climes beyond the sea;
With pleasure drugg'd, he almost long'd for woe,
And e'en for change of scene would seek the shades below.

"Byronic" melancholy became a fashionable complaint, and on the strength of the poem Byron was henceforward regarded as eccentric, satirical, unhappy, and wicked. He encouraged this view of himself, especially by talking freely about his private affairs. Public opinion soon turned against him. His separation from his wife in 1816 was the first of many actions which his countrymen would not tolerate. Genuinely disgusted, and feeling an exile, Byron left England and set off again on his wanderings.

It is interesting to see how he appeared to Sir Walter Scott, who first saw him in 1815. Scott and Byron had a mutual respect for each other's work, and had for some time looked forward to a meeting.

"Report had prepared me to meet a man of peculiar habits and quick temper, and I had some doubts whether we were likely to suit each other in society. I was most agreeably disappointed in this respect. I found Lord Byron in the highest degree courteous, and even kind. We met for an hour or two almost daily in Mr. Murray's drawing-room, and found a great deal to say to each other. . . . He was often melancholy, almost gloomy. When I observed him in this humour I used either to wait till it went of its own accord, or till some natural and easy mode occurred of leading him into conversation, when the shadows almost always left his countenance, like the

mist arising from a landscape. I think I also remarked in his temper starts of suspicion, when he seemed to pause and consider whether there had not been a secret and perhaps offensive meaning in something that was said to him. In this case I also judged it best to let his mind, like a troubled spring, work itself clear, which it did in a minute or two. A downright steadiness of manner was the way to his good opinion. Will Rose, looking by accident at his feet, saw him scowling furiously; but on his showing no consciousness, his lordship resumed his easy manner. What I liked about him, besides his boundless genius, was his generosity of spirit as well as of purse, and his utter contempt of all the affectations of literature. He liked Moore[1] and me because, with all our other differences, we were both good-natured fellows, not caring to maintain our dignity. . . ."

That is the true Byron, with great virtues as well as great faults. Byron also knew Shelley, whom he met at Geneva in the following year, and who became his close friend. They often sailed together on the Lake, and on one occasion the two poets were very nearly wrecked together in a sudden storm. Byron loved adventure and action, and his poetry is full of them. Here is a stanza from *Childe Harold.*

Once more upon the waters! yet once more!
And the waves bound beneath me as a steed
That knows his rider. Welcome to the roar!
Swift be their guidance, wheresoe'er it lead!
Though the strain'd mast should quiver as a reed,
And the rent canvas fluttering strew the gale,
Still must I on: for I am as a weed,
Flung from the rock, on Ocean's foam to sail
Where'er the surge may sweep, the tempest's breath prevail.

[1] Tom Moore, the Irish poet.

Here is a shipwreck from another of his long poems, *Don Juan.*

'Twas twilight, and the sunless day went down
Over the waste of waters; like a veil,
Which, if withdrawn, would but disclose the frown
Of one whose hate is mask'd but to assail.
Thus to their hopeless eyes the night was shown,
And grimly darkled o'er the faces pale,
And the dim desolate deep: twelve days had Fear
Been their familiar, and now Death was here.

Some trial had been making at a raft,
With little hope in such a rolling sea,
A sort of thing at which one would have laugh'd,
If any laughter at such times could be,
Unless with people who too much have quaff'd,
And have a kind of wild and horrid glee,
Half epileptical, and half hysterical:—
Their preservation would have been a miracle.

At half-past eight o'clock, booms, hencoops, spars,
And all things, for a chance, had been cast loose,
That still could keep afloat the struggling tars,
For yet they strove, although of no great use:
There was no light in heaven but a few stars,
The boats put off o'ercrowded with their crews;
She gave a heel, and then a lurch to port,
And going down head foremost—sunk in short.

Then rose from sea to sky the wild farewell—
Then shriek'd the timid, and stood still the brave,—
Then some leap'd overboard with dreadful yell,
As eager to anticipate their grave;

And the sea yawn'd around her like a hell,
And down she suck'd with her the whirling wave
Like one who grapples with his enemy,
And strives to strangle him before he die.

And first one universal shriek there rush'd,
Louder than the loud ocean, like a crash
Of echoing thunder; and then all was hush'd,
Save the wild wind and the remorseless dash
Of billows; but at intervals there gush'd,
Accompanied with a convulsive splash,
A solitary shriek, the bubbling cry
Of some strong swimmer in his agony.

2

In *Child Harold* Byron describes the Eve of Waterloo. Many years later, Thackeray was to describe the same occasion in *Vanity Fair*:[1] but no prose description could have the urgency and alarm of Byron's swift verses:

There was a sound of revelry by night,
And Belgium's capital had gather'd then
Her Beauty and her Chivalry, and bright
The lamps shone o'er fair women and brave men;
A thousand hearts beat happily; and when
Music arose with its voluptuous swell,
Soft eyes look'd love to eyes which spake again,
And all went merry as a marriage-bell;
But hush! hark! a deep sound strikes like a rising knell!

Did ye not hear it?—No; 'twas but the wind,
Or a car rattling o'er the stony street;
On with the dance! let joy be unconfined;
No sleep till morn, when Youth and Pleasure meet

[1] See p. 501.

To chase the glowing Hours with flying feet—
But hark!—that heavy sound breaks in once more,
As if the clouds its echo would repeat;
And nearer, clearer, deadlier than before!
Arm! Arm! it is—it is—the cannon's opening roar!

Within a window's niche of that high hall
Sate Brunswick's fated chieftain; he did hear
That sound the first amidst the festival,
And caught its tone with Death's prophetic ear;
And when they smiled because he deem'd it near,
His heart more truly knew that peal too well
Which stretch'd his father on a bloody bier,
And roused the vengeance blood alone could quell:
He rushed into the field, and, foremost fighting, fell.

Ah! then and there was hurrying to and fro,
And gathering tears, and tremblings of distress,
And cheeks all pale, which but an hour ago
Blush'd at the praise of their own loveliness;
And there were sudden partings, such as press
The life from out young hearts, and choking sighs
Which ne'er might be repeated; who could guess
If ever more should meet those mutual eyes,
Since upon night so sweet such awful morn could rise!

And there was mounting in hot haste: the steed,
The mustering squadron, and the clattering car,
Went pouring forward with impetuous speed,
And swiftly forming in the ranks of war;
And the deep thunder peal on peal afar;
And near, the beat of the alarming drum
Roused up the soldier ere the morning star;
While throng'd the citizens with terror dumb,
Or whispering, with white lips—"The foe! They come! they come!"

Byron openly preferred action to literature, and his own life bore out his preference. The Greeks at this time were being cruelly oppressed by the Turks. In 1823 Byron threw himself eagerly into the struggle. He did all he could for the Greeks, helping them with money and by his personal leadership, and the undertaking did not lack excitement. Here is an account of his voyage to Missolonghi in a small, fast ship called a mistico. It is written by the commander of a ship which sailed with him.

"We sailed together till after ten at night; the wind favourable, a clear sky, the air fresh, but not sharp. Our sailors sang alternately patriotic songs, monotonous indeed, but to persons in our situation extremely touching, and we took part in them. We were all, but Lord Byron particularly, in excellent spirits. The mistico sailed the fastest. When the waves divided us, and our voices could no longer reach each other, we made signals by firing pistols and carbines. To-morrow we meet at Missolonghi—to-morrow."

It was at Missolonghi that Byron died. He caught rheumatic fever after rash exposure to a heavy storm. He was already in poor health, and the climate of the place was bad. He died on April 19th, 1824. Greece mourned him as a national hero, and an Englishman, Lord Stanhope, wrote "England has lost her brightest genius —Greece her noblest friend."

Byron's fame as a poet was international. He is more widely read on the continent than any other English poet except Shakespeare, partly because he was known to Italy, Greece, and other countries as a man, and partly because his poems have an unusually cosmopolitan tone and standpoint. Goethe, the great German

poet, said that he was "undoubtedly to be regarded as the greatest genius of our century." "The English may think of Byron what they please, but it is certain that they can point to no poet who is his like. He is different from all the rest, and, in the main, greater." "Greater" may well be questioned. Among his contemporaries alone were such great names as Shelley, Keats, Wordsworth, and Coleridge. "Different" gives the key to his fame. Byron's poems do not suffer as much in translation as those of most writers. They meant almost the same to Goethe in Germany as they mean to English readers. Byron himself is the subject and the inspiration of his poems. They owe their special quality to the attraction of his eccentric genius, and their range and vigour to his love of action and his restlessness.

CHAPTER XXX

SHELLEY

1

SHELLEY AND KEATS are between them probably responsible for much of the popular English prejudice against poets and poetry, the belief that the poet is not quite a man, and usually a good deal less than a gentleman. This belief, real, if not often expressed in so many words, was enormously strengthened in the course of the last century, despite all that was done to dispel it by Tennyson, who wrote *The Charge of the Light Brigade*, and the *Ode on the Death of the Duke of Wellington*, and Kipling, who wrote *If* and *The Recessional*: all of them poems of which the "manly man" might approve without damage to his self-respect. About the second ten years of the century, two poets attracted wide public attention, and a third was destined soon to do so. One of the two was Byron, through whom poetry became associated in the public mind with "romance" and scandalous goings-on: the fact that the ladies found him romantic making their men-folk all the more righteously indignant. The second was Shelley, around whose name a certain amount of scandal was also gathered: whose opinions were, so rumour had it, atheistic and anti-social, till he had to flee the country as an avowed enemy to God and government: it being further recorded to his discredit that he had long hair, a high, squeaky voice, and did not get on well at Eton. Of the third, Keats, little was at first heard, but the fuss made by Shelley over his death caused it ultimately to be rumoured that he was a fellow of such namby-pamby temperament, that, upon reading an article in the *Quarterly Review* which dealt

with his so-called poems as they deserved, he went and died. Further enquiry elicited the fact that he was not a gentleman.

This "case for the prosecution" seriously damaged the general position of the poet. In Elizabethan times, when poetry was often practised by men of rank, there was no prejudice against it. A century or more later when the system of patronage was firmly established, the picture of the needy poet depending upon and trying to please the wealthy patron introduced the "not quite a gentleman" idea: and it wanted only one or two conspicuous instances of badly behaved poets to fix the stigma from which poetry is only now recovering.

Percy Bysshe Shelley was born near Horsham, in 1792, of a sound county family. The love of humanity and hatred of oppression which were his strongest passions broke out early. The rough life at Eton in those days did not suit him, and he revolted against the fagging system. When he went to Oxford, the revolt took another form. Shelley and a friend of his named Thomas Hogg produced a pamphlet called *The Necessity of Atheism*. This was a protest, not against God, but against the popular interpretation of God which was current at the time: for Shelley's belief in "a pervading Spirit co-eternal with the universe" remained with him to the end of his short life. It was not likely, however, that the university authorities would appreciate this distinction: and Shelley was sent down.

The next display of his crusading spirit involved him in a more serious trouble. He met a young girl named Harriet Westbrook, who was very unhappy at home, and, in an access of generous pity, he married her. It did not take him long to find out that pity, even if akin to love, is an insufficient basis for marriage. Harriet, though good and gentle, was not his equal in brains: and once he met

the sensitive and intelligent Mary Godwin, it was only a matter of time. He separated from Harriet. In 1816 she committed suicide, and Shelley married Mary Godwin. Two years later he left England for Italy. Here his health (he had been threatened with consumption) greatly improved. In spite of cold shouldering, and occasional demonstrations of hostility, he had no lack of friends about him, and was often in excellent spirits. (Byron, who was constantly with him, described him as the most companionable man under the age of thirty he had ever known.) In 1821, hearing of Keats' death, and believing it to have been accelerated by a review in the *Quarterly*, Shelley was once more up in arms, and began the writing of *Adonais*, a lament for the death of his brother poet. The same year he met one Captain Trelawny, a widely travelled man of the world, to whom we owe almost all we know of Shelley's last days, and whose evidence, being completely unbiased, tells heavily against those who still wish to make out that Shelley was a kind of freak. Here is Trelawny's account of their first meeting:

"Swiftly gliding in, blushing like a girl, a tall, thin stripling held out both his hands; and although I could hardly believe, as I looked at his flushed, feminine, and artless face, that it could be the poet, I returned his warm pressure. After the ordinary greetings and courtesies he sat down and listened. I was silent from astonishment: was it possible this mild-looking, beardless boy could be the veritable monster at war with all the world —excommunicated by the Fathers of the Church, deprived of his civil rights by the fiat of a grim Lord Chancellor, discarded by every member of his family, and denounced by the rival sages of our literature as the founder of the Satanic School? I could not believe it; it must be a hoax."

In August 1822, Shelley was out sailing in the Gulf of Spezia, when a storm came on and the boat capsized. His body was washed up some days later and cremated on the sea shore.

2

The central fact of Shelley's character, besides his genius, was his passionate love of mankind. "The cynic Byron," wrote Trelawny, "acknowledged him to be the best and ablest man he had ever known. The truth was, Shelley loved everything better than himself." In society he "was as much at ease as in his own home, omitting no occasion of obliging those whom he came in contact with, readily conversing with all or any who addressed him, irrespective of age or rank, dress or address." Elsewhere Trelawny says that he was "frank and outspoken, like a well conditioned boy, well-bred and considerate for others, because he was totally devoid of selfishness and vanity." Shelley's personal courage was never in doubt from his Eton days: indeed, he could be madly reckless. It is difficult for us, now, to imagine how he managed to become such a figure of notoriety and to raise such bitter antagonism and dislike: and how such a legend has grown up around his name. Actually, when we study his writing and the facts of his life, the incontestable truth appears that he was a man of brilliant intellect, capable in business, far-seeing, with a quick eye for the inner significance of tendencies and of events, and a generous, noble mind that wished no fellow-creature harm. It was typical of him that the hero of his noblest poem was Prometheus, who stole fire from heaven and was terribly punished by the Gods: in other words, a man who sacrificed himself to win a divine secret for the good of humanity. His hatred of oppression and zeal for

its overthrow kept him a firm believer in the French Revolution: not in the atrocities it brought, but in the good he thought it had done, and would do, to an oppressed world.

Shelley incurred hostility and dislike because he was odd, because he was in advance of his time (as, in some particular, all poets are), because he did not see with the same eyes as other people, because he ignored, or was never aware of, ordinary conventions, because he differed from the multitude in belief, and, most important, because he acted on his beliefs, and was often aggressive on their behalf. None of these characteristics would harm their owner as much to-day as they did a hundred and more years ago. We are a little broader minded, a little more prepared to live and let live. Shelley's countrymen could ostracise him, drive him out of England, abuse and neglect his work: but they could not suppress him: and to-day—ironically enough—the Oxford college that threw him out has, most unsuitably situated, a beautiful monument to his memory. Whenever we are inclined to abuse and depreciate work which shocks or startles us, it is salutary to remember what their contemporaries said of Shelley and Keats, whom to-day all unite to honour.

Shelley's poetry has an extraordinary range and vigour, without parallel since the days of the Elizabethans. It ranges from an extreme simplicity to the magnificent complexities of his *Prometheus Unbound*. Here it is at its simplest:

A widow bird sate mourning for her love
Upon a wintry bough;
The frozen wind crept on above,
The freezing stream below.

There was no leaf upon the forest bare,
No flower upon the ground,
And little motion in the air
Except the mill-wheel's sound.

Such a simplicity is deceptive: there is genius behind it. *To Night* is still simple.

Swiftly walk over the western wave,
Spirit of Night!
Out of the misty eastern cave,
Where all the long and lone daylight,
Thou wovest dreams of joy and fear,
Which make thee terrible and dear,—
Swift be thy flight!

Wrap thy form in a mantle grey,
Star-inwrought!
Blind with thine hair the eyes of day,
Kiss her until she be wearied out,
Then wander o'er city, and sea, and land,
Touching all with thine opiate wand—
Come, long-sought!

The *Ode to the West Wind* resounds with a deeper voice.

I

O wild West Wind, thou breath of Autumn's being,
Thou, from whose unseen presence the leaves dead
Are driven, like ghosts from an enchanter fleeing,

Yellow, and black, and pale, and hectic red,
Pestilence-stricken multitudes: O thou,
Who chariotest to their dark wintry bed

The winged seeds, where they lie cold and low,
Each like a corpse within its grave, until
Thine azure sister of the spring shall blow

Her clarion o'er the dreaming earth, and fill
(Driving sweet buds like flocks to feed in air)
With living hues and odours plain and hill:

Wild Spirit, which art moving everywhere;
Destroyer and preserver; hear, oh hear!

II

Thou on whose streams, 'mid the steep sky's commotion,
Loose clouds like earth's decaying leaves are shed,
Shook from the tangled boughs of Heaven and Ocean,

Angels of rain and lightning: there are spread
On the blue surface of thine airy surge,
Like the bright hair uplifted from the head

Of some fierce Mœnad, even from the dim verge
Of the horizon to the zenith's height,
The locks of the approaching storm. Thou dirge

Of the dying year, to which this closing night
Will be the dome of a vast sepulchre,
Vaulted with all thy congregated might

Of vapours, from whose solid atmosphere
Black rain, and fire, and hail, will burst: Oh, hear!

III

Thou who didst waken from his summer dreams
The blue Mediterranean, where he lay,
Lulled by the coil of his crystalline streams,

Beside a pumice isle in Baiæ's bay,
And saw in sleep old palaces and towers
Quivering within the wave's intenser day,

All overgrown with azure moss and flowers
So sweet, the sense faints picturing them! Thou
For whose path the Atlantic's level powers

Cleave themselves into chasms, while far below
The sea-blooms and the oozy woods which wear
The sapless foliage of the ocean, know

Thy voice, and suddenly grow grey with fear,
And tremble and despoil themselves: Oh hear!

IV

If I were a dead leaf thou mightest bear:
If I were a swift cloud to fly with thee:
A wave to pant beneath thy power, and share

The impulse of thy strength, only less free
Then thou, O uncontrollable! If even
I were as in my boyhood, and could be

The comrade of thy wanderings over heaven,
As then, when to outstrip thy skyey speed
Scarce seemed a vision; I would ne'er have striven

As thus with thee in prayer in my sore need.
Oh! lift me as a wave, a leaf, a cloud!
I fall upon the thorns of life! I bleed!

A heavy weight of hours has chained and bowed
One too like thee: tameless, and swift, and proud.

V

Make me thy lyre, even as the forest is:
What if my leaves are falling like its own!
The tumult of thy mighty harmonies

Will take from both a deep autumnal tone,
Sweet though in sadness. Be thou, spirit fierce,
My spirit! Be thou me, impetuous one!

Drive my dead thoughts over the universe
Like withered leaves to quicken a new birth;
And by the incantation of this verse,

Scatter, as from an unextinguished hearth
Ashes and sparks, my words among mankind!
Be through my lips to unawakened earth

The trumpet of a prophecy! O wind,
If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind?

3

Here are stanzas from *Adonais*:

Peace, peace! he is not dead, he doth not sleep—
He hath awakened from the dream of life—
'Tis we, who, lost in stormy visions, keep
With phantoms an unprofitable strife,
And in mad trance strike with our spirit's knife
Invulnerable nothings—We decay
Like corpses in a charnel; fear and grief
Convulse us and consume us day by day,
And cold hopes swarm like worms within our living clay.

He has outsoared the shadow of our night;
Envy and calumny, and hate and pain,
And that unrest which men miscall delight,
Can touch him not and torture not again;
From the contagion of the world's slow stain
He is secure, and now can never mourn
A heart grown cold, a head grown grey in vain;
Nor, when the spirit's self has ceased to burn,
With sparkless ashes load an unlamented urn.

He lives, he wakes—'tis Death is dead, not he;
Mourn not for Adonais.—Thou young Dawn,
Turn all thy dew to splendour, for from thee
The spirit thou lamentest is not gone;
Ye caverns and ye forests, cease to moan!
Cease ye faint flowers and fountains, and thou Air,
Which like a morning veil thy scarf hadst thrown
O'er the abandoned Earth, now leave it bare
Even to the joyous stars which smile on its despair!

He is made one with Nature: there is heard
His voice in all her music, from the moan
Of thunder, to the song of night's sweet bird;
He is a presence to be felt and known
In darkness and in light, from herb and stone,
Spreading itself where'er that Power may move
Which has withdrawn his being to its own;
Which wields the world with never wearied love,
Sustains it from beneath, and kindles it above.

This is the conclusion of the poem:

The one remains, the many change and pass;
Heaven's light for ever shines. Earth's shadows fly;
Life, like a dome of many-coloured glass,
Stains the white radiance of Eternity,

Until Death tramples it to fragments.—Die,
If thou wouldst be with that which thou dost seek!
Follow where all is fled!—Rome's azure sky,
Flowers, ruins, statues, music, words, are weak
The glory they transfuse with fitting truth to speak.

Why linger, why turn back, why shrink, my Heart?
Thy hopes are gone before: from all things here
They have departed: thou shouldst now depart!
A light is past from the revolving year,
And man, and woman; and what still is dear
Attracts to crush, repels to make thee wither.
The soft sky smiles,—the low wind whispers near:
'Tis Adonais calls! oh, hasten thither,
No more let Life divide what Death can join together.

That light whose smile kindles the Universe,
That Beauty in which all things work and move,
That Benediction which the eclipsing Curse
Of birth can quench not, that sustaining Love
Which through the web of being blindly wove
By man and beast and earth and air and sea,
Burns bright or dim, as each are mirrors of
The fire for which all thirst, now beams on me,
Consuming the last clouds of cold mortality.

The breath whose might I have invoked in song
Descends on me; my spirit's bark is driven
Far from the shore, far from the trembling throng
Whose sails were never to the tempest given;
The massy earth and spherèd skies are riven!
I am borne darkly, fearfully afar;
Whilst burning through the inmost veil of Heaven,
The soul of Adonais, like a star,
Beacons from the abode where the Eternal are.

When Shelley's body was found, a copy of Keats' poems, hastily doubled back, was in his pocket. The body was buried in the sand, until arrangements could be made to cremate it. Trelawny has described the scene that followed on the 16th of August 1822.

"Three white wands had been stuck in the sand to mark the poet's grave, but as they were at some distance from each other, we had to cut a trench thirty yards in length, in the line of the sticks, to ascertain the exact spot, and it was nearly an hour before we came upon the grave.

"In the meantime Byron and Leigh Hunt arrived in the carriage attended by soldiers, and the Health Officer, as before. The lonely and grand scenery that surrounded us, so exactly harmonized with Shelley's genius, that I could imagine his spirit soaring over us. The sea, with the islands of Gorgona, Capraja, and Elba, was before us; old battlemented watch-towers stretched along the coast, backed by the marble-crested Apennines glistening in the sun, picturesque from their diversified outlines, and not a human dwelling was in sight.

"As I thought of the delight Shelley felt in such scenes of loneliness and grandeur whilst living, I felt we were no better than a herd of wolves or a pack of wild dogs, in tearing out his battered and naked body from the pure yellow sand that lay so lightly over it, to drag him back to the light of day: but the dead have no voice, nor had I power to check the sacrilege—the work went on silently in the deep and unresisting sand, not a word was spoken, for the Italians have a touch of sentiment, and their feelings are easily excited into sympathy. Byron was silent and thoughtful. . . . After the fire was well kindled we repeated the ceremony of the previous day; and more wine was poured over Shelley's dead body than he had

consumed during his life. This with the oil and salt made the yellow flames glisten and quiver. The heat from the sun and fire was so intense that the atmosphere was tremulous and wavy. . . . The fire was so fierce as to produce a white heat on the iron, and to reduce the contents to grey ashes . . . what surprised us all was that the heart remained entire."

The ashes were buried in the Protestant cemetery at Rome, with the epitaph "Cor Cordium" (Heart of hearts) above them.

CHAPTER XXXI

KEATS

1

JOHN KEATS offended less than Shelley against the standards of the ordinary man. His chief offence was that he was "not a gentleman." It is not so very long since those who had not to work for a living considered themselves superior to those who had. Till quite recently, the number of professions socially possible for "a gentleman" was very limited. It would have been completely impossible, for instance, for him to take a position in Harrod's or Barker's or Selfridge's, as many consider themselves lucky to do to-day. The old contemptuous name for a doctor—"Sawbones"—shows the old spirit. Keats, whose father kept a livery stable, was a doctor.

Shelley lived to be thirty, Keats to be twenty-six. "If one English poet," wrote the late Dr. Robert Bridges, "might be recalled to-day from the dead to continue the work which he left unfinished on earth, it is probable that the crown of his country's desire would be set on the head of John Keats."

Keats was born at Moorfields in October 1795. He died at Rome in February 1821—a short life in which to have accomplished so much. Like Shelley, he gave abundant proof of his courage at school.

"Upon one occasion, when an usher, on account of some impertinent behaviour, had boxed his brother Tom's ears, John rushed up, put himself in the received posture of offence, and, it was said, struck the usher—who could, so to say, have put him into his pocket. His

passion at times was almost ungovernable; and his brother George, being considerably the taller and stronger, used frequently to hold him down by main force, laughing when John was in 'one of his moods' and was endeavouring to beat him."

All his friends, however, and his own brother, bear witness to the gentle and affectionate nature that broke out occasionally into these rages at the wrongs of others.

After six years at school he took up the study of medicine, and held an appointment at Guy's Hospital. But his heart was not in medicine. His friend Joseph Severn, the artist, with whom he went on holiday, has left notes describing his behaviour, which another writer has worked up:

"Severn was astonished by his companion's faculty of observation. Nothing seemed to escape him, the song of a bird and the undernotes of response from covert or hedge, the rustle of some animal, the changing of the green and brown lights and furtive shadows, the motions of the wind—just how it took certain tall flowers and plants—and the wayfaring of the clouds: even the features and gestures of passing tramps. . . . Certain things affected him extremely, particularly when 'a wave was billowing through a tree,' as he described the uplifting surge of air among swaying masses of chestnut or oak foliage or when, afar off, he heard the wind coming across woodlands. 'The tide! the tide!' he would cry delightedly, and spring on to some stile, or upon the low bough of a wayside tree, and watch the passage of the wind upon the meadow-grasses or young corn, not stirring till the flow of air was all around him, while an expression of rapture made his eyes gleam and his face glow."

Such perceptions did not go well with medicine. One day, Keats had to perform a small operation, which he did successfully, though his mind was elsewhere. "I did it with the utmost nicety," he said, "but on reflecting what had passed through my mind at the time, my dexterity seemed a miracle, and I never took up the lancet again."

Here is a passage from a letter in which he describes a journey by coach to Southampton.

"I am safe at Southampton —after having ridden three stages outside and the rest in, for it began to be very cold. I did not know the Names of any of the Towns I passed through—all I can tell you is that sometimes I saw dusty Hedges—sometimes Ponds—then nothing—then a little Wood with trees look you like Launce's Sister 'as white as a Lilly and as small as a Wand'—then came houses which died away into a few straggling Barns—then came hedge trees aforesaid again. As the Lamplight crept along the following things were discovered—'long heath broom furze'—Hurdles here and there half a Mile—Park palings when the Windows of a House were always discovered by reflection—One Nymph of Fountain—N.B. Stone—lopped Trees—Cow ruminating—ditto Donkey—Man and Woman going gingerly along—William seeing his Sisters over the Heath—John waiting with a Lanthorn for his Mistress—Barber's Pole—Doctor's Shop—However after having had my fill of these I popped my Head out just as it began to Dawn—*N.B. This tuesday Morn saw the sun rise*—of which I shall say nothing at present. I felt rather lonely this Morning at breakfast so I went and unbox'd a Shakespeare—'*There's my Comfort*'—I went immediately after Breakfast to Southampton Water where I enquired for the Boat to the Isle of Wight as I intend

seeing that place before I settle—it will go at 3. So shall I after having taken a Chop."

And here is something from a letter to his little sister Fanny, of whom he was very fond:

"I should like now to promenade round your Gardens —apple-tasting—pear-tasting—plum-judging—apricot-nibbling — peach-scrunching — nectarine-sucking and Melon-carving. I have also a great feeling for antiquated cherries full of sugar cracks—and a white currant tree kept for company. I admire lolling on a lawn by a water lillied pond to eat white currants and see gold fish: and go to the Fair in the Evening if I'm good. There is not hope for that—one is sure to get into some mess before evening."

There was another Fanny, Fanny Brawne, the girl whom Keats loved. She did not return his love, and the strain helped to weaken his health. He fell into consumption, and his medical training gave him only too true a knowledge of his case. He was ordered to Italy, and set sail in September 1820: writing his last farewell to Fanny Brawne as he left.

Bright star! would I were steadfast as thou art—
Not in lone splendour hung aloft the night,
And watching, with eternal lids apart,
Like Nature's patient, sleepless Eremite,[1]
The moving waters at their priestlike task
Of pure ablution round earth's human shores,
Or gazing on the new soft fallen mask
Of snow upon the mountains and the moors—

[1] Hermit.

No—yet still steadfast, still unchangeable,
Pillow'd upon my fair love's ripening breast,
To feel for ever its soft fall and swell,
Awake for ever in a sweet unrest,
Still, still to hear her tender-taken breath,
And so live ever—or else swoon to death.

The journey was undertaken too late to be of any avail, and he died in February 1821.

2

The belief in which Shelley wrote *Adonais*, that Keats had been almost literally killed by a savage review of his *Endymion* in the *Quarterly Review*, can hardly be upheld. Keats, as has been aptly said, was not the kind of man to be "snuff'd out by an article." His faith in his own work was strong. "Beauty is truth, truth beauty" was his creed, and he held to it with a conviction unlikely to be shaken by a critic who obviously had more than his work in mind when he attacked him: while nothing short of an attack which shook his inward faith in himself could affect his physical health. Still, that is no excuse for the attack, which brands its author for ever with the mark of malignity and ignorance. There was a good deal to criticise, but the young poet's genius should have been apparent to any critic in his senses.

Keats distrusted the philanthropy of Shelley in his poetry, and kept only to his standard of beauty. Here is a poem with a lovely opening:

In a drear-nighted December
Too happy, happy tree,
Thy branches ne'er remember
Their green felicity:

The north cannot undo them
With a sleety whistle through them;
Nor frozen thawings glue them
From budding at the prime.

In a drear-nighted December,
Too happy, happy brook,
Thy bubblings ne'er remember
Apollo's summer look;
But with a sweet forgetting,
They stay their crystal fretting,
Never, never petting[1]
About the frozen time.

Ah! would 'twere so with many
A gentle girl and boy!
But were there ever any
Writhed not at passèd joy?
To know the change and feel it,
When there is none to heal it
Nor numbèd sense to steal it,
Was never said in rhyme.

The following sonnet expresses his joy on first reading Chapman's translation of Homer. (Chapman was the poet who completed Marlowe's *Hero and Leander*.)

Much have I travell'd in the realms of gold,
And many goodly states and kingdoms seen;
Round many western islands have I been
Which bards in fealty to Apollo hold.
Oft of one wide expanse had I been told
That deep-brow'd Homer ruled as his demesne;

[1] Complaining.

Yet did I never breathe its pure serene
Till I heard Chapman speak out loud and bold:
Then felt I like some watcher of the skies
When a new planet swims into his ken;
Or like stout Cortez[1] *when with eagle eyes*
He stared at the Pacific—and all his men
Look'd at each other with a wild surmise—
Silent, upon a peak in Darien.

Another sonnet is terribly prophetic of his early death.

When I have fears that I may cease to be
Before my pen has glean'd my teeming brain,
Before high-pilèd books, in charact'ry,
Hold like rich garners the full-ripen'd grain;
When I behold, upon the night's starr'd face,
Huge cloudy symbols of a high romance,
And think that I may never live to trace
Their shadows, with the magic hand of chance;
And when I feel, fair creature of an hour!
That I shall never look upon thee more,
Never have relish in the faery power
Of unreflecting love!—then on the shore
Of the wide world I stand alone, and think,
Till Love and Fame to nothingness do sink.

Next, a longer poem: the famous *Ode On A Grecian Urn.*

Thou still unravish'd bride of quietness,
Thou foster-child of silence and slow time,
Sylvan historian, who canst thus express
A flowery tale more sweetly than our rhyme;

[1] The explorer.

What leaf-fringed legend haunts thy shape
Of deities or mortals, or of both,
In Tempé or the dales of Arcady?
What men or gods are these? What maidens loth?
What mad pursuit? What struggle to escape?
What pipes and timbrels? What wild ecstasy?

Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard
Are sweeter: therefore, ye soft pipes, play on;
Not to the sensual ear, but, more endear'd,
Pipe to the spirit ditties of no tone:
Fair youth, beneath the trees, thou canst not leave
Thy song, nor ever can those trees be bare;
Bold Lover, never, never canst thou kiss,
Though winning near the goal—yet, do not grieve;
She cannot fade, though thou hast not thy bliss,
For ever will thou love, and she be fair!

Ah, happy, happy boughs! that cannot shed
Your leaves, nor ever bid the Spring adieu;
And happy melodist, unwearied,
For ever piping songs for ever new;
More happy love! more happy, happy love!
For ever warm and still to be enjoy'd,
For ever panting, and for ever young;
All breathing human passion far above,
That leaves a heart high-sorrowful and cloy'd,
A burning forehead, and a parching tongue.

Who are these coming to the sacrifice?
To what green altar, O mysterious priest,
Lead'st thou that heifer lowing at the skies
And all her silken flanks with garlands drest?

What little town by river or sea shore,
Or mountain-built with peaceful citadel,
Is emptied of its folk, this pious morn?
And, little town, thy streets for evermore
Will silent be; and not a soul to tell
Why thou art desolate, can e'er return.

O Attic shape! Fair attitude! with brede[1]
Of marble men and maidens overwrought,
With forest branches and the trodden weed;
Thou, silent form, dost tease us out of thought
As doth eternity: Cold Pastoral!
When old age shall this generation waste,
Thou shalt remain, in midst of other woe
Than ours, a friend of man, to whom thou say'st,
"Beauty is truth, truth beauty,"—that is all
Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.

Here is a single stanza from the *Ode to a Nightingale.*

Thou wast not born for death, immortal Bird!
No hungry generations tread thee down;
The voice I hear this passing night was heard
In ancient days by emperor and clown;
Perhaps the self-same song that found a path
Through the sad heart of Ruth, when, sick for home,
She stood in tears amid the alien corn;
The same that oft-times hath
Charm'd magic casements, opening on the foam
Of perilous seas, in faery lands forlorn.

The man, little more than boy, who wrote those lines belonged to the highest company. He wrote happily of the famous Mermaid Tavern, where Shakespeare, Ben Jonson, Chapman, and their friends used to meet and make merry.

[1] Pattern: the figures on the urn.

Souls of Poets dead and gone:
What Elysium have ye known,
Happy field or mossy cavern,
Choicer than the Mermaid Tavern?
Have ye tippled drink more fine
Than mine host's Canary wine?
Or are fruits of Paradise
Sweeter than those dainty pies
Of venison? O generous food!
Drest as though bold Robin Hood
Would, with his maid Marian,
Sup and bowse[1] *from horn and can.*

I have heard that on a day
Mine host's sign-board flew away,
Nobody knew whither, till
An astrologer's old quill
To a sheepskin gave the story,
Said he saw you in your glory,
Underneath a new-old sign
Sipping beverage divine,
And pledging with contented smack
The Mermaid in the Zodiac.

Souls of Poets dead and gone,
What Elysium have ye known,
Happy field or mossy cavern,
Choicer than the Mermaid Tavern?

If we can picture Keats drawing shyly near to that Tavern in Elysium, we know that the first to bid him welcome there would be the greatest poet of them all.

[1] Drink.

CHAPTER XXXII

SCOTT

1

SIR WALTER SCOTT, whatever else he is and is not, is a magnificent story teller. He is out of favour with most readers to-day, simply because they are usually introduced to the wrong books first. Scott did not take all his work seriously. He told his daughter not to read his *Lady of the Lake*, as it was "bad poetry." By an unhappy chance, the books of Scott one first meets are two or three mediæval romances, *Ivanhoe* in particular, which show him at anything but his best. He admitted that his young heroines bored him—after which we need hardly be surprised if they bore us. Their stilted conversations, their ability to talk copy-book English in the most breathless and desperate situations, sound to us now completely unreal: and, once a book sounds unreal, our interest is gone.

Scott's best work, however, as some of the following extracts will show, is a very different kettle of fish. He is uneven, partly because of the vast amount which he turned out at high pressure, and partly because of his method, which was to go into a kind of daydream and put down whatever came into his head. All writers do this to some extent, but for Scott time was money, and he scrutinised his work with less care than most great men of his craft. Thus its quality depended upon the degree to which his imagination was steeped in the subject on hand, and the degree to which its characters interested him. Scott's best books are those of which the period is nearest his own life, and into which he could freely introduce characters whom he might have met as

a boy. A whole host of these folk, Dominie Sampson, Meg Merrilees, Dandie Dinmont, Edie Ochiltree, Peter Peebles, Nicol Jarvie—these and their doings are the best criticism of Scott's lesser work, and the best answer to those who cast it up against his reputation.

Born in Edinburgh in 1771, Scott had as a child the run of his grandfather's farm, which gave him the inestimable advantage of getting to know simple folk and speak their language. His grandmother and his aunt used to tell him the lore and legends of the Jacobite rebellions—the rising in support of Bonnie Prince Charlie was only thirty years old: another influence which formed his romantic art. He studied at the High School in Edinburgh, went on to the University, and took up law as his profession. It was as a poet that he first began to write, and for ten years he published long romances in verse. Realising, however, that he could not possibly compete with Byron in this field, he finished a novel he had begun some years before, and in 1814 there appeared *Waverley*, a story of the rising of 1745. The book appeared unsigned, but its popularity was immediate, and Scott was encouraged to continue. A born novelist had found his life's work.

In 1826 the publishers with whom his money was involved went bankrupt, leaving him penniless. He could have escaped by pleading bankruptcy, but preferred to shoulder the responsibility, and to attempt to pay off the huge debt (£130,000, worth much more then than now) by his writings. His health broke, and in 1832 he died, able to hear to the last the rippling of his beloved River Tweed.

2

Scott's work, though later writers were to sneer at its romanticism, was of the greatest importance in the

history of romantic writing, because, at its best, it combined realism with romance. That is to say, it substituted for high-falutin, sentimental puppets, characters in whom we can believe and with whom we can sympathise. In this way it was a real link between the work of the regular romantics and the tradition of such a writer as Fielding. It set a new standard in romantic writing, and raised the historical novel to an honourable position and to a hold on popular favour which, with hardly a set-back, it has held ever since.

Now for the novels. Our first extract is from *Old Mortality*. Henry Morton, a young officer, has been taken prisoner by the fanatical Covenanters. His captor is speaking:—

" 'Then camest thou, delivered to us as it were by lot, that thou mightest sustain the punishment of one that hath wrought folly on Israel. Therefore mark my words. This is the Sabbath, and our hand shall not be on thee to spill thy blood upon this day; but, when the twelfth hour shall strike, it is a token that thy time on earth hath run! Wherefore improve thy span, for it flitteth fast away. Seize on the prisoner, brethren, and take his weapon.'

"The command was so unexpectedly given, and so suddenly executed by those of the party who had gradually closed behind and around Morton, that he was overpowered, disarmed, and a horse-girth passed round his arms, before he could offer any effectual resistance. When this was accomplished, a dead and stern silence took place. The fanatics ranged themselves around a large oaken table, placing Morton amongst them bound and helpless, in such a manner as to be opposite to the clock which was to strike his knell. Food was placed before them, of which they offered their intended victim a share; but, it will readily be believed,

he had little appetite. When this was removed, the party resumed their devotions. Macbriar, whose fierce zeal did not perhaps exclude some feelings of doubt and compunction, began to expostulate in prayer, as if to wring from the Deity a signal that the bloody sacrifice they proposed was an acceptable service. The eyes and ears of his hearers were anxiously strained, as if to gain some sight or sound which might be converted or wrested into a type of approbation, and ever and anon dark looks were turned on the dial-plate of the time-piece, to watch its progress towards the moment of execution.

"Morton's eye frequently took the same course, with the sad reflection, that there appeared no possibility of his life being expanded beyond the narrow segment which the index had yet to travel on the circle until it arrived at the fatal hour. Faith in his religion, with a constant unyielding principle of honour, and the sense of conscious innocence, enabled him to pass through this dreadful interval with less agitation than he himself could have expected, had the situation been prophesied to him. Yet there was a want of that eager and animating sense of right which supported him in similar circumstances, when in the power of Claverhouse. Then he was conscious that, amid the spectators, were many who were lamenting his condition, and some who applauded his conduct. But now, among these pale-eyed and ferocious zealots, whose hardened brows were soon to be bent, not merely with indifference, but with triumph, upon his execution,—without a friend to speak a kindly word, or give a look either of sympathy or encouragement,—awaiting till the sword destined to slay him crept out of the scabbard gradually, and as it were by strawbreadths, and condemned to drink the bitterness of death drop by drop,—it is no wonder that his feelings

were less composed than they had been on any former occasion of danger. His destined executioners, as he gazed around them, seemed to alter their forms and features, like spectres in a feverish dream; their figures became larger, and their faces more disturbed; and, as an excited imagination predominated over the realities which his eyes received, he could have thought himself surrounded rather by a band of demons than of human beings; the walls seemed to drop with blood, and the light tick of the clock thrilled on his ear with such loud, painful distinctness, as if each sound were the prick of a bodkin inflicted on the naked nerve of the organ.

"It was with pain that he felt his mind wavering, while on the brink between this and the future world. He made a strong effort to compose himself to devotional exercises, and unequal, during that fearful strife of nature, to arrange his own thoughts into suitable expressions, he had, instinctively, recourse to the petition for deliverance and for composure of spirit which is to be found in the Book of Common Prayer of the Church of England. Macbriar, whose family were of that persuasion, instantly recognised the words, which the unfortunate prisoner pronounced half aloud.

" 'There lacked but this,' he said, his pale cheek kindling with resentment, 'to root out my carnal reluctance to see his blood spilt. He is a prelatist, who has sought the camp under the disguise of an Erastian, and all, and more than all, that has been said of him must needs be verity. His blood be on his head, the deceiver! let him go down to Tophet, with the ill-mumbled mass which he calls a prayer-book in his right hand!'

" 'I take up my song against him!' exclaimed the maniac. 'As the sun went back on the dial ten degrees for intimating the recovery of holy Hezekiah, so shall it now

go forward, that the wicked may be taken away from among the people, and the Covenant established in its purity.'

"He sprang to a chair with an attitude of frenzy, in order to anticipate the fatal moment by putting the index forward; and several of the party began to make ready their slaughter-weapons for immediate execution, when Mucklewrath's hand was arrested by one of his companions.

" 'Hist!' he said—'I hear a distant noise.'

" 'It is the rushing of the brook over the pebbles,' said one.

" 'It is the sough of the wind among the bracken,' said another.

" 'It is the galloping of horse,' said Morton to himself, his sense of hearing rendered acute by the dreadful situation in which he stood; 'God grant they may come as my deliverers!'

"The noise approached rapidly and became more and more distinct.

" 'It is horse,' cried Macbriar. 'Look out and descry who they are.'

" 'The enemy are upon us!' cried one who had opened the window in obedience to his order.

"A thick trampling and loud voices were heard immediately round the house. Some rose to resist, and some to escape; the doors and windows were forced at once, and the red coats of the troopers appeared in the apartment.

" 'Have at the bloody rebels!—Remember Cornet Grahame!' was shouted on every side.

"The lights were struck down, but the dubious glare of the fire enabled them to continue the fray. Several pistol-shots were fired; the whig who stood next to Morton received a shot as he was rising, stumbled against

the prisoner, whom he bore down with his weight, and lay stretched above him a dying man. This accident probably saved Morton from the damage he might otherwise have received in so close a struggle, where fire-arms were discharged and sword-blows given for upwards of five minutes.

" 'Is the prisoner safe?' exclaimed the well-known voice of Claverhouse;[1] 'look about for him, and dispatch the whig dog who is groaning there.'

"Both orders were executed. The groans of the wounded man were silenced by a thrust with a rapier, and Morton, disencumbered of his weight, was speedily raised and in the arms of the faithful Cuddie, who blubbered for joy when he found that the blood with which his master was covered had not flowed from his own veins. A whisper in Morton's ear, while his trusty follower relieved him from his bonds, explained the secret of the very timely appearence of the soldiers.

" 'I fell into Claverhouse's party when I was seeking for some o' our ain folk to help ye out o' the hands of the whigs, sae being atween the deil and the deep sea, I e'en thought it best to bring him on wi' me, for he'll be wearied wi' felling folk the night, and the morn's a new day, and Lord Evandale awes ye a day in ha'arst; and Monmouth gies quarter, the dragoons tell me, for the asking. Sae haud up your heart, and I'se warrant we'll do a'weel eneugh yet.' "

Next, a domestic scene from *Guy Mannering*. Dandie Dinmont, a Liddesdale farmer, brings home the acquaintance who has helped him in a fight.

" 'Deil's in the wife,' said Dandie Dinmont, shaking off his spouse's embrace, but gently and with a look of great

[1] Graham of Claverhouse, Viscount Dundee.

affection; 'deil's in ye, Ailie—d'ye no see the stranger gentleman?'

"Ailie turned to make her apology—'Troth, I was sae weel pleased to see the gudeman, that——— But gude gracious! what's the matter wi' ye baith?'—for they were now in her little parlour, and the candle showed the streaks of blood which Dinmont's wounded head had plentifully imparted to the clothes of his companion as well as to his own. 'Ye've been fighting again, Dandie, wi' some o' the Bewcastle horse-coupers! Wow, man, a married man, wi' a bonny family like yours, should ken better what a father's life's worth in the warld.' The tears stood in the good woman's eyes as she spoke.

" 'Whisht! whisht! gudewife,' said her husband, with a smack that had much more affection than ceremony in it; 'Never mind—never mind—there's a gentleman that will tell you, that's just when I had ga'en up to Lourie Lowther's, and had bidden the drinking of two cheerers, and gotten just in again upon the moss, and was whigging cannily[1] awa hame, two land-loupers jumpit out of a peat-hag on me or I was thinking, and got me down, and knevelled[2] me sair aneuch, or I could gar my whip walk about their lugs[3]—and troth, gudewife, if this honest gentleman hadna come up, I would have gotten mair licks than I like, and lost mair siller than I could weel spare; so ye maun be thankful to him for it, under God.' With that he drew from his side-pocket a large greasy leather pocket-book, and bade the gudewife lock it up in her kist.[4]

" 'God bless the gentleman, and e'en God bless him wi' a' my heart—but what can we do for him, but to gie him the meat and quarters we wadna refuse to the poorest body on earth—unless (her eye directed to the

[1] Jogging quietly. [2] Pommelled. [3] Ears. [4] Trunk.

pocket-book, but with a feeling of natural propriety which made the inference the most delicate possible), unless there was ony other way'—Brown saw, and estimated at its due rate the mixture of simplicity and grateful generosity which took the downright way of expressing itself, yet qualified with so much delicacy; he was aware his own appearance, plain at best, and now torn and splattered with blood, made him an object of pity at least, and perhaps of charity. He hastened to say his name was Brown, a captain in the --- - regiment of cavalry, travelling for pleasure, and on foot, both from motives of independence and economy; and he begged his kind landlady would look at her husband's wounds, the state of which he had refused to permit him to examine. Mrs. Dinmont was used to her husband's broken heads more than to the presence of a captain of dragoons. She therefore glanced at a table-cloth not quite clean, and conned over her proposed supper a minute or two, before, patting her husband on the shoulder, she bade him sit down for 'a hard-headed loon, that was aye bringing himsel' and other folk into collie-shangies.'[1]

"When Dandie Dinmont, after executing two or three caprioles, and cutting the Highland-fling, by way of ridicule of his wife's anxiety, at last deigned to sit down, and commit his round, black, shaggy bullet of a head to her inspection, Brown thought he had seen the regimental surgeon look grave upon a more trifling case. The gudewife, however, showed some knowledge of chirurgery —she cut away with her scissors the gory locks, whose stiffened and coagulated clusters interfered with her operations, and clapped on the wound some lint besmeared with a vulnerary salve, esteemed sovereign by the whole dale (which afforded upon Fair nights considerable

[1] Squabbles.

experience of such cases),—she then fixed her plaster with a bandage, and, in spite of her patient's resistance, pulled over all a night-cap, to keep every thing in its right place. Some contusions on the brow and shoulders she fomented with brandy, which the patient did not permit till the medicine had paid a heavy toll to his mouth. Mrs. Dinmont then simply, but kindly, offered her assistance to Brown.

"He assured her he had no occasion for any thing but the accommodation of a basin and towel.

" 'And that's what I should have thought of sooner,' she said; 'and I did think o't, but I durst na open the door, for there's a' the bairns, poor things, sae keen to see their father.'

"This explained a great drumming and whining at the door of the little parlour, which had somewhat surprised Brown, though his kind landlady had only noticed it by fastening the bolt as soon as she heard it begin. But on her opening the door to seek the basin and towel (for she never thought of showing the guest to a separate room), a whole tide of white-headed urchins streamed in, some from the stable, where they had been seeing Dumple, and giving him a welcome home with part of their four-hours scones; others from the kitchen, where they had been listening to auld Elspeth's tales and ballads; and the youngest half-naked out of bed, all roaring to see daddy, and to enquire what he had brought home for them from the various fairs he had visited in his peregrinations. Our knight of the broken head first kissed and hugged them all round, then distributed whistles, penny-trumpets, and ginger-bread, and, lastly, when the tumult of their joy and welcome got beyond bearing, exclaimed to his guest—'This is a' the gudewife's fault, captain—she will gie the bairns a' their ain way.'

" 'Me! Lord help me,' said Ailie, who at that instant

entered with the basin and ewer, 'how can I help it? —I have naething else to gie them, poor things!'

"Dinmont then exerted himself, and, between coaxing, threats, and shoving, cleared the room of all the intruders, excepting a boy and girl, the two eldest of the family, who could, as he observed, behave themselves 'distinctly.' For the same reason, but with less ceremony, all the dogs were kicked out, excepting the venerable patriarchs, old Pepper and Mustard, whom frequent castigation and the advance of years had inspired with such a share of passive hospitality, that, after mutual explanation and remonstrance in the shape of some growling, they admitted Wasp, who had hitherto judged it safe to keep beneath his master's chair, to a share of a dried wedder's skin, which, with the wool uppermost and unshorn, served all the purposes of a Bristol hearthrug.

"The active bustle of the mistress (so she was called in the kitchen, and the gudewife in the parlour) had already signed the fate of a couple of fowls, which, for want of time to dress them otherwise, soon appeared reeking from the gridiron—or brander, as Mrs. Dinmont denominated it. A huge piece of cold beef-ham, eggs, butter, cakes, and barley-meal bannocks in plenty, made up the entertainment, which was to be diluted with home-brewed ale of excellent quality, and a case-bottle of brandy. Few soldiers would find fault with such cheer after a day's hard exercise, and a skirmish to boot; accordingly Brown did great honours to the eatables."

3

In *The Heart of Midlothian* Scott tells the story of Jeanie Deans, who when her sister was unjustly condemned to death tramped all the way from Edinburgh to London to intercede with the Queen for pardon.

"The Queen seemed to acquiesce, and the Duke made a signal for Jeanie to advance from the spot where she had hitherto remained watching countenances, which were too long accustomed to suppress all apparent signs of emotion, to convey to her any interesting intelligence. Her Majesty could not help smiling at the awe-struck manner in which the quiet demure figure of the little Scotchwoman advanced towards her, and yet more at the first sound of her broad northern accent. But Jeanie had a voice low and sweetly toned, an admirable thing in a woman, and eke besought 'her Leddyship to have pity on a poor misguided young creature,' in tones so affecting, that, like the notes of some of her native songs, provincial vulgarity was lost in pathos.

" 'Stand up, young woman,' said the Queen, but in a kind tone, 'and tell me what sort of a barbarous people your countryfolk are, where child-murder is become so common as to require the restraint of laws like yours?'

" 'If your Leddyship pleases,' answered Jeanie, 'there are mony places beside Scotland where mothers are unkind to their ain flesh and blood.'

"It must be observed, that the disputes between George the Second, and Frederick, Prince of Wales, were then at the highest, and that the good-natured part of the public laid the blame on the Queen. She coloured highly, and darted a glance of a most penetrating character first at Jeanie and then at the Duke. Both sustained it unmoved; Jeanie from total unconsciousness of the offence she had given, and the Duke from his habitual composure. . . . Then again applying herself to Jeanie, [the Queen] asked, how she travelled up from Scotland.

" 'Upon my foot mostly, madam,' was the reply.

" 'What, all that immense way upon foot? How far can you walk in a day?'

" 'Five and twenty miles and a bittock.'

" 'And a what?' said the Queen, looking towards the Duke of Argyle.

" 'And about five miles more,' replied the Duke.

" 'I thought I was a good walker,' said the Queen, 'but this shames me sadly.'

" 'May your Leddyship never hae sae weary a heart, that ye canna be sensible of the weariness of the limbs!' said Jeanie.

"That came better off, thought the Duke; it's the first thing she has said to the purpose.

" 'And I didna just a'thegither walk the haill way neither, for I had whiles the cast of a cart; and I had the cast of a horse from Ferrybridge—and divers other easements,' said Jeanie, cutting short her story, for she observed the Duke made the sign he had fixed upon.

" 'With all these accommodations,' answered the Queen, 'you must have had a very fatiguing journey, and, I fear, to little purpose; since, if the King were to pardon your sister, in all probability it would do her little good, for I suppose your people of Edinburgh would hang her out of spite.'

"She will sink herself now outright, thought the Duke.

"But he was wrong. The shoals on which Jeanie had touched in this delicate conversation lay under ground, and were unknown to her; this rock was above water, and she avoided it.

" 'She was confident,' she said, 'that baith town and country wad rejoice to see his Majesty taking compassion on a poor unfriended creature.'

" 'His Majesty has not found it so in a late instance,' said the Queen; 'but, I suppose, my lord Duke would advise him to be guided by the votes of the rabble themselves, who should be hanged and who spared?'

" 'No, madam,' said the Duke; 'but I would advise his

Majesty to be guided by his own feelings, and those of his royal consort; and then, I am sure, punishment will only attach itself to guilt, and even then with cautious reluctance.'

" 'Well, my lord,' said her Majesty, 'all these fine speeches do not convince me of the propriety of so soon showing any mark of favour to your—I suppose I must not say rebellious?—but, at least, your very disaffected and intractable metropolis. Why, the whole nation is in a league to screen the savage and abominable murders of that unhappy man; otherwise, how is it possible but that, of so many perpetrators, and engaged in so public an action for such a length of time, one at least must have been recognised? Even this wench, for aught I can tell, may be a depository of the secret.—Hark you, young woman, had you any friends engaged in the Porteous mob?'

" 'No, madam,' answered Jeanie, happy that the question was so framed that she could, with a good conscience, answer it in the negative.

" 'But I suppose,' continued the Queen, 'If you were possessed of such a secret, you would hold it matter of conscience to keep it to yourself?'

" 'I would pray to be directed and guided what was the line of duty, madam,' answered Jeanie.

" 'Yes, and take that which suited your own inclinations,' replied her Majesty.

" 'If it like you, madam,' said Jeanie, 'I would hae gaen to the end of the earth to save the life of John Porteous, or any other unhappy man in his condition; but I might lawfully doubt how far I am called upon to be the avenger of his blood, though it may become the civil magistrate to do so. He is dead and gane to his place, and they that have slain him must answer for their ain act. But my sister—my puir sister Effie, still lives, though

her days and hours are numbered! She still lives, and a word of the King's mouth might restore her to a broken-hearted auld man, that never, in his daily and nightly exercise, forgot to pray that his Majesty might be blessed with a long and a prosperous reign, and that his throne, and the throne of his posterity, might be established in righteousness. O, madam, if ever ye ken'd what it was to sorrow for and with a sinning and a suffering creature, whose mind is sae tossed that she can be neither ca'd fit to live or die, have some compassion on our misery!—Save an honest house from dishonour, and an unhappy girl, not eighteen years of age, from an early and dreadful death! Alas! it is not when we sleep soft and wake merrily ourselves, that we think on other people's sufferings. Our hearts are waxed light within us then, and we are for righting our ain wrangs and fighting our ain battles. But when the hour of trouble comes to the mind or to the body—and seldom may it visit your Leddyship—and when the hour of death comes, that comes to high and low—lang and late may it be yours—O, my Leddy, then it isna what we hae dune for oursel's, but what we hae dune for others that we think on maist pleasantly. And the thoughts that ye hae intervened to spare the puir thing's life will be sweeter in that hour, come when it may, than if a word of your mouth could hang the haill Porteous mob at the tail of ae tow.'

"Tear followed tear down Jeanie's cheeks, as, her features glowing and quivering with emotion, she pleaded her sister's cause with a pathos which was at once simple and solemn.

" 'This is eloquence,' said Her Majesty to the Duke of Argyle. 'Young woman,' she continued, addressing herself to Jeanie, '*I* cannot grant a pardon to your sister—but you shall not want my warm intercession with his Majesty. Take this housewife's case,' she continued,

putting a small embroidered needle-case into Jeanie's hands; 'do not open it now, but at your leisure you will find something in it which will remind you that you have had an interview with Queen Charlotte.'

"Jeanie, having her suspicions thus confirmed, dropped on her knees, and would have expanded herself in gratitude; but the Duke, who was upon thorns lest she should say more or less than just enough, touched his chin once more.

" 'Our business is, I think, ended for the present, my Lord Duke,' said the Queen, 'and I trust, to your satisfaction. Hereafter I hope to see your Grace more frequently, both at Richmond and St. James's.—Come, Lady Suffolk, we must wish his Grace good morning.'

"They exchanged their parting reverences, and the Duke, so soon as the ladies had turned their backs, assisted Jeanie to rise from the ground, and conducted her back through the avenue, which she trode with the feeling of one who walks in her sleep."

Scott's novels are so rich in excellent scenes that the only difficulty is to limit our choice of extracts. *Redgauntlet*, one of his very finest works, contains an account of the attack of rioters by the Solway.

" 'Thou didst not expect me to-night, friend Davies?' said my friend to the old man, who was arranging seats for us by the fire.

" 'No, Master Geddes,' answered he, 'I did not expect you, nor, to speak the truth, did I wish for you either.'

" 'These are plain terms, John Davies,' answered Mr. Geddes.

" 'Ay, ay, sir, I know your worship loves no holyday speeches.'

" 'Thou dost guess, I suppose, what brings us here so late, John Davies?' said Mr. Geddes.

" 'I do suppose, sir,' answered the superintendent, 'that it was because these d—d smuggling wreckers on the coast are showing their lights to gather their forces, as they did the night before they broke down the dam-dike and weirs up the country; but if that same be the case, I wish once more you had staid away, for your worship carries no fighting tackle aboard, I think; and there will be work for such ere morning, your worship.' "

There was indeed work for fighting tackle, as John Davies prophesied. The scene, which is among Scott's best, is unfortunately too long to be given in full: but the variety of episodes in *Redgauntlet* and his other Scottish novels will show that there is as much to admire in Scott the writer as in Scott the man.

CHAPTER XXXIII

DICKENS

1

THE TWO great Victorian novelists between them covered the entire social range of their time. Dickens, with his trained reporter's eye, excelled in the portrayal of low life: Thackeray, from his house in Kensington Square, loved to describe the aristocracy. Each, by a lucky twist, was pre-eminently a novelist of character—judged on the actual shape and architecture of their novels, they would neither of them belong to the first class: with the result that the world in which they moved lives vividly in our minds. Recent though it is (Dickens died only sixty years ago), it has vanished completely, and is as far from us, in spirit, as the age of Queen Anne. The immediate past never seems as interesting as the remote, but the period of Dickens and Thackeray was full of interest and importance, and it is well for us and for readers of the future that two such keen observers were at work to record it.

The method of Dickens was in its essence a development from the doctrine of the Humours. This does not mean that Dickens had so much as read Ben Jonson: we know of nothing to show that he had: but his approach to character was on similar lines. Dickens brought to a high pitch the art of caricature. That is to say, he seized on the outstanding feature in a character, and exaggerated it until he had a label which would make the character instantly recognisable. It might be a moral characteristic, a physical peculiarity, a trick of speech, or a blend of all three: but, whatever it was, it was in evidence whenever the character appeared on the

scene. With Dickens, the method is far less mechanical than with Ben Jonson—and herein lies his greatness. He was possessed by an inexhaustible comic imagination, which, fed and strengthened by his knowledge of queer types, enabled him to draw attention to their queerness without making them any less real. His comic characters are characters as well as comics: the very exaggeration gives them greater life and greater reality. A roll-call of the memorable characters in Dickens would take a long time to call over. He can get almost endless variety from a single humour. For Jonson's Rabbi Busy, the hypocrite of *Bartholomew Fair*, he gives us Pecksniff, Chadband, and Stiggins, with an extra variety, Uriah Heep, thrown in. (Nothing, by the way, adds more to our understanding of life and literature than to realise these likenesses between characters in periods far apart: to hear, perhaps, a modern audience laugh at a joke made by the Greek playwright Aristophanes well over two thousand years ago: to read the Roman novelist Petronius' account of a profiteer's dinner party: to come suddenly upon the expression of a thought or a feeling we had supposed to be our very own, in work separated from us by one, two, three, or a dozen lifetimes. These are the moments in which we understand and are thankful for the uses of literature.)

The boyhood of Charles Dickens was spent at Chatham and at Camden Town. His father was poor, and Dickens received a very scrappy education. He worked in a warehouse, taught himself to write shorthand, and became a reporter on the *Morning Chronicle*. His first volume was a collection of sketches contributed to this and to other papers. Then the *Pickwick Papers*, an enormous success, established Dickens in popular favour, giving him a position he held till his death. His activity was very great. Two of his novels, *Barnaby Rudge* and *The Old*

Curiosity Shop, which like many others were written as serials, came out in the same twelvemonth. He visited America, edited a couple of papers, produced and acted in plays, and gave readings from his works at home and abroad. It was the strain of these readings which in the end proved too much for him. He did not need the money, but the actor in him needed the public appearances and the applause. He died in 1870.

It must be admitted, before we go any further, that there is much in Dickens which is out of tune with modern taste. Some of the very qualities which endeared him to our grandparents we turn from in embarrassment to-day. There are scenes in *Dombey and Son*, in *The Old Curiosity Shop*, even in *Martin Chuzzlewit*, which strike us as impossibly sentimental. There will always be something of the kind in the work of every age: detail which is, for posterity, just so much rubbish swept along on the tide of artistic creation. The elaborate puns of the Elizabethans do not now amuse us, and we find it hard to believe that some of Shakespeare's fools, or court jesters, can ever have greatly amused anybody. To look through back numbers of *Punch* often makes us wonder at the people who found some of the jokes funny; whereas others strike us freshly and make us laugh outright. Such things have to be accepted as historical facts, and we have to accept the pathos of Dickens in this way. It must be remembered, too, that he often wrote with the deliberate intention of attacking abuses, and so tended naturally to choose hard cases and to play upon the feelings of his public. Many of the abuses have been reformed, either in consequence of Dickens' work, or by the gradual education of public opinion. At any rate, they concern us no longer. Once we know where the passages come, we can skip them: and there is a great deal left to strike fresh.

2

We will proceed at once to make the acquaintance of an immortal character in Mrs. Gamp, from *Martin Chuzzlewit*. In creating her, Dickens was doing much more than attacking the dirty, ignorant, untrained nurses so common in his time: he was creating a personage who has taken such a hold upon the national imagination that her name has become the symbol for an untidy umbrella.

Mrs. Gamp arrives at the inn, to which she has been summoned to look after a patient suffering from fever.

"Mrs. Gamp traversed the gallery in a great heat from having carried her large bundle up so many stairs, and tapped at the door, which was immediately opened by Mrs. Prig, bonneted and shawled and all impatience to be gone. Mrs. Prig was of the Gamp build, but not so fat; and her voice was deeper and more like a man's. She had also a beard.

" 'I began to think you warn't a-coming!' Mrs. Prig observed, in some displeasure.

" 'It shall be made good to-morrow night,' said Mrs. Gamp, '*h*onourable. I had to go and fetch my things.' She had begun to make signs of enquiry in reference to the position of the patient and his overhearing them — for there was a screen before the door—when Mrs. Prig settled that point easily.

" 'Oh!' she said aloud, 'he's quiet, but his wits is gone. It ain't no matter wot you say.'

" 'Anythin' to tell afore you goes, my dear?' asked Mrs. Gamp, setting her bundle down inside the door, and looking affectionately at her partner.

" 'The pickled salmon,' Mrs. Prig replied, 'is quite delicious. I can partick'ler recommend it. Don't have

nothink to say to the cold meat, for it tastes of the stable. The drinks is all good.'

"Mrs. Gamp expressed herself much gratified.

" 'The physic and them things is on the drawers and mankle-shelf,' said Mrs. Prig, cursorily. 'He took his last slime draught at seven. The easy-chair an't soft enough. You'll want his piller.'

"Mrs. Gamp thanked her for these hints, and giving her a friendly good night, held the door open until she had disappeared at the other end of the gallery. Having thus performed the hospitable duty of seeing her safely off, she shut it, locked it on the inside, took up her bundle, walked round the screen, and entered on her occupation of the sick chamber.

" 'A little dull, but not so bad as might be,' Mrs. Gamp remarked. 'I'm glad to see a parapidge, in case of fire, and lots of roofs and chimley-pots to walk upon.'

"It will be seen from these remarks that Mrs. Gamp was looking out of the window. When she had exhausted the prospect, she tried the easy-chair, which she indignantly declared was 'harder than a brick-badge.' Next she pursued her researches among the physic-bottles, glasses, jugs, and tea-cups; and when she had entirely satisfied her curiosity on all these subjects of investigation, she untied her bonnet-strings and strolled up to the bedside to take a look at her patient.

"A young man—dark and not ill-looking—with long black hair, that seemed the blacker for the whiteness of the bed-clothes. His eyes were partly open, and he never ceased to roll his head from side to side upon the pillow, keeping his body almost quiet. He did not utter words; but every now and then gave vent to an expression of impatience or fatigue, sometimes of surprise; and still his restless head—oh, weary, weary hour! —went to and fro without a moment's intermission.

"Mrs. Gamp solaced herself with a pinch of snuff, and stood looking at him with her head inclined a little sideways, as a connoisseur might gaze upon a doubtful work of art. By degrees, a horrible remembrance of one branch of her calling took possession of the woman; and stooping down, she pinned his wandering arms against his sides, to see how he would look if laid out as a dead man. Hideous as it may appear, her fingers itched to compose his limbs in that last marble attitude.

" 'Ah!' said Mrs. Gamp, walking away from the bed, 'he'd make a lovely corpse!'

"She now proceeded to unpack her bundle; lighted a candle with the aid of a fire-box on the drawers; filled a small kettle, as a preliminary to refreshing herself with a cup of tea in the course of the night; laid what she called 'a little bit of fire,' for the same philanthropic purpose; and also set forth a small tea-board, that nothing might be wanting for her comfortable enjoyment. These preparations occupied so long, that when they were brought to a conclusion it was high time to think about supper; so she rang the bell and ordered it.

" 'I think, young woman,' said Mrs. Gamp to the assistant chambermaid, in a tone expressive of weakness, 'that I could pick a little bit of pickled salmon, with a nice little sprig of fennel, and a sprinkling of white pepper. I takes new bread, my dear, with jest a little pat of fresh butter, and a mossel of cheese. In case there should be such a thing as a cowcumber in the 'ouse, will you be so kind as bring it, for I'm rather partial to 'em, and they does a world of good in a sick room. If they draws the Brighton Tipper here, I takes *that* ale at night, my love; it bein' considered wakeful by the doctors. And whatever you do, young woman, don't bring more than a shilling's-worth of gin and water warm when I rings the

bell a second time: for that is always my allowance, and I never takes a drop beyond!'

"Having preferred these moderate requests, Mrs. Gamp observed that she would stand at the door until the order was executed, to the end that the patient might not be disturbed by her opening it a second time; and therefore she would thank the young woman to 'look sharp.'

"A tray was brought with everything upon it, even to the cucumber; and Mrs. Gamp accordingly sat down to eat and drink in high good humour. The extent to which she availed herself of the vinegar, and supped up that refreshing fluid with the blade of her knife, can scarcely be expressed in narrative.

" 'Ah!' sighed Mrs. Gamp, as she meditated over the warm shilling's-worth, 'what a blessed thing it is—living in a wale—to be contented! What a blessed thing it is to make sick people happy in their beds, and never mind one's self as long as one can do a service! I don't believe a finer cowcumber was ever grow'd. I'm sure I never see one!'

"She moralised in the same vein until her glass was empty, and then administered the patient's medicine, by the simple process of clutching his windpipe to make him gasp, and immediately pouring it down his throat.

" 'I a'most forgot the piller, I declare!' said Mrs. Gamp, drawing it away. 'There! Now he's as comfortable as he can be, *I*'m sure! I must try to make myself as much so as I can.'

"With this view, she went about the construction of an extemporaneous bed in the easy chair, with the addition of the next easy one for her feet. Having formed the best couch that the circumstances admitted of, she took out of her bundle a yellow nightcap, of prodigious size, in shape resembling a cabbage; which article of dress she fixed and tied on with the utmost care, previously divesting herself

of a row of bald old curls that could scarcely be called false, they were so very innocent of anything approaching to deception. From the same repository she brought forth a nightjacket, in which she also attired herself. Finally, she produced a watchman's coat which she tied round her neck by the sleeves, so that she became two people; and looked, behind, as if she were in the act of being embraced by one of the old patrol.

"All these arrangements made, she lighted the rush-light, coiled herself up on the couch, and went to sleep. Ghostly and dark the room became, and full of lowering shadows. The distant noises in the streets were gradually hushed; the house was quiet as a sepulchre; the dead of night was coffined in the silent city. . . .

"Still, without a moment's interval, the burning head tossed to and fro. Still, from time to time, fatigue, impatience, suffering, and surprise, found utterance upon that rack, and plainly too, though never once in words. At length, in the solemn hour of midnight, he began to talk; waiting awfully for answers sometimes; as though invisible companions were about his bed; and so replying to their speech and questioning again.

"Mrs. Gamp awoke, and sat up in her bed: presenting on the wall a shadow of a gigantic night constable, struggling with a prisoner.

" 'Come! Hold your tongue!' she cried, in sharp reproof. 'Don't make none of that noise here.'

"There was no alteration in the face, or in the incessant motion of the head, but he talked on wildly.

" 'Ah!' said Mrs. Gamp, coming out of the chair with an impatient shiver; 'I thought I was a sleepin' too pleasant to last! The devil's in the night, I think, it's turned so chilly.'

" 'Don't drink so much!' cried the sick man. 'You'll ruin us all. Don't you see how the fountain sinks? Look

at the mark where the sparkling water was just now!'

" 'Sparkling water, indeed!' said Mrs. Gamp. 'I'll have a sparkling cup o' tea, I think. I wish you'd hold your noise!'

"He burst into a laugh, which, being prolonged, fell off into a dismal wail. Checking himself, with fierce inconstancy he began to count fast.

" 'One—two—three—four—five—six.'

" 'One, two, buckle my shoe,' said Mrs. Gamp, who was now on her knees, lighting the fire, 'three, four, shut the door—I wish you'd shut your mouth, young man—five, six, picking up sticks. If I'd got a few handy, I should have the kettle biling all the sooner.'

"Awaiting this desirable consummation, she sat down so close to the fender (which was a high one) that her nose rested upon it; and for some time she drowsily amused herself by sliding that feature backwards and forwards along the brass top, as far as she could, without changing her position to do it. She maintained, all the time, a running commentary upon the wanderings of the man in bed.

" 'That makes five hundred and twenty-one men, all dressed alike, and with the same distortion on their faces, that have passed in at the window, and out at the door,' he cried, anxiously. 'Look there! Five hundred and twenty-two—twenty-three—twenty-four. Do you see them?'

" 'Ah! *I* see 'em,' said Mrs. Gamp; 'all the whole kit of 'em numbered like hackney-coaches—ain't they?'

" 'Touch me! Let me be sure of this. Touch me!'

" 'You'll take your next draught when I've made the kettle bile,' retorted Mrs. Gamp, composedly, 'and you'll be touched then. You'll be touched up, too, if you don't take it quiet.'

" 'Five hundred and twenty-eight, five hundred and twenty-nine, five hundred and thirty—look here!'

" 'What's the matter now?' said Mrs. Gamp.

" 'They're coming four abreast, each man with his arm entwined in the next man's, and his hand upon his shoulder. What's that upon the arm of every man, and on the flag?'

" 'Spiders, p'raps,' said Mrs. Gamp.

" 'Crape! Black crape! Good God! why do they wear it outside?'

" 'Would you have 'em carry black crape in their insides?' Mrs. Gamp retorted. 'Hold your noise, hold your noise.'

"The fire beginning by this time to impart a grateful warmth, Mrs. Gamp became silent; gradually rubbed her nose more and more slowly along the top of the fender; and fell into a heavy doze. She was awakened by the room ringing (as she fancied) with a name she knew:

" 'Chuzzlewit!'

"The sound was so distinct and real, and so full of agonised entreaty, that Mrs. Gamp jumped up in terror, and ran to the door. She expected to find the passage filled with people, come to tell her that the house in the City had taken fire. But the place was empty: not a soul was there. She opened the window, and looked out. Dark, dull, dingy, and desolate house-tops. As she passed to her seat again, she glanced at the patient. Just the same; but silent. Mrs. Gamp was so warm now, that she threw off the watchman's coat, and fanned herself.

" 'It seemed to make the wery bottles ring,' she said. 'What could I have been a-dreaming of? That dratted Chuffey, I'll be bound.'

"The supposition was probable enough. At any rate, a pinch of snuff, and the song of the steaming kettle, quite restored the tone of Mrs. Gamp's nerves, which

were none of the weakest. She brewed her tea; made some buttered toast; and sat down at the tea-board, with her face to the fire.

"When once again, in a tone more terrible than that which had vibrated in her slumbering ear, these words were shrieked out:

" 'Chuzzlewit! Jonas! No!'

"Mrs. Gamp dropped the cup she was in the act of raising to her lips, and turned round with a start that made the little tea-board leap. The cry had come from the bed.

"It was bright morning the next time Mrs. Gamp looked out of the window, and the sun was rising cheerfully. Lighter and lighter grew the sky, and noisier the streets; and high into the summer air uprose the smoke of newly kindled fires, until the busy day was broad awake."

Mrs. Gamp alludes frequently to a mysterious lady friend named Mrs. Harris.

" 'There are some happy creeturs,' Mrs. Gamp observed, 'as time runs back'ards with, and you are one, Mrs. Mould; not that he need do nothing except use you in his most owldacious way for years to come, I'm sure; for young you are and will be. I says to Mrs. Harris,' Mrs. Gamp continued, 'only t'other day; the last Monday evening fortnight as ever dawned upon this Piljian's Projiss of a mortal wale; I says to Mrs. Harris when she says to me, "Years and our trials, Mrs. Gamp, sets marks upon us all."—"Say not the words, Mrs. Harris, if you and me is to be continual friends, for sech is not the case. Mrs. Mould," I says, making so free, I will confess, as use the name,' (she curtseyed here), ' "is one of them that goes agen the

observation straight; and never, Mrs. Harris, whilst I've a drop of breath to draw, will I set by, and not stand up, don't think it."—"I asts our pardon, ma'am," says Mrs. Harris, "and I humbly grant your grace; for if ever a woman lived as would see her feller creeturs into fits to serve her friends, well do I know that woman's name is Sairey Gamp.' "

"At this point she was fain to stop for breath; and advantage may be taken of the circumstance, to state that a fearful mystery surrounded this lady of the name of Harris, whom no one in the circle of Mrs. Gamp's acquaintance had ever seen; neither did any human being know her place of residence, though Mrs. Gamp appeared on her own showing to be in constant communication with her. There were conflicting rumours on the subject; but the prevalent opinion was that she was a phantom of Mrs. Gamp's brain—as Messrs. Doe and Roe are fictions of the law—created for the express purpose of holding visionary dialogues with her on all manner of subjects, and invariably winding up with a compliment to the excellence of her nature."

Finally, Mrs. Gamp and her friend Mrs. Prig have a tea-party—and a quarrel.

"Mrs. Gamp's apartment in Kingsgate Street, High Holborn, wore, metaphorically speaking, a robe of state. It was swept and garnished for the reception of a visitor. That visitor was Betsey Prig: Mrs. Prig, of Bartlemy's; or as some said Barklemy's, or as some said Bardlemy's: for by all these endearing and familiar appellations, had the hospital of Saint Bartholomew become a household word among the sisterhood which Betsey Prig adorned.

"Mrs. Gamp's apartment was not a spacious one, but

to a contented mind a closet is a palace; and the first-floor front at Mr. Sweedlepipe's may have been, in the imagination of Mrs. Gamp, a stately pile. If it were not exactly that, to restless intellects, it at least comprised as much accommodation as any person, not sanguine to insanity, could have looked for in a room of its dimensions. For only keep the bedstead always in your mind; and you were safe. That was the grand secret. Remembering the bedstead, you might even stoop to look under the little round table for anything you had dropped, without hurting yourself much against the chest of drawers, or qualifying as a patient of Saint Bartholomew, by falling into the fire.

"Visitors were much assisted in their cautious efforts to preserve an unflagging recollection of this piece of furniture, by its size: which was great. It was not a turn-up bedstead, nor yet a French bedstead, nor yet a four-post bedstead, but what is poetically called a tent: the sacking whereof was low and bulgy, insomuch that Mrs. Gamp's box would not go under it, but stopped half way, in a manner which while it did violence to the reason, likewise endangered the legs, of a stranger. The frame too, which would have supported the canopy and hangings if there had been any, was ornamented with divers pippins carved in timber, which on the slightest provocation, and frequently on none at all, came tumbling down; harassing the peaceful guest with inexplicable terrors . . .

"Mrs. Gamp stored all her household matters in a little cupboard by the fire-place; beginning below the surface (as in nature) with the coals, and mounting gradually upwards to the spirits, which, from motives of delicacy, she kept in a tea-pot. The chimney-piece was ornamented with a small almanack, marked here and there in Mrs. Gamp's own hand, with a memorandum of the date at

which some lady was expected to fall due. It was also embellished with three profiles: one, in colours, of Mrs. Gamp herself in early life; one, in bronze, of a lady in feathers, supposed to be Mrs. Harris, as she appeared when dressed for a ball; and one, in black, of Mr. Gamp, deceased. The last was a full length, in order that the likeness might be rendered more obvious and forcible, by the introduction of the wooden leg.

"A pair of bellows, a pair of pattens, a toasting-fork, a kettle, a pap-boat, a spoon for the administration of medicine to the refractory; and lastly, Mrs. Gamp's umbrella, which as something of great price and rarity was displayed with particular ostentation; completed the decorations of the chimney-piece and adjacent wall. Towards these objects, Mrs. Gamp raised her eyes in satisfaction when she had arranged the tea-board, and had concluded her arrangements for the reception of Betsey Prig, even unto the setting forth of two pounds of Newcastle salmon, intensely pickled.

" 'There! Now drat you, Betsey, don't be long!' said Mrs. Gamp, apostrophising her absent friend. 'For I can't abear to wait, I do assure you. To wotever place I goes, I sticks to this one mortar, "I'm easy pleased; it is but little as I wants; but I must have that little of the best, and to the minit when the clock strikes, else we do not part as I could wish, but bearin' malice in our arts." '

"Her own preparations were of the best, for they comprehended a delicate new loaf, a plate of fresh butter, a basin of fine white sugar, and other arrangements on the same scale. Even the snuff with which she now refreshed herself, was so choice in quality, that she took a second pinch."

Presently, the expected guest arrives.

" 'My precious Betsey,' said Mrs. Gamp, 'how late you are!'

"The worthy Mrs. Prig replied, with some asperity, 'that if perwerse people went off dead, when they was least expected, it warn't no fault of her'n,' and further, 'that it was quite aggrawation enough to be made late when one was dropping for one's tea, without hearing on it again.'

"Mrs. Gamp, deriving from this exhibition of repartee some clue to the state of Mrs. Prig's feelings, instantly conducted her up stairs: deeming that the sight of pickled salmon might work a softening change.

"But Betsey Prig expected pickled salmon. It was obvious that she did; for her first words, after glancing at the table, were:

" 'I know'd she wouldn't have a cowcumber!'

"Mrs. Gamp changed colour, and sat down upon the bedstead.

" 'Lord bless you, Betsey Prig, your words is true. I quite forgot it!'

"Mrs. Prig, looking steadfastly at her friend, put her hand in her pocket, and, with an air of surly triumph, drew forth either the oldest of lettuces or youngest of cabbages, but at any rate, a green vegetable of an expansive nature, and of such magnificent proportions that she was obliged to shut it up like an umbrella before she could pull it out. She also produced a handful of mustard and cress, a trifle of the herb called dandelion, three bunches of radishes, an onion rather larger than an average turnip, three substantial slices of beetroot, and a short prong or antler of celery; the whole of this garden-stuff having been publicly exhibited but a short time before as a twopenny salad, and purchased by Mrs. Prig, on condition that the vendor could get it all into her pocket. Which had been happily accomplished, in High

Holborn: to the breathless interest of a hackney-coach stand. And she laid so little stress on this surprising forethought that she did not even smile, but returning her pocket into its accustomed sphere, merely recommended that these productions of nature should be sliced up for immediate consumption, in plenty of vinegar.

" 'And don't go a dropping none of your snuff in it,' said Mrs. Prig. 'In gruel, barley-water, apple-tea, mutton-broth, and that, it don't signify. It stimulates a patient. But I don't relish it myself.'

" 'Why, Betsey Prig!' cried Mrs. Gamp, 'how *can* you talk so!'

" 'Wot, an't your patients, wotever their diseases is, always a sneezin' their wery heads off, along of your snuff!' said Mrs. Prig.

" 'And wot if they are!' said Mrs. Gamp.

" 'Nothing if they are,' said Mrs. Prig. 'But don't deny it, Sairah.'

" 'Who deniges of it?' Mrs. Gamp inquired.

"Mrs. Prig returned no answer.

" 'WHO deniges of it, Betsey?' Mrs. Gamp inquired again. Then Mrs. Gamp, by reversing the question, imparted a deeper and more awful character of solemnity to the same. 'Betsey, who deniges of it?'

"It was the nearest possible approach to a very decided difference of opinion between these ladies; but Mrs. Prig's impatience for the meal being greater at the moment than her impatience of contradiction, she replied, for the present, 'Nobody, if you don't, Sairah,' and prepared herself for tea. For a quarrel can be taken up at any time, but a limited quantity of salmon cannot.

"Her toilet was simple. She had merely to 'chuck' her bonnet and shawl upon the bed; give her hair two pulls, one upon the right side and one upon the left, as if she were ringing a couple of bells; and all was done. The

tea was already made, Mrs. Gamp was not long over the salad, and they were soon at the height of their repast.

"The temper of both parties was improved, for the time being, by the enjoyments of the table. When the meal came to a termination (which it was pretty long in doing), and Mrs. Gamp having cleared away, produced the tea-pot from the top-shelf, simultaneously with a couple of wine-glasses, they were quite amiable.

" 'Betsey,' said Mrs. Gamp, filling her own glass, and passing the tea-pot, 'I will now propoge a toast. My frequent pardner, Betsey Prig!'

" 'Which, altering the name to Sairah Gamp; I drink,' said Mrs. Prig, 'with love and tenderness.'

"From this moment, symptoms of inflammation began to lurk in the nose of each lady; and perhaps, notwithstanding all appearances to the contrary, in the temper also.

" 'Now, Sairah,' said Mrs. Prig, 'joining business with pleasure, wot is this case in which you wants me?'

"Mrs. Gamp betraying in her face some intention of returning an evasive answer, Betsey added:

" '*Is* it Mrs. Harris?'

" 'No, Betsey Prig, it an't,' was Mrs. Gamp's reply.

" 'Well!' said Mrs. Prig, with a short laugh. 'I'm glad of that, at any rate.'

" 'Why should you be glad of that, Betsey?' Mrs. Gamp retorted, warmly. 'She is unbeknown to you except by hearsay, why should you be glad? If you have anythink to say contrary to the character of Mrs. Harris, which well I knows behind her back, afore her face, or anywheres, is not to be impeaged, out with it, Betsey. I have know'd that sweetest and best of women,' said Mrs. Gamp, shaking her head, and shedding tears, 'ever since afore her First, which Mr. Harris who was dreadful timid went and stopped his ears in a empty dog-kennel,

and never took his hands away or come out once till he was showed the baby, wen bein' took with fits, the doctor collared him and laid him on his back upon the airy stones, and she was told to ease her mind, his owls was organs. And I have know'd her, Betsey Prig, when he has hurt her feelin' art by sayin' of his Ninth that it was one too many, if not two, while that dear innocent was cooin' in his face, which thrive it did though bandy, but I have never know'd as you had occagion to be glad, Betsey, on accounts of Mrs. Harris not requiring you. Require she never will, depend upon it, for her constant words in sickness is, and will be, 'Send for Sairey!'

"During this touching address, Mrs. Prig adroitly feigning to be the victim of that absence of mind which has its origin in excessive attention to one topic, helped herself from the tea-pot without appearing to observe. Mrs. Gamp observed it, however, and came to a premature close in consequence.

" 'Well it an't her, it seems,' said Mrs. Prig coldly: 'who is it, then?'

" 'You have heerd me mention, Betsey,' Mrs. Gamp replied, after glancing in an expressive and marked manner at the tea-pot, 'a person as I took care on at the time as you and me was pardners off and on, in that fever at the Bull?'

" 'Old Snuffey,' Mrs. Prig observed.

"Sarah Gamp looked at her with an eye of fire, for she saw in this mistake of Mrs. Prig, another wilful and malignant stab at that same weakness or custom of hers, an ungenerous allusion to which, on the part of Betsey, had first disturbed their harmony that evening. And she saw it still more clearly, when, politely but firmly correcting that lady by the distinct enunciation of the word 'Chuffey,' Mrs. Prig received the correction with a diabolical laugh.

"The best among us have their failings, and it must be conceded of Mrs. Prig, that if there were a blemish in the goodness of her disposition, it was a habit she had of not bestowing all its sharp and acid properties upon her patients (as a thoroughly amiable woman would have done), but of keeping a considerable remainder for the service of her friends. Highly pickled salmon, and lettuces chopped up in vinegar, may, as viands possessing some acidity of their own, have encouraged and increased this failing in Mrs. Prig; and every application to the teapot, certainly did; for it was often remarked of her by her friends, that she was most contradictory when most elevated. It is certain that her countenance became about this time derisive and defiant, and that she sat with her arms folded, and one eye shut up: in a somewhat offensive, because obtrusively intelligent, manner.

"Mrs. Gamp observing this, felt it the more necessary that Mrs. Prig should know her place, and be made sensible of her exact station in society, as well as of her obligations to herself. She therefore assumed an air of greater patronage and importance, as she went on to answer Mrs. Prig a little more in detail.

" 'Mr. Chuffey, Betsey,' said Mrs. Gamp, 'is weak in his mind. Excuge me if I makes remark, that he may neither be so weak as people thinks, nor people may not think he is so weak as they pretends, and what I knows, I knows; and what you don't, you don't; so do not ask me, Betsey. But Mr. Chuffey's friends has made propojals for his bein' took care on, and has said to me, "Mrs. Gamp, *will* you undertake it? We couldn't think," they says, "of trustin' him to nobody but you, for, Sairey, you are gold as has passed through the furnage. Will you undertake it, at your own price, day and night, and by your own self?" "No," I says, "I will not. Do not reckon on it. There is," I says, "but one creetur in the world as I would under-

take on sech terms, and her name is Harris. But," I says, "I am acquainted with a friend, whose name is Betsey Prig, that I can recommend, and will assist me. Betsey," I says, "is always to be trusted, under me, and will be guided as I could desire." '

"Here Mrs. Prig, without any abatement of her offensive manner, again counterfeited abstraction of mind, and stretched out her hand to the tea-pot. It was more than Mrs. Gamp could bear. She stopped the hand of Mrs. Prig with her own, and said, with great feeling:

" 'No, Betsey! Drink fair, wotever you do!'

"Mrs. Prig, thus baffled, threw herself back in her chair, and closing the same eye more emphatically, and folding her arms tighter, suffered her head to roll slowly from side to side, while she surveyed her friend with a contemptuous smile.

"Mrs. Gamp resumed:

" 'Mrs. Harris, Betsey——'

" 'Bother Mrs. Harris!' said Betsey Prig.

"Mrs. Gamp looked at her with amazement, incredulity, and indignation; when Mrs. Prig, shutting her eye still closer, and folding her arms still tighter, uttered these memorable and tremendous words:

" 'I don't believe there's no sich a person!'

"After the utterance of which expressions, she leaned forward, and snapped her fingers once, twice, thrice; each time nearer to the face of Mrs. Gamp; and then rose to put on her bonnet, as one who felt that there was now a gulf between them, which nothing could ever bridge across.

"The shock of this blow was so violent and sudden that Mrs. Gamp sat staring at nothing with uplifted eyes, and her mouth open as if she were gasping for breath, until Betsey Prig had got on her bonnet and her

shawl, and was gathering the latter about her throat. Then Mrs. Gamp rose—morally and physically rose—and denounced her.

" 'What!' said Mrs. Gamp, 'you bage creetur, have I know'd Mrs. Harris five and thirty year, to be told at last that there an't no sech a person livin'! Have I stood her friend in all her troubles, great and small, for it to come at last to sech a end as this, which her own sweet picter hanging up afore you all the time, to shame your Bragian words! But well you mayn't believe there's no sech a creetur, for she wouldn't demean herself to look at you, and often has she said, when I have made mention of your name, which, to my sinful sorrow, I have done, "What, Sairey Gamp! debage yourself to *her*!" Go along with you!'

" 'I'm a goin', ma'am, ain't I?' said Mrs. Prig, stopping as she said it.

" 'You had better, ma'am,' said Mrs. Gamp.

" 'Do you know who you're talking to, ma'am?' inquired her visitor.

" 'Aperiently,' said Mrs. Gamp, surveying her with scorn from head to foot, 'to Betsey Prig. Aperiently so. I know her. No one better. Go along with you, do!'

" 'And *you* was a going to take me under you!' cried Mrs. Prig, surveying Mrs. Gamp from head to foot in her turn. 'You was, was you! Oh, how kind! Why, deuce take your imperence,' said Mrs. Prig, with a rapid change from banter to ferocity, 'what do you mean?'

" 'Go along with you!' said Mrs. Gamp. 'I blush for you.'

" 'You had better blush a little for yourself, while you *are* about it!' said Mrs. Prig. 'You and your Chuffeys! What, the poor old creetur isn't mad enough, isn't he? Aha!'

" 'He'd very soon be mad enough, if you had anythink to do with him,' said Mrs. Gamp.

" 'And that's what I was wanted for, is it?' cried Mrs. Prig, triumphantly. 'Yes. But you'll find yourself deceived. I won't go near him. We shall see how you get on without me. I won't have nothink to do with him.'

" 'You never spoke a truer word than that!' said Mrs. Gamp. 'Go along with you!'

"She was prevented from witnessing the actual retirement of Mrs. Prig from the room, notwithstanding the great desire she had expressed to behold it, by that lady, in her angry withdrawal, coming into contact with the bedstead, and bringing down the previously-mentioned pippins; three or four of which came rattling on the head of Mrs. Gamp so smartly, that when she recovered from this wooden shower-bath, Mrs. Prig was gone.

"She had the satisfaction, however, of hearing the deep voice of Betsey, proclaiming her injuries and her determination to have nothing to do with Mr. Chuffey, down the stairs, and along the passage, and even out in Kingsgate Street."

3

The next extract is from what is probably Dickens' finest novel, *David Copperfield.* David is in church.

"Here is our pew in the church. What a high-backed pew! With a window near it, out of which our house can be seen, and *is* seen many times during the morning's service, by Peggotty, who likes to make herself as sure as she can that it's not being robbed, or is not in flames. But though Peggotty's eye wanders, she is much offended if mine does, and frowns to me, as I stand upon the seat, that I am to look at the clergyman. But I can't always look at him—I know him without that white thing on, and I am afraid of his wondering why I stare so, and perhaps stopping the service to inquire—and what am I to do? It's a dreadful thing to gape, but I must do

something. I look at my mother, but she pretends not to see me. I look at a boy in the aisle, and *he* makes faces at me. I look at the sunlight coming in at the open door through the porch, and there I see a stray sheep—I don't mean a sinner, but mutton—half making up his mind to come into the church. I feel that if I looked at him any longer, I might be tempted to say something out loud; and what would become of me then! I look up at the monumental tablets on the wall, and try to think of Mr. Bodgers late of this parish, and what the feelings of Mrs. Bodgers must have been, when affliction sore, long time Mr. Bodgers bore, and physicians were in vain. I wonder whether they called in Mr. Chillip, and he was in vain; and if so, how he likes to be reminded of it once a week. I look from Mr. Chillip, in his Sunday neckcloth, to the pulpit; and think what a good place it would be to play in, and what a castle it would make, with another boy coming up the stairs to attack it, and having the velvet cushion with the tassels thrown down on his head. In time my eyes gradually shut up; and, from seeming to hear the clergyman singing a drowsy song in the heat, I hear nothing, until I fall off the seat with a crash, and am taken out, more dead than alive, by Peggotty."

One last extract—since no chapter on Dickens would be complete without a reference to *Pickwick Papers*. Sam Weller is cleaning boots in the inn yard.

"A loud ringing of one of the bells, was followed by the appearance of a smart chambermaid in the upper sleeping gallery, who, after tapping at one of the doors, and receiving a request from within, called over the balustrades.

" 'Sam!'

" 'Hallo,' replied the man with the white hat.

" 'Number twenty-two wants his boots.'

" 'Ask number twenty-two, vether he'll have 'em now, or wait till he gets 'em,' was the reply.

" 'Come, don't be a fool, Sam,' said the girl, coaxingly, 'the gentleman wants his boots directly.'

" 'Well, you *are* a nice young 'ooman for a musical party, you are,' said the boot-cleaner. 'Look at these here boots—eleven pair o' boots; and one shoe as b'longs to number six, with the wooden leg. The eleven boots is to be called at half-past eight and the shoe at nine. Who's number twenty-two, that's to put all the others out? No, no; reg'lar rotation, as Jack Ketch said ven he tied the men up. Sorry to keep you a waitin', Sir, but I'll attend to you directly.'

"Saying which, the man in the white hat set to work upon a top-boot with increased assiduity.

"There was another loud ring; and the bustling old landlady of the White Hart made her appearance in the opposite gallery.

" 'Sam,' cried the landlady, 'where's that lazy, idle—why Sam—oh, there you are; why don't you answer?'

" 'Vouldn't be gen-teel to answer, till you'd done talking,' replied Sam, gruffly.

" 'Here, clean them shoes for number seventeen directly, and take 'em to private sitting-room, number five, first floor.'

"The landlady flung a pair of lady's shoes into the yard, and bustled away.

" 'Number 5,' said Sam, as he picked up the shoes, and taking a piece of chalk from his pocket, made a memorandum of their destination on the soles—'Lady's shoes and private sittin' room! I suppose *she* didn't come in the vaggin.'

" 'She came in early this morning,' cried the girl, who was still leaning over the railing of the gallery, 'with a

gentleman in a hackney-coach, and it's him as wants his boots, and you'd better do 'em, and that's all about it.'

" 'Vy didn't you say so before?' said Sam, with great indignation, singling out the boots in question from the heap before him. 'For all I know'd he vas one o' the regular three-pennies. Private room! and a lady too! If he's anything of a gen'lm'n, he's vurth a shillin' a day, let alone the arrands.' "

The novels of Dickens are a mine of character and humour. They have enormous faults: but, when the severest critic has finished pointing out the faults, the books are still there, with their enormous virtues, for our delight.

CHAPTER XXXIV

THACKERAY

1

WILLIAM MAKEPEACE THACKERAY inclined, both by birth and temperament, towards the other end of the social scale. He was born in India, in 1811, a year before Dickens, and, unlike Dickens, received a full better-class education at Charterhouse and at Trinity College, Cambridge. For a while he did nothing in particular, trying his hand at various professions, including drawing and the law. Then, settling down to journalism, he wrote for *Punch*, *The Times*, and other journals. The appearance of *Vanity Fair* brought him fame and fortune, and for the remaining fifteen years of his life (he died early, at fifty-two) he enjoyed a popularity second only to that of Dickens.

Thackeray was of a satirical turn of mind, with a strong bias against the romantic in literature. He might, all else being equal, have belonged to the Age of Reason, in the literature of which he was deeply versed. He disliked and ridiculed the romantic strain in Scott, and in many writers of his own time. Fielding was his model, and an excellent model for a writer of his temperament: though it is probably to Fielding's trick of stopping to reflect about his characters that we owe the trick in Thackeray which seems as irritating and as out-of-date as the sentimentality of Dickens: his trick of suddenly stepping out of the pages of his book, and coming between us and his characters, in order to tell us something about them in his own person. It is not as a rule very edifying, for Thackeray had little philosophy beyond the vague, rather snobbishly superior beliefs of the gentlefolk of his

time: the belief in good manners, an established state of society, and the firm conviction that the majority of his fellow creatures were scoundrels. He is at his best when his characters take complete charge—which, to do him justice, is for most of the time, since he was always unconscious of exercising any control over them. They seemed to him to go their way quite independently. He merely followed, and recorded what they said and did.

Thackeray's principal novels, besides *Vanity Fair*, are *Pendennis*, *Henry Esmond*, and *The Newcomes*. We will start with a passage from *Vanity Fair*, describing a ball on the eve of the Battle of Waterloo. To explain who all the characters were would take too long, and the extract can easily be read without any explanation:

"There never was, since the days of Darius, such a brilliant train of camp-followers as hung round the train of the Duke of Wellington's army in the Low Countries, in 1815; and led it dancing and feasting, as it were, up to the very brink of battle. A certain ball which a noble Duchess gave at Brussels on the 15th of June in the above-named year is historical. All Brussels had been in a state of excitement about it, and I have heard from ladies who were in that town at the period, that the talk and interest of persons of their own sex regarding the ball was much greater even than in respect of the enemy in their front. The struggles, intrigues, and prayers to get tickets were such as only English ladies will employ, in order to gain admission to the society of the great of their own nation.

"Jos and Mrs. O'Dowd, who were panting to be asked, strove in vain to procure tickets; but others of our friends were more lucky. For instance, through the interest of my Lord Bareacres, and as a set-off for the dinner at the restaurateur's, George got a card for Captain and Mrs. Osborne; which circumstance greatly elated him. Dobbin,

who was a friend of the General commanding the division in which their regiment was, came laughing one day to Mrs. Osborne, and displayed a similar invitation, which made Jos envious, and George wonder how the deuce *he* should be getting into society. Mr. and Mrs. Rawdon, finally, were of course invited, as became the friends of a General commanding a cavalry brigade.

"On the appointed night, George, having commanded new dresses and ornaments of all sorts for Amelia, drove to the famous ball, where his wife did not know a single soul. After looking about for Lady Bareacres, who cut him, thinking the card was quite enough—and after placing Amelia on a bench, he left her to her own cogitations there, thinking, on his own part, that he had behaved very handsomely in getting her new clothes, and bringing her to the ball, where she was free to amuse herself as she liked. Her thoughts were not of the pleasantest, and nobody except honest Dobbin came to disturb them.

"Whilst her appearance was an utter failure (as her husband felt with a sort of rage), Mrs. Rawdon Crawley's *début* was, on the contrary, very brilliant. She arrived very late. Her face was radiant; her dress perfection. In the midst of the great persons assembled, and the eyeglasses directed to her, Rebecca seemed to be as cool and collected as when she used to marshal Miss Pinkerton's little girls to church. Numbers of the men she knew already, and the dandies thronged round her. As for the ladies, it was whispered among them that Rawdon had run away with her from out of a convent, and that she was a relation of the Montmorency family. She spoke French so perfectly that there might be some truth in this report, and it was agreed that her manners were fine, and her air *distingué*. Fifty would-be partners thronged round her at once, and pressed to have the

honour to dance with her. But she said she was engaged, and only going to dance very little; and made her way at once to the place where Emmy sate quite unnoticed, and dismally unhappy. And so, to finish the poor child at once, Mrs. Rawdon ran and greeted affectionately her dearest Amelia, and began forthwith to patronise her. She found fault with her friend's dress, and her hair-dresser, and wondered how she could be so *chaussée*, and vowed that she must send her *corsetière* the next morning. She vowed that it was a delightful ball; that there was everybody that every one knew and only a *very* few nobodies in the whole room. It is a fact, that in a fortnight, and after three dinners in general society, this young woman had got up the genteel jargon so well, that a native could not speak it better; and it was only from her French being so good, that you could know she was not a born woman of fashion."

Amelia, as may be imagined, did not enjoy the ball and after a time her rival's successes were too much for her.

" 'William,' she said, suddenly clinging to Dobbin, who was near her, 'you've always been very kind to me—I'm —I'm not well. Take me home.' She did not know she called him by his Christian name, as George was accustomed to do. He went away with her quickly. Her lodgings were hard by; and they threaded through the crowd without, where everything seemed to be more astir than even in the ballroom within.

"George had been angry twice or thrice at finding his wife up on his return from the parties which he frequented: so she went straight to bed now; but although she did not sleep, and although the din and clatter and the galloping of horsemen was incessant, she never heard any of these noises, having quite other disturbances to keep her awake.

"Osborne meanwhile, wild with elation, went off to a play-table and began to bet frantically. He won repeatedly. 'Everything succeeds with me to-night,' he said. But his luck at play even did not cure him of his restlessness, and he started up after a while, pocketing his winnings, and went to the buffet, where he drank off many bumpers of wine.

"Here, as he was rattling away to the people around, laughing loudly and wild with spirits, Dobbin found him. He had been to the card-tables to look there for his friend. Dobbin looked as pale and grave as his comrade was flushed and jovial.

" 'Hullo, Dob! Come and drink, old Dob! The Duke's wine is famous. Give me some more, you sir;' and he held out a trembling glass for the liquor.

" 'Come out, George,' said Dobbin, still gravely; 'don't drink.'

" 'Drink! there's nothing like it. Drink yourself, and light up your lantern jaws, old boy. Here's to you.'

"Dobbin went up and whispered something to him, at which George, giving a start and a wild hurray, tossed off his glass, clapped it on the table, and walked away speedily on his friend's arm. 'The enemy has passed the Sambre,' William said, 'and our left is already engaged. Come away. We are to march in three hours.' "

2

Our last extract shows Thackeray in a very different vein, as a teller of Christmas fairy-stories. *The Rose and the Ring* contains the curious adventures of the Royal Family of Paflagonia; King Valoroso XXIV, the Queen, their daughter Angelica, and Angelica's maid Betsinda, who was unfortunately far more attractive than her royal mistress.

Betsinda's charm made life in the palace very difficult for a time. This is what happened one night after she had dressed the Countess Gruffanuff's hair. Gruffanuff, a hideous woman, had been governess to Princess Angelica.

"Little Betsinda came in to put Gruffanuff's hair in papers; and the Countess was so pleased, that, for a wonder, she complimented Betsinda. 'Betsinda!' she said, 'you dressed my hair very nicely to-day; I promised you a little present. Here are five sh - - no, here is a pretty little ring, that I picked—that I have had some time.' And she gave Betsinda the ring she had picked up in the court.[1] It fitted Betsinda exactly.

" 'It's like the ring the Princess used to wear,' says the maid.

" 'No such thing,' says Gruffanuff, 'I have had it this ever so long. There, tuck me up quite comfortable; and now, as it's a very cold night (the snow was beating in at the window), you may go and warm dear Prince Giglio's bed, like a good girl, and then you may unrip my green silk, and then you can just do me up a little cap for the morning, and then you can mend that hole in my silk stocking, and then you can go to bed, Betsinda. Mind I shall want my cup of tea at five o'clock in the morning.'

" 'I suppose I had best warm both the young gentlemen's beds, ma'am,' says Betsinda.

"Gruffanuff, for reply, said, 'Hau-au-ho!—Grau-haw-hoo!—Hong-hrho!' In fact, she was snoring sound asleep.

"Her room, you know, is next to the King and Queen, and the Princess is next to them. So pretty Betsinda went away for the coals to the kitchen, and filled the royal warming-pan.

[1] A magic ring, which made its wearer appear very beautiful.

"Now, she was a very kind, merry, civil, pretty girl; but there must have been something very captivating about her this evening, for all the women in the servants' hall began to scold and abuse her. The housekeeper said she was a pert, stuck-up thing; the upper-housemaid asked, how dare she wear such ringlets and ribbons, it was quite improper! The cook (for there was a woman-cook as well as a man-cook) said to the kitchen-maid that *she* never could see anything in that creetur: but as for the men, every one of them, Coachman, John, Buttons the page, and Monsieur, the Prince of Crim Tartary's valet, started up, and said—

'My eyes!'
'O mussey!'
'O jemmany!'
'O ciel!' } 'What a pretty girl Betsinda is!'

" 'Hands off, none of your impertinence, you vulgar, low people!' says Betsinda, walking off with her pan of coals. She heard the young gentlemen playing at billiards as she went upstairs: first to Prince Giglio's bed, which she warmed, and then to Prince Bulbo's room.

"He came in just as she had done; and as soon as he saw her, 'O! O! O! O! O! O! what a beyou—oo—ootiful creature you are! You angel—you peri—you rosebud, let me be thy bulbul—thy Bulbo, too! Fly to the desert, fly with me! I never saw a young gazelle to glad me with its dark blue eye that had eyes like thine. Thou nymph of beauty, take, take this young heart. A truer never did itself sustain within a soldier's waistcoat. Be mine! Be mine! Be Princess of Crim Tartary! My Royal father will approve our union; and, as for that little carroty-haired Angelica, I do not care a fig for her any more.'

" 'Go away, your Royal Highness, and go to bed, please,' said Betsinda, with the warming-pan.

"But Bulbo said, 'No, never, till thou swearest to be

mine, thou lovely, blushing, chambermaid divine! Here, at thy feet, the Royal Bulbo lies, the trembling captive of Betsinda's eyes.'

"And he went on, making himself so *absurd and ridiculous*, that Betsinda, who was full of fun, gave him a touch with the warming-pan, which, I promise you, made him cry 'O-o-o-o!' in a very different manner.

"Prince Bulbo made such a noise that Prince Giglio, who heard him from the next room, came in to see what was the matter. As soon as he saw what was taking place, Giglio, in a fury, rushed on Bulbo, kicked him in the rudest manner up to the ceiling, and went on kicking him till his hair was quite out of curl.

"Poor Betsinda did not know whether to laugh or to cry; the kicking certainly must hurt the Prince, but then he looked so droll! When Giglio had done knocking him up and down to the ground, and whilst he went into a corner rubbing himself, what do you think Giglio does? He goes down on his own knees to Betsinda, takes her hand, begs her to accept his heart, and offers to marry her that moment. Fancy Betsinda's condition, who had been in love with the Prince ever since she first saw him in the palace garden, when she was quite a little child.

" 'Oh, divine Betsinda!' says the Prince, 'how have I lived fifteen years in thy company without seeing thy perfections? What woman in all Europe, Asia, Africa, and America, nay, in Australia, only it is not yet discovered, can presume to be thy equal? Angelica? Pish! Gruffanuff? Phoo! The Queen? Ha, ha! Thou art my Queen. Thou art the real Angelica, because thou art really angelic.'

" 'Oh, Prince! I am but a poor chambermaid,' says Betsinda, looking, however, very much pleased.

" 'Didst thou not tend me in my sickness, when all

forsook me?' continued Giglio. 'Did not thy gentle hand smooth my pillow, and bring me jelly and roast chicken?'

" 'Yes, dear Prince, I did,' says Betsinda, 'and I sewed your Royal Highness's shirt-buttons on too, if you please, your Highness,' cries this artless maiden.

"When poor Prince Bulbo, who was now madly in love with Betsinda, heard this declaration, when he saw the unmistakable glances which she flung upon Giglio, Bulbo began to cry bitterly, and tore quantities of hair out of his head, till it all covered the room like so much tow.

"Betsinda had left the warming-pan on the floor while the Princes were going on with their conversation, and as they began now to quarrel and be very fierce with one another, she thought proper to run away.

" 'You great big blubbering booby, tearing your hair in the corner there; of course you will give me satisfaction for insulting Betsinda. *You* dare to kneel down at Princess Giglio's knees and kiss her hand!'

" 'She's not Princess Giglio!' roars out Bulbo. 'She shall be Princess Bulbo, no other shall be Princess Bulbo.'

" 'You are engaged to my cousin!' bellows out Giglio.

" 'I hate your cousin,' says Bulbo.

" 'You shall give me satisfaction for insulting her!' cried Giglio in a fury.

" 'I'll have your life.'

" 'I'll run you through.'

" 'I'll cut your throat.'

" 'I'll blow your brains out.'

" 'I'll knock your head off.'

" 'I'll send a friend to you in the morning.'

" 'I'll send a bullet into you in the afternoon.'

" 'We'll meet again,' says Giglio, shaking his fist in Bulbo's face; and seizing up the warming-pan, he kissed it, because, forsooth, Betsinda had carried it, and rushed downstairs. What should he see on the landing but

His Majesty talking to Betsinda, whom he called by all sorts of fond names. His Majesty had heard a row in the building, so he stated, and smelling something burning, had come out to see what the matter was.

" 'It's the young gentlemen smoking, perhaps, sir,' says Betsinda.

" 'Charming chambermaid,' says the King (like all the rest of them), 'never mind the young men! Turn thy eyes on a middle-aged autocrat, who has been considered not ill-looking in his time.'

" 'Oh, sir! what will Her Majesty say?' cries Betsinda.

" 'Her Majesty!' laughs the monarch. 'Her Majesty be hanged. Am I not Autocrat of Paflagonia? Have I not blocks, ropes, axes, hangmen—ha? Runs not a river by my palace wall? Have I not sacks to sew up wives withal? Say but the word, that thou wilt be mine own,—your mistress straightway in a sack is sewn, and thou the sharer of my heart and throne.'

"When Giglio heard these atrocious sentiments, he forgot the respect usually paid to Royalty, lifted up the warming-pan, and knocked down the King as flat as a pancake; after which, Master Giglio took to his heels and ran away, and Betsinda went off screaming, and the Queen, Gruffanuff, and the Princess, all came out of their rooms. Fancy their feelings on beholding their husband, father, sovereign, in this posture!"

CHAPTER XXXV

TENNYSON AND BROWNING

1

TENNYSON and Browning, two great contemporaries, were contemporaries also of Dickens and Thackeray. Tennyson was born in 1809, Browning in 1812. Dickens was the same age as Browning, and Thackeray a year older. Neither Tennyson's poetry nor Browning's needs to be explained with reference to the events of their life. Both led comfortable, prosperous lives with nothing to interrupt them in their chosen task of poetry. Tennyson became poet laureate. The great event of Browning's life was his runaway marriage with Elizabeth Barrett, also a poet, who inspired his best work from that time on.

Tennyson was a deliberate and accomplished artist with a wide range, who has left his mark on every type of metre he used. Here is a lyric of his from a long narrative poem, *The Princess*.

The splendour falls on castle walls
And snowy summits old in story:
The long light shakes across the lakes,
And the wild cataract leaps in glory.
Blow, bugle, blow, set the wild echoes flying,
Blow, bugle; answer, echoes, dying, dying, dying.

O hark, O hear! how thin and clear,
And thinner, clearer, farther going!
O sweet and far from cliff and scar
The horns of Elfland faintly blowing!
Blow, let us hear the purple glens replying:
Blow, bugle; answer, echoes, dying, dying, dying.

O love, they die in yon rich sky,
They faint on hill or field or river:
Our echoes roll from soul to soul,
And grow for ever and for ever.
Blow, bugle, blow, set the wild echoes flying,
And answer, echoes, answer, dying, dying, dying.

His poems, and such of Browning's as will be quoted, explain themselves, and can be offered almost without comment. The difference between the two poets also will be clear without any effort on our part to choose poems for contrast. Here is Browning's *Prospice*,[1] written after the death of his wife.

Fear death?—to feel the fog in my throat,
The mist in my face,
When the snows begin, and the blasts denote
I am nearing the place,
The power of the night, the press of the storm,
The post of the foe;
Where he stands, the Arch Fear in a visible form,
Yet the strong man must go:
For the journey is done and the summit attained,
And the barriers fall,
Though a battle's to fight ere the guerdon be gained,
The reward of it all.
I was ever a fighter, so—one fight more,
The best and the last!
I would hate that death bandaged my eyes, and forebore,
And bade me creep past.
No! let me taste the whole of it, fare like my peers
The heroes of old,
Bear the brunt, in a minute pay glad life's arrears
Of pain, darkness and cold.

[1] Look forward.

For sudden the worst turns the best to the brave,
The black minute's at end,
And the element's rage, the fiend-voices that rave,
Shall dwindle, shall blend,
Shall change, shall become first a peace out of pain,
Then a light, then thy breast,
O thou soul of my soul! I shall clasp thee again
And with God be the rest!

In a different mood, Browning wrote the *Cavalier Tunes*, rousing anti-Roundhead poems which live up to their name.

I

Kentish Sir Byng stood for his King,
Bidding the crop-headed Parliament swing:
And pressing a troop unable to stoop
And see the rogues flourish and honest folk droop,
Marched them along, fifty score strong,
Great-hearted gentlemen, singing this song.

II

God for King Charles! Pym and such carles
To the Devil that prompts 'em their treasonous parles!
Cavaliers, up! Lips from the cup,
Hands from the pasty, nor bite take nor sup
Till you're (CHORUS) marching along, fifty-score strong,
Great-hearted gentlemen, singing this song. . . .

Here is one of Tennyson's finest short poems, *The Eagle.*

He clasps the crag with crooked hands;
Close to the sun in lonely lands,
Ring'd with the azure world, he stands.

The wrinkled sea beneath him crawls;
He watches from his mountain walls,
And like a thunderbolt he falls.

And here, for a last short one, is the famous *Break, Break, Break.*

Break, break, break,
On thy cold grey stones, O Sea!
And I would that my tongue could utter
The thoughts that arise in me.

O well for the fisherman's boy
That he shouts with his sister at play!
O well for the sailor lad,
That he sings in his boat on the bay!

And the stately ships go on
To their haven under the hill;
But O for the touch of a vanished hand,
And the sound of a voice that is still!

Break, break, break,
At the foot of thy crags, O Sea!
But the tender grace of a day that is dead
Will never come back to me.

2

Tennyson was an observer, a reflective and solitary poet. Browning was above all an analyst of human character. He had lyric powers, and great dramatic powers, and he combined them best in his dramatic lyrics. In these poems of Browning's, only one man or woman speaks: but what they say reveals not only their

story, but their whole character. Here is Fra Lippo Lippi, the monk-painter of Florence, caught by the watch when he is playing truant in the streets outside his convent. In the midst of his indignation, he keeps spotting likely models for his work.

But you, sir, it concerns you that your knaves
Pick up a manner nor discredit you:
Zooks, are we pilchards, that they sweep the streets
And count fair prize what comes into their net?
He's Judas to a tittle, that man is!
Just such a face! Why, sir, you make amends.
Lord, I'm not angry! Bid your hangdogs go
Drink out this quarter-florin to the health
Of the munificent House that harbours me
(And many more beside, lads! more beside!)
And all's come square again. I'd like his face—
His, elbowing on his comrade in the door
With the pike and lantern,—for the slave that holds
John Baptist's head a-dangle by the hair
With one hand ("Look you, now," as who should say)
And his weapon in the other, yet unwiped!
It's not your chance to have a bit of chalk,
A wood-coal or the like? or you should see!
Yes, I'm a painter, since you style me so.

He describes how he was received into the convent, and began to draw.

I drew men's faces on my copy-books,
Scrawled them within the antiphonary's[1] *marge,*
Joined legs and arms to the long music-notes,
Found eyes and nose and chin for A's and B's,
And made a string of pictures of the world

[1] The Roman choir-book.

Betwixt the ins and outs of verb and noun,
On the wall, the bench, the door. The monks looked black.
'Nay,' quoth the Prior, 'turn him out, d'ye say?
'In no wise. Lose a crow and catch a lark.
"What if at last we get our man of parts,
'We Carmelites, like those Camaldolese
'And Preaching Friars, to do our church up fine
'And put the front on it that ought to be!'
And hereupon he bade me daub away.
Thank you! my head being crammed, the walls a blank,
Never was such prompt disemburdening.
First, every sort of monk, the black and white,
I drew them, fat and lean: then, folk at church. . . .
I painted all, then cried "'Tis ask and have;
'Choose, for more's ready!'—laid the ladder flat,
And showed my covered bit of cloister-wall.
The monks closed in a circle and praised loud
Till checked, taught what to see and not to see,
Being simple bodies,—'That's the very man!
'Look at the boy who stoops to pat the dog!
'That woman's like the Prior's niece who comes
'To care about his asthma: it's the life!'

A very different ecclesiastic explains himself in *Bishop Blougram's Apology*. This is how he begins.

No more wine? then we'll push back chairs and talk.
A final glass for me, though: cool, i'faith! . . .
These hot long ceremonies of our church
Cost us a little—oh, they pay the price,
You take me—amply pay it! Now, we'll talk.

One-sided though the argument, we see exactly what kind of a man he is addressing.

So, you despise me, Mr. Gigadibs.
No deprecation,—nay, I beg you, sir!
Beside 'tis our engagement: don't you know,
I promised, if you'd watch a dinner out,
We'd see truth dawn together?—truth that peeps
Over the glasses' edge when dinner's done,
And body gets its sop and holds its noise
And leaves soul free a little. Now's the time:
Truth's break of day! You do despise me then. . . .
Don't you protest now! It's fair give and take;
You have had your turn and spoken your home-truths:
The hand's mine now, and here you follow suit.

Blougram explains his modest equipment of beliefs by an apt comparison.

A simile!
We mortals cross the ocean of this world
Each in his average cabin of a life;
The best's not big, the worst yields elbow-room.
Now for our six months' voyage—how prepare?
You come on shipboard with a landsman's list
Of things he calls convenient: so they are!
An India screen is pretty furniture,
A piano-forte is a fine resource,
All Balzac's novels occupy one shelf,
The new edition fifty volumes long;
And little Greek books, with the funny type
They got up well at Leipsic, fill the next:
Go on! slabbed marble, what a bath it makes!
And Parma's pride, the Jerome, let us add!
'Twere pleasant could Correggio's fleeting glow
Hang full in face of one where'er one roams,
Since he more than the others brings with him
Italy's self,—the marvellous Modenese!—
Yet was not on your list before, perhaps,

—Alas, friend, here's the agent . . . is't the name?
The captain, or whoever's master here—
You see him screw his face up; what's his cry
Ere you set foot on shipboard? 'Six feet square!'
If you won't understand what six feet mean,
Compute and purchase stores accordingly—
And if, in pique because he overhauls
Your Jerome, piano, bath, you come on board
Bare—why, you cut a figure at the first
While sympathetic landsmen see you off;
Not afterward, when long ere half seas over,
You peep up from your utterly naked boards
Into some snug and well-appointed berth,
Like mine for instance (try the cooler jug—
Put back the other, but don't jog the ice!)
And mortified you mutter 'Well and good!
'He sits enjoying his sea-furniture;
''Tis stout and proper, and there's store of it:
'Though I've the better notion, all agree,
'Of fitting rooms up. Hang the carpenter,
'Neat ship-shape fixings and contrivances—
'I would have brought my Jerome, frame and all!'
And meantime you bring nothing: never mind—
You've proved your artist-nature: what you don't
You might bring, so despise me, as I say.

Now come, let's backward to the starting-place.
See my way: we're two college friends, suppose.
Prepare together for our voyage, then;
Each note and check the other in his work,—
Here's mine, a bishop's outfit; criticize!
What's wrong? why won't you be a bishop too?

Browning's largest work, *The Ring and the Book*, reveals more of his absorbing interest in psychology. Its

story is nothing more than a Roman murder case, of which Browning happened to read in an old, yellow book which he bought for eightpence at a bookstall in Florence. Browning grew interested in the story, and planned and carried out a detailed study of it, telling the whole thing no less than ten times, as it must have appeared to ten different people who were involved in it. The result is very far from dull.

Here is Browning's own account of the murder of Pompilia by her husband Count Guido.

Count Guido Franceschini the Aretine,
Descended of an ancient house, though poor,
A beak-nosed bushy-bearded black-haired lord,
Lean, pallid, low of stature yet robust,
Fifty years old,—having four years ago
Married Pompilia Comparini, young,
Good, beautiful, at Rome, where she was born,
And brought her to Arezzo, where they lived
Unhappy lives, whatever curse the cause,—
This husband, taking four accomplices,
Followed this wife to Rome, where she was fled
From their Arezzo to find peace again,
In convoy, eight months earlier, of a priest,
Aretine, also, of still nobler birth,
Guiseppe Caponsacchi—and caught her there
Quiet in a villa on a Christmas night,
With only Pietro and Violante by,
Both her putative parents; killed the three,
Aged they, seventy each, and she, seventeen,
And, two weeks since, the mother of his babe
First-born and heir to what the style was worth
O' the Guido who determined, dared and did
This deed just as he purposed point by point.

He goes on to tell how the murder appeared to three different Roman citizens, who are the equivalent of our newspaper-readers to-day. One of them was full of sympathy for the wife, Pompilia, who had not yet died of her wounds, but was gravely ill in hospital. It is hard to remember that this story was two hundred years old when Browning came upon it.

There she lies in the long white lazar-house.
Rome has besieged, these two days, never doubt,
Saint Anna's where she waits her death, to hear
Though but the chink o' the bell, turn o' the hinge
When the reluctant wicket opes at last,
Lets in, on now this and now that pretence,
Too many by half,—complain the men of art,—
For a patient in such plight. The lawyers first
Paid the due visit—justice must be done;
They took her witness, why the murder was;
Then the priests followed properly,—a soul
To shrive; 'twas Brother Celestine's own right,
The same who noises thus her gifts abroad:
But many more, who found they were old friends,
Pushed in to have their stare and take their talk
And go forth boasting of it and to boast.

After the Pope has condemned Count Guido to death, the doomed man tries to clear himself to his friends the Cardinal and the Abbot.

You have my last word,—innocent am I
As Innocent my Pope and murderer,
Innocent as a babe, as Mary's own,
As Mary's self,—I said, say, and repeat,—
And why, then, should I die twelve hours hence? . . .
For why? All honest Rome approved my part;

Whoever owned wife, sister, daughter,—nay,
Mistress,—had any shadow of any right
That looks like right, and, all the more resolved
Held it with tooth and nail,—these manly men
Approved! I being for Rome, Rome was for me!

This is the epilogue to *The Ring and the Book.*

So did this old woe fade from memory,
Till after in the fullness of the days
My needs must find an ember yet unquenched
And, breathing, blow the spark to flame. It lives
If precious be the soul of man to man.

3

Browning expressed himself most characteristically in the dramatic lyric and monologue. Apart from his short lyrics, Tennyson seems to have inclined specially to the type of poem, part narrative, part descriptive, which he developed ultimately into the *Idylls of the King. Ulysses* shows the germ of this type:

It little profits that an idle king,
By this still hearth, among these barren crags,
Match'd with an aged wife, I mete and dole
Unequal laws unto a savage race,
That hoard, and sleep, and feed, and know not me.
I cannot rest from travel: I will drink
Life to the lees: all times I have enjoy'd
Greatly, have suffer'd greatly, both with those
That loved me, and alone; on shore, and when
Thro' scudding drifts the rainy Hyades
Vext the dim sea: I am become a name;
For always roaming with a hungry heart
Much have I seen and known; cities of men

And manners, climates, councils, governments,
Myself not least, but honour'd of them all;
And drunk delight of battle with my peers,
Far on the ringing plains of windy Troy.
I am a part of all that I have met;
Yet all experience is an arch wherethro'
Gleams that untravell'd world, whose margin fades
For ever and for ever when I move.
How dull it is to pause, to make an end,
To rust unburnish'd, not to shine in use!
As tho' to breathe were life. Life piled on life
Were all too little, and of one to me
Little remains: but every hour is saved
From that eternal silence, something more
A bringer of new things; and vile it were
For some three suns to store and hoard myself,
And this gray spirit yearning in desire
To follow knowledge like a sinking star,
Beyond the utmost bound of human thought.
This is my son, mine own Telemachus,
To whom I leave the sceptre and the Isle—
Well-loved of me, discerning to fulfil
This labour, by slow prudence to make mild
A rugged people, and thro' soft degrees
Subdue them to the useful and the good.
Most blameless is he, centred in the sphere
Of common duties, decent not to fail
In offices of tenderness, and pay
Meet adoration to my household gods,
When I am gone. He works his work, I mine.
There lies the port: the vessel puffs her sail:
There gloom the dark broad seas. My mariners,
Souls that have toil'd, and wrought, and thought with me—
That ever with a frolic welcome took

The thunder and the sunshine, and opposed
Free hearts, free foreheads—you and I are old;
Old age hath yet his honour and his toil;
Death closes all: but something ere the end,
Some work of noble note, may yet be done,
Not unbecoming men that strove with Gods.
The lights begin to twinkle from the rocks,
The long day wanes: the slow moon climbs: the deep
Moans round with many voices. Come, my friends,
'Tis not too late to seek a newer world.
Push off, and sitting well in order smite
The sounding furrows; for my purpose holds
To sail beyond the sunset, and the baths
Of all the western stars, until I die.
It may be that the gulfs will wash us down:
It may be we shall touch the Happy Isles,
And see the great Achilles, whom we knew.
Tho' much is taken, much abides: and tho'
We are not now that strength which in old days
Moved earth and heaven; that which we are, we are;
One equal temper of heroic hearts,
Made weak by time and fate, but strong in will
To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield.

Apart from *In Memoriam*, a tribute to his friend Arthur Hallam, Tennyson's chief long works were the *Idylls of the King*. These were the stories of King Arthur and his knights. The finest of them, the *Morte d'Arthur*, was written many years before the rest and is really separate from them, though it falls into its place at the end.

So all day long the noise of battle roll'd
Among the mountains by the winter sea;
Until King Arthur's Table, man by man,

Had fall'n in Lyonnesse about their lord,
King Arthur. Then, because his wound was deep,
The bold Sir Bedivere uplifted him,
And bore him to a chapel nigh the field,
A broken chancel with a broken cross,
That stood on a dark strait of barren land:
On one side lay the ocean, and on one
Lay a great water, and the moon was full.

Then spake King Arthur to Sir Bedivere:
'The sequel of to-day unsolders all
'The goodliest fellowship of famous knights
'Whereof this world holds record. Such a sleep
'They sleep—the men I loved. I think that we
'Shall never more, at any future time,
'Delight our souls with talk of knightly deeds,
'Walking about the gardens and the halls
'Of Camelot, as in the days that were.'

Arthur told Sir Bedivere to take his sword Excalibur, and throw it far into the lake from whence, many years ago, he had received it. Sir Bedivere took the sword, and, leaving the wounded king unwillingly, went to the lake.

There drew he forth the brand Excalibur,
And o'er him, drawing it, the winter moon,
Brightening the skirts of a long cloud, ran forth
And sparkled keen with frost against the hilt:
For all the haft twinkled with diamond sparks,
Myriads of topaz-lights, and jacinth-work
Of subtlest jewellery. He gazed so long
That both his eyes were dazzled as he stood,
This way and that dividing the swift mind,
In act to throw: but at the last it seem'd
Better to leave Excalibur conceal'd

There in the many-knotted waterflags,
That whistled stiff and dry about the marge.
So strode he back slow to the wounded king.

Then spake King Arthur to Sir Bedivere:
'Hast thou perform'd my mission which I gave?
'What is it thou hast seen? or what hast heard?'

And answer made the bold Sir Bedivere:
'I heard the ripple washing in the reeds,
'And the wild water lapping on the crag.'

Arthur angrily sent him back to throw Excalibur into the water. Sir Bedivere tried again, and could not bear that so lovely a thing should be lost.

Then spake King Arthur, breathing heavily:
'What is it thou hast seen? or what hast heard?'

And answer made the bold Sir Bedivere:
'I heard the water lapping on the crag,
'And the long ripple washing in the reeds.'

Arthur replied that he would kill him unless he did his duty.

Then quickly rose Sir Bedivere, and ran,
And leaping down the ridges lightly, plunged
Among the bulrush beds, and clutch'd the sword,
And strongly wheel'd and threw it. The great brand
Made lightnings in the splendour of the moon,
And flashing round and round, and whirl'd in an arch,
Shot like a streamer of the northern morn,
Seen where the moving isles of winter shock
By night, with noises of the Northern Sea.

So flashed and fell the brand Excalibur:
But ere he dipt the surface, rose an arm
Clothed in white samite, mystic, wonderful,
And caught him by the hilt and brandish'd him
Three times, and drew him under in the mere.

Arthur was dying. At his request Sir Bedivere carried him to the shore of the lake.

Then saw they how there hove a dusky barge,
Dark as a funeral scarf from stem to stern,
Beneath them; and descending they were ware
That all the decks were dense with stately forms,
Black-stoled, black-hooded, like a dream—by these
Three Queens with crowns of gold: and from them rose
A cry that shiver'd to the tingling stars,
And, as it were one voice, an agony
Of lamentation, like a wind that shrills
All night in a waste land, where no one comes,
Or hath come, since the making of the world.

Then murmur'd Arthur, 'Place me in the barge.'
So to the barge they came. There those three Queens
Put forth their hands, and took the King, and wept.

Arthur spoke his last words to Sir Bedivere, and said he was going on a long journey to the island-valley of Avilion:

Where falls not hail, or rain, or any snow,
Nor ever wind blows loudly; but it lies
Deep-meadow'd, happy, fair with orchard lawns
And bowery hollows crown'd with summer sea,
Where I will heal me of my grievous wound.
So said he, and the barge with oar and sail

Moved from the brink, like some full-breasted swan
That, fluting a wild carol ere her death,
Ruffles her pure cold plume, and takes the flood
With swarthy webs. Long stood Sir Bedivere
Revolving many memories, till the hull
Look'd one black dot against the verge of dawn,
And on the mere the wailing died away.

Here, in conclusion, is Tennyson's blank-verse lyric, *Tears, Idle Tears.*

Tears, idle tears, I know not what they mean,
Tears from the depth of some divine despair
Rise in the heart, and gather to the eyes,
In looking on the happy Autumn-fields,
And thinking of the days that are no more.

Fresh as the first beam glittering on a sail,
That brings our friends up from the underworld,
Sad as the last which reddens over one
That sinks with all we love below the verge;
So sad, so fresh, the days that are no more.

Ah, sad and strange as in dark summer dawns
The earliest pipe of half-awaken'd birds
To dying ears, when unto dying eyes
The casement slowly grows a glimmering square;
So sad, so strange, the days that are no more.

Dear as remember'd kisses after death,
And sweet as those by hopeless fancy feign'd
On lips that are for others; deep as love,
Deep as first love, and wild with all regret;
O Death in Life, the days that are no more.

Tennyson's aim as a poet was to make the sound exactly fit the sense. When asked for his best line, he gave without hesitation

The mellow ouzel fluting in the elm:

showing that the production of appropriate sound took precedence with him of philosophy or ideas. Indeed, the philosophy of the *Idylls of the King* is the least remarkable thing about them. Browning, on the other hand, was absorbed by philosophical and psychological speculation. His style also, wilfully abrupt and colloquial as it was, fitted the sense of his poems, which were almost all concerned with the queer kinks and turns and the unexpected greatness of men's minds.

EPILOGUE

THIS ENDS our very brief survey of some of the most interesting writers in the history of English Literature. We have barely touched the fringe of the subject: drawn a few shillings only from the huge storehouse of riches which lies waiting for anyone who troubles to take the key.

Our aim in choosing both authors and extracts has been to show how people felt and thought in the past; and, from this, to let it be seen that they were not as unlike the people of to-day as their clothes and their speech and their actions make them appear. This feeling of dissimilarity is the highest barrier between us and the past. It is, as you will by now have realised, an artificial barrier: and, once it is broken down, the rest is easy.

If, while reading these pages, you have been interested in a single extract from a single writer, and have wanted to read more for yourself, then, as far as we are concerned, the book will have done its work.

L. A. G. S.
M. R.

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